Article

Female Radicalisation and ISIS: What are the Implications for UK Domestic Security?

By Wing Commander Siân English

Biography: Wing Commander Siân English joined the Royal Air Force in 2003 as an Intelligence Analyst before commissioning as a Personnel Support Officer. Having served in a variety of overseas theatres she completed the Advanced Command and Staff College in September 2020 and was made an MBE in the same year. She is a Charactered Member of the Institute of Personnel Development and was part of the Chief of Defence Personnel Team who received the 'Inclusive Teamwork' award in the Women in Defence 2021. She presently works in the MOD Defence People Strategy Team.

Abstract: It has long been the assumption that radicalisation and subsequent violent activity emanating from a terrorist group was predominantly from the male protagonists. Indeed, societal opinion and cultural bias asserts women involved in such activity have either been coaxed or hoodwinked by male predators, or that they are mentally or physically unwell and thus unable to make intellectual informed decisions; equally their involvement is peripheral. In 2015, three London school girls left the UK to join ISIS. Headlines then portrayed three innocent girls, lured, groomed and/or brain washed by an insidious organisation. The paper will focus on the increase of UK females radicalised by ISIS, who subsequently voluntarily travel to the Islamic State, examining the factors which made these women become more susceptible. It will offer that 'some' women, who are radicalised can pose a threat to domestic security, needing greater attention from the UK Government, Security Services and Partners Across Government to understand the impact gender has on security to ensure preventative strategies and policies are considered through a gendered lens.

Disclaimer: The views expressed are those of the authors concerned, not necessarily the MOD.

Introduction

Islamist radicalisation has been at the forefront of the Western security agenda since the aftermath of 9th September 2001 (9/11) terrorist attack in the U.S., and the emergence of the term 'radicalisation' has shaped the actions of governments, practitioners, and scholars alike to understand and combat terrorism.[1] As such, it has become core policy and central to terrorism studies and counter-terrorism policymaking. The consequences of radicalisation and the existential threat posed by those who would carry out acts of terror is well documented and indeed much of the literature and research discourse within terrorism studies focuses on the subject. However, the link between female Islamist radicalisation and domestic security is not as apparent as much of the literature is centred on violent radicalisation and acts carried out by men rather than women. In addition, academic literature, governmental policies and strategies, and government security enforcement agencies all focus on preventative measures that have been written largely by men for men, and therefore are 'gender-blind'[2] which has serious implications when implementing counterterrorism, deradicalisation, and re-integration programs.

This research project will examine the link by focusing on the rise of UK females radicalised by Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and the potential implications for UK domestic security. The paper has two main objectives: 1) to critically analyse the contributing factors why ISIS was able to recruit UK females to its ideology and to highlight the primary reasons why these women were more susceptible to radicalisation; 2) to assess the potential impact to UK domestic security as women radicalised by ISIS integrate back into society by examining the current preventative measures and deradicalisation programs. This paper will begin with setting out the parameters of the research by outlining the methodological approaches used and the theoretical framework that has formed the foundations of the project. Throughout the paper the term female radicalisation, radicalisation and Islamist radicalisation will be used interchangeably, and IS, ISIS, Da'esh and Caliphate will be used in the same manner and will have the same meaning, but the focus will only be on the period 2014-2018 when the group was most active and in conflict with Western Forces. However, it must be noted that the group remains an active terrorist organisation with an online presence capable of radicalising states' citizens across the globe, including those from the UK.

This paper will only focus on Islamist radicalisation and not violent extremism, and it is primarily centred on examining the non-violent political motivations which made up the larger percentage of UK females who joined ISIS but acknowledges that a smaller percentage did want to bear arms and fight. The final point to note is that when defining UK domestic security, due to the classification of this paper, detailed counter-terrorism strategies and policies adopted by the security services cannot be included and instead the UK Government websites and online definitions in the public domain will be used when citing and referencing current preventative and deradicalisation initiatives. For the purposes of this research paper both *Prevent* and *Channel* will be referenced interchangeably as both are intended to tackle radicalisation in all communities, regardless of the ideology behind the radicalisation; however,

they are also different because one is only referred to Channel if, and only if, they are identified or flagged at various stages during Prevent.

This paper will conclude that the increase of UK females radicalised by ISIS does have implications for domestic security, as many of those women who travelled to IS witnessed terrorist attacks, potentially helped to plan attacks or condoned atrocities, committed acts of violence, or were directly involved in the establishment of the Caliphate by supporting its fighters, bearing their children, and lastly promoting the ideology's narrative and therefore hold the same extremist beliefs as the men in the group. Similarly, some women actively recruited other women online, promulgated ISIS' narrative across social media and were crucial players in the radicalisation of UK females. Whilst many of these women did not carry out a violent act or attack themselves, they did carry out key roles which gave the caliphate state-like properties, along with strength and power, and undoubtedly helped the ideology grow on a global scale. Further, for the most part these women were not victims or forced to travel, and academic research to date highlights that the vast majority voluntarily left to join a terrorist organisation who were fighting against Western democracy and international rules-based order in the name of religion, and therefore like their male counterparts they pose a threat to UK domestic security.

Despite the current measures in place to tackle radicalisation – *Prevent* and *Channel* - this paper will contend that greater focus must be given to the gendered lens of security if the UK Security Services and Partners Across Government (PAG) are to adequately support those females radicalised by ISIS through the de-radicalised programmes, the judiciary process, and subsequent reintegration into society. This latter point is key if the UK Government and security agencies hope to prevent further radicalisation in our communities when these women return from Iraq, Syria, or refugee camps, or are released from prison. Therefore, the part the UK Government, media, and social media plays in its narrative to society by rebranding the 'them vs Islam' segregation over the past 10 years is crucial to prevent the 'ISIS effect' reoccurring should another ideology offer young people the same opportunities. Ultimately, the roles women play in an ideology, a radical or terrorist group must be reframed in security literature, polices and military doctrine to appropriately assess risk through a gendered lens to mitigate against any potential threat to UK domestic security.

Research Framework

Whilst the research approach is qualitative drawing on existing literature from the field of terrorism studies, the analysis does include the expert views of two leading scholars who have both published work in terrorism and radicalisation, with specific focus on the gendered lens. The primary aim of this research is to answer a defined question by exploring if there is a potential connection between the rise of female radicalisation in the UK and an increased threat to domestic security. By using a methodical framework and theoretical ideas from Identity Crisis Theory, Hyper-Masculinity Theory and Hyper-Femininity theory a positive research approach will be used to 'describe, understand and explain the links between

empirical phenomena, and the potential relationships between the theoretical concepts and the empirical facts'[3] which are required to test the hypothesis. Further, the research will share some of the views of Dr. Katherine Brown and Dr. Joana Cook from the expert interviews which will be used to fill gaps in existing International Relations and feminist theory literature on the potential connections between gender and security, and the implications for UK domestic security.

To ensure the research has originality and validity, both ontological and epistemological views have been considered and balanced by the input from expert interviews to ensure the research and information has been interpreted with neutrality.[4] The most relevant paradigm for this research is constructivism based on the fact there is no single truth or reality as distilled by Lincoln and Guba (*The constructivist Credo 2008*) 'constructivism is defined in such a general way that it can relate to a wider range of sociological theories.'[5] Indeed, within the academic field there is very limited quantitative statistics and research discourse about female Islamist radicalisation, specifically in relation to how many UK females joined ISIS and the implications for domestic security. Therefore, this paper aims to draw on both the extensive academic literature and content from the elite interviews and explore theoretical frameworks to test hypothesis whilst acknowledging that there are vast and differing opinions rather than truths.

Section 1
Defining Terms

This section will define the key terms in the research question: Radicalisation and UK Domestic Security.

Radicalisation

Radicalisation and its concept have gained increased popularity since 2004 after bomb attacks in Madrid and London and it has become central to terrorism studies and counter-terrorism policy making.[6] As U.S. and European governments focused on 'home-grown' Islamist political violence and coined the term 'violent radicalisation' it has featured in much academic literature and discussion and become a 'political shibboleth.'[7] Kundnani (2012) comments:

> 'The introduction of policies designed to 'counter-radicalise' has been accompanied by the emergence of a government-funded industry of advisers, analysts, scholars, entrepreneurs and self-appointed community representatives who claim that their knowledge of a theological or psychological radicalisation process enables them to propose interventions in Muslim communities to prevent extremism.'[8]

Sikle et al define the term radicalisation as a process of how people become involved with terrorist causes or movements but argue that in the past it was often referred to as 'becoming' a terrorist, 'joining', a terrorist group, or of being 'recruited'[9] and that the term has been embellished and expanded by politicians and academics due to 9/11 and the shift in focus

to Islamist political violence. Schmid supports this notion that the term has been heavily politicised by Western governments and often applied one-sided to non-state actors who fall to adhere democratic processes and principles, laws and who use violence to achieve political ends.[10] This view is reinforced by Sedgewick who highlights that the term is linked too freely with terrorism by politicians which has created a multitude of obstacles.[11]

Horgan and Bradcock offer one of the most recent definitions which is widely cited in modern literature and define it as 'the social and psychological process of incrementally experienced commitment to extremist political or religious ideology.'[12] This latter definition will be used in this research paper as the description is befitting to ISIS in that the ideology was able to attract followers who were both radicalised in opinion and action. McCauley and Moskalenko argue that their two pyramids 'radicalisation of opinion' (beliefs, attitudes and feeling) are cognitive which is importantly different from 'radicalisation in action' (which is physical behaviour) however, the principle for both models is that for the vast majority 'radical ideas do not take radical action.'[13]

UK Domestic Security

The policy for UK Domestic Security is captured in the National Security Strategy (NSS) which outlines how the national capabilities are used to build a prosperous Britain through influence in the world and to strengthen our security by using all the instruments of national power to prevent conflict and avert threats beyond our shores. Fundamentally, the security of the UK is the foundation of our freedom and our prosperity.[14] Within this strategy one of the key areas is titled 'Risks to our Security' captures those threats which have the potential to become an existential threat to the state, undermine the core foundations of the society, or endanger the lives of our citizens.[15] Radicalisation, terrorism and extremism form part of the strategy and the policies and formal doctrine for UK Defence and the Security Services also lists Islamist Radicalisation as a continued threat to the UK. The National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence Review 2015 states:

> 'the increasing threat posed by terrorism, extremism and instability. Whether inspired by Islamist extremism, the far right, or the situation in Northern Ireland, the overarching goal of individual terrorists and the groups that support them is the same – to inflict harm, to inspire fear and, in so doing, look to undermine the very fabric of our society.'[16]

To mitigate against these threats, the UK Counterterrorism and Security Act received Royal Assent on 12 February 2015 and contains powers to help the UK respond to the threat of terrorism. The act has the power to do the following: disrupt the ability of people to travel abroad to engage in terrorist activity and then return to the UK; enhance the ability of operational agencies to monitor and control the actions of those who pose a threat, and combat the underlying ideology that feeds, supports and sanctions terrorism.[17] Within the Act, the UK Government introduced the *Prevent* strategy as part of the Government's wider counter-terrorism and deradicalisation strategy, known as CONTEST.[18] *Prevent* aims to

safeguard and support those vulnerable to radicalisation to stop them engaging in violent extremism or supporting terrorism, in all its forms including when it is inspired by Islamist or right-wing ideologies.

The purpose of *Prevent* is early engagement to encourage individuals and communities to challenge radicalisation, violent extremist ideologies and behaviours.[19] The strategy is reliant on the society, or someone working in schools, colleges, universities, hospitals etc who can raise their concerns to the police, or local authority safeguarding teams about a person they know who has or is susceptible to being radicalised.[20] The *Channel* programme which is a voluntary initiative provides a multi-agency approach to safeguarding, supporting and protecting children, young people and vulnerable adults at risk of radicalisation, extremism or terrorist related activity, and which delivers this strategic aim of *Prevent*.[21]

Section 2
The Rise of ISIS

This section will provide a summative overview of ISIS, its history, how it emerged and how it exploited the Western Media to create divisions in UK society to further its gains, before examining why the group posed a threat to international and domestic peace and security.

ISIS is a terrorist organisation that emerged only three years after 9/11 from the remnants of al-Qaeda in Iraq in 2004.[22] After the surge of U.S. troops in Iraq in 2007, the group was on the peripheral edges in the area, but not active and it did not pose a threat to the international community.[23] In 2013 the group changed its name to ISIS and launched an offensive on Mosul and Tikrit in June 2014. On June 28, Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, announced the end of ISIS and the birth of the IS on the first day of Ramadan; however, the UK and most of the West continued to refer to the group as either ISIS or Daesh.[24] The declaration of the caliphate was motivated by its military momentum, the size of its forces and the takeover of Sunni Iraq at the onset of the holy month of Ramadan, and saw Baghdadi call upon all Muslims throughout the world, including all existing jihadi groups, to accept IS supreme authority.[25]

Following several terrorist attacks by ISIS in the UK and across Europe in 2014, the group was assessed by the security services, and governments to pose a significant threat to international peace and security and was formally recognised as a 'terrorist organisation with considerable military and territorial and financial resource.'[26] As such, in August 2014 the U.S. and its allies resumed Air Strikes over Iraq. Whilst ISIS started in Iraq in 2004, it was the Syrian civil war in 2011 that saw the group grow exponentially benefiting from the instability in the country to gain territory and enabling it to recruit as many as 30,000 foreign fighters, mainly from the region but also from Europe.[27] The group seized strategic territory in Syria and Iraq, acquired a revenue estimated at $2 billion annually and created Islamic laws, including its own judicial system which included courts and a police force enforcing the 'Islamic Laws', and it was also able to 'claim the responsibility for over 90 terrorist attacks in more than 21 countries including France, Belgium, Turkey, Australia, the UK, and the USA.'[28]

It was this global reach that presented the greatest threat to international peace and security, including the UK, who viewed ISIS emergences as posing an existential threat to their state, their citizens, and international order. However, it was also this same factor that attracted large numbers of Westerners to join ISIS as it was able to make itself internationally accessible irrespective of geographical boundaries. This global reach was also one of the primary reasons it could portray the caliphate as an Islamic utopia, and a functioning state 'where *sharia* (Islamic law) would be implemented according to the principles of *al-salaf al-salih* (the righteous predecessors) or the first three generations of Muslims.'[29] The Internal Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague - estimated in 2016 that between 663 and 883 women and young girls, including three London schoolgirls Amira Abase, Shamima Begum and Khadiz Sultana all aged between 15 and 16 travelled to join IS.[30] Since 2014, ISIS aggressively recruited Western women through their propaganda campaigns and narratives of *Dabiq* which called on Western women to perform *hijrah* to its territories, and in 2016 it released its first English-language magazine, 'Rumiyah' directly targeting UK females.[31]

From the outset, the UK media coverage on the British military's return to Iraq was extensive which heightened ISIS's profile and brought the group's presence on to the centre stage with minimal effort. The extensive literature on ISIS' propaganda machine highlights its far reaching, influential and immensely adaptive capabilities which in turn helped to radicalise, recruit and infiltrate Western society.[32] From broadcasting the group's violent, brutal actions such as streamed execution videos or armed fighters killing citizens who refuse to covert to the caliphate, to including videos and blogs, or celebrating the large number of Western fighters that left their homelands to join the fight for an IS, the Western Media unwittingly reinforced another dimension which enhanced the group's ability to recruit members and sympathisers, instil fear in its opponents, and promote its legitimacy as an IS.[33] This heightened global media presence, coupled with the group's extensive use of online platforms such as YouTube, Twitter, Telegram and online magazines in both English and Arabic was disseminated in-real-time on a scale not previously achieved by other terrorist organisations.[34] The media created sensationalist spectacles of violence which appealed to those seeking stardom, and popular culture and this narrative became the spectacle for the news media.[35] Hoffman explains, 'through the publicity generated by their violence, terrorists seek to obtain the leverage, influence, and power they otherwise lack to effect political change on either a local or international scale.'[36] Ultimately ISIS was able to use Western media to advance its political agenda, and improve its media strategies with a constant output merging 'pre-modern religious ideology with 21st Century communication management.'[37]

Using online media, ISIS was able to create a camaraderie and belonging which appealed to those individuals searching for a meaningful political, religious or personal identity.[38] A recent study by Cook & Vale found that many of the women who migrated to Iraq and Syria were attracted to the caliphate because of the purported sense of belonging and sisterhood which they felt lacking from the West, and the sense of unity, purpose and empowerment offered by ISIS and its ideology was a powerful recruitment tool.[39] Jeffry et al highlight that

'Ideology plays an important role in that it can provide the true believers with a license to kill'[40] and that ideology plays an important and constant factor in the radicalisation process towards terrorism. In contrast, Schmid argues that whilst ideology is a major factor for some, he cites McCauley and Moskalenko by noting that there are many paths to radicalisation that do not involve ideology.[41] However, it was ISIS' ideology that acted as a key pull factor in the recruitment of Western women who were drawn to the notion of building utopia, the so-called 'Caliphate' in the hope to live Islamic lives without the restrictions of Western laws, societal pressure, judgement and victimisation; these narratives were important drivers of female radicalisation.[42] It was ISIS' ideology and propaganda machine that attracted and empowered UK women to join the group.[43]

Section 3
Radicalisation: Primary Motivations and Factors

This section will explore the primary reasons for radicalisation and the factors associated with the radicalisation process by examining McCauley and Moskalenko's 12 mechanism model and McClauley's Two Pyramids Model looking at Radicalisation of Opinion and Radicalisation of Action. The expansion of theoretical models over the past decade has been fuelled by a plethora of theories around what factors and processes drive radicalisation.[44] The models all provide different perspectives on the issue, but for the purposes of this paper the McCauley and Moskalenko's 12 mechanism model will be used as a framework to understand the primary reasons why ISIS was able to radicalise many Western females, specifically UK females, to join the caliphate. Published in 2008, the McCauley and Moskalenko's model argues that radicalisation can happen at three levels: individual, group, and mass.[45] The primary argument in their work is that normal people can be radicalised and move towards criminal and violent behaviour, and that radicalisation is not an abnormality or psychopathology. The focus on Individual radicalisation features heavily in their works, and six of the twelve mechanisms

Table 1: McCauley and Moskalenkos 12 mechanism model[46]

Level of radicalisation	Mechanism
Individual	1. Personal victimization
	2. Political grievance
	3. Joining a radical group—the slippery slope
	4. Joining a radical group—the power of love
	5. Extremity shift in like-minded groups
Group	6. Extreme cohesion under isolation and threat
	7. Competition for the same base of support
	8. Competition with state power—condensation
	9. Within-group competition—fissioning
Mass	10. Jujitsu politics
	11. Hate
	12. Martyrdom

Table 1 above outlines the level of radicalisation and the mechanism.

are identified by the process of political radicalisation centred around Western culture and psychology that behaviour reflects an individual's beliefs, feelings, and preferences.[47] Within their framework, each level is considered as a pathway leading to radicalisation, and the 12 mechanisms within the model describe how the process can happen.

At the Individual level, mechanisms one to four outline grievances, either directly or indirectly through affiliation with a group whom the individual identifies with, that leads an individual to move from sympathizer to activist which sees radicalisation of opinion (behaviour) develop to radicalisation of action (carrying out violent acts). However, in most cases this process is normally slow and gradual, and cases of individual radicalisation to political violence, highlights that more often than not an individual will act as part of a group, or on behalf of the group, rather than on their own.[48] Mechanisms three and four are particularly relevant in this paper as ISIS was able to successfully attract individuals to embrace the violent ideology in support of a political and religious cause which led to some moving through the process from sympathy (cognitive radicalisation) to extreme violence in a single giant step. However, Silke and Brown argue that radicalisation is complex and dynamic, and there is no single route to an individual carrying out a violent act[49] and that more than 200 different factors have been identified by research that play a role in the radicalisation process.[50]

The path that leads an individual to join a radical group is often via personal connections through a trusted network of friends, lovers, and family to prevent betrayal to the authorities. This was particularly true in the ISIS recruitment campaign as many young UK females were contacted online through friendship groups, by other trusted women and through family and friends. In the case of the three London School girls, it is alleged they were recruited online by an old schoolfriend, Aqsa Mahmood, who had already made the journey to Syria in 2013 and that she facilitated their journey, which indicates the importance of the 'sisterhood' to escape the feelings of oppression, isolation, and identity which they believed lacking in the West.[51]

At the Group Level, mechanisms five to nine outline how individuals can be radicalised through affiliation with likeminded people, through shared values, beliefs, opinions, and feelings which can result in conflict, competition and resentment against other groups, political and societal opinions or even state governance and rule of law. These changes in behaviour are often referred to as 'risky shift,' 'group extremity shift,' or 'group polarization' [52] and outlines the process where strangers with shared political opinion come together and adopt two types of behaviour.[53] More often, the shift towards increased extremity occurs on the balance of which opinion is favoured most by those within the group.[54] In the case of ISIS the 'group extremity shift' is particularly relevant as despite the vast array of differing motives that shaped individual aspiration and motivations to migrate to the IS, the group was able to fuse diversity of opinion of its recruits persuading them to follow its idealistic goals of religious duty and to build a utopian 'Caliphate state'.[55] The power of group radicalisation is especially evident regarding Western women who joined ISIS with many citing social and

cultural isolation within communities being a key push factor in their decision to leave in search of a Muslim sisterhood and to find a sense of belonging and identity with individuals who shared their opinions, values and beliefs.[56]

At the Mass level, mechanisms nine to twelve outline a much larger phenomenon of radicalisation which sees exceptionally large numbers (thousands upwards), or multiple groups with similar shared characteristics joining forces. These small, combined groups lead to increased group cohesion, increased respect for ingroup leaders, the acceptance of established structure and idealisation of group norms.[57] Mass radicalisation was a concept used by ISIS to create a 'State like' identity by pushing the extremist narrative that cast the other side (the West) as evil, as 'enemies,' and that individuals joining the group must fight at all costs in order to preserve their way of life. By building the Caliphate, ISIS was able to convince its recruits that it was their mandatory religious duty to assist in the process of State-building and its narrative was that all Muslims must travel to build IS.[58]

Historically, mass radicalisation took time as the outlet for information and dissemination was slow through newspapers or political speeches in towns and cities etc. However, that is no longer reality with the power of the internet as a radicalising message can be broadcast to hundreds of millions of people in a matter of seconds. ISIS effectively embraced the full power of this tool by using social media platforms to maximum effect reaching individuals worldwide, via their mobile phones or other electronic devices with relative ease.[59] The internet, media outlets and social media companies set the perfect conditions for mass radicalisation for the ideology and between 2014-2017, ISIS was able to recruit over 41,000 citizens from 80 countries, and a quarter of these were women and minors.[60] Further, its use of slick videos, online messages, extensive Vlogs and Blogs on YouTube and Twitter, and the creation of an app that all aimed to radicalise and create a new generation of cyber jihadists, fighters and terrorists suggests that its reach, goals and ideology extended beyond the 'state' it had built.[61] Cook and Vale argue that these modern-day tools helped ISIS spread their propaganda and ideology to thousands of online sympathisers across the world, and despite ISIS' loss of territory many of its supporters are likely to carry on its ideology, mostly online.[62]

Whilst the influence of the internet is cited extensively throughout literature on ISIS as being a key component in the radicalisation process of its recruits in the most part this is the first step which sees an individual's behaviour, beliefs or values change as described in the model above.[63] McCauley and Moskalenko refer to this first step as 'Radicalisation of Opinion' and this process is illustrated by a 'Radicalisation in Opinion Pyramid' which demonstrates how individuals or groups can move upwards from neutrality to sympathiser, to justifier to personal moral obligation to act (violently in most cases). Further, that the pyramid represents the front line in the 'war of ideas' between terrorist and government.[64] This later point is especially true for individuals who joined ISIS as many of those radicalised by the group cite political motivation directly linked to their treatment by Western governments, and the UK Foreign Policy, as their primary factor for deciding to travel to the IS.[65]

Section 4
How ISIS Recruited Western Women?

This section will analyse how ISIS was able to recruit Western women to support its ideology by exploring some of the key reasons how the ideology deliberately targeted and directed their recruitment campaigns to attract UK/Western women to the Caliphate.

Although foreign fighters joining an Islamist extremist organisation is not a new issue, the call from ISIS resonated with greater numbers of Westerners to travel and join the Caliphate than in the past.[66] This was especially true in relation to the number of Western females who migrated to join ISIS, and Bakker and de Leede argue that the conflict in Iraq and Syria introduced a new dimension which saw Western citizens of Muslim origin, or converts to Islam, travelling to Iraq and Syria voluntarily to fight against their own society. Indeed, their research suggests around 10-12% of the individuals who travelled from Western countries were women, of which around 80-90 were from the UK.[67] However, this number is disputed as most western countries, including the UK, did not track the gender of those that travelled and therefore the number could potentially be higher.[68]

The 'International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation' at King's College London estimates that the women were mainly aged between 16 and 24 years old, and that the women fall into two main groups: those that travelled as a family unit, and those that travelled alone.[69] One of the most important reasons cited in the report prepared by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) is that ISIS was able to recruit greater numbers of women to join because of its state-building project.[70] Indeed, the call from the leader al-Baggdadi directly calling upon Muslim females to travel to help build the new territory, and how they would play an important role in its society by assuming the traditional roles as wives and mothers. Offering Western women, the opportunity to be part of the fight by adopting *jihad* off the battlefield by raising *mujahid* children, and by supporting their husbands in the fight to create the foundations for the new proclaimed caliphate was a major driver for women who travelled because the narrative empowered them to act.[71]

The Importance of Western Women to the Ideology, and the Caliphate

Spencer expands on the importance of women in the ideology and highlights that the ISIS leadership viewed women, especially Western women, as an 'untapped resource and it was increasingly willing to make concessions in its ideology to fold women into its ranks.'[72] Peresin and Cervone reinforce this notion and highlight that ISIS recognised that women produced sensational international media attention as media outlets became fascinated by the roles women filled within the territory, especially those women who were well-educated, professional from well-established families and who generally had bright prospects of life in the West.[73] This enhanced attention, and media coverage saw ISIS actively use women for propaganda purposes which generated a new swath of potential recruits who became alerted to the ideological cause with minimum effort.[74] Further, the promise and hope ISIS portrayed online appealed especially to Western women as they were given the opportunity to do more

than simply play a peripheral role as they were actively encouraged to undertake physical action by travelling to join the group in the creation of an ideologically pure state.[75]

The traditional role of a woman in most Islamist terrorist groups is to serve her husband and previous groups such as al Qaeda clearly emphasized that men and women were not equal and therefore women were not permitted to leave their homes unless there were legitimate reasons, such as having to wage jihad when no men were available.[76] ISIS from the outset depicted the importance of women in building the State and whilst women were recruited to fulfil traditional roles, they were also recruited to take on active roles such as policing official, recruiter, and in armed roles.[77] Gan et al state that ISIS used these enhanced roles as a form of empowerment which helped in the recruitment of Western women to join its ranks.[78] This was particularly evident when ISIS created an all-female police unit, Al-Khansaa Brigade, in 2014 to enforce strict rules and regulations women living in the State.[79] Again, these high profile armed roles normally preserved for men acted as key recruitment tool as women were offered directive roles in the governance of the Caliphate, and thus demonstrated the importance of their presence to the group. However, for some women it was the opportunity to carry out acts of violence in the name of ISIS which lured them into making the journey,[80] which reinforces that some women want to bear arms and carry out violent attacks like their male counterparts, and therefore can pose a threat to domestic security.

Section 5
Identity Crisis Theory and the Push/ Pull Factors of Radicalisation

This section will analyse the 'push and pull factors'[81] that influenced UK citizens to become radicalised by ISIS looking at Identity Crisis Theory to critically examine the role of the British Governmental decisions, strategies and polices played and that of UK society in the radicalisation process.

Identify Crisis Theory

The term identity 'refers to a complex theoretical construct involving elements originating at three levels: cultural, social and personal.'[82] Identity crisis theory played a key part in the motivations of UK women who decided to travel, and many cited when interviewed that they felt isolated from society (personal), isolated culturally by British norms and way of life (societal), and uncertain of their place within a Western culture which made them question their identity (cultural).[83] Hamid highlights that 'studies on radicalisation find identity to stand at the forefront of the radicalisation process'[84] and Stroink states this is especially true for Muslims living in Western democracies where public displays of religiosity go against mainstream views.[85] These feelings of exclusion, and discrimination in some cases, can lead certain individuals to draw heavily on their religion in their search for identity because the mainstream society threatens their 'self-identity.'[86] Liht and Savage argue that European Muslims face '*self-definitional uncertainty*' and the solution for many was an intensification of Islamic identity.[87] Certainly, one of the major pull factors for UK women was ISIS' ideology and the creation of a pure-IS where individuals believed they could find a sense of belonging, unity and self-identity.

The Push Factors

> 'The motivations for women to travel were diverse and generally referred to as drivers or 'push' and 'pull' factors – factors in their individual lives that 'pushed' them out of their society and 'pulled' them toward IS.' [88]

The factors, processes and rate of radicalisation for both men and women is not linear but Cragin and Daly argue that there are distinct patterns.[89] The 'Push Factors' are those that 'prime certain women to be more vulnerable to extremist propaganda' [90] and from the extensive research by the ISD report 'Till Martyrdom Do Us Part' highlights that the factors which motivated Western women to migrate to ISIS-controlled territory were similar, if not the same, as their male counterparts.[91] This notion is supported by Bakker and de Leede who argue that the motivations of young women and young men who joined ISIS were broadly similar.[92]

The major push factors cited during the extensive interviews and research of men and women were: 'feeling isolated socially and/or culturally, including questioning one's identity and uncertainty of belonging within a Western culture; feeling that the international Muslim community as a whole is being violently persecuted; and, an anger, sadness and/or frustration over a perceived lack of international action in response to this persecution.' [93] Hoyle et al expand the concept by adding that like men, women saw it as their ideological and religious duty to support jihad and live their lives by the laws of Alah in a pure IS because Western culture did not offer this opportunity or prospect, and for many this was seen as a push factor in the search of self-identity.[94]

Research suggests that most females radicalised in the UK were second or third generation who are shaped by their parents' views at home, which were often in conflict with their own, and who struggled to integrate into British society and be accepted. Many stated they felt in conflict between their religion and the cultural norms of society.[95] This was further exacerbated by the UK Government's emphasis on 'political correctness and Muslim cultural sensitivity' which appears to have unintentionally aggravated feelings of difference and separation.[96] Equally, other societal pressures on identity such as socioeconomic status, higher unemployment and low social standing caused individuals to become disenfranchised due to a perception of unfair treatment.[97] Tahir states that 'Muslims may fall prey to radicalisation as they suffer from economic inequality, social disparity, discrimination and acts of Islamophobia' [98] and Roy (2004) supports this notion by arguing that ISIS was able to target individuals in doubt of their identity and faith, and that ISIS appealed to an '*uprooted, disaffected youth in search of identity beyond the lost cultures of their parents and beyond the thwarted expectations of a better life in the West*.' [99] These individuals strongly believed that ISIS could provide them with a chance to build a new and positive identity and be part of a pure IS or a 'imaginary ummah.' [100]

Studies in Britain illustrate that personal negative experiences, such as attacks on fellow Muslims in Iraq and Afghanistan, the death of loved ones, or close relatives also fostered cognitive openings and extremist visions.[101] Hasan argues that revenge theory plays a part as

individuals are outraged by Western actions, foreign policy and that the oppression of Muslims can trigger radicalisation, which links directly to one of the Push Factors outlined above – 'feeling that the international Muslim community as a whole is being violently persecuted.'[102] The feeling of persecution and being under attack from the West was echoed by female migrants who talked of the oppression of Muslims internationally as a motivating push factor.[103] In addition, anger and frustration over international inaction, on issues such as racism, inequality within society etc broadens the divide between Muslims and non-Muslims, and the 'us versus them' narrative heightens, for some, feelings which justify violence against this perceived enemy force.

Another factor during the early stages saw some Western women migrating in the name of humanitarianism and their process of radicalisation was accelerated due to the perception that the West was in some way responsible for the atrocities on the ground, and in the suffering of innocent Muslims.[104] The empathy that women undergoing radicalisation feel for victims of violence is a highly influential factor for individuals choosing to leave, and it was seen as a key push factor.[105] Finally, the rigid patriarchal values in parts of UK Muslim communities was cited by female participants as a push factor, with many suffering from low self-esteem, a feeling of restriction of opportunity due to their gender, and how they were perceived as being less educated, less 'streetwise' and less resilient.[106]

The Pull Factors

While the push factors for men and women were broadly similar, the primary 'Pull Factors'[107] for women were more gender specific and predominately shaped by the roles that they could fill once inside the IS. Recent academic research identifies that the pull factors were much more specific and individualised and shaped by incentives, motivations and goals for each woman who left to join the Caliphate.[108] However, the most cited by those interviewed in existing literature are: Idealistic goals of religious duty and building a utopian 'caliphate state'; belonging to a sisterhood; and romanticisation of the experience, which are all gendered. Lahoud reinforces this notion by highlighting that the major pull factors were diverse and ranged from ideological motivations, the opportunity for empowerment and adventure, seeking a husband or joining one in country, the perceived 'obligation' to make hijra and live under strict Islamic jurisprudence and governance, and play an active and supportive role in the State-building project.[109]

Whilst the vast majority of Western women appeared willing and eager to travel, often evading their families in the bid to make the journey, there is also evidence to suggest some were coerced or forced to travel by their family unit, through marriage.[110] Sherwood et al argue that given the age of the females that travelled, particularly from the UK (the London school girls were 14 and 15 at the time), that they were groomed online and that they made the decision to leave because they were too young and naïve to understand the consequences of their actions.[111] Sjoberg and Gentry highlight that the Western media were quick to victimise these girls for travelling by belittling their actions to simply the pursuit of romance, to find husbands

and to be wives and mothers. These perceptions were reinforced by UK media outlets, and governmental departments to potentially avert the real reasons girls had been radicalised by ISIS by removing the issue from the political agenda or preventing questions around governmental commitment to ethnic minorities, societal or community divisions or failure in radicalisation policies.[112] These narratives made the actions of UK women seem irrational and non-credible as potential terrorists, and for some, the lack of recognition was a driver that shaped their reason for leaving, and for others it was a rebellion or demonstration of defiance towards society.[113]

The most captivating pull factor for UK women was the prospect of a new world, a utopian society and many travelled in search of the opportunity to live freely as a Muslim without victimisation, intimidation, threats of violence and Islamophobia they received in their daily lives in British communities.[114] The ISIS propaganda and official speeches by al-Bagdadi reinforced this pull factor as females felt they were an essential part of the State-building process, and thus the sense of personal and societal identity relating to the 'Sisterhood and Belonging' lured women to travel to the caliphate.[115] Hoyle et al highlight how the strong bond with other 'sisters' formed online, especially for those women seeking sanctity, acceptance, or a sense of belonging which they felt was missing in the UK/Western culture was a key pull factor, and those cited in the ISD report consistently referenced a feeling of belonging, of unity and community as their motivation.[116]

The final major pull factor which was captured extensively in the media was the romantic notion of adventure and finding romance. As most UK females who travelled were aged between their late teens and early twenties, the promise of marriage and status after being married to a jihadist was their reason.[117] In addition, some saw the opportunity as a chance to rebel against their family, a way of starting their freedom of expression, and the possibility to make the transition from childhood to adulthood on their own terms.[118]

Despite the many factors which mirror their male counterparts, the UK media portrayed the females as 'Jihadi Brides' and therefore simply dismissed them as hopeless romantics. Schröter warns against this assumption by stating that 'the women of ISIS may have been partly attracted by romantic ideas of finding a soul mate, but like the male jihadists, they also see themselves as part of a grand movement that will completely change the world.'[119] This view is supported by Ingram who argues that the media has portrayed a simplistic understanding of female radicalisation and recruitment which does not match reality, and the notion of the 'jihadi bride: the idea that females are motivated to join ISIS solely for romantic and sexual motives'[120] significantly undervalues the importance of women. Equally, it miscalculates the potential for women to be regarded as a security threat in the future and undermines the principles of CONTEST strategies.[121]

Brown reinforces this notion that the consequence of gender and radicalisation is holistically overlooked and that the 'policies not only fail to prevent radicalisation and terrorism, but it

further reinforces the insecurities of women driving them to groups such as ISIS.'[122] Further, Brown & Cook agree that the link between gender, radicalisation and security is not given the appropriate resource, funding, training or attention by the UK Government or the Security Services and therefore *Prevent* and *Channel* both overlook the threat radicalised women pose to domestic security.[123]

Section 6
Gender and Radicalisation

This section will analyse the importance of Gender in the ISIS radicalisation process by exploring the similarities and differences between men and women including their roles in the Caliphate. Similarly, it will examine the impact and relevance of UK societal gendered perceptions and stereotypes.

Gender describes the socially constructed characteristics and rules that construct masculinity and femininity.[124] This includes behaviours and roles associated within the social construct such as power dynamics, and gender will vary within societies and can change over time. As such, it plays a considerable role on daily life for citizens as it defines power relations throughout socio-political domains in sometimes rigid and restrictive ways depending on regime type, societal and cultural factors.[125] Studies of female and male radicalisation often consider them in isolation, but Sageman argues that in fact women, like men, join extremist groups for both personal and political reasons and that organisational factors, such as ideology, motives, aspirations and group unity are strong influences for both.[126] However, by linking men and women's motivations as similar, Pearson & Winterbotham argue that the societal assumption about 'women's "natural" propensity for peace is challenged.'[127] This was particularly relevant in the UK as the Government would not accept that females left freely, and that they had the same motivations as men because this narrative would likely cast doubt on their deradicalisation strategies, and potentially highlight divisions within society.[128] Similarly, the shift in the rise of females being radicalised challenged the perceived recognised societal behavioural and stereotypical norms depicted of UK women.

Within societies, gender perceptions will differ depending on the regime type, religion, culture etc. but in general terms men are often depicted as adventurous, aggressive and rebellious and therefore joining ISIS to fight for a cause befitted this narrative, whereas women are viewed as obedient and compliant[129] and therefore their decisions to join ISIS was viewed as irrational and based on unhappiness, bad relations at home, tension with parents, education, conflict with the rise of identity around feminism, or mental health.[130] Loken and Zelenz argue that the rise of female participation in ISIS challenged Western perceptions on gender norms in relation to violence, as women are often seen as victims rather than perpetrators.[131] As such, their participation in the group has continued to perplex policymakers, government officials and researchers, and the Security Services and it is also these gendered norms and perceptions within UK society that have shaped deradicalisation programmes resulting in preventative strategies which have overlooked understanding security through a gendered lens.[132]

Another push factor cited by UK females who joined ISIS was the Islamophobia they faced within their communities, and online.[133] The predominant identification of a Muslim woman is a visual one as they wear religious symbols (hijab, burqa) which makes them more susceptible to victimisation and discrimination within Western society; the same cannot be said for a Muslim man as their relationship with religion does not require them to wear external religious attire.[134] Indeed, UK Muslim women are often viewed as oppressed and passive victims of Muslim men and this narrative has been fuelled by the 'War on Terror',[135] and terrorists attacks on home soil which have generated a one-dimensional perception within society which has exacerbated Muslim women's feelings of isolation from communities and society. Moreover, these narratives were intensified by the international community who responded with abject condemnation as Western women migrated to join ISIS and governments and media outlets regularly referred to them as 'mothers, monsters (and) whores.'[136] Despite the growing awareness of the varied roles, and importance, women play within conflict,[137] many of the labels and narratives were centred on gender stereotypes such as victim, mothers, wives and sisters of radical men which denied these women agency as an individual actor.[138] Brown focuses on the narrative of 'hypersexualized warriors' which again reinforces motivation based purely on romance, and highlights how women were perceived as being ill, dangerous and potentially mentally unstable.[139]

In contrast to these ideas of romance and vulnerability, Yilmaz argues that the great majority of Western women joined ISIS to 'escape the alleged pressure and denigration they have encountered living in the West'[140] and that their motives like men, were more political than psychological.[141] Likewise, Gan et al argue that many young Western women who voluntarily joined ISIS shared the same motivations as men: 'motivated by ideology; motivated by alienation and equality motivated by romance; motivated by peer influence; and motivated by sense of security'[142] and that they were both educated and fully aware of their decisions.[143] Their deep grievances at the treatment of Muslims worldwide, the political and social resentment towards the West's foreign policy, the lack of opportunities in society and the isolation from their community were broadly the same motivations shared by men online.[144] Ingram reinforces this notion that some of the major motivators for Western men and women were similar and equally as complex: 'personal experiences, a range of politico-historical and psychological factors such as identity crisis, feelings of marginalization, perceived erosion of gender roles in society due to emerging feminist movements, and unequal opportunities in society in comparison to non-Muslims.'[145]

Bloom challenges the assumption that women are drawn into violence by men, by arguing that women are driven by political motivation in the same manner as men, and that 'some women are just as blood thirsty as the male members', and like a man.[146] Although women were initially recruited for more domestic roles, ISIS' Manifesto did not exclude combat roles for women, and indeed the Al-Khansaa Brigade was responsible for policing the IS territory which often involved undertaking acts of violence for those not abiding to the caliphate rules.[147] Indeed, Cottee highlights that during interviews with ISIS women they mocked the Western concept of Jihadi Bride by stating that no women would leave the comfort of their

home just to marry a man, and that these views were held only by Western men, or Western media to belittle their agency and alliance to the caliphate.[148]

Women's Roles in ISIS and Gender Perceptions Around Femininity and Masculinity in UK society

As women are generally assessed as less risk to domestic security or viewed as periphery in the terrorist groups, ISIS was able to exploit this resource with limited scrutiny.[149] Brown states that ISIS Western women were seen with weapons or dressed as a suicide bomber in ISIS propaganda videos to signify their support to violent 'jihad' and to highlight that women had made a 'political choice' as much as a personal one to join the group, which was aimed to challenge Western values, society and gender norms.[150] Whilst the day-to-day roles between men and women differed, current research across the field suggests that like men, women's motivations were borne out of a devotion to gendered religious and political ideology to the creation of the IS.[151] Cook and Vale highlight that the women who were radicalised online were made to feel empowered and crucially important to the existence of the caliphate, and even though the roles would be predominately domestic, they were also numerous and diverse: Wife, Mother, Operational (Al-Khansaa Brigde), Recruiters, State-Building and Skilled Workers such as doctors, and teachers. Women joining ISIS viewed these opportunities as meaningful employment which many lacked in the West.[152] The diversity of these roles undoubtedly shaped ISIS' recruitment campaign, articles and propaganda messaging which led to the largest number of Western women to join its ranks than any Islamic group in history.[153]

A recent study by Pearson and Winterbotham emphasises that some women joined ISIS because of the growth of Western feminism, gender equality and consumerism and that their decision to leave was based on the rejection of these Western values.[154] Their research suggests that many Western women believed a new enhanced status in the State would serve as dual functions: it could constitute rejection of traditional family norms which see women restricted more than men, and it could offer independence and a new identity which rejected Western norms which does not value religion and the role of women to raise the family.[155] Unsurprisingly, the loss of status in their communities in the West and a desire to attain greater prominence in a society was strongly linked with female rather than male radicalisation.[156] The sense of worth and value in society was a firm part of ISIS' narrative to depict women as valued supporters with agency within their families, who gain status from their husbands' perceived glory, and this was reflective in a specific policy for women widowed which further heights the status the group placed on women within its ranks.[157]

For some Western women, their exclusion from wider society due to governmental partial banning of religious dress left them feeling unable to express their religion how they wished. Further, the UK media often associated religious items of clothing, particularly Islamic headwear such as the veil with oppression, terrorism, fundamentalism, and victimhood.[158] A consequence of this narrative left some women believing they must choose between their Muslim identity and their belief in gender equality; one that involved betraying either

their faith or their feminist conscientiousness. This was a key pull factor for Western women as the group offered them the opportunity to do both.[159] These feelings were aggravated by the UK Governmental policy to limit religious headdress in the community, places of work and educational environments which led to greater segregation and further marginalised Muslim women as 'different' to the societal culture thus promoting a new wave of Islamophobia both within society and actively online.[160]

Whilst there were gendered motivations for the men and women who joined ISIS, Topping and Gani (2015) argue that men and women were motivated by 'idealistic reasons'[161] and this view is shared by Pearson who argues that the shock within societies stems from the disbelief that women, like men, appear to have an appetite for violence. The fact UK women willingly joined a violent and extremist group which violated women shocked society as it did not align with gendered norms,[162] and Brown argues that these gendered perceptions have wrongly shaped the UK Governmental approach to female radicalisation.[163] Similarly, that the UK Governmental Departments have significantly overlooked the role women played in ISIS, and in most cases they were considered peripheral based on the assertion that historically women have carried out fewer attacks than men and therefore their participation is viewed as somehow a lesser threat to domestic and international security.[164] The perception that UK female Muslims who joined ISIS had less agency than men demonstrates a lack of understanding of the importance gender plays in the radicalisation process, and the significant role women can have in terrorist groups, which has led to an inevitable assumption that women pose less of a security risk.[165]

Section 7
Female Radicalisation and Threats to UK Domestic Security

This section will analyse the link between gender and security by exploring elements of the UK CONTEST Strategies, and to identify the potential risk from women radicalised by ISIS and the implications to domestic security.

Peresin and Cervone aptly summarise why women who join a terrorist organisation should be considered as much of a security threat as their male counterparts:

> 'Female suicide bombers may conceal explosives and evade security checks better than their male companions and have more chances to hit with precision their targets, because they are considered less suspicious than men.'[166]

Current research shows that the UK Counterterrorism and Deradicalisation programmes are gender-blind and that the integration of gender perspectives during the design, implementation and review processes is extremely lacking in substance.[167] Brown argues that:

> 'there is little explicit consideration of the role of gendered norms and impacts in these programs for either men and women, rendering such efforts unreflectively focused on men's security needs and priorities.'[168]

The European Radicalisation Awareness Network highlights that while motives into radicalisation appear similar for both men and women, the mechanics are influenced by gender but that this is often overlooked because the gender norms of society hinder the success of the programmes; women are seen as victims and men as aggressors.[169] Jacobs reinforces this notion that empirical evidence of female motivations and the factors in the radicalisation process is problematic as it denies women agency and fails to acknowledge their perceived grievances, and most importantly that it creates a dangerous gap in the security response.[170] Pearson and Winterbotham support this view by arguing that '*if policy-makers ignore the variety of women's motivations in favor of stereotypes, this will limit the reach of any policy designed to counter or prevent their involvement*' [171] and therefore detecting radicalisation in communities will be difficult because reality contradicts assumptions and norms about how women should behave.

Whilst female Islamist radicalisation is not a new phenomenon, the number of young UK females who left to join ISIS was unprecedented, and with many unaccounted for possibly still living in Iraq, Syria and Turkey, or in refugee camps and yet to return, the threat they pose to domestic security remains unclear.[172] Furthermore, as the UK did not track the gender of those who travelled so the exact numbers who left to support ISIS is unknown, it is very difficult for the Security Services and PAG to appropriately assess the potential implications or threat to domestic security, and equally to introduce mitigation methods, strategies or policies to minimise such threats.[173] Similarly, those females that left but who travelled as part of a family network remain broadly undetected as their reason for travel at the time could be legitimate such as visiting family, and therefore it is unlikely they were stopped from leaving, or returning, by boarder control agencies as their activity was not deemed suspicious.

Brown states that the potential security threat posed by these females is the most difficult to assess, but that it is likely to be much lower than those who travelled alone as association with a terrorist does not mean an individual will carry out a violent act themselves.[174] However, Cook holds a different view that women who have spent time in conflict zones who have been facilitators or supported foreign fighters or terrorists, whilst not directly engaged in the fight on the frontline, have been invaluable facilitators and provided essential information on Western culture and security practices which can be used by the group, and their direct inputs are likely to increase the success of terrorist activity, and therefore these women could pose a threat to UK domestic security.[175]

Given that several young British women were reportedly active in the support of the Al-Khasaa Brigade, concerns have been raised about the level of threat they pose to the UK as they have been closely linked to brutal and violent atrocities and punishment of women, and associated with, or supported the group in many ways.[176] This group is assessed as having the greatest potential to carry out a lone attack in the West given their extremist behaviour in the name of ISIS.[177] Focusing on this group who were predominately young single women it must therefore be assumed that the vast majority left voluntarily. As this group made informed decisions to leave their home and join a terrorist organisation, Brown and Cook agree that this group

could potentially pose the greatest risk to UK domestic security.[178] This notion was introduced by Briggs and Silverman who argue that there are three type of threats to domestic security that originate from individuals involved in terrorist groups: directed plots by individuals acting upon group instructions; individuals who carry out lone attacks without direction, but pledge alliance to the group; and individuals, or a network, that provide support and infrastructure to terrorist plots.[179] Indeed, a 2018 RUSI report highlighted that a small portion of those who voluntarily travelled are more likely to target the West, especially since ISIS has lost territory leaving many resentful to the UK and U.S. Governments for their military intervention in Syria and Iraq.[180]

Although ISIS may have lost most of the territory it acquired, the *MOD Regional Threat Outlook: Daesh, Iraq and Syria* report reinforces that the group remains a threat to UK domestic security.[181] The report states that Daesh remains a global ideology driven by a long-term objective of re-establishing the caliphate and therefore it will continue to employ violence to achieve its objective.[182] Further, the report highlights that the group maintains its global network of affiliates who are active in employing its Islamic governance to ensure the group maintains its leading position within the global Salafi-jihadist movement.[183] Brawn agrees that UK women living in the Middle East in areas still largely controlled by ISIS are still part of this active network, and as they have already been exposed to brutal war experiences and established contacts, formulated networks and adopted ISIS' way of life, this makes them a particular threat to domestic security if they try to return.[184] Hegghammer argues that whilst his 'tentative data' does not indicate that all foreign fighters return to carry out domestic terrorist attacks, there is a small minority who are motivated overseas, who have acquired terrorist combat skills and are therefore more effective operatives on their return; this group does have implications for domestic security and counterterrorism strategies.[185] Therefore, those females who travelled from the UK to join ISIS voluntarily, and who have chosen to remain living overseas or in refugee camps waiting to return home, like Shamima Begum, should not be underestimated as even a small number of returnees with the skills and desire to carry out terrorist attacks pose a very real threat to domestic security.[186]

In the four years of ISIS control, it is highly likely that many UK women will have been further radicalised, married to a jihadi fighter, remain living in a war-torn country or a refugee camp, and potentially support the group online or regionally. Whilst some women have chosen to remain, others are unable to leave having surrendered their passports upon arrival as a sign of dedication to the caliphate.[187] Further, the lack of support provided by the UK Government for those wanting to return could potentially exacerbate feelings of resentment, abandonment, and betrayal which are all motivating factors in the radicalisation process. Indeed, these feelings are likely to have intensified by the change in 2015 to the UK Counter-terrorism and Security Act which was amended to introduce new powers to remove British citizenship from any individual who travelled to join ISIS who has appealed to return if they are assessed as a security threat.[188] This was the case for Begum who asked for leave to return to the UK from a Syrian refugee camp but her appeal was denied due to her links with ISIS, and the

fact that she displayed little remorse for leaving the UK and for her actions. As such she was deemed an unacceptable candidate for deradicalisation and not granted permission to return.

While senior political figures, the Security Services and the Metropolitan Police Commission all agreed that Begum, and others like her, do pose a security risk to the UK, the temporary measure of citizenship deprivation whilst effective in the short term to reduce the immediate threat, is likely to be counterproductive in the longer term as a Counterterrorism approach.[189] An individual's sense of betrayal from having citizenship removed, the potential disillusionment with the radical cause itself and the psychological scars faced by those who have witnessed fighting could pose a greater threat if these disenfranchised, isolated and aggrieved individuals chose to seek retaliation.[190] Furthermore, their personal identity and moral image of the world and belief system could have been altered making them significantly more vulnerable, and a target for further radicalisation,[191] and whilst the scale of the threat posed by those yet to return, or held in refugee camps awaiting return, is not yet known it is predicted to be substantial.[192]

As the women who joined ISIS are largely viewed by the UK government, its agencies, and society as being less of a risk to security than the men who joined the group, those who do manage to return (legally or illegally) are likely to pose a threat because they are likely to remain undetected by the security enforcement agencies.[193] Indeed, Brown (2020) agrees with this notion that gendered motivations for women's participation in conflicts, and their underlying grievances especially at the political level are ignored and those in charge of programmes such as *Prevent* and *Channel* are not qualified to interact or advise in relation to gender specific requirements. As such, women are not given the appropriate support which often results in them being a higher risk as they are left unwatched in society.[194] Spalek reinforces Brown's argument that *Prevent* and counter-terrorism policies 'affirm and reinforce Islamophobia and have created a suspect community' which has formed a greater divide in society and left UK Muslims feeling socially, culturally, and personally isolated from society and thus more likely to be radicalised as they search for belonging.[195]

A further challenge of UK deradicalisation programmes is that the judiciary system is unable to prosecute women because there is predominately insufficient evidence they were contributing towards an act of terrorism and therefore the link between their behaviour and criminal activity is tenuous.[196] Women are more likely to be charged with kidnapping, child abuse or child neglect rather than terrorism related charges which means they often do not qualify for deradicalisation support in the same way their male counterparts do.[197] Similarly, many women find that because the practitioners are men, they cannot build a rapport or trust due to cultural boundaries, and their religious beliefs are called into conflict which causes the programme to be unsuccessful, and they stop attending.[198]

For the UK women who have returned from Iraq and Syria and are arrested, prosecuted and imprisoned for terrorist related offences, the prison system can be a breeding ground for

network building or further radicalisation resulting in greater resentment towards the government and society on their return to normal life, and thus an increased security threat.[199] Moreover, UK women who returned were sentenced differently (often more leniently) than men which sends a message to terrorist groups, extremists or radicals that the UK does not treat men and women who participate in terrorist activity equally.[200] This could see young females and women deliberately targeted in future as it could be perceived they can achieve greater success in a terrorist attack because they are less likely to be detected, suspected, or tracked by the Security Services. Cook and Vale argue that almost all women, and children born in the Caliphate, will face social stigma within society, potential rejection from their families and community and have far limited opportunities in society because of their time in the IS which makes them a greater security threat as they are isolated from society, likely to be easily radicalised and more paradoxically a potential motive to strike back at the society they believe has failed them.[201]

Whilst the UK has adopted the approach to strip or deny citizenship for those individuals who travelled to join ISIS who pose a threat, and to leave them in refugee camps in the Middle East, this approach can only be short-term and only temporarily mitigates the risk. It is likely that these individuals' sense of 'non-belonging and unbelonging' [202] will magnify and potentially manifest into a greater threat to UK domestic security in the form of retaliation, resentment or the potential to radicalise others online who might be sympathetic to the cause and prepared to carry out violent acts on the group's behalf.[203] This could potentially generate a longer-term wave of new young females radicalised, and children born to these women, especially as Islamist terrorist groups continue to praise attacks carried out by women that align with their goals, which in turn empowers women to join their ranks.[204]

Chapter 8
Conclusion

The rise of ISIS highlights the complexity of radicalisation both in relation to how individuals, groups and mass levels of people can be radicalised by both opinion and action, but it also highlights how motivational factors will differ depending on the societal, cultural, political, and personal status. The theoretical model by McCauley and Moskalenko provides a useful framework to demonstrate how individuals can move from radicalisation of opinion to radicalisation of action, and to understand the importance and power of group radicalisation in the process. ISIS was able to use group radicalisation to recruit greater numbers of UK women to join its caliphate than any other Islamist group before them by reaching and influencing its supporters irrespective of geographical boundaries. They achieved this by using online channels to sell its propaganda narrative, social media forums to recruit, and blogs and videos to enhance the profile, ISIS captivated those in the UK society who felt excluded whether that be personal victimisation, political grievance, disenfranchised with the lack of opportunities, or a rejection of families and cultural norms with relative ease. By portraying a sense of belonging and camaraderie within the ideology, the promise of a utopian Islamic Caliphate appealed to many young women in search for a 'sisterhood' of likeminded Muslim women, and an opportunity to live a life where their religion and societal values were not in conflict.

For these women who joined ISIS, identity crisis theory played a key part in their radicalisation process and was the primary push factor for those travelling in search of self-identity, belonging and unity which was fuelled by ISIS' deliberate targeting online via women only forums and trusted friendship groups to capture those individuals who displayed feelings of isolation both socially and culturally from society, and therefore more vulnerable and susceptible to be radicalised. This paper has highlighted that the push factors for both men and women radicalised by ISIS were similar and broadly shaped by political motivations, ideology, and a sense of unity around religion which led to large numbers making the journey. Equally, that some women like men joined ISIS to carry out acts themselves and therefore the perception by the Western media and governments that all women who joined ISIS were victims, oppressed by Muslim men or mentally unstable fundamentally overlooks the importance of understanding gendered motivations in the radicalisation process. Not only did these narratives deny these women agency, but it also reinforced gender stereotype within UK society that women involved with an extremist group do not pose the same threat to security as their male counterparts.

However, the pull factors were more gendered and for the women who joined ISIS, they were centred on the roles they could undertake in the IS, and the importance placed by al-Bagdadhi on their value to building the Caliphate, and its future. Critically, this provided UK Muslim women with a sense of belonging, purpose and empowerment and an opportunity to be more than just a peripheral element to the ideology. The primary pull factor was the 'sisterhood', a sense of belonging and to live freely as a Muslim by overtly following their religion without victimisation or subject to the Islamophobia which they faced in the UK, and for some a chance to rebel against their family's cultural way of life. These similarities and differences identify why gender should play an important part in future Counterterrorism and Deradicalisation programmes, and that understanding security through a gendered lens is critical to the effectiveness of UK security strategies and policy in the future.

This paper has identified that there is a connection between the UK females radicalised by ISIS and a threat to UK domestic security, and whilst the firm-hand narrative the government has adopted to deal with those returning or wanting to return is understandable as the level of risk is undetermined, adopting an aggressive and resolute stance is unlikely to be the answer. Neither is arresting our way out of the problem leaving citizens in refugee camps or in Iraq and Syria to make their own way home, removing citizenship or detaining in prison as this does not stop the risk to UK security, it only delays the threat. Understanding the motives of those radicalised by ISIS must be at the forefront of future UK deradicalisation and counter-terrorism strategies and policies if the UK Government and the Security Services are to properly assess the threat and then implement mitigation measures in the NSS to appropriately monitor, support and where necessary detain those radicalised by ISIS who pose a threat to domestic security.

ISIS was able to implant a message to potential followers unlike any other Islamist group whilst gaining territory across Iraq and Syria, revenue and income and introduced state-like attributes

in just four years. Their global reach and ability to attract large numbers of Western women was unprecedented and therefore the UK Government and its Security Services need to reevaluate preventative strategies and polices to better understand the link between gender and security and to assess the implications with greater numbers of women within society either radicalised by ISIS or who are susceptible to being radicalised to ensure the 'ISIS Effect' is not relived in the future.

Whilst female radicalisation is not new, the number of UK women who joined ISIS between 2014-2018 was unprecedented, and the ages of those who left voluntarily was also concerning but their movements were not tracked by the Security Services, and PAG, the actual threat they pose is undetermined, and potentially underestimated. Having been exposed to life within an extremist organisation, it is likely these women have been involved in operational and tactical level planning, carried out or supported acts of violence, and most likely been involved in the group's recruitment campaign, therefore the skills they have acquired can be dangerous if not controlled appropriately. Similarly, these women are likely to be susceptible to further radicalisation in future as they are largely undetected by security agencies and displaced within society.

As the exact numbers of women still living in Iraq and Syria or embedded in refugee camps either wanting to return or denied access remains unknown, this factor alone is concerning as it denudes governmental departments assessing threats and establishing mitigation, or preventative measures. Equally, those women who have returned and been processed through the judiciary system or *Prevent* programme have been given very little tailored support to integrate back into society which could result in these individuals being further isolated from society which is a key driver to radicalisation. With so many unknowns, the UK could be potentially at risk in the future from either a lone attack (with or without group instruction), or a more collaborated event as we have already seen in London if these women chose to provide infrastructure, networks, or safe spaces within our communities for the group to launch such attacks.

As the *Prevent* and *Channel* programmes have been designed to tackle extremist radicalisation which is primarily aimed towards violence (radicalisation of action) and therefore overlooks the risks from cognitive radicalisation (radicalisation of opinion), many women often slip through the net, or do not engage with these voluntary programmes as they are not tailored in any way to their specific requirements. Moreover, as the programme practitioners are predominately men, Muslim women struggle to build rapport due to cultural sensitivities and they often drop out of the programmes and are left largely unmonitored. The gendered perception that women are victims of violence rather than perpetrators, and that society does not view the women radicalised by ISIS with the same metrics as the men could mean that new extremist groups, or existing ones, start to actively target and recruit larger numbers to their ranks as they are an untapped resource, with the ability to enhance a groups profile and influence.

As such, this paper has demonstrated that the link between gender and radicalisation needs to be better understood in academia and at the UK governmental level as 'some' UK women radicalised by ISIS can, and do, pose the same threat to domestic security as 'some' of their male counterparts, noting that radicalisation does not always resort to extremist behaviour. Therefore, security preventative measures, the judiciary system and the deradicalisation programmes should not be gender blind if they want to mitigate against any future threats to UK domestic security.

An area for further research is to understand the potential risk that children born within the Caliphate might pose when they reach adulthood to UK domestic security. Whilst there is early academic research by Cook and Vale this is limited due to the vast number of unknowns because the UK government, and its PAG, did not accurately track the gender of those who joined ISIS. Similarly, whilst revision of UK CONTEST strategies is not the intent of this paper, it has demonstrated that *Prevent* and *Channel* need to be redesigned through a gendered lens if they are to be successful in tackling female radicalisation with greater emphasis placed on the role women can play in terrorist groups, and why they should not automatically be discounted as posing a threat to security because of societal gendered perceptions. The actions of the Security Services and the Government in supporting and facilitating the reintegration of ISIS women back into society is critical for them, their community, and potentially future generations if the UK hopes to mitigate against radicalisation in our communities.

Notes

[1] Arun Kundnani, 'Radicalisation: the journey of a concept,' *Race & Class, Vol. 54*, No. 2 (Oct.-Dec. 2012): 3.
[2] Dr. Katherine Brown, interview with author, Appx 1, Q1.
[3] Dimiter Toshkov, '*Research Design in Political Science*,' (London: Macmillan Education UK, 2016), 24.
[4] James Scotland, 'Exploring the Philosophical Underpinnings of Research.' *English Language Teaching 5*, no. 9 (2012): 9-16.
[5] George Ritzer and Guba, Egon, Paradigm Dialog, '*Canadian Journal of Sociology 16*', no. 4 (1991): 446-448.
[6] Alex P. Schmid, 'Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion & Literature Review.' *ICCT Research Paper* 4.2 (2013): 1.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Kundnani, 'Radicalisation: the journey of a concept.':3.
[9] Andrew Silke, Katherine Brown and S Jayakumar, *Radicalisation: The Transformation of Modern Understanding of Terrorist Origins, Psychology & Motivation*. (World Scientific, 2016), 1.
[10] Schmid, *Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation*. 22.
[11] Mark Sedgwick, 'The Concept of Radicalisation as a Source of Confusion', *Terrorism & Political Violence, Vol. 22*, No. 4 (2010): 480.
[12] John Horgan and Kurt Braddock, 'Rehabilitating the Terrorists? Challenges in Assessing the Effectiveness of Deradicalization programs', *Terrorism & Political Violence*, Vol. 22, No. 2, (2010): 267-291.

[13] Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, 'Toward a Profile of Lone Wolf Terrorists: What Moves an Individual from Radical Opinion to Radical Action.' Terrorism & Political Violence 26.1 (2014): 69-71.
[14] A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The National Security Strategy (2010).
[15] Ibid. 25-33.
[16] National Security Strategy: Strategic Defence & Security Review 2015.
[17] UK CONTEST & Security Act, Nov 2014.
[18] UK CONTEST Strategy (2011). The aim of CONTEST is to reduce the risk to the UK & its interests overseas from terrorism.
[19] Home Office - Prevent Strategy (2011).
[20] Ibid. 'Individuals referred to and supported through the Prevent Programme', April 2017 to March 2018.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Michael Weiss and Hassan, Hassan, *Isis: Inside the Army of Terror* (First Regan Arts Paperback ed. 2015), 1-8.
[23] *Timeline: Rise and Spread of the Islamic State* (2016): Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars.
[24] Weiss and Hassan. 1-8.
[25] Mashail Haydar Ali 'The Language Policy of the Caliphate State.' *Middle Eastern Studies* 57, no. 2 (2020): 391-405.
[26] Devorah Margolin, 'The Changing Roles of Women in Violent Islamist Groups,' *George Washington University Program on Extremism*, (2019).
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, Nathaniel Barr and Bridget Moreng, 'The Islamic State's Global Propaganda Strategy.' *ICCT Research Paper (Online)* 7.1 (2016): 9.
[30] Mark Singleton, Bibi van Ginkel and Eva Entenmann eds., 'The Foreign Fighters Phenomenon in the European Union: Profiles, Threats & Policies,' International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague 7, no. 2 (2016).
[31] Kiriloi Ingram, 'IS's Appeal to Western Women: Policy Recommendations.' *ICCT Research Paper (Online)* 8.4 (2017): 4.
[32] Jan Christoffer Andersen and Sveinung Sandberg, 'Islamic State Propaganda: Between Social Movement Framing & Subcultural Provocation.' *Terrorism & Political Violence* 32.7 (2020): 1506-526.
[33] Ibid.
[34] *Handbook of Terrorism & Counterterrorism Post 9/11*, edited by D. M. Jones, et al., Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 2019:26-38.
[35] Audrey Courty, Halim Rane and Kasun Ubayasiri, 'Blood & Ink: The Relationship between Islamic State Propaganda and Western Media.' *Journal of International Communication* 25.1 (2019): 69-94.
[36] Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Colombia University Press, 2006).
[37] Chris Galloway, 'Media Jihad: What PR Can Learn in Islamic State's Public Relations

Masterclass.' *Public Relations Review* 42.4 (2016): 582-90.
[38] Ibid. 23
[39] Joana Cook and Gina Vale, 'From Daesh to Diaspora: Tracing the Women & Minors of Islamic State,' *International Centre for Study of Radicalisation* (2018): 7-20.
[40] Jeffry R, Halverson, Lloyd H, Goodall & Steven R. Corman, *Master Narratives of Islamist Extremism*. 1st ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).
[41] Schmid, 'Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation:':89.
[42] Cook and Vale, 9-20.
[43] Anne Speckhard and Molly Ellenberg, 'ISIS in Their Own Words: Recruitment History, Motivations for Joining, Travel, Experiences in ISIS, & Disillusionment over Time,' *Journal of Strategic Security* 13.1 (2020): 82-127.
[44] Randy Borum, 'Radicalization into Violent Extremism II: A Review of Conceptual Models & Empirical Research', Journal of Strategic Security, Vol. 4, No. 4, (2011), 7-62; M. King & D. Taylor, 'The Radicalization of Homegrown Jihadists: A Review of Theoretical Models & Social Psychological Evidence', Terrorism & Political Violence, Vol. 23, No. 4, (2011), 602-622.
[45] McCauley and Moskalenko, 'Mechanisms of Political Radicalization: Pathways Toward Terrorism', Terrorism and Political Violence, Vol.20, No.3 (2008),415-433.
[46] McCauley and Moskalenko, (2008), 418.
[47] McCauley and Moskalenko, Friction: How radicalization happens to them and us. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, 4.
[48] Ibid. 419.
[49] Silke and Brown, 'Radicalisation,': 7.
[50] University of Amsterdam, Empirical Study (revised). SAFIRE: Scientific Approach to Finding Indicators for & Responses to Radicalisation (2013).
[51] Ruth Gan, Loo Seng Neo, Jeffery Chin and Majeed Khader, 'Change Is the Only Constant: The Evolving Role of Women in the ISIS.' *Women & Criminal Justice* 29.4-5 (2019): 214.
[52] McCauley and Moskalenko, 'Mechanisms of Political Radicalization': 422.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Roger Brown, 'Group Polarization,' in *Social Psychology*: The Second Edition (New York: Free Press, 1986).
[55] European Parliamentary Research Service. Radicalisation and counter-radicalisation: A gender perspective.
[56] Anita Peresin and Alberto Cervone, 'The Western Muhajirat of ISIS.' *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 38.7 (2015): 495-509.
[57] John Duckitt and Kirstin Fisher, 'The Impact of Social Threat on Worldview & Ideological Attitudes,' Political Psychology 24, no. 1 (2003): 199–222.
[58] Peresin and Cervone, 497.
[59] Imran Awan, 'Cyber-Extremism: ISIS & the Power of Social Media.' *Society* 54.2 (2017): 138-149.
[60] Cook and Vale, 'From Daesh to Diaspora.': 7-12.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Awan. (2017): 138-149.
[63] Ibid. 140.

[64] McCauley and Moskalenko, 'How radicalization happens to them and us,': 268.
[65] Ibid. 270.
[66] Peresin and Cervone, 'The Western Muhajirat of ISIS.' 498.
[67] Edwin Bakker and Seran De Leede, 'European Female Jihadists in Syria: Exploring an Under-Researched Topic.' *ICCT Research Paper* 6.2 (2015): 1-13.
[68] Peresin and Cervone: 499.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Carolyn Hoyle, Alexandra Bradford and Ross Frenett. 'Becoming Mulan?' Institute for Strategic Dialogue (2015): 8.
[71] Yılmaz Zehra. (2017). Critique of ISIS' women policy. *Turkish Journal of Middle Eastern Studies, 4*, 2. (2017): 29.
[72] Amanda Spencer, 'The Hidden Face of Terrorism: An Analysis of the Women in Islamic State.' *Journal of Strategic Security* 9.3 (2016): 74-98.
[73] Peresin & Cervone, 'The Western Muhajirat of ISIS': 509.
[74] Spencer. 78.
[75] Hoyle et al, 'Becoming Mulan?': 13.
[76] Gan et al, 'Change Is the Only Constant.': 209-212.
[77] Ibid, 209.
[78] Ibid. 211.
[79] Amanda Spencer, 'Behind the veils: The forgotten women of ISIS.' (Orchard Research Group, 2017).
[80] Joana.Cook, *A Woman's Place: US Counterterrorism since 9/11*. (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2020).
[81] Schmid, 'Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation.':1-91.
[82] Seth J. Schwartz, Curtis S. Dunkel and Alan S Waterman, 'Terrorism: An Identity Theory Perspective.' *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 32.6 (2009): 540.
[83] Erin et al, '*Till Martyrdom Do Us Part*'. 11.
[84] Hamid Sadek. 'The Attraction of "Authentic Islam": Salafism & British Muslim Youth,' in Roel Meijer (ed.), Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 384-403.
[85] Mirella L. Stroink, 'Processes and Preconditions Underlying Terrorism in Second-Generation Immigrants,' Peace & Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology 13:3 (2007): 293-312.
[86] Catarina Kinnvall, 'Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security' Political Psychology 25:5 (2004): 742.
[87] Sara Savage Hampson and Jose Liht Boyd-Macmillan. 'Turning the Telescope Round: Reciprocity in Psychology-Theology Dialogue.' *Archive for the Psychology of Religion* 30.1 (2008): 8.
[88] Joana Cook and Gina Vale. 'From Daesh to "Diaspora" II: The Challenges Posed by Women & Minors After the Fall of the Caliphate', *CTC Sentinel*. (2019).
[89] Kim Cragin and Sara Daly, A. *Women as Terrorists Mothers, Recruiters, and Martyrs*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger Security International, 2009.
[90] Marie Erin, Melanie Saltman-Smith and Lawrence Freedman. Institute for Strategic Dialogue,

and International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation Political Violence. '*Till Martyrdom Do Us Part': Gender and the ISIS Phenomenon*. 2015: 8.
[91] Ibid. 9-12.
[92] Bakker and de Leede. 'European Female Jihadists in Syria.': 5.
[93] Susanne Schröter, 'Between romance & Kalashnikovs – the women of "Islamic State"', 11 February 2015, Deutsche Welle.
[94] Hoyle el al. 'Becoming Mulan?':12.
[95] Matenia Sirseloudi, 'The Meaning of Religion & Identity for the Violent Radicalisation of the Turkish Diaspora in Germany,' Terrorism and Political Violence 24:5 (November 15, 2012):813-14.
[96] Munira Mirza, Senthilkumaran, Abi, Ja'far, Zein, and Policy Exchange. *Living Apart Together: British Muslims & the Paradox of Multiculturalism*. London: Policy Exchange, 2007.
[97] Savage Hampson and Liht Boyd-Macmillan. 75-113.
[98] Tahir Abbas. *Islamic Radicalism & Multicultural Politics: The British Experience*. Taylor & Francis, 2011.
[99] Oliver Roy. 'FT.com Site: Radical Islam Appeals to the Rootless.' FT.com, 2004: 1-4.
[100] Ibid.2.
[101] Quintan Wiktorowicz. *Radical Islam Rising*. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 20-24.
[102] Erin et al. '*Till Martyrdom Do Us Part*': 8-10.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Cook and Vale, 'From Daesh to 'Diaspora.': 7-9.
[105] Ibid. 12-14.
[106] Ibid. 66-68.
[107] Cook and Vale. 'From Daesh to Diaspora,':20.
[108] Ibid. 22
[109] Nelly Lahoud, 'Empowerment or Subjugation: An analysis of ISIL's gendered messaging' UN Women, June 2018.
[110] Cook and Vale. 24.
[111] Harriet Sherwood, Sandra Laville and Kim Willsher *in Paris*, Ben Knight *in Berlin*, Maddy French, 'Schoolgirl Jihadis: the Female Islamists Leaving Home to Join ISIS", *The Guardian, September 29 2014*.
[112] Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry *Beyond Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Thinking about Women's Violence in Global Politics*. London: Zed Books (2015).
[113] Ibid.
[114] Brown. Interview, Appx 1, Q2.
[115] Erin et al. '*Till Martyrdom Do Us Part*'. 14-15.
[116] Hoyle et al. 'Becoming Mulan?': 12-18.
[117] Erin et all. 16.
[118] Bakker and de Leede. 'European Female Jihadists in Syria.': 7.
[119] Schröter, 'Between romance & Kalashnikovs.'
[120] Ingram, 'IS's Appeal to Western Women.': 1-13.
[121] Ibid.

[122] Brown, '*Gender and Countering Islamic State Radicalisation*'. E-International Relations (2016): 1-4.
[123] K Brown and J.Cook, Interview with authors, Appx 1 and 2.
[124] Laura Sjoberg, Grade D. Cooke and Stacy Reiter Neal. 'Introduction: WOMEN, GENDER, AND TERRORISM.' *Women, Gender, and Terrorism*. Athens; London: U of Georgia, 2011,6.
[125] Srobana Bhattacharya, 'Gender, Insurgency, and Terrorism: Introduction to the Special Issue.' *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 30, no. 6-7 (2019): 1077-088.
[126] Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011, 81-82.
[127] Emily Winterbotham and Elizabeth Pearson, 'Different Cities, Shared Stories: A Five-Country Study Challenging Assumptions Around Muslim Women & CVE Interventions.' *The RUSI Journal* 161, no. 5 (2016): 61-63.
[128] Winterbotham and Pearson. 62.
[129] Alice Martini, 'Making Women Terrorists into "Jihadi Brides": An Analysis of Media Narratives on Women Joining ISIS.' *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 11, no. 3 (2018): 469.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Mereidth Loken and Anna Zelenz, 'Explaining Extremism: Western Women in Daesh.' *European Journal of International Security* 3, no. 1 (2018): 47.
[132] Brown and Cook. Interviews with authors, Appx 1 and 2.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Cook, Interview, Appx 2, Q3.
[135] Richard Jackson, *Writing the War on Terrorism: Language, Politics & Counterterrorism*. New Approaches to Conflict Analysis. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005.
[136] Laura Sjoberg, 'The Women of ISIS: Gender and Political Violence', Political Violence at a Glance, 28 August 2017.
[137] United Nations Security Council, Resolution 1325 (2000).
[138] Sofia Patel and Jacqueline Westermann, 'Women and Islamic-State Terrorism: An Assessment of How Gender Perspectives Are Integrated in Countering Violent Extremism Policy & Practices.' *Security Challenges* 14, no. 2 (2018): 54.
[139] Katherine Brown, 'Gender & Countering Islamic State Radicalisation',18 February 2016.
[140] Zehar Yılmaz, İsmail Numan Telci and Kemal İnat, 'Critique of ISIS' Women Policy.' *Türkiye Ortadoğu Çalışmaları Dergisi* 4, no. 2 (2017): 13-40.
[141] Ibid. 36.
[142] Gan et al. 'Change Is the Only Constant': 204-20.
[143] Nabeelah Jaffer. 'The Secret World of Isis Brides: U Dnt Hav 2 Pay 4 ANYTHING If U R Wife of a Martyr'; What Draws Western Women to Islamic State's Violent Jihad? *The Guardian (London, England)*, 2015.
[144] Gan et al. 211.
[145] Ingram, 'IS's Appeal to Western Women.': 19.
[146] Mia Bloom, 'Bombshells: Women & Terror.' *Gender Issues* 28, no. 1 (2011): 11.
[147] Peresin and Cervone, 'The Western Muhajirat of ISIS.': 502.
[148] Simon Cotte, 'What ISIS Women Want,' *Foreign Policy*, 17 May 2016.

[149] Cook. Interview, Appx 2.
[150] Katherine Brown, 'Utopian Vision in Jihadi Gender Politics'. *Durnstein Symposium*, Austria 2015.
[151] Loken & Zelenz, 'Explaining Extremism: Western Women in Daesh,': 59.
[152] Spencer, 'Behind the veils,': 80-88.
[153] Cook. Interview, Appx 2, Q2.
[154] Pearson and Winterbotham. 'Different Cities, Shared Stories.': 60-80.
[155] Ibid.
[156] Ibid.
[157] Ibid.
[158] Fraihi Hind, 'The Future of Feminism by ISIS Is in the Lap of Women.' *International Annals of Criminology* 56, no. 1-2 (2018): 23-31.
[159] Brown, Interview, Appx 1, Q3.
[160] Hind. 30.
[161] Alexandra Topping and Aisha Gani. School reaction to 'Syria-bound' schoolgirls: 'It doesn't make sense.' The Guardian. (23 February 2015).
[162] Emily Pearson, The case of Roshonara Choudhry: Implications for theory on online radicalization, ISIS women, and the gendered jihad. Policy & internet, 8(1), (2015): 5–33.
[163] Brown, Interview, Appx 1, Q3.
[164] Ibid.
[165] Pearson and Winterbotham, 'Women, Gender & Daesh Radicalisation,' *The RUSI Journal*, Vol. 162.2, 2017, 65.
[166] Peresin and Cervone, 'The Western Muhajirat of ISIS': 500 – 502.
[167] Patel and Westermann, 'Women and Islamic-State Terrorism.':55.
[168] Brown, *Gender, Religion, Extremism*. Oxford Studies in Gender & International Relations. 2020, 12.
[169] European Commission - RAN EXIT Gender-specific approaches in exit work, 22-23 October 2019.
[170] Anne Jacobs, 'The Evolution of Women in The Islamic State,' Washington institute for Near East Policy, 26 September 2016.
[171] Pearson and Winterbotham, 'Different Cities, Shared Stories.':65.
[172] Cook, Interview, Appx 2, Q4.
[173] Ibid.
[174] Brown, Interview, Appx 1, Q4.
[175] Cook, Interview, Appx 2, Q4.
[176] Pearson and Winterbotham, 60.
[177] Katherine Brown, *Gender, Religion, Extremism*. 42.
[178] Brown and Cook, Interview, Appx 1&2.
[179] Rachel Briggs and Tanya Silverman, Western Foreign Fighters Innovations in Responding to the Threat' *Institute for Strategic Dialogue* 2014: 37.
[180] Raffaello Pantucci & Clare Elis, 'The Threat of ISIS to the UK', *Rusi Threat Assessment*, October 2018.

[181] Mod.Gov.UK. MOD Regional Threat Outlook: Daesh, Iraq & Syria, 16 December 2020.
[182] Ibid.
[183] Ibid.
[184] Kerstin Braun, '"Home, Sweet Home": Managing Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters in Germany, The United Kingdom & Australia.' *International Community Law Review* 20, no. 3-4 (2018): 311-46.
[185] Thomas Hegghammer, 'Should I Stay, or Should I Go? Explaining Variation in Western Jihadists' Choice between Domestic and Foreign Fighting. (Report) (Author Abstract).' *American Political Science Review* 107, no. 1 (2013): 1.
[186] Bruan. 321.
[187] UNSC - CTED Trends Report – Gender Dimensions of the Response to Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters. 8.
[188] Helen Fenwick, 'Responding to the ISIS Threat: Extending Coercive Non-trial-based Measures in the Counterterrorism & Security Act 2015.' *International Review of Law, Computers & Technology* 30, no. 3 (2016): 175.
[189] Institute on Statelessness & Inclusion (2020). Citizenship striping as a security measure. *World Statelessness Report 2020*.
[190] Ibid.
[191] Briggs and Silverman, 'Western Foreign Fighters Innovations in Responding to the Threat.': 39.
[192] Ibid.
[193] Mia Bloom, 'Death Becomes Her: The Changing Nature of Women's Role in Terror. (Conflict & Security).' *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* 11, no. 1 (2010): 95.
[194] Brown, Interview (2021).
[195] Basia Spalek, 'Radicalisation, De-radicalisation & Counter-radicalisation in Relation to Families: Key Challenges for Research, Policy & Practice.' *Security Journal* 29, no. 1 (2016): 39-52.
[196] Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). (2019). OSCE Secretariat. Vienna: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.
[197] Spalek, 40.
[198] Schmid, 'Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation:':90.
[199] Ibid.
[200] Brown, Interview, Appx 1, Q4.
[201] Cook and Vale, 'From Daesh to Diaspora' II. 2019.
[202] Briggs and Silverman, 'Western Foreign Fighters Innovations in Responding to the Threat.': 45-49.
[203] Ibid.
[204] Ibid.

Appendix 1

Elite Interview conduct on Wednesday 3rd March 2021 with Dr. Katherine Brown, Senior Lecturer in Islamic Studies University of Birmingham.

This appendix (appx) is a summative overview of the answers to the four questions posed ahead of the interview which was recorded on Teams. Whilst I do not have permission to share the entire script, the author has given authority for me to summarise the key points from the interview. In addition, some of the author's professional opinions discussed during this interview have been used as primary evidence in the Research paper and these have been footnoted accordingly.

Q1. What role, if any, has gender in the radicalisation of British women supporting ISIS?

Dr. Brown stressed that the general perception, not just in the UK, but in academic literature, at the political level and within the security domain is the assumption that women are largely insignificant in terms of the radicalisation process as the numbers involved with terrorist groups is small in comparison to men. Therefore, why would governmental strategies, funding and deradicalisation programmes be shaped around the minority. Further, that UK deradicalisation programmes have been designed to tackle Counterterrorism with the primary objective to maintain physical security in society and preventing harm to citizens. Dr. Brown stated that even though there has been a shift since 9/11 towards tackling radicalisation in the UK, the focus has remained on understanding how people (predominately men) behave and think which is designed to prevent them undertaking physical acts of violence. In the past, most attacks have been carried out by men which has led to the perception that women are less violent or likely to be a security risk; women have carried out a small number of physical acts, but they remain an outlier.

Q2. If there is a potential link, what part do you think gender perception and stereotypes within UK society plays in how men and women were radicalised by ISIS. Do you think there are similarities and differences?

Dr. Brown stated that until the emergence of ISIS, British women were largely not carrying out acts of violence and therefore they remained unnoticed – Dr. Brown used the example that you do not notice that most of the world leaders are predominately men until you see women in the photo. ISIS has shone a light on the importance of understanding gender in the radicalisation process, and only when the UK Government started to see its female citizens engage with ISIS' ideology and voluntarily willing to travel in support of an extremist terrorist organisation did the narrative start to migrate towards understanding 'why and how' women were radicalised - but this is still very limited. Dr. Brown states that UK domestic security polices, programmes and strategies are gender blind. Therefore, British policy has been shaped around preventing men from carrying out acts of violence, rather than focusing on radicalisation and the part gender plays in this process.

Lengthy discussion took place on the role of the UK society and the importance of the ideological component and what ISIS offered to young females. Dr. Brown stated that the

prospect of living in a Muslim state and being part of this new pure-State, which valued religion and Muslim culture was for many a key driving factor for why younger females migrated. She stated that many felt oppressed and restricted in the West due to the Islamophobia they faced daily, and due to societal perceptions about all Muslims. In addition, Dr. Brown stated that some young women made the journey in the fight for jihad but that this concept has been overlooked almost entirely by the UK government, and the Security Services.

Q3. What was the role of British society, if it did have one, in driving Islamist radicalisation, and what were the primary factors that lead women leaving to join ISIS?

The focus during the meeting was on the role the UK media played, and at the governmental level which shaped the narrative that UK females who joined ISIS were motivated by romance and were simply termed as 'Jihadi Brides.' This oversimplified term, Dr Brown argues removes agency from their decisions and somehow makes them less of a risk to security. Dr. Brown stated that the general Western perception is that women should 'not be doing it anyway' and therefore by using the narrative that they were coerced or lured reinforces the UK societal and cultural perception that women are forced into violence by men; violent behaviour is accepted of men, but not of women. Dr. Brown agreed that there were similarities and differences that motivated men and women to join ISIS which are covered in the paper.

Dr. Brown introduced the Shamima Begum case as an example of how women who participated are framed as needing psychological help, and that their motivating factors are medicalised unlike their male counterparts where its culturally and societally accepted that some men will fight for a cause. Dr. Brown stated that this perception has also shaped our national security policies as women are viewed as less of a risk to the society as they are deemed unlikely to fight or carry out acts of violence.

Q4. What do you foresee are the primary security implications of potential amounts of increased British females radicalised by ISIS, especially those that do return?

Dr. Brown discusses at length the UK CONTEST programmes and stated that Prevent and Channel have been designed mostly by men, and that these interventions are delivered predominately by male practitioners which not only overlooks gendered factors in the radicalisation process but results in women not fully engaging or they are dropping out as it does not meet their needs. She uses the term 'designed by men for men' – and stated that the deradicalisation and Counterterrorism strategies, programmes and governmental policies are largely unsuccessful in supporting women involved in terrorist organisation as they do not consider the gendered aspect – they are 'gender blind.' Further, Dr Brown stated that the UK judiciary system is not equipped to deal with women who support a terrorist group as often the offences they are charged with are reduced to child abuse/neglect or linked to terrorist related offensives but only as a supporter or an affiliate. Due to gender perceptions and stereotypes of a woman's role in a terrorist organisation, Dr. Brown states that the UK women radicalised by ISIS are not given the appropriate support, scrutiny, or risk assessment

in the same way as their male counterparts, as the role is normally viewed as peripheral or supportive – victims rather than perpetrators.

Dr. Brown's opinion was that the women who lived in the Islamic State are likely to have been trained in defensive measures, and there is evidence of them wearing suicide vests and bearing arms. Similarly, that they had training in field triage and involved in the planning of operations which does give them some battle skills. However, Dr. Brown stated that these extra skills or their affiliation to ISIS does not necessarily make them a security threat by association, but she did agree that the level of threat posed by women who joined ISIS is undetermined, especially for younger women who travelled alone as it is reasonable to expect they made the decision based on the facts available online, in the media and globally; these women were aware that ISIS were a violent extremist group and yet they still decided to participate. Dr. Brown stated that these motives are likely to mirror that of the men who travelled and therefore they could potentially pose a similar, if not the same, threat to domestic security.

Appendix 2

Elite Interview conducted on Friday 26th February 2021 with Dr. Joana Cook, Assistant Professor Terrorism and Political Violence, Faculty of Governance and Global Affairs, Leiden University.

This appendix (appx) is a summative overview of the answers to the four questions posed ahead of the interview which was recorded on Teams. Whilst I do not have permission to share the entire script, the author has given authority for me to summarise the key points from the interview. In addition, some of the author's professional opinions discussed during this interview have been used as primary evidence in the Research paper and these have been footnoted accordingly.

Q1. What role, if any, has gender in the radicalisation of British women supporting ISIS?

Dr. Cook stated that in her book, *A Woman's Place*, and in her recent current research *Daesh to Diaspora* with Gina Vale she looks at the role gender plays in the radicalisation process. She stated that if you look at the question through the counterterrorism lens, and across the full spectrum which includes everything from preventative to direct engagement, disengagement, rehabilitation, and reintegration, and you consider each of these different groups, gender has a role to play in every aspect. Dr. Cook stated that gender influences the trajectory of radicalisation and is present throughout an individual's entire journey. Specifically, gender plays an essential part in how an individual accesses radical ideology, what roles are on offer within a group, how that role will be present in the organisation, and how the organisation has evolved; these factors are all shaped by gender stereotypes within societies and what attracts an individual to a particular terrorist group will be shaped by gendered cultural, societal, and personal beliefs. Dr. Cook highlighted that gender plays a part in how individuals are targeted, and in the case of ISIS, the propaganda campaigns and online recruiting was extremely gender focused. Dr. Cook stated that this gendered targeting in ISIS' Manifesto, during their recruitment campaigns, how it was portrayed online by its followers

and from the direct call from its leader all empowered Western women, including those from the UK, to travel on a scale not seen by any other Islamist Terrorist group in history. Dr. Cook stated that the gender lens offers insight into the lived experience, allows us to understand factors or pathways into radicalisation and what accelerator radicalisation is – what are the motivating factors that cause men and women to be radicalised.

Q2. If there is a potential link, what part do you think gender perception and stereotypes within UK society plays in how men and women were radicalised by ISIS. Do you think there are similarities and differences?

Dr. Cook focuses on a chapter in her recent book and explains how Muslim women in the UK tend to face Islamophobic attacks, particularly women who wear religious symbols. She explains that a division in society whereby these women are feeling excluded, rejected, or increasingly targeted based on gender, compounds their feelings of cultural, societal, and personal separation from the society and communities where they live. These factors are key drivers for radicalisation as evidence suggests these individuals are likely to seek like-minded groups as part of self-identity, and to find a sense of belonging. Dr. Cook raises a key point that gender stereotypes and roles within communities shape the way in which individuals exist, behave and who they form networks with.

Dr. Cook touched on her recent research *Daesh to Diaspora* to explain that in almost all cases that she looked at, the motivations for radicalisation have been multifaceted, but the ideology and the opportunity to live in a Caliphate was a key factor for women. The opportunity to live in a kind of hegemonic organisational structure and ideology where very idealised gender roles is supported and facilitated appealed to many young women. In addition, that ISIS offered UK women the opportunity to live in a State which valued their belief system and rejected the femininity movement growing in the UK. Therefore Dr. Cook argues that the UK societal perceptions on roles of men and women, with males being leaders and fighters, and women being private, inward facing, and supportive was exploited by ISIS as a key recruitment tactic and pull factor as they projected a utopian Muslim State were the traditional roles of men and women were firmly accepted and encouraged in their ideology.

Q3. What was the role of British society, if it had did have one, in driving Islamist radicalisation, and what were the primary factors that lead women leaving to join ISIS?

We discussed the impact of recent conflicts in the Middle East, the history of terrorist activity from the IRA and more recent terrorist attacks in London and how they have influenced British perception that Muslim men are terrorists, and that women are oppressed by men, and the general view that they are forced to wear the hijab etc reinforces the notion that they are weak, brain-washed, and vulnerable. Dr. Cook stated that for many UK young females, the feelings of isolation, disenfranchisement, and lack of opportunity within the society, along with day-to-day verbal and in some cases physical attacks were both push and pull factors in each individualised radicalisation journey. Similarly, that the Shamima Begum case demonstrates how the public view Muslims in UK society, as even though she is British

born and bred the debate around her citizenship was fuelled by the media coverage that she did not deserve this status, and society largely supported this notion. Dr. Cook states that the UK society, and Media platforms and UK Government all played a key role in the radicalisation process for many UK females who felt that the British state did not care about them, or their identity which for many just validated their feelings of isolation from the society and reaffirmed their decision to leave. ISIS was able to give these women a sense of empowerment to choose the life they want to live, and for some to rebel against society or fight back.

Q4. What do you foresee are the primary security implications of potential amounts of increased British females radicalised by ISIS, especially those that do return?

Dr. Cook stated that around 900 UK individuals travelled to the Islamic State (but this number could be higher) and that the gender was not accurately tracked. In addition, Dr. Cook stated that unlike European countries, the UK was the only country that has not actually differentiated the women who have returned, but that they have for the men. She stated a few questions, How many women remain in camps in northeast Syria? How many are confirmed dead? How many have drifted off to other parts of Iraq and Syria? We discussed these questions but the answer to all three question is the statistics are not accurate and the number remains unknown. However, Dr. Cook did state that of the women who have returned, no attacks have yet been conducted but that does not mean they should not be viewed as potential threats and treated as such. Dr. Cook stated that many of these women have been trained by ISIS to use guns, accustomed to battle tactics, supported the network, facilitated attacks, part of the State building process and indoctrinated children to the ideology's cause and therefore they do have the potential to pose a threat to UK domestic security, and must be given the appropriate attention. She did stress that the judiciary system is not the only mechanism to support these women but that the social services, and other government departments must be involved if the threat is to be appropriately mitigated.

Dr. Cook stated that the biggest areas of concern for the UK is the deradicalisation programmes and disengagement programmes which do not factor gender in their design, delivery, or measures of success. She stressed that there must be a strong gendered lens when creating programmes or approaches to manage these individuals as they return, and that they must be gender sensitive. Lastly, Dr. Cook stated that the UK judiciary system is often more lenient on women involved in terrorist groups, and many are not brought to justice for their actions which does have consequences as they are not offered deradicalisation or reintegration support, therefore potentially making them a greater threat.

This article has been republished online with Open Access.

Ministry of Defence © Crown Copyright 2023. The full printed text of this article is licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0. To view this licence, visit https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/. Where we have identified any third-party copyright information or otherwise reserved rights, you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned. For all other imagery and graphics in this article, or for any other enquires regarding this publication, please contact: Director of Defence Studies (RAF), Cormorant Building (Room 119), Shrivenham, Swindon, Wiltshire SN6 8LA.

ROYAL AIR FORCE
Centre for Air and Space Power Studies

OGL