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## **Targeting a Female Audience: American Muslim Women's Perceptions of al-Qaida Propaganda**

# Targeting a Female Audience: American Muslim Women's Perceptions of al-Qaida Propaganda

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## Introduction

Media has played an important role in propaganda efforts throughout history. Propaganda strategies are most prevalent in times of war, both by state and non-state actors. Al-Qaida makes the most of using propaganda strategies to spread its message and to recruit. Recently, al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) targeted its propaganda towards Muslim women to assist in its terrorist activities. The repercussions may have long-term effects of radicalization in Muslim communities worldwide. AQAP produced *al-Shamikhah*, an online magazine, to generate AQAP support within the female Muslim community.

Media capabilities, such as the Internet, expand how fast information is disseminated. Al-Qaida capitalizes on the new media technologies to spread its propaganda. Propaganda is “a form of communication aimed at influencing the attitude of a community towards some cause or position.”<sup>1</sup> Propaganda use among modern terrorist groups includes the use of posters, books, leaflets, radio broadcasts and television, and often, include acts of violence to assist their propaganda strategies. Al-Qaida uses all of these, but much of its dissemination of propaganda is reliant on electronic media, in particular the use of the Internet. Al-Qaida is credited as the “terrorist group that revolutionized its operations by successfully utilizing information technologies (IT).”<sup>2</sup> Al-Qaida's use of media strategy give it the means to infiltrate Muslim communities around the world for easier access to potential recruits. Some argue that al-Qaida has become the “first guerrilla movement in history to migrate from physical space to cyber space.”<sup>3</sup>

Al-Qaeda uses a combination of “written and audiovisual messages that [transcends] both technology and literacy barriers.”<sup>4</sup> Most recently, al-Qaida added online magazines such as *Inspire*, launched in 2010 in several languages. U.S. officials are aware of the recruitment ramifications that the magazine suggests to young Muslim men. The ease of disseminating the magazine via the Internet, it has become a vital recruitment method for al-Qaida. The “*Inspire* magazine “encourages young Muslims [men] in the West to commit terrorist attacks and publishes step by step directions for ‘homegrown’ terrorists.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Rebecca A. Keller, “Influence Operations and the Internet: A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Issue: Legal, Doctrinal, and Policy Challenges in the Cyber World,” Maxwell Paper 52: 70, available at: <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/maxwell/mp52.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> *Beyond Al-Qaeda, Part I: The Global Jihadist Movement*, Rand: Project Air Force. (2006): 17.

<sup>3</sup> Steve Coll and Susan B. Glasser, “Terrorists Turn to Web as Base of Operations,” Washington Post, August 7, 2005. As cited in Magnus Ranstrop in “The Virtual Sanctuary of Al-Qaeda and Terrorism in an Age of Globalisation,” (2006), *International Relations and Security in the Digital Age*, London: Routledge, (2007).

<sup>4</sup> *Beyond Al-Qaeda, Part I: The global jihadist movement*, Rand: Project Air Force. (2006), 16.

<sup>5</sup> Cynthia Hodges, “A New Magazine Inspires Female Terrorists,” Chicago Homeland Security Examiner, March 15, 2011, available at: <http://www.examiner.com/homeland-security-in-chicago/a-new-magazine-inspires-female-terrorists>.

Al-Qaeda strategically uses propaganda to spread its message. Al-Qaida's use of propaganda is postmodern in character.<sup>6</sup> Al-Qaida networks are located globally and connected digitally. One particular region of interest is AQAP, because of how it implements propaganda strategies. It was formed in January 2009, when Yemeni and Saudi Arabian branches of al-Qaida merged under the leadership of Nasir al-Wuhayshi, who was bin Laden's personal secretary.<sup>7</sup> Both, Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, now both deceased, transformed al-Qaida to connect with the outside world through the Internet and global media. "Harnessing their media shrewdness, they connected with diverse audiences around the world with a constant message. The repetition of their platform themes and use of 'message projection opportunities' demonstrate a great understanding of human nature, marketing strategy, global media and world politics."<sup>8</sup> It is difficult to shut down or censor the access and freedoms that new technologies deliver to people worldwide.

The U.S. acknowledges the sophistication of al-Qaida's use of media. Governments take countermeasures to remove or block websites and videos to prevent further dissemination of Al-Qaida's propaganda. Much of al-Qaida's propaganda targets young men and most of the counterterrorism literature focus on al-Qaida's propaganda strategies on men's recruitment. However, not much research has been done on how al-Qaida targets Muslim women.

AQAP's propaganda did not include the Muslim woman; it has since, closed the communication gap and developed propaganda strategies geared towards Muslim women. AQAP uses a different propaganda strategy to attract women to be active participates in its cause. Ironically, AQAP turns to American advertisement approaches, which target specific demographics. The digital media publication for Muslim women is a magazine with "glossy" pages similar to American magazines *Cosmopolitan* and *Elle*. *al-Shamikhha* "the majestic woman," launched in March 2011. "The magazine is marketed exclusively towards a female jihadi audience."<sup>9</sup> The U.S. has not assessed the magazine as a national security issue.<sup>10</sup> *Inspire*, printed in Yemen, targets young men. "These publications are considered 'Jihadi cool'. Magazines like *Inspire* are published in English to target [twenty-something] jihadists with European or American citizenship."<sup>11</sup> *Inspire* receives Western attention for the type of information that it disseminates. U.S. officials express concern over the success of *Inspire* as a recruitment tool. Within the first few months of its publication, *al-Shamikhha* draws some attention mostly from media outlets. Both the *Huffington Post* and *USA Today* write stories. *USA Today* compares *al-Shamikhha* to Western magazines. "Al-Qaeda uses magazines to spread [its] message' discusses that '*al-Shamikhha*, the al-Qaida

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<sup>6</sup> *Beyond Al-Qaeda, Part 1*, 2006, 15.

<sup>7</sup> *Anti-Defamation League (ADL)*, "The Christmas day bomber: Al-Qaeda in Yemen's plot against Americans: Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula," November 8, 2010.

<sup>8</sup> Carl J. Ciovacco, "The Contours of Al-Qaeda's Media Strategy," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 32 (2009): 853-875.

<sup>9</sup> Adam Rawnsley, "Jihadi Media Outfit Rolls Out a Terrorist Lady Mag," *Wired*, March 14, 2011, available at: <http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2011/03/jihadi-media-outfit-rolls-out-a-terrorist-ladymag/>.

<sup>10</sup> This was the case when the first *al-Khansaa*, monthly Internet publication for female militants that was hosted by several Islamist Web sites. In *Al Khansaa*, the theorists of al-Qaida offer women "a path to reach freedom that would be denied in every other way — using the dominion of religion to oppose the dominion of men," the Italian secret service report said, quoted in *Washington Times*, "Women Magazine Offer Tips to Terrorists," (January 17, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*.

version of *Cosmopolitan* magazine, mixes beauty and fashion tips with articles encouraging women to push their husbands on the path of martyrdom.”<sup>12</sup>

Women play an important role in Western countries. Western advertising understands how to target the female population—from shopping habits to running households. Women play similar roles in other countries. Al-Qaida uses women in operational roles in its terrorists' activities, and now makes terrorist activities attractive to more Muslim women, by implementing a magazine tailored for women. “By catering to women, al-Qaida's publication [encourages women] to play an operational role (in terrorist attacks), which is largely ignored, [including how their cultural roles affects this] specific society.”<sup>13</sup>

*Al-Shamikha's* potential to radicalize Muslim women creates an impact on Muslim communities. Women's role in the family structure holds the fabric of a society together. Women are usually the main caretakers who raise children and help mold them into adulthood. If Muslim women accept AQAP's propaganda, what sort of future children will Muslim communities then be raising? Legitimate Middle East governments struggle with terrorist groups infiltrating their communities and radicalizing the next generation.

The radicalization of communities is a global issue. U.S. efforts overseas seem to be making an impact on al-Qaida's operations.<sup>14</sup> Efforts in American communities are part of this strategy. “This includes challenging and undermining the twisted ideology—the political propaganda—that al-Qaida uses to recruit, radicalize and mobilize its supporters to violence; and uses propaganda methods to include videos, Internet forums, online magazines, which are used to ‘convince Muslim Americans to reject their country and attack their fellow Americans.’”<sup>15</sup> Recruitment of Muslim Americans is a growing trend in U.S. communities. The U.S. counters recruitment by helping Muslim Americans to feel part of American society and not part of the radicalization process that occurs in the rest of the world. President Obama in the State of the Union conveys this message:

“As extremists try to inspire acts of violence within our borders, [we] are responding with the strength of our communities, with respect for the rule of law, and with the conviction that Muslim Americans are a part of our American family.

The best defense against terrorist ideologies is strong and resilient individuals and communities. This should be no surprise. In America we have a long history of community-based initiatives and partnerships dealing successfully with a whole range of challenges, like violent crime.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Mona Alami, “Al-Qaeda Using Magazines to Spread Message, USA Today: Special, April 20, 2011, available at: <http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2011-04-19-al-qaeda-magazines.htm>.

<sup>13</sup> Magnus Ranstorp, as cited in Mona Alami, “Al-Qaeda Using Magazines to Spread Message, USA Today: Special, April 20, 2011, available at: <http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2011-04-19-al-qaeda-magazines.htm>.

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Department of Homeland Security. “U.S. Outlines Community Involvement to Prevent Violent Extremism.” GovMonitor Public Sector News and Information, March 8, 2011, available at: [http://www.thegovmonitor.com/world\\_news/united\\_states/u-s-outlines-community-involvement-to-prevent-violent-extremism-47382.html](http://www.thegovmonitor.com/world_news/united_states/u-s-outlines-community-involvement-to-prevent-violent-extremism-47382.html).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

While the U.S. strengthens its communities against al-Qaida's propaganda, other countries with Muslim populations may not have the resources to prevent their own communities from radicalization.

A qualitative discourse analysis of AQAP's use of propaganda towards Muslim women may provide a better understanding and help construct strategies to counter and prevent further radicalization within Muslim communities.

There are crucial elements missing in studying how propaganda affects the female jihadi. Jowett and O'Donnell's *Propaganda and Persuasion* model, a 10-step plan of propaganda analysis is incorporated as the method to analyze the propaganda disseminated to Muslim women.<sup>17</sup> The major elements of propaganda include:

“Identification of ideology and purpose, identification of context, identification of the propagandist, investigation of the structure of the propaganda organization, identification of the target audience, understanding of media utilization techniques, analysis of special techniques to maximize effect, analysis of audience reaction, identification and analysis of counterpropaganda, and completion of an assessment and evaluation.”<sup>18</sup>

Jowett and O'Donnell state, “propaganda is a deliberate and systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist.”<sup>19</sup>

AQAP targets its propaganda by using the discourse found in Islamic culture to pressure Muslims into more fundamental beliefs. AQAP exploits centuries of cultural Muslim women's societal discourse accepting of what it means to be a follower of the Islamic faith. “Discourse is what makes us human.”<sup>20</sup> *Al-Shamikhah*, distributed by al-Qaida's affiliated with *al Fajr Media Centre* and the Women's Media Bureau in the Arabian Peninsula fosters these discourses in its propaganda by including articles such as “Sharia law that applies to you,” “the female martyr,” “meeting with a jihad wife,” “marrying a jihadist” and “your house is your kingdom.” Critical discourse analysis evaluates AQAP propaganda strategies and its effectiveness on Muslim women. Jowett and O'Donnell's *Propaganda and Persuasion* model, examines AQAP's strategies use on its female Muslim population. AQAP uses agitation propaganda, which “seeks to arouse people to participate in or support a cause. It attempts to arouse people from apathy by giving them feasible actions to carry out.”<sup>21</sup> AQAP implements its propaganda strategies of its “ideology and purpose” on its female Muslim population and shapes the discussion as part of the Muslim discourse community. AQAP uses the discourse community in Muslim society to gain control. [Foucault makes] “the assumption that the production of discourse is at once controlled,

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<sup>17</sup> Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006): 270.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Arthur C. Graesser, A.C., Keith K. Millis and Rolf A. Zwaan. “Discourse Comprehension,” *Annual Review of Psychology* 48, (February 1997): 163-89; quoted in Ruth Wodak and Mical Krzyzanowski, *Qualitative Discourse Analysis in the Social Sciences*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008): 4.

<sup>21</sup> Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, “How to Analyze Propaganda.” *Propaganda and Persuasion*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2006): 271.

selected, organized, and canalized in every society.”<sup>22</sup> Foucault’s definition of the concept of discourse is applicable in the power dynamics that AQAP uses. AQAP selects admirable qualities found in Muslim society and then warps them into radical ideology. One way to accomplish this on a grand scale is to distribute material to encourage the discourse community to action. The discourse in a community is an effective tool when implementing propaganda; it makes it that much easier to insert the propagandist ideology and purpose, to reflect the existing community discourse. AQAP’s *al-Shamikhah* allows for the dissemination of its ideology and serves as a platform to recruit for jihad.

“The cover features the barrel of a sub-machine gun next to the image of a woman in a veil. The magazine features exclusive interviews with martyrs’ wives who praise their husbands’ decisions to die in suicide bombings. [...]The aim of the magazine is to educate women and involve them in the war against the enemies of Islam.”<sup>23</sup>

The images on the cover of the magazine send the message that a Muslim woman can adhere to Islamic ways and be a jihadist. AQAP sets the parameters in this discourse community by selecting and canalizing in which way Muslim women may behave. The magazine calls women to action. “*Al-Shamikhah* targets would-be and veteran female supporters of [al-Qaida].”<sup>24</sup> The articles reflect the radical ideology that AQAP promotes. The majority of the articles are written by women for women, in which, AQAP tries to mimic western style beauty magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* and *Elle*, but its true essence is radicalization. AQAP’s use of the Muslim discourse community requires further examination.

AQAP use of propaganda towards Muslim women is not a novel idea. Women are active players in terrorist organizations and can be just as ruthless as their male counterparts. If it were not for women, much of the organizational functions of terrorist groups may not be as effective. Female terrorists have greater mobility; they are invisible to the outside world. Terrorist groups benefit from women’s participation and are excellent media coverage. “Media images of women terrorists serve as powerful propaganda tools.”<sup>25</sup> Women join terrorist organizations for many reasons. Some seek vengeance, because their men are casualties from “counterterrorism, failed missions, and successful suicide bombing operations.”<sup>26</sup> Women who join terrorist organizations usually commit—they are loyal to the cause. In general, female terrorists are motivated by political and personal reasons. Women enjoy the power that comes with joining a terrorist group, in an environment, where they are very much marginalized within their society. “To understand the scope and rise of female terrorism, organizational motives for recruiting women must be explored. Women may want to become actively engaged in the conflict, but the evolution of women’s role from supportive to active is initiated at the organizational level.”<sup>27</sup> AQAP *al-*

<sup>22</sup> Michel Foucault, “The Order of Discourse,” (1984): 10-11; quoted in Ruth Wodak and Mical Krzyzanowski, *Qualitative Discourse Analysis in the Social Sciences*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008): 5.

<sup>23</sup> *Daily India*, “New Al-Qaeda magazine offers beauty tips mixed with bombing advice,” March 14, 2011, available at: [www.dailyindia.com/show/429741.php](http://www.dailyindia.com/show/429741.php), 1.

<sup>24</sup> Heidi Basch-Harod, “The Right to Choose: The Women of Al-Qaeda,” *Telaviv Notes: An Update on Middle Eastern Developments*, 6:3 (February 9, 2012), *The Moshe Dayan Center*, available at: <http://www.dayan.tau.ac.il>.

<sup>25</sup> Katherine Von Knop, “The Female Jihad: Al-Qaeda’s Women,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 30, (2007): 397-414.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 400.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 410.

*Shamikha* understands how to actively engage in the rhetoric needed to propagate Muslim women into the jihadist movement.

Al-Qaida recognizes the context in which its propaganda occurs; today it is the aftermath of 9/11, the U.S. invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan and the constant presence of U.S. and other western entities in Muslim lands. Al-Qaida uses the U.S. wars in the Middle East to demonstrate to Muslims the power struggle between Muslims and Westerners. The use of context involves knowing and understanding the historical background.<sup>28</sup> Al-Qaida exploits Muslims' longtime "held beliefs and values" in their Muslim faith to move them to action. An example of al-Qaida's use of situating its propaganda in context is the preamble to *al-Shamikha*:

"Because women constitute half of the population - and one might even say that they are the population since they give birth to the next generation - the enemies of Islam are bent on preventing the Muslim woman from knowing the truth about her religion and her role, since they know all too well what would happen if women entered the field of jihad.... The nation of Islam needs women who know the truth about their religion and about the battle and its dimensions and know what is expected of them."<sup>29</sup>

This reference to the role that Muslim women have historically played in the battlefield and the reasons a Muslim would join Jihad, reminds Muslim women of their duty.<sup>30</sup>

Al-Qaida's use of ideology and purpose is crucial to recruitment. "To understand the mindset of al-Qaida's volunteers [westerners] must appreciate their belief system and the group's ideology, which is founded on Islamism and the pursuit of jihad."<sup>31</sup> It is this mindset, in which al-Qaida relies on when considering how to approach its propaganda strategies towards Muslims. Al-Qaida gravitates to Muslim communities to exploit the marginalization that exists. This creates an "us against them" mentality that allows al-Qaida's propagandist ideology seem rational to some Muslims. Martha Coopers states, "Ideology as a coherent 'world view that determines how arguments will be received and interpreted. The common sense of the world view provides the basis for determining what is good, bad, right, wrong, and so forth'"<sup>32</sup> In the Muslim world view, for some Muslims, al-Qaida's call to *jihad* seems acceptable. An al-Qaida recruitment video states, "*Jihad*, bullets and martyrdom operation are the only way to destroy the degradation and disbelief which have spread in the Muslim lands."<sup>33</sup> Al-Qaida's main audience after 9/11 was

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<sup>28</sup> Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, "How to Analyze Propaganda." *Propaganda and Persuasion*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2006): 272.

<sup>29</sup> *Huffington Post: Style*. "Al-Shamikha, Al-Qaeda Women's Magazine, Launches: Report," March 14, 2011, available at: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/03/14/al-Shamikha-al-qaeda-womens-magazine\\_n\\_835572.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/03/14/al-Shamikha-al-qaeda-womens-magazine_n_835572.html).

<sup>30</sup> "Eight principle reasons for joining the jihad are: first, so that non-believers do not dominate; second, because of the scarcity of manpower; third, fear of hellfire; fourth, fulfilling the duty of jihad and responding to the call of Allah; fifth, following the footsteps of pious predecessors; sixth, establish a solid foundation as a base of Islam; seventh, protecting those who are oppressed in the land; and eighth, seeking martyrdom," quoted in Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al-Qaeda: Global Network of Terror*, (New York: Columbia UP., 2002): 90.

<sup>31</sup> Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al-Qaeda: Global Network of Terror*, (New York: Columbia UP., 2002): 84.

<sup>32</sup> Martha Cooper, *Analyzing Public Discourse*. (Prospect Heights: Waveland, 1989): 162; quoted in Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, "How to Analyze Propaganda." *Propaganda and Persuasion*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2006),:271.

<sup>33</sup> Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al-Qaeda: Global Network of Terror*, (New York: Columbia UP., 2002),:54; From a commentary from an Al-Qaeda recruitment video seized by police in London after 9/11.



young Muslims, who needed to take back their communities. Al-Qaida continues to use the same propaganda strategies today.

Al-Qaida identifies itself as a leader in the struggle for *jihad*, and before his death, bin Laden made videos and wrote *fatwas*. As leader of al-Qaida, he spoke frequently and with authority, which created a strong propaganda structure for the organization. "Successful propaganda campaigns tend to originate from a strong, centralized, decision-making authority that produces a consistent message throughout its structure."<sup>34</sup> *Al-Shamikhah* provides a constant message; it reminds Muslim women how they are expected to behave in order to support their jihadist husbands, brothers, and fathers. Umm Badr makes this statement to Muslim women:

"A Muslim woman is a female Jihad warrior always and everywhere. She is a female Jihad warrior who wages Jihad by means of funding Jihad. She wages Jihad by means of waiting for her Jihad warrior husband, and when she educates her children to that which Allah loves. She wages jihad when she supports Jihad when she calls for jihad in word, deed, belief, and prayer."<sup>35</sup>

The knowledge of Muslim culture and values makes the information and suggestions in *al-Shamikhah* a targeted campaign. The magazine gives women empowerment in the family structure to follow through by participating and encouraging their males in *Jihad*. Von Knop argues "Women are similarly interested in power in the assigned scope by the society they are living in. This scope in fundamentalist societies is normally the family. Encouraging the male relatives to participate in a terrorism organization and supporting as well as facilitating operation gives women power and access to the public domain."<sup>36</sup> The editorial in *al-Shamikhah* calls women to action.

"Muslims currently are suffering from enemies who are targeting them. However, there is a small group that is ready to defend Islam and Muslims. This group promised to lose their lives for the sake of their nation.

As long as women represent the half of the society, at the end they represent the whole society they are the mothers, the sisters and the wives of the other half. The enemy of the society tried to push them away from this reality in addition to her ability to participate in facing the enemy.

The Islamic nation is in need of real women who can undertake the responsibility of protecting their nation. Taking care of men and supporting them could achieve this type of protection."<sup>37</sup>

The editorial promotes the idea that women are contributing to the cause and have the power to make a difference. AQAP ascertains that Muslim women need to "defend Islam and Muslims"

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<sup>34</sup> Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, "How to Analyze Propaganda," 273.

<sup>35</sup> Umm Badr, "Obstacles in the Path of the Jihad Warrior Woman," al-Khansaa Katherine, quoted in Von Knop, "The Female Jihad: Al-Qaeda's Women," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 30, (2007): 397-414.

<sup>36</sup> Katherine Von Knop, "The Female Jihad: Al-Qaeda's Women," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 30 (2007): 397-414.

<sup>37</sup> Editorial is a Translation from *al-Shamikhah* Magazine by Shahbaa Zaidan.

and that it is their “responsibility to protect their nation” because they are “the other half” of the equation to make *Jihad* possible. *Al-Shamikah* creates meaning for its female-targeted audience. Ellul says, “the propagandist builds his techniques on the basis of his knowledge of man, his tendencies, his desires, his needs, his psychic mechanisms, his conditioning.”<sup>38</sup> It is human nature to want to be a part of something bigger.

*Al-Shamikhah* includes interviews by mujahedeen widows. “A Heart Moving Interview with a Mohaheed Widow: Umm Muhaned” splashes the pages of the magazine.<sup>39</sup>

(The following translation and transcript has not been altered. Therefore, there will be errors in the syntax).

“Umm Muhaned, god bestowed her and she became a wife of a mujahid and a mother to his children, and she is now a widow of martyr as we think of him. He has been killed in the land of jihad raiding the Crusaders, enemies of God may god accept him and raise his rank.”<sup>40</sup>

The interview begins with the introduction of the widow of a martyr who has been killed fighting the “Crusaders.” “The propagandist uses belief to create belief by linking or reinforcing audience predispositions to reinforce propagandistic ideology, or in some cases, to create new attitudes or behaviors or both.”<sup>41</sup> AQAP, uses the term “Crusaders” to incite the readers and to remind them of the past abhorrent actions of The Crusades many centuries ago. AQAP delineates the similarities of the current fight that Muslims lead with the West—the new Crusaders that they must abolish from their lands. Many Muslims have a historical understanding and anger towards the role that the Crusades played in their religion, culture and lands. Jowett and O’Donnell argue, “Messages have greater impact when they are inline with existing opinions, beliefs, and dispositions.”<sup>42</sup> AQAP takes past experiences, in which Muslims and the Islamic faith were and continue to be threatened, and exploits this in its female readership of the magazine.

AQAP’s uses Umm Muhaned as the messenger for AQAPs recruitment of Muslim women. In the interview, the widow is asked several questions. Of particular interest are the questions and responses that she provides concerning family and community. Umm Muhaned’s views seem to be similar to that of the Sisterhoods and the Global Salafi Jihad, a gender-specific interpretation of Jihad. “The concept of the female Jihad signifies that the women carry out the Jihad by educating, supporting, and encouraging their sons, brothers, and husbands. To reach this goal they have to prepare themselves as a struggler.”<sup>43</sup> In Umm Muhaned’s interview, she is asked how the children felt and if they knew where their father was. (The following translation and transcript has not been altered. Therefore, there will be errors in the syntax).

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<sup>38</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men’s Attitudes*. Translated by Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner, Introduction by Konrad Keller, (New York: Random House, 1965): 4.

<sup>39</sup> Umm Muhaned, “The English Translation of a Heart Moving Interview with a Mojaheed Widow,” *Al-Shamikah*, (March 3, 2011); quoted in Jihad’s Media Elite: Language and Translation Department, available at: [www.ansar.com/vb/showthread.php?t=35521](http://www.ansar.com/vb/showthread.php?t=35521).

<sup>40</sup> Umm Muhaned, “The English Translation of a Heart Moving Interview with a Mojaheed Widow,” 2011.

<sup>41</sup> Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O’Donnell, “How to Analyze Propaganda.” 2006, 279.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Katherine Von Knop, “The Female Jihad: Al-Qaeda’s Women,” 2007, 410.

And they were from their young age watching the mujahedeen releases especially the leader Khateb my Allah have on him, and they never get bored watching him....

One of the older children as he watched the films asked about his father and if he went to fight like the mujahedeen in the film:

“where are the children? It seems they have kids but they left them with their mothers to strive and it seems my father went like them...is it? No it is.. I will do like them.”

The mother comforts her children and tells them the story:

“Abraham and his son Ishmael peace be upon them and we must spare no what we love for....sake of gods religion.... And this made it easy for them thanks to god and the rejoiced that their father left them for this reason and increased their attachment a lot to jihad, praise be Allah.”

The mother does not tell them of their father's martyrdom:

“As for telling them about the martyrdom of their father, one of the sisters did that... you love the mujahedeen and she talked to him about martyrdom and made him ore desirous and said to him; would you like your father to be martyr like Zarqawi and the like khatab and...ext. and then she told him, he was very delighted at the news and his mood improved more and he explained the thing too his brothers and they accepted it with the same happiness.”<sup>44</sup>

This section of the interview seems to be typical of Muslim women who participate in the “ideology of the global Salafi Jihad, [because it] has different functions for the women in mind than the one of a suicide bomber.”<sup>45</sup> Even bin Laden expressed clearly the role of women in the *fatawa* and in some audiotapes:

“...women are playing an essential role as supporters, facilitators, and promoters in carrying out the Jihad. ‘Our women had set a tremendous example for generosity in the cause of Allah; they motivate and encourage their sons, brothers and husbands to fight for the cause of Allah. [...] Our women instigate their brothers to fight in the cause of Allah. [...] Our women encourage Jihad saying: Prepare yourself like a struggler; the matter is bigger than the words.’”<sup>46</sup>

The interview delineates the role that women must play in the home and echoes bin Laden's beliefs. The widow is asked if it possible for a woman to be a motivation for jihad or an obstacle for it.

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<sup>44</sup> Umm Muhaned, “The English Translation of a Heart Moving Interview with a Mojaheed Widow,” 2011.

<sup>45</sup> Katherine Von Knop, “The Female Jihad: Al-Qaeda's Women,” 2007, 406.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

“Certainly... this is considered a problem to many of the brothers and sisters and they see that marriage is an obstacle for jihad or oppose it. The whole thing is marry the religious woman (otherwise) you’ll be the [loser].

As has been said...behind every great man there is a woman  
...Women have a very important initial key role which is incitement and support. And when we underestimate the importance of this role, it is a fatal mistake...and if a woman satisfied with something then she became a source to it plant it around her, god willing. She’ll educate and incite from the childhood until he became a mojihid and then support him until he get what he wants by gods almighty willing.”<sup>47</sup>

Umm Muhaned’s establishes that the wife of a jihadist must be religious and accept jihad as a way of life for the marriage to work. In the next section, the widow discusses the Muslim folklore of Muslim women and their contribution to jihad. She romanticizes Khadija, Aisha and Safiyya’s contribution to the cause.

“So the mojahid is in dire need to those who support and advocate him and be a help to him by Allah’s willing...he went to his wife and affability, Khadija which harbored and supported him. She was the first [woman] who believed and had faith in the nation prophet peace be upon him, and we seek this great role in his words peace be upon him. And after the imposing of jihad a woman also had a role no less important aside from the support, Aisha, may Allah be pleased with her, and some women of Muslims supplied the thirsty with water and medicated the wounded, and in the case when jihad need the women, it was Safiyya may Allah be please with first who applied that practically when she killed the Jew who hovered around him in the battle of Uhad and the prophet eulogized her by saying [Whenever I looked right or left Uhad day I saw her fighting to defend me].”<sup>48</sup>

AQAP’s use of Umm Muhaned as the voice of a good jihadi wife provides the emotional language needed to recruit other Muslim women, who believe in Jihad or who have not fully committed as of yet. Not only does the interview show how much she has sacrificed, she also creates a connection to Khadija, Aisha and Safiyya’s struggles to defend Muslims and Islam. The widow also shames those Muslim women who hesitate to participate in *Jihad*.

Family and community are important to a Muslim’s life. In the interview the widow is asked how the rest of the family and community view her as a *mujahid* wife (a terrorist).

“Just as the public is divided into supporter and bake to jihad or assaulter and objector to it, so that is how they are in their treatment and views to mujahedeen’s wives:  
For my family despite the love and their sympathy to their daughter, yet the obsession of fearing she may carry her husband’s idea or spreads it even if they know it is right; but the one who seat away from jihad, favors safety and fear the sacrifice for God’s sake! As it is sometimes the most important thing to them is for me to forget this past and they

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<sup>47</sup> Umm Muhaned, “The English Translation of a Heart Moving Interview with a Mojaheed Widow,” 2011.

<sup>48</sup> Umm Muhaned, “The English Translation of a Heart Moving Interview with a Mojaheed Widow,” 2011.

pressure with (marriage so she'll live normally) and get compensated for what happened to her.”<sup>49</sup>

In this section, the widow admits that the family has a critical reaction to her being the wife of jihadist. *Al-Shamikha* includes this section in order to provide the counterargument that many Muslim families object to their daughters being married to a Jihadist. However, the interview also acknowledges that the family knows that Jihad is the right thing to do; therefore, embarrassing the family for wanting their daughter to recant her life as a Jihadist.

There are two views concerning the community reactions to a mujahidin wife. The widow explains the rejection of the community is one of abandonment and cowardice. AQAP's sentiments are transmitted via her interview accusing the Muslim community of forgetting both the fallen and those in prison.

“As for the community there is who became coward and cut his relationship with us completely once he knew this man is a (terrorist) Mujahid although he may have been a friend for decades.

And there are who sympathize with us or with the kids and keeps for a period of time asking about them and then turns away and forget about he matter as they forgotten their mujahideen brother and the captive.”<sup>50</sup>

As AQAP's messenger, the widow praises those in the community who stand behind her and who believe in Jihad. In this part of the interview, AQAP's reference to the “humiliation of America” is code for 9/11.

“And of course there is the kind of those who cannot forget and they combined the saying with action: And thank god this kind is in remarkable increase, especially with the propitious signs of victories and with the humiliation of America and its puppets governments in the eyes of people after the demise of its prestige at the hands of mujahideen ommah's (nation of Islam) vanguards. As for the supportive sisters, certainly they look at as with respect and loyalty and we did to god.”<sup>51</sup>

In this section, the widow values the respect and loyalty her supportive sisters and those in the community who embrace jihadists. The acknowledgment of support and the increase in participation is crucial for AQAP. The widow remarks that AQAP's recruitment efforts are successful because more than ever, there are more mujahedeen fighting.

At the end of the interview, the widow is asked if there is anything that she wants to say to the “rest of the sisters who lost their spouses for the sake of Allah.” With affection and admiration both the widow and AQAP praise the women for their sacrifices.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Umm Muhaned, “The English Translation of a Heart Moving Interview with a Mojaheed Widow,” 2011.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

“To those whom lost their husbands or sons; my noble-minded sisters and my kind mothers....O who sacrificed for the sake of Allah by their loved ones as we think of you and Allah is your sufficient....Am not advising you rather an seeking advice and direction from you.

You are the role models among the wives of sedition, and the bride of the *Ommah* in time of humiliation and shame, I just to remind myself and my sisters that sincerity of intention and sacrificing for God’s reward and satisfaction with his acts, all this trivialize the ordeal.”<sup>52</sup>

The interview ends with the widow saying that Muslim women who support Jihad are the role models that Muslim society should embrace, and that there is no greater sacrifice for God.

The use of AQAP’s *al-Shamikha* as a propaganda tool may be successful for its organization, especially if it continues to use women, like the widow as its messengers. The use of media strategies in AQAP’s *al-Shamikha* and other magazines like it has demonstrated that the implementation of this type of print/electronic media is a successful medium for recruitment of future jihadists. *Al-Shamikah* has the potential to increase the jihadist movement and provides a platform for marginalized Muslim women who see themselves playing a bigger role in Jihad.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.