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Women and Islamic-State Terrorism: An Assessment of How Gender Perspectives Are Integrated in Countering Violent Extremism Policy and Practices

Sofia Patel and Jacqueline Westermann

This paper discusses Western women's involvement with Islamic State terrorism, to evaluate how governments and civil society can comprehensively develop countering violent extremism (CVE) strategies that are inclusive of gender perspectives. The paper's overarching goal is to demonstrate that existing approaches to CVE do not adequately incorporate the challenges posed by *women* and *for women*, and that much more empirical research is required to develop a holistic understanding of women's experiences with violent extremism. CVE initiatives must engage women at all stages including design, implementation, operation and evaluation, and engagement must comply with human rights standards,¹ and in advancement of gender equality.² A set of policy recommendations for Australia will be provided based on assessing existing national and international practices.

Terrorists, terrorisms and counter-terrorisms are products of a gendered world.³ The ideological distinctions between ethno-separatist and religious terrorist organisations have dictated the different roles, responsibilities and opportunities afforded to women.

It should not be a surprise that women have joined and supported Islamic State (IS) either by making *hijra* (migrating) or from their home countries. Women have participated in geographically and ideologically diverse manifestations of violent extremism and terrorism throughout modern history.⁴ Women have played multiple roles within terrorist organisations from facilitators and recruiters to suicide bombers and frontline fighters. There has been a range of left-wing and ethno-separatist terrorist groups

¹ Global Counterterrorism Forum, 'Good Practices on Women and Countering Violent Extremism', 2015, <www.thegctf.org/Portals/1/Documents/Framework%20Documents/A/GCTF-Good-Practices-on-Women-and-CVE.pdf> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

² United Nations, 'Sustainable Development Goals: Goal 5: Achieve Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Girls', <www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

³ Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry (eds), *Women, Gender and Terrorism* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2011), p. 236; Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry, *Beyond Mothers, Monsters and Whores* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015); See also writing by Katherine Brown, Fionnuala Ni Aolain, and Laura Zahra MacDonald.

⁴ Sjoberg and Gentry, *Women, Gender and Terrorism*.

that have had strong female presence, including female leadership. Ulrike Meinhof was the female leader of the German Baader-Meinhof group; Fusako Shigenobu founded and led the Japanese Red Army; Leila Khaled was the first female hijacker for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine; the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the (former) Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) have incorporated female militants in their ranks for decades.

Despite the growing awareness of the varied roles that women play within peace, security and conflict, namely through UNSCR 2242,⁵ the international community still responds to the idea of women in terrorism and political violence with surprise. Governments and media regularly defer to recurring narratives such as “mothers, monsters [and] whores”⁶ to explain and rationalise women’s participation within political violence, as “violent women interrupt gender stereotypes”.⁷ Women are labelled either as victims or fetishised as hypersexualised warriors who are more dangerous than their male counterparts—both labels deny the woman agency as an individual actor. Women are also “defined via their roles as mothers, wives and sisters of radical men”⁸—this is particularly the case with Muslim women and is very often applied when developing and implementing countering violent extremism (CVE) policy and practice.

Overview of the Literature

As the number of women perpetrating terrorism has increased, the literature has also burgeoned. Mia Bloom, Karla Cunningham, Cindy Ness, Katherine Brown, Laura Sjoberg and David Cooke are a selection of scholars who have consistently made valuable contributions to the motivations, roles and responsibilities of women in terrorism and political violence. Margot Badran, Lila Abu-Lughod, Asef Bayat, Aili Tripp and Valentin Moghadam have made essential contributions to explaining the cultural mobilisations and experiences of women in postcolonial nations and have explored how women have resisted dominant patriarchal order in Muslim societies through different types of feminisms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, Naureen Chowdhury Fink and Katherine Brown have provided nuanced analysis on the impact of resilience building in mitigating violent extremism, and how governments have attempted to integrate women into existing counter- and de-

⁵ United Nations Security Council, Resolution 2242 (2015), S/RES/2242 (13 October 2015), <www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_res_2242.pdf> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

⁶ Laura Sjoberg, ‘The Women of ISIS: Gender and Political Violence’, *Political Violence at a Glance*, 28 August 2017, <politicalviolenceataglance.org/2017/08/28/the-women-of-isis-gender-and-political-violence/> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

⁷ Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry, ‘Reduced to Bad Sex: Narratives of Violent Women from the Bible to the War on Terror’, *International Relations*, vol. 22, no. 1 (2008), p. 5.

⁸ Katherine E. Brown, ‘Gender and Countering Islamic State Radicalisation’, *E-International Relations*, 18 February 2016, <www.e-ir.info/2016/02/18/gender-and-countering-islamic-state-radicalisation/> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

radicalisation efforts. Edith Schlaffer's research and grassroots programs have been central to informing current approaches to counter- and de-radicalisation efforts that identify mothers as being the front-line of defence against radicalisation. On the other hand, Jacqui True has addressed the lack of gendered analysis of international counterterrorism (CT) and CVE measures that are employed by governments and civil society. Laura Shepherd's work has linked the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda with a gendered approach to CVE at global, national and local levels.⁹ Additionally, multilateral research institutes such as the OSCE and RAN Europe,¹⁰ have produced useful toolkits to help guide and advise policymakers and practitioners working as with communities and civil society to counter and prevent radicalisation towards violent extremism. A major factor that is missing from practical responses to terrorism and violent extremism, is the integration of gender perspectives during design, implementation and review processes, which this research hopes to inform.¹¹

Different disciplines have approached the subject of women in political violence from a variety of angles and theoretical framings, which shifts the focus of the debate accordingly. Feminist critical theory seeks to remove the binaries of public and private so that "the personal is redefined as political, and the political as personal".¹² This helps restore agency to the individual, by redrawing the barriers of behavioural norms. Furthermore, this approach has been influential towards developing and understanding of female engagement in political violence as a form of resistance where "the everyday survival strategies of individuals can be reconstituted as subtle forms of resistance".¹³ By redrawing the boundaries by which we understand how women participate conflict and political violence, we are able to consider all

⁹ Laura Shepherd, 'The Role of the WPS Agenda in Countering Violent Extremism', *The Strategist*, 8 March 2017, <www.aspistrategist.org.au/role-wps-agenda-countering-violent-extremism/> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

¹⁰ RAN Centre of Excellence, 'The Role of Gender in Violent Extremism', *RAN Issue Paper*, 4 December 2015, <ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/issue_paper_gender_dec2015_en.pdf> [Accessed 5 April 2018]; and RAN Centre of Excellence, 'Response to Returnees: Foreign Terrorist Fighters and Their Families', *RAN Manual*, July 2017, <ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/ran_br_a4_m10_en.pdf> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

¹¹ Jacqui True and Sri Eddyono, 'Preventing Violent Extremism: Gender Perspectives and Women's Roles', Monash Centre for Gender, Peace and Security, Monash University, 2017, <docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/b4aef1_5fb20e84855b45aabb5437fe96fc3616.pdf> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

¹² Katherine E. Brown, 'Blinded by the Explosion? Security and Resistance in Muslim Women's Suicide Terrorism', in Sjoberg and Gentry, *Women Gender and Terrorism* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2011).

¹³ Lila Abu-Lughod, 'The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power Through Bedouin Women', *American Ethnologist*, vol. 17, no. 1 (1990), pp. 41-55.

actions and interactions as being part of a 'gendered process'.¹⁴ This includes the gendered approaches to counter- and de-radicalisation processes.

Gender perspectives are rarely holistically integrated into definitions and processes of radicalisation. This has resulted in incomplete understanding of female pathways into and out of violent extremism, as well as the ways in which women develop resilience to resist radicalisation; as argued by Jayne Huckerby, "policy makers are playing catch-up when it comes to understanding the full extent of women's roles in jihadist groups".¹⁵ Understanding the gendered experiences of radicalisation processes is essential. Men and women—especially within religious communities—may have different experiences of radicalisation. For example, Elizabeth Pearson's research into online IS Twitter communities has pointed to the differences in the operation of Salafi-jihadi gender norms in the offline and online spaces. Pearson, and others, have asserted that "the online space is popular among female extremists as it operates as a comparative site of liberation, free of the gender boundaries and restrictions frequently found offline...",¹⁶ thus demonstrating that the online freedom of the internet has greatly enabled and facilitated female radicalisation and recruitment to IS in place of offline restrictions.¹⁷

Women have key roles to play in both perpetrating and preventing violence. According to Valerie Hudson,

over a decade's worth of research shows that women's advancement is critical to stability and to reducing political violence. Countries where women are empowered are vastly more secure, whether the issue is food security, countering violent extremism or resolving disputes with other nations peacefully.¹⁸

Research has demonstrated that a peacekeeping agreement is more likely to be reached—and to hold—if women are involved in the process.¹⁹ It is

¹⁴ This research will apply Randy Borum's understanding of pathways into and out of radicalisation as a 'set of diverse processes', 'Radicalization into Violent Extremism I: A Review of Social Science Theories', *Journal of Strategic Security*, vol. 4, no. 4 (2011), pp. 7-36.

¹⁵ Jayne Huckerby, 'When Women Become Terrorists', *The New York Times*, 21 January 2015, <www.nytimes.com/2015/01/22/opinion/when-women-become-terrorists.html?_r=0> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

¹⁶ Elizabeth Pearson, 'Online as the New Frontline: Affect, Gender and ISIS-Take-Down on Social Media', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 7 July 2017, <www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1057610X.2017.1352280> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Valerie Hudson and Dara Kay Cohen, 'Women's Rights are a National Security Issue', *The New York Times*, 26 December 2016, <www.nytimes.com/2016/12/26/opinion/womens-rights-are-a-national-security-issue.html> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

¹⁹ United Nations, 'Women Too Often Omitted from Peace Process, Despite Key Role in Preventing Conflict, Forging Peace, Secretary General Tells Security Council', Meetings Coverage, United Nations Security Council Meeting 7793, 25 October 2016, <www.un.org/press/en/2016/sc12561.doc.htm> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

therefore vital that women occupy a seat at the negotiating table when designing and implementing programs or policy concerning security and development, including counterterrorism and countering violent extremism.²⁰

With the disintegration of the IS's caliphate in the Middle East, which had been propped up by committed international *muhajrun* (migrants), it is incumbent on governments to implement appropriate strategy, policy, legislation and operations to prepare for the aftermath. Governments and civil society need to be prepared for security challenges posed by women involved in violent extremism, as well as develop new approaches to holistically integrate women within CVE initiatives that ensure gender perspectives are reflected at all stages from design to implementation and evaluation.

This paper offers a state of the field assessment on how gender perspectives are integrated within CT and CVE policy and practice. The analysis draws upon international academic literature, field research and policy documents and provides some concise recommendations from an Australian policy perspective.

Structure

The paper will be divided into three parts:

- The first will explore the gendered roles of women in IS-terrorism, and explain why policymakers need to pay more attention to women's experiences within terrorism.
- The second will locate CVE within Australia's national security architecture. It will analyse how gender perspectives are incorporated, and where the gaps and challenges lie.
- The third will advise how to improve CVE gender mainstreaming in policy and practice. An analysis of existing empirical and academic research will present examples of positive and negative policy and practice and provide comments on how to move forward.

A Note on Terms and Distinguishing between Processes

The term 'returnees' will be used instead of foreign terrorist fighters to refer to individuals who want to or have already returned from IS territories. This term is more 'gender-neutral' noting that both men and women migrated

²⁰ Paul Kirby and Laura J Shepherd, 'The Futures Past of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda', *International Affairs*, vol. 92, no. 2 (March 2016), pp. 373-92, <www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/publications/ia/inta92-2-08-shepherdkirby.pdf> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

overseas to IS territories, but only men were authorised to take up combat operations within the caliphate.

This paper understands the term ‘radicalisation’ within the context of Islamic State, as a process leading to terrorism.²¹ (There are many alternative understandings of ‘radicalisation’ that are not related to violent extremism or terrorism.) ‘Resilience’ will be understood as the ability for communities to recover from or respond positively to negative experiences, such as radicalisation.²²

In addition, the phrases ‘violent extremist’ and ‘violent extremism’ will refer to individuals or processes that relate to ‘*terrorist radicalisation*’, and specifically in the context of IS terrorism.

‘CVE’ is understood to be the ‘softer’ end of a government’s CT strategy. The researchers acknowledge an important distinction between CVE²³ and Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE).²⁴ However, since Australian policy does not yet distinguish between the two processes, we refer mainly to CVE practices, unless otherwise indicated.

The phrase ‘de-radicalisation’ will not be used, and all references to CVE and PVE should be understood as part of a disengagement²⁵ process, unless otherwise stated.²⁶

²¹ Definition as explained in the OSCE’s *Women and Terrorist Radicalization Final Report*, 2013, <www.osce.org/atu/99919?download=true> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

²² OSCE, *Preventing Terrorism and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism: A Community-Policing Approach* (Vienna: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, March 2014), <www.osce.org/atu/111438?download=true> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

²³ CVE—or countering violent extremism—is a process that attempts to *disengage* or *deradicalise* individuals or groups who have already had some level of exposure to radical or extremist ideology. CVE efforts must distinguish which avenue they are going down, as conflating the two goals is impractical.

The researchers will refer to processes such as rehabilitation, reintegration and resocialisation. These are interpreted as non-punitive methods of CVE and PVE for individuals—men and women—involved in IS-related terrorism and violent extremism.

²⁴ PVE—or preventing violent extremism—is a process that tries to stop radical extremist ideology from taking root within individuals and communities in the first place. PVE is something that should be taught at school and at home from a young age, and should be a skill rooted in critical thinking and global citizenship education. PVE should be taught in the same way as other social security issues, including those related to domestic violence and crime prevention and should emphasise the values of being a good citizen.

²⁵ J. M. Berger, ‘Making CVE Work: A Focused Approach Based on Process Disruption’, *ICCT Research Paper* no. 5 (The Hague: The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, May 2016), <www.icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/J.-M.-Berger-Making-CVE-Work-A-Focused-Approach-Based-on-Process-Disruption-.pdf> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

²⁶ *Ibid.*

Women's Experiences with IS Terrorism

NUMBERS

It has been estimated that 17 per cent of all Europeans who made *hijra* to IS were women.²⁷ French intelligence reported that “women made up more than a third (35 percent) of French citizens travelling to Iraq and Syria to join the IS group, up from just 10 percent in 2010”.²⁸ Similar trends were seen in Germany, with 930 people leaving Germany to join the Islamic State, of whom around 20 per cent were women.²⁹ There are reports that hundreds of British girls that despite information as to the brutality of the Islamic State still want to join the group.³⁰ Two years ago, Julie Bishop confirmed that up to forty Australian women were known to have supported terrorist activity abroad and at home.³¹ Exact numbers of Australian women who migrated to the caliphate are unknown; open source information can be found for nine of them, and of these individuals, four are known to have been killed.³² Although research has suggested that a “mass exodus”³³ of returnees is unlikely, the issue of returning families is nevertheless of paramount concern to Australia, noting that 30 per cent of individuals have already returned from the conflict zones to home countries in the European Union.³⁴ There has been no indication that Australia has yet had to deal with women returning from IS territories, but the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) has cited that there are around seventy children of Australians who may want to return.³⁵

²⁷ B. Van Ginkel and E. Entenmann (eds), ‘The Foreign Fighters Phenomenon in the European Union: Profiles, Threats & Policies’, *ICCT Research Paper* no. 2 (The Hague: The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, April 2016), 2016, <icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/ICCT-Report_Foreign-Fighters-Phenomenon-in-the-EU_1-April-2016_including-AnnexesLinks.pdf> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

²⁸ Sam Ball, ‘Rise in French Women Joining IS Group Ranks as Jihadists Target Female Recruits’, *France24*, 10 January 2016, <www.france24.com/en/20160108-france-women-islamic-state-group-female-recruits> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

²⁹ News Agencies, ‘ISIL Women Recruits Arrested in Mosul’, *Al Jazeera*, 23 July 2017, <www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/07/isil-women-recruits-detained-mosul-170722190720527.html> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

³⁰ Mark Townsend, ‘Hundreds of Young People in UK Still Want to Join Isis in Syria’, *The Observer*, 13 August 2016, <www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/13/hundreds-of-uk-girls-still-want-to-join-isis> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

³¹ Susan McDonald, ‘Islamic State: Up to 40 Australian Women Including “Jihadi Brides” Supporting Terrorist Activity in Syria and Iraq, Julie Bishop Says’, *ABC News*, 26 February 2015, <www.abc.net.au/news/2015-02-25/40-australian-women-supported-terrorists-iraq-syria-bishop-says/6262452> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

³² Sofia Patel, *The Sultanate of Women: Exploring Female Roles in Perpetrating and Preventing Violent Extremism*, Special Report (Canberra: Australian Strategic Policy Institute, February 2017), <s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/ad-aspi/import/SR100_Sultanate-of-women_v2.pdf?7BtsSZBgI0DezLXkbPXgQXW.A5UiiYFz> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

³³ RAN Centre of Excellence, ‘Response to Returnees’.

³⁴ Van Ginkel and Entenmann, ‘The Foreign Fighters Phenomenon in the European Union’.

³⁵ David Wroe, ‘Security First, But Welfare of IS Fighters’ Children Will Be Managed: Government’, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 September 2017, <www.smh.com.au/federal-

WHY HAVE WESTERN WOMEN JOINED IS?

Far from the sensationalised media coverage painting women as vulnerable victims manipulated by their recruiters, or as lovestruck ‘jihadi brides’, research has demonstrated that Western women joined IS for many of the same reasons as their male counterparts. The range of push and pull factors encouraging women to join IS included issues relating to identity and belonging, alienation, perceived persecution of Muslims, social/cultural isolation in the West, redemption, shared experiences, adventure and romance.³⁶ Another prime reason for women’s migration to IS territory was to be part of a utopian state building project.³⁷

Prolonged issues of displacement, peripatetic lifestyles, insufficient or inadequate economic or employment opportunities are real contributing factors to creating conditions conducive to radicalisation. These political, economic and social grievances transcend gender; focusing on women as ‘jihadi brides’ “diverts attention and resources away from enhancing critical skills and engagement with real problems of youth unemployment, islamophobia, political participation and gender barriers”.³⁸ To understand motivations for joining IS, research needs to move away from gendered stereotypes that afford binary distinctions between men and women as an explanation.

WHAT ROLES HAVE WOMEN PLAYED WITHIN IS?

Western women’s support of IS—both inside and outside the caliphate—ranged from recruitment and homemaking to financing and attack planning. Women who made *hijra* were assigned a set of roles that conformed to IS’s strict gender binary principles without much flexibility: women’s roles were confined to the domestic sphere, and were largely non-combative. As part of the state-building project, women were also required to work in professions including education, healthcare and policing (e.g. the Al Khanssaa Brigade) to ensure gender segregation was upheld. Although media reported that IS allegedly deployed female suicide bombers in Mosul in July 2017 for tactical

politics/political-news/security-first-but-welfare-of-is-fighters-children-will-be-managed-government-20170924-gynrrq.html> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

³⁶ Erin Saltman and Melanie Smith, *Till Martyrdom Do Us Part* (London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2015), <www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Till_Martyrdom_Do_Us_Part_Gender_and_the_ISIS_Phenomenon.pdf> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Brown, ‘Gender and Countering Islamic State Radicalisation’.

purposes,³⁹ these reports remain unverified and IS has not claimed responsibility for the attacks.⁴⁰

Dominant official IS doctrine maintained that a woman's jihad is as a "wife of a mujahid and the mother of lion cubs".⁴¹ Women are considered as "teacher[s] of generations and the producer of men ... the woman is a shepherd in her house and is responsible for her herd".⁴² Thus women are encouraged and praised for encouraging their men to take up arms,⁴³ rather than engaging in combat operations themselves.

Women have had mixed reactions to their exclusion from the battlefield. For example, Hayat Boumeddine—wife of Amedy Coulibaly who killed four civilians at a kosher grocery store in Paris in 2015—did not encourage women to take up arms, and said in an interview:

Be a base of support and safety for your husbands, brothers, fathers and sons. Be advisors to them. They should find comfort and peace with you. Do not make things difficult for them. Facilitate all matters for them. Be strong and brave.⁴⁴

Others have lamented about being excluded from combat. Zehra Duman, a Melbourne girl of Turkish descent who travelled to the caliphate in 2014, identified on social media her desire to take up operational roles for IS; she simultaneously demonstrated by her enthusiasm her ideological commitment to the organisation with the caveat that this was not permissible for women.⁴⁵

In October 2017, IS shifted their rhetoric to endorse female combatants (until then combat roles were only permitted in very specific circumstances).⁴⁶

³⁹ For more information on terrorist organisations deploying women in operations for tactical purposes see Mia Bloom, *Bombshell: Women and Terrorism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); and Mia Bloom, 'The Changing Nature of Women in Violent Extremism', *Freedom From Fear Magazine*, issue 11, <f3magazine.unicri.it/?p=1093> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

⁴⁰ Charlie Winter and Devorah Margolin, 'The Mujahidat Dilemma: Female Combatants and the Islamic State', *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, CTC Sentinel*, vol. 10, no. 7 (16 August 2017), <ctc.usma.edu/posts/the-mujahidat-dilemma-female-combatants-and-the-islamic-state> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

⁴¹ Aaron Y. Zelin, 'A Jihad Without Fighting', *Dabiq*, no. 11 (9 September 2015), <jihadology.net/category/dabiq-magazine/> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Louisa Tarras-Wahlberg, 'Promises of Paradise? A Study on Official ISIS-Propaganda Targeting Women', Master's Thesis, Swedish Defence University, 2016, <fhs.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:942997/FULLTEXT01.pdf> [Accessed 5 April 2018]; Saltman and Smith, *Till Martyrdom Do Us Part*.

⁴⁴ Clarion Project, 'A Brief Interview with Umm Basir al-Muhajirah', *Dabiq*, no. 7 (12 February 2015), <clarionproject.org/docs/islamic-state-dabiq-magazine-issue-7-from-hypocrisy-to-apostasy.pdf> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

⁴⁵ Saltman and Smith, *Till Martyrdom Do Us Part*.

⁴⁶ See Charlie Winter, 'In August #IS]ers Circulated This Clarification on Permissibility of Women and Fighting [Translation]', Twitter, 19 November 2015, <twitter.com/charliewinter/status/667326295706050560> [Accessed 5 April 2018]. Furthermore on 6 October, IS

The sanctioning of women to take up arms by IS could be huge and could influence a whole cohort of individuals who had not previously considered taking up arms to do so.

However, it should be noted that women outside the caliphate did take it upon themselves over the past few years to wage defensive jihad (*jihad al-daf*),⁴⁷ prior to the official authorisation. Over the past eighteen months, women planned and attempted to execute various types of attacks including shootings, suicide operations and bomb detonation in Kenya, Morocco, France and Indonesia. It is very possible that the number of these incidents is likely to increase, and governments should be prepared to respond to this adequately.

WHY DO WOMEN'S ROLES IN TERRORISM AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM MATTER TO AUSTRALIA?

Governments, multilateral organisations and civil society need to overcome the narrative that within terrorism and violent extremism "women ... rarely [take] decisions and influence events".⁴⁸ Focusing only on male perpetrators of violence has meant that the voices of women have been overlooked, and opportunities for careful CT and CVE policy design and implementation have been missed.

Although statistics remain comparatively low, Australia should pay closer attention to female involvement in IS-related violence for three reasons.

First, due to the dissolution of IS's caliphate, women and children will likely be among those wanting to return. As mentioned, ASIO has identified around seventy children who could be awaiting rehabilitation procedures in Australia. Although Australia has developed competent security procedures, the long-term rehabilitation process is not straightforward. For CVE measures to have resonance and effect, considering sociopolitical and cultural grievances that create conditions conducive to radicalisation is key.

published their first official statement explicitly calling on women to wage jihad alongside men, Site Intelligence Group, 'IS Urges Muslim Women to Fight in Battlefield Alongside Men to Defend Group', 10 October 2017, <ent.siteintelgroup.com/Periodicals/is-urges-muslim-women-to-fight-in-battlefield-alongside-men-to-defend-group.html> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

⁴⁷ See analysis of salafi-jihadi ideological inconsistencies on *jihad al-daf* by Nelly Lahoud in Nelly Lahoud, 'The Neglected Sex: The jihadis' Exclusion of Women from Jihad', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 20 February 2014, also shorter analysis from Sofia Patel on the implications of IS endorsing female fighters, Sofia Patel, 'The Mujahidat: Myth No More?', *The Strategist*, 16 October 2017, <www.aspistrategist.org.au/the-mujahidat-myth-no-more/> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

⁴⁸ Peter R. Neumann, 'Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalisation that Lead to Terrorism: Ideas, Recommendations and Good Practices from the OSCE Region', ICSR Report, 28 September 2017, <icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Countering-Violent-Extremism-and-Radicalisation-that-Lead-to-Terrorism.pdf> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

Women are at the heart of community activities, and their voices need to be heard.

Second, IS's increased presence in South-East Asia heightens regional security concerns for Australia and other nations. Returnees are likely to attempt to travel to the region, bringing with them battlefield experience, skills, discipline and ideological commitment. Women already play many roles to facilitate violent extremism across South-East Asia, and the prospect of returnees—both male and female—may reinforce their commitment, organisation and effect. Earlier this year the Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict reported that Indonesian women are increasingly vocal in their desire to join international *mujahidat* (female fighters) and take up arms for the cause—“Indonesian women in extremist organisations are now catching up with the lethal practices of their sisters in other parts of the world”.⁴⁹ Indeed, the first Indonesian woman—Dian Yulia—was arrested in December 2016 for planning to detonate a suicide vest at the presidential palace. Yulia appeared in court in July 2017, and is looking at a potential ten-year sentence.⁵⁰

Thirdly, with IS's recent change in rhetoric⁵¹ on female combatants, it could be likely that more women will indeed attempt to wage violent attacks. Australia should be prepared for the possibility of ‘inspired’ women combatants, both at home and in the region, and this requires robust gender perspectives integrated within CT and CVE strategies.

Western governments are slowly beginning to realise the strategic need to integrate gender perspectives within narratives of CVE and PVE. As Strømme rightly states, “[w]omen need to be considered as full agents’ rather than feeding ‘the gender-paradigm of ‘men-as-perpetrators’ and ‘women-as-victims’”.⁵² The proven fact that women can indeed facilitate and perpetrate extremist violence⁵³ underlines the need for the international community, including Australia, to firstly, put women on the agenda, and, secondly, include a gendered approach in its larger CVE strategy that

⁴⁹ Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, ‘Mothers to Bombers: The Evolution of Indonesian Women Extremists’, *IPAC Report*, no. 35, 31 January 2017, <file.understandingconflict.org/file/2017/01/IPAC_Report_35.pdf> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

⁵⁰ Samantha Hawley, ‘Indonesian Prosecutors Seek 10-Year Sentence for First Woman Charged Over Suicide Bomb Plot’, *ABC News*, 23 August 2017, <www.abc.net.au/news/2017-08-23/female-suicide-bomber-jakarta-prosecutors-seek-10-year-sentence/8836096> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

⁵¹ MEE and agencies, ‘Islamic State Calls on Female Supporters to Take Part in “Jihad”’, *Middle East Eye*, 6 October 2017, <www.middleeasteye.net/news/islamic-state-called-female-supporters-take-part-jihad-934020595> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

⁵² Ester E. J. Strømme, ‘Jihadi Brides or Female Foreign Fighters? Women in Da’esh—from Recruitment to Sentencing’, *Peace and Security, GPS Policy Brief 01/2017*, PRIO Centre on Gender, 2017, <www.prio.org/utility/DownloadFile.aspx?id=1219&type=publicationfile> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

⁵³ See for more in-depth Patel, *The Sultanate of Women*.

addresses rehabilitation, resocialisation and reintegration of citizens, who have been involved with violent extremism.

Locating CVE Within Australia's National Security Architecture: Are Gender Perspectives Incorporated?

The current wave of IS-related terrorism has created two main immediate security challenges for governments: returnees and individuals or cells at home who are inspired to carry out attacks on their behalf. There are two main routes for governments and civil society to pursue when dealing with individuals who have been engaged in violent extremist networks: punitive or non-punitive. Regardless of which approach is taken for the individual, research and empirical evidence have demonstrated that it is essential that a tailored approach for each returnee is developed and an individual program of rehabilitation and reintegration is followed.⁵⁴

Australia's federal structure means that the Commonwealth has created an overarching National CT Strategy, and within that sit the national CVE framework, strategy and program.⁵⁵ This system allows power to be devolved to states and territories to provide localised policy and operational responses to the threat of terrorism through their own autonomous CT and CVE structures. Australia does not distinguish between CVE and Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) initiatives. PVE is not separated from CVE in current policy and practice; this is unhelpful as the aims of PVE and CVE are quite different. PVE needs to address the "drivers of violent extremism".⁵⁶ Academics and practitioners have called for a distinction⁵⁷ to be made between the two processes, which would separate PVE from hard CT security practices, and instead focus on strengthening good governance, human rights and the rule of law.⁵⁸

States and territories have developed their own approaches to CT and CVE—some of which are more effective than others. For example, New South Wales's COMPACT Program appears to operate independently from national security agencies or law enforcement—the board comprises members of civil society working in different professions including healthcare, business and academia. A number of community-led projects

⁵⁴ RAN Centre of Excellence, 'Response to Returnees'.

⁵⁵ Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Review of Australia's Counter-Terrorism Machinery* [hereafter *Review*], (Canberra: Australian Government, January 2015), <www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/190215_CT_Review_1.pdf> [Accessed 5 April 2018], pp. 8-9, 16-17, 30-32.

⁵⁶ United Nations General Assembly, 'Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism', A/70/670 (24 December 2015), <www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/674> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

⁵⁷ Katrina Lee-Koo and Jacqui True, 'Recognising Women's Roles in Countering Violent Extremism', *The Interpreter*, Lowy Institute, 28 August 2017, <www.loyyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/responding-women-roles-countering-violent-extremism> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

⁵⁸ United Nations General Assembly, 'Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism'.

have been funded by COMPACT in 2016, including a CVE initiative led by the United Muslim Women's Association. COMPACT runs parallel to the NSW CT Plan which was published by NSW Police in December 2016.⁵⁹ It is unclear from the plan where the links are between law enforcement, social services, community organisations and other important stakeholders. Further, it lacks details of specific measures to action future developments for CVE, including any references to grassroots organisations, women or gender and terrorism.

Victoria has also separated certain elements of CVE from hard security CT, which is carried out by the Community Resilience Unit (CRU). The CRU published their Strategic Framework in December 2015,⁶⁰ which aimed to "Strengthen Victoria's social cohesion and the resilience of its communities" through a whole of government approach, that is not focused on legislative or law enforcement measures.⁶¹ Although the document outlines good objectives and actions, grounded in solid human rights principles of equality, tolerance and social justice, it does not demonstrate how grassroots or women's organisations will be integrated or that they are even being considered as community partners. There are many women's organisations—government and non-government funded—focusing on community strength, resilience building, social cohesion and preventing violent extremism.⁶² If these organisations were connected through a centralised platform such as the CRU, information and best practice information and evaluations could be shared, which could assist with generating a more nuanced understanding of women's involvement in violent extremism.

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull recently called for both unification and tightening of detention and investigation laws, and for other states and territories to orientate themselves on NSW's regulations.⁶³ This is problematic as states and territories have developed their own unique approaches based on localised sociocultural experiences, values and issues.

⁵⁹ NSW Government, 'New South Wales Counter Terrorism Plan', December 2016, <www.secure.nsw.gov.au/media/admin/220/_/644vd9w0jw37s4wss0/Plan-NSWCounterTerrorismPlan.pdf> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

⁶⁰ Victoria State Government, *Strategic Framework to Strengthen Victoria's Social Cohesion and the Resilience of its Communities* (Melbourne: Victorian Government, December 2015), <www.vic.gov.au/system/user_files/Documents/riosc/Strategic_Framework_to_Strength_Victoria_Socoal_Cohesion.PDF> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Sofia Patel, *The Sultanate of Women*.

⁶³ Katharine Murphy, 'Turnbull to Push for Terrorism Suspects to Be Detained Without Charge for up to 14 Days', *The Guardian*, 3 October 2017, <www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/oct/03/turnbull-to-push-for-terrorism-suspects-to-be-detained-without-charge-for-up-to-14-days?CMP=share_btn_tw> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

An overview of the two levels is provided below for context about what the government's current approach is, where gender concerns have been integrated, and where the gaps lie. Even though terrorism and violent extremism are highly gendered processes, Australia's CT and CVE policy and legislation do not explicitly address different gender perspectives at either the Commonwealth or state and territory level.

COMMONWEALTH CT AND CVE ARCHITECTURE

The 2015 *Review of Australia's Counter-Terrorism Machinery* demonstrates how the Australian Government has expanded its CT (and CVE) architecture post 9/11. Since 2001, Australia's Commonwealth CT architecture has integrated a whole of government approach that mobilises various agencies and departments to deal with different CT challenges. Charts 3 and 5 from the *Review* are providing a good overview of the changes in Australia's CT functions and activities (Figure 1).⁶⁴

The *Review* offered several recommendations, such as "expand Commonwealth efforts to address the causes of violent extremism in Australia", including developing a "national CVE Strategy"; as well as proposing the Attorney General's Department (AGD) develop a strategy for controlled return of so-called foreign fighters.⁶⁵ There is no mention of women, or of 'gender' in the *Review*. A request for tender was published in April 2017 by the AGD, calling for CVE services, which may have been in response to the recommendations from the *Review*; a request by the researchers for information on the current situation remained unanswered.

The Australian Federal Police (AFP) coordinates several multilateral arrangements, working on punitive and non-punitive approaches to current CT challenges, CVE, and preventative future measures. Some examples are the Australia-New-Zealand Counter-Terrorism Committee,⁶⁶ Joint Counter-Terrorism Teams⁶⁷ (ASIO, state and territory police, AFP) operating across all states and territories,⁶⁸ and the National Disruption Group (NDG)⁶⁹ with its Diversion Team. The NDG is responsible for non-punitive

⁶⁴ Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Review*, pp. 5, 7.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* pp. vi, 39.

⁶⁶ Australian Federal Police, 'Governance and Legislative Arrangements', <www.afp.gov.au/what-we-do/crime-types/fighting-terrorism/governance-and-legislative-arrangements> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

⁶⁷ "The aim of the teams is to work closely with other domestic agencies in the broader intelligence community and with international partners to identify and investigate terrorist activities in Australia (including terrorism financing) with an emphasis on preventative operations." Australian Federal Police, 'National Efforts', <www.afp.gov.au/what-we-do/crime-types/fighting-terrorism/national-efforts#dt> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ "The NDG consolidates the capabilities of participating agencies to prevent, disrupt and prosecute Australian nationals who travel or intend to travel offshore to engage in hostilities and/or undertake terrorism training, as well as those providing support to them." *Ibid.*

measures,⁷⁰ and has been a successful conduit between government and community activity through the deployment of Community Liaison Officers (CLOs).⁷¹ At present, there is no known focus on integrating gender perspectives within existing CT or CVE strategic arrangements that are carried out by the AGD or AFP. The NDG would be a useful vehicle to communicate community needs to government, including how to address gender-based security issues.

⁷⁰ A requested meeting with involved AFP officials could unfortunately not be arranged.

⁷¹ Researcher consultations with members of the AGD Countering violent extremism centre in October 2017.

Figure 1: Comparing Commonwealth CT functions and activities prior to 2001 and in 2014.

Chart 3: Commonwealth CT functions and activities prior to 2001

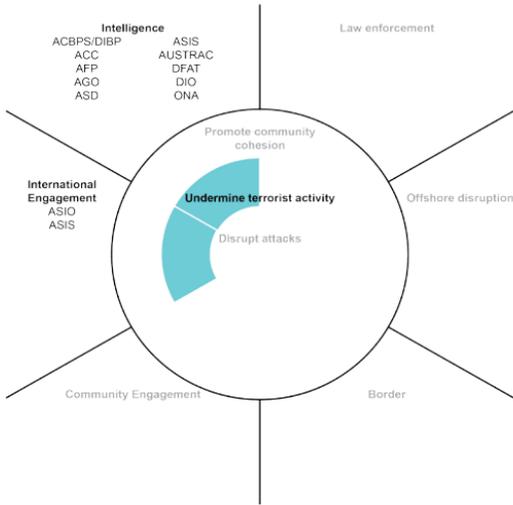
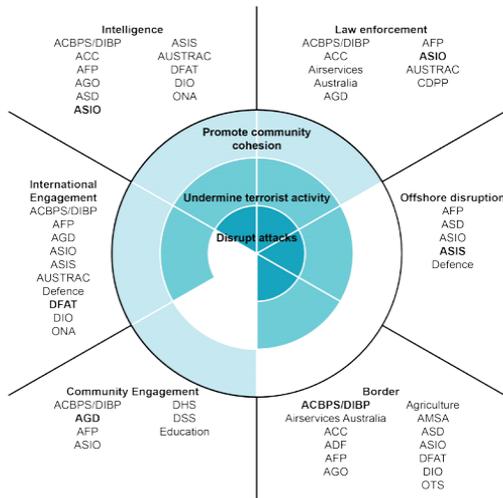


Chart 5: Commonwealth CT functions and activities in 2014



Source: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Review of Australia's Counter-Terrorism Machinery* (Canberra: Australian Government, January 2015).

Actors on Commonwealth Level

For example, the AGD already funds various State and Territory initiatives that work with existing women's associations to prevent and counter violent extremism by building skills such as leadership, education—religious and secular—and vocational training, particularly for immigrant or ethnic minority women. It would be useful to encourage CLOs to communicate concerns and challenges from the local level to the policy level.

STATE, TERRITORY AND COMMONWEALTH COOPERATION ON SECURITY ISSUES

Returnees: The 2015 Review emphasised the security challenges posed by returnees.⁷² Fulfilling its primary obligation to prevent and combat violent extremism and terrorism, the Australian Government is constantly evolving legislation and policy to be able to deal with the prospect of returnees, and the crimes they may or may not have committed while abroad, and mitigate the risks they may or may not pose at home. A key challenge for judiciaries is determining what kind of offence has been committed, and what laws may have been violated. This will also determine whether the individual faces punitive or non-punitive measures. Whereas committing crimes will be difficult to prove, many returning from conflict zones will likely have committed a 'declared area offence', which is regulated at Section 119.2 of the *Criminal Code Act 1995*, by travelling to Mosul or Al-Raqqa.⁷³ Policy and legislation regarding citizenship, the right to a fair trial, sentencing and rehabilitation processes—for men women and children—have to be grounded in protecting human rights and individual freedoms.

The AGD is coordinating a multi-agency 'reception plan' for those who have been authorised to return home to Australia. This bespoke plan is put together before the individual/family lands in Australia, and is implemented immediately when they arrive. A team comprising border force, immigration officials, law enforcement, healthcare, social workers, child protection, housing and education work together at different phases and stages of the rehabilitation and reintegration process, and the process is adjusted according to the unique concerns for and from the individual. This multi-agency approach is created for those going down both punitive and non-punitive routes, with emphasis on different things for each individual. Details on the concrete design and content of the resources as well as a rehabilitation time-frame, however, were not provided.

Prisons: In Australia, the maximum penalty for a person who was found guilty for committing a terrorism offence is imprisonment for up to twenty-five

⁷² Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Review*, pp. 11, 34.

⁷³ Australian Government, 'Australian National Security: Declared Area Offence', <www.nationalsecurity.gov.au/whataustraliaisdoing/pages/declaredareaoffence.aspx> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

years.⁷⁴ However, associating with a terrorist organisation results in only three years imprisonment, but being a member of an organisation, in ten years.⁷⁵ With many of today's terrorist attacks being 'inspired' and 'directed', the distinctions and definitions between membership and association could be a grey area.

As of March 2016, there were 37,996 adults incarcerated with only 58 remand and convicted terrorist offenders—15 in Victoria, 41 in NSW and two in Queensland. Nonetheless, this represents a significant growth since 2013 when there were just 13 terrorist prisoners.⁷⁶

Currently, NSW and Victoria operate different practices regarding terrorism-related prisoners: NSW practises a policy of separation and segregation whereas Victoria practises a policy of dispersal.⁷⁷

There are benefits and drawbacks for each approach, but policymakers should be wary of applying short-term solutions (e.g. segregation prevents 'prison radicalisation' of others) that sow the seeds for deeper challenges in the longer term.⁷⁸ Thus, confining someone in an environment only to be exposed to others of similar mindset and grievances may cement rather than dilute an individual's commitment to a particular cause. Once he/she serves out the sentence, they may be even more dangerous than when they went in.

The lack of adequate gender perspectives within CVE processes has affected the sentencing of returnee women. Cases abroad have shown a tendency to treat female returnees differently to men, based on prevailing gender stereotypes that position women as less dangerous than men. Strømme presents several examples of women who returned and entered the judicial process but who were either pardoned or sentenced with reduced punishment than their partners or comparable cases involving male returnees, such as the case of Laura Passoni in Belgium.⁷⁹ Strømme underlines, how this is problematic:

⁷⁴ Australian Government, 'Living Safe Together: Counter Terrorism Laws', <www.livingsafetogether.gov.au/informationadvice/Pages/counter-terrorism-laws.aspx#q2b> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Clarke Jones, 'Segregate to Rehabilitate?', Australian National University, 20 October 2016, <regnet.anu.edu.au/news-events/news/6587/segregate-rehabilitate> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Sofia Patel, 'Prison Radicalisation: Security Outweighs Reform', *The Strategist*, 12 July 2017, <www.aspistrategist.org.au/prison-radicalisation-security-outweighs-reform/> [Accessed 5 April 2018].; also see Peter R. Neumann, 'Prisons and Terrorism: Radicalisation and Deradicalisation in 15 Countries', ICSR Policy Report (London: International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, 2010), <icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/1277699166PrisonsandTerrorismRadicalisationandDeradicalisationin15Countries.pdf> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

⁷⁹ Laura Passoni returned to Belgium. While her male partner was sentenced to four years in jail, her three-year sentence was suspended. Additionally, she was imposed with restrictions

In treating female violence and membership in an extremist organization as though it cannot be equivalent to male violence and membership, highly problematic and false gendered assumptions about extremism and participation are being made.⁸⁰

Citizenship: In 2015 the *Allegiance to Australia Act*⁸¹ legislation was passed to strip dual nationals of Australian citizenship “for terrorist acts committed abroad or by a person who is no longer in Australia”.⁸² However, this is heavily contingent on a case-by-case assessment basis, and (hopefully) cannot be implemented *carte blanche*. The new legislation creates particular risks for children, who may be eligible for the revoking of their citizenship as young as fourteen years old.⁸³ If enacted, this would be highly controversial, especially as the minimum legal age of a soldier under the United Nations Human Rights Convention on the Rights of the Child, is fifteen.⁸⁴ Lydia Shelly, a solicitor, argued that it should be the responsibility of the courts to decide who should and should not be an Australian citizen, and not the government.⁸⁵ Further, revoking Australian citizenship leaves the issue of dealing with a potentially radicalised citizen to a third country, which could include Australia’s allies. The fate of the deceased Khaled Sharrouf’s children will be subject to debate, noting that he was the first dual national to be stripped of his Australian citizenship, in February 2017.⁸⁶ Questions regarding citizenship of children born overseas as well as others who travelled with their parents are still being debated.

ISSUES: POLICY AND PRACTICE

According to the CVE Centre at the AGD, effective communication is operating between all involved levels and actors across state, territory and departmental representatives. All officials involved have daily contact with the respective coordinators in the jurisdictions. Quarterly evaluations of the

including a communication ban to her partner for five years, no internet usage, and a travel ban to leave the country for five years.

⁸⁰ Strømme, ‘Jihadi Brides or Female Foreign Fighters?’.

⁸¹ Parliament of Australia, ‘Australian Citizenship Amendment (Allegiance to Australia Bill) 2015’, <www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bld=r5507> [Accessed 5 April 2018]. Now the *Australian Citizenship Amendment (Allegiance to Australia) Act 2015*.

⁸² Human Rights Watch, ‘Australia: Don’t Revoke Citizenship Without Safeguards’, 13 December 2015, <www.hrw.org/news/2015/12/13/australia-dont-revoke-citizenship-without-safeguards> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ United Nations, ‘Convention on the Rights of the Child’, 2 September 1990, <www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx>

⁸⁵ Michael Edwards, ‘Dual Citizens Involved in Terror Set to Lose Citizenship’, *ABC Radio*, 8 April 2016, <www.abc.net.au/radio/programs/pm/dual-citizens-involved-in-terror-set-to-lose/7312704> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

⁸⁶ Jane Norman and Caitlyn Gribbin, ‘Islamic State Fighter Khaled Sharrouf Becomes First to Lose Citizenship Under Anti-Terror Laws’, *ABC News*, 11 February 2017, <www.abc.net.au/news/2017-02-11/islamic-state-fighter-khaled-sharrouf-stripped-of-citizenship/8262268> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

state and territory programs based on qualitative and quantitative data allow for reassessing the current strategies. Furthermore, the current division of tasks among both horizontal as well as vertical levels is seen as well-functioning.⁸⁷

This assessment resonates very differently at the community level: A member of the Muslim community in Sydney, who works closely with men and women affected by violent extremism, domestic violence, child protection and other social welfare issues, commented anecdotally that robust intervention and returnee reception plans may exist on paper, but in practice the reality for the individuals involved looks a lot different. Often, returnees or those from communities affected by violent extremism are approached by government for intelligence purposes rather than genuine assistance and rehabilitation. Furthermore, the spokesperson commented that everyday issues for women left behind (whose husbands made *hijra*) are of key concern, specifically for those who struggle with securing sole parenting rights. These women are reluctant to go to institutions such as Legal Aid, or to members of the Islamic Community as they are worried about the repercussions if they voice their concerns. These women need support and welfare, not securitisation or surveillance.

The reluctance to confide in local authority resonates with the work that the Victorian Immigrant and Refugee Women's Coalition (VIRWC) is doing with female victims of domestic violence. A representative⁸⁸ from the VIRWC unequivocally stated that these women are unwilling to go to the police to report family violence, due to fear for their families, religious and cultural profiling, trust and language barriers. This nuanced approach could be beneficial when developing approaches to CVE initiatives. Organisations such as the VIRWC are better placed to establish trusted relationships with communities who are fearful and apprehensive about the involvement of law enforcement. This is a good example of how the concerns of women should be centrally incorporated within CVE policy design and implementation.

The issue of trust is key. An Islamic Council of Victoria spokesperson suggested that a reason they recently distanced from Victoria Police's Community Integration Support Program⁸⁹ was because the community no

⁸⁷ Personal conversations with AGD; unfortunately, no answers were provided to questions on gender aspects in the areas of intervention, on monitoring measures regarding the Living Safe Together initiative, on the division between Commonwealth and state/territory levels, the role of law enforcement, and others.

⁸⁸ Researcher conversations with the VIRWC, October 2017.

⁸⁹ Criminal Code Amendment (High Risk Terrorist Offenders) Bill 2016, Attorney-General's Department submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security, October 2016, <www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Intelligence_and_Security/HRTOBill/Report-PDF> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

longer trusted a police-led program.⁹⁰ Anecdotal comments have suggested that many individuals—specifically women—are reluctant to participate in initiatives that could get members of their families in trouble.⁹¹

These examples demonstrate that from a community perspective, there is a genuine lack of trust in what the government is trying to do. There is a discrepancy between policy and practice, especially concerning security and support and community empowerment. While the communication on higher levels might be working successfully, the ground level feels differently about the scope of understanding for particular needs among the involved officials. This could be attributed to a lack of evaluation and monitoring of policies, while regular assessment of policies is essential to develop legislation and operational measures. These issues need to be addressed if CVE policy is going to be implemented sustainably.

Applying Gender Perspectives to CVE

The UNSCR 2242 in 2015, was a landmark document that addressed the roles of women and girls in countering and assisting in terrorism and violent extremism.⁹² This was the first time the international community acknowledged the need for quantitative and qualitative research to understand drivers of radicalisation for women, and the requirement of closer alignment between the women, peace and security (WPS), CT and CVE agendas. The movement towards this has been slow, especially as many WPS practitioners are wary of the securitisation of women's rights by practitioners with no gender training implementing policy.⁹³ However, if done properly, there is much scope for information and best practice sharing opportunities.⁹⁴

There are two aspects to integrating gender perspectives within CVE. First, governments and civil society must deal with the security challenges *posed by* women who are involved with violent extremism and terrorism. This includes returnees as well as networks integrating women at home. Secondly, governments must work with civil society and communities to better understand the range of roles that women can and do play *to prevent and counter* the threat of violent extremism and terrorism.

⁹⁰ Researcher conversations with the Islamic Council of Victoria, October 2017; Chip Le Grand and Rebecca Urban, 'Muslim Mentors Walk Away from Jail Deradicalisation Program', *The Australian*, 9 June 2017.

⁹¹ Researcher conversations with ICV, October 2017.

⁹² United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee, 'Role of Women in Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism', <www.un.org/sc/ctc/focus-areas/womens-role/> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

⁹³ Shepherd, 'The Role of the WPS Agenda in Countering Violent Extremism'.

⁹⁴ Sofia Patel, 'How Should Australia's WPS National Action Plan Tackle Terrorism?', *The Strategist*, 29 March 2017, <www.aspistrategist.org.au/australias-wps-national-action-plan-tackle-terrorism/> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

SECURITY CHALLENGES POSED BY WOMEN

Returnees are a major security concern and pose a set of unique challenges such as battlefield experience, psychological and physical trauma, hardened ideological conviction and international networks of similar mindsets. Individuals who have remained at home, but who may have been drawn towards violent extremist ideologies and narratives because of varying sociopolitical, religious and personal experiences also pose specific challenges. The experiences of men and women in both these cohorts differ, and must therefore be considered as a prerequisite before designing and implementing policy or programs.

There are three main challenges posed by returnees that require gender-based CVE interventions:

1. battlefield experience (not just operating weaponry but also knowledge of bombmaking and detonating)
2. implementing policy for families and children—those taken over by parents and those born overseas
3. the echo-chamber effects of friendship groups and communities that can be maintained internationally through the internet. The challenges posed by returning women and children are similar to a degree to those posed by male returnees.

Applying Gender Perspectives to Battlefield Experience: Although women may have less battlefield experience, they have been heavily involved in training exercises, and may have good knowledge of bombmaking and operating weapons. Additionally, based on IS's official documents, reading anecdotal testimonies and interviews with IS women, there is no reason to suggest that women's ideological commitment to the caliphate ideal is not as deep as that of male counterparts. If anything, the struggle for women to migrate to the territory and to exist whilst over there, far exceeds that of men, due to restrictions on their civil liberties, imposed on them both inside and outside the caliphate.⁹⁵

The battlefield extends beyond the physical, into the virtual. Noting Elizabeth Pearson's research⁹⁶ of pro-IS Twitter communities, men and women have created highly resilient online profiles to maintain and reinforce the distribution of pro-IS ideology within their own circles and beyond. CVE initiatives must account for these communication channels, especially as

⁹⁵ Rukmini Callimachi and John Woo, 'Dressing Under the Islamic State', *The New York Times*, 7 December 2016, <www.nytimes.com/video/international-home/100000004807233/dressing-under-the-islamic-state.html?ref=collection%2Fbyline%2Frukmini-callimachi> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

⁹⁶ Pearson, 'Online as the New Frontline'.

they are becoming less visible, due to company crackdowns on the one hand, and the proliferation of encryption software on the other.

Applying Gender Perspectives to Policy on Returning Families and Children: Women and children are the most likely candidates to return home.⁹⁷ If the Sharrouf children—the eldest is now sixteen—are reintegrated back into Australian society, prolonged stringent intervention measures will have to be uniquely tailored to each one to ensure an effective balance between security and support.

Prevailing gender stereotypes that apply ‘maternalistic logic’⁹⁸ to women’s involvement with IS could affect how CVE policy is implemented. Governments and media have contributed to the dominant rhetoric suggesting that women’s radicalisation occurs “because they are ignorant or brainwashed”, which “masks cultural and material considerations in their literal and intellectual journey to Islamic State”.⁹⁹ Within the narrative of political violence, women are often seen as less dangerous than men. Noting the depth of Zaynab Sharrouf’s commitment to IS’s ideology, it would be heavily misguided to assume she poses less of a risk to broader national security concerns than her brothers. As has been argued, sociopolitical grievances and ideological commitment to IS’s cause transcend gender, thus the risks posed by these individuals to national security should not be underestimated. CVE processes should be equipped to deal with the challenges.

Applying Gender Perspectives to Social Networks and Echo Chambers: The idea of creating a sisterhood was a key pull factor for Western women towards joining IS to bond with others sharing similar ideals. Many Muslim women living in the West felt alienated by the pressures to conform to standards of liberalism. The Australian women within IS’s caliphate were thought to have created a particularly strong bond, mainly due to their openly supportive conversations via their social media accounts.¹⁰⁰ Returnees may still have friends and relatives back home with whom they will likely reconnect with, should they come back. For example, Australian jihadi Mohamed Elomar’s first wife, Fatima Elomar, was prosecuted and sentenced to two years in prison in 2014 for providing support to her husband to fight with IS in Syria (clothing and other items). She was released in 2016 and “appeared to have been rehabilitated and posed low risk of reoffending”.¹⁰¹ As far as we know, she is back in her former neighbourhood in Western

⁹⁷ RAN Centre of Excellence, ‘Response to Returnees’.

⁹⁸ See work of Mia Bloom, Katherine Brown, Karla Cunningham, Laura Sjoberg, Caron Gentry and Laura Shepherd.

⁹⁹ Brown, ‘Gender and Countering Islamic State Radicalisation’.

¹⁰⁰ Saltman and Smith, *Till Martyrdom Do Us Part*.

¹⁰¹ Joanna Woodburn, ‘Wife of Islamic State fighter Mohamed Elomar Given Two-Year Suspended Sentence’, *ABC News*, 1 July 2017, <www.abc.net.au/news/2016-07-01/wife-of-is-fighter-mohamad-elomar-pleads-guilty-terror-charges/7560986> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

Sydney. Should Mohamed's second wife—Zaynab Sharrouf—return from IS territory, with his child, the likelihood of the Elomar family reconnecting with the Sharrouf family is very likely.

The impact of these networks on an individual is important to consider when developing CVE initiatives. IS recruitment relied heavily on cultivating networks of interaction both online and offline. These networks contribute towards reinforcing beliefs between each other and potentially recruiting new members.

WOMEN IN PREVENTING AND COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

At present, policies addressing violent extremism are limited in their scope and effect due to three main factors:

1. prevailing gender stereotypes that construct women as innately peaceful and maternal;
2. implementing policy or practice that securitises rather than supports women; and
3. policy that marginalises women from participating wholly in public life.

To address these challenges, CVE needs to be designed, implemented, operationalised and evaluated by women as well as men to ensure holistic understanding of the challenges posed by terrorism and violent extremism.

Gender Stereotypes: Policy integrating the roles of women in violent extremism replicates gender stereotypes assuming that women are innately maternal, domestic and non-violent. Katherine Brown has argued that this 'maternal logic'¹⁰² depends on reinforcing particular notions of masculinity and femininity. Women in the narrative of IS-terrorism are often portrayed as irrational actors whose involvement with the organisation was either because of manipulation by recruiters or force against their will. This notion denies seeing women as independent agents, which subordinates and patronises them.¹⁰³

This has encouraged governments and civil society to harness the roles of mother, wife and sister as central to detecting early signs of radicalisation, which does not incorporate women into the public sphere as functioning citizens of society.¹⁰⁴ Instead, it restricts women's roles to the private sphere. The valuable roles played by women around the world in all kinds of

¹⁰² Brown, 'Gender and Countering Islamic State Radicalisation'.

¹⁰³ See Bloom, *Bombshell*; Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry (eds), *Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Women's Violence in Global Politics* (London: Zed Books Ltd, 2007); and Brown, 'Gender and Countering Islamic State Radicalisation'.

¹⁰⁴ Brown, 'Gender and Countering Islamic State Radicalisation'.

family, community, society and government efforts in building resilience, peacekeeping and peacebuilding thus go unnoticed,¹⁰⁵ and ineffective CVE processes are created based on inaccurate understandings of women's participation in violent extremism. CT and CVE policies must avoid replicating gender assumptions and stereotypes, otherwise, it "further emphasises how women are only subjects of policy and of the state through their relations with men and their ability to reproduce".¹⁰⁶ Women can and should be considered as powerful agents of change within their communities and in mainstream society.

Example from the field: *Field research in Indonesia, conducted by Monash University has usefully dismantled gender stereotypes surrounding women's roles in PVE and CVE, arguing that "women's capacity to prevent and counter violent extremism extends far beyond their family roles."*¹⁰⁷ *Through empirical evidence, the research demonstrates that women are active citizens within their communities, as educators, running businesses or charities, religious leaders, and family members. Furthermore, the impact of "women's leadership and authority within their workplaces"*¹⁰⁸ *is indicative of a powerful counternarrative to fundamentalist patriarchal ideology of female subordination. The research concludes that championing gender parity is likely to be "the single most powerful counter-discourse to extremist interpretations of religion."*¹⁰⁹

Policy and Practice of Securitising Not Supporting Women: Securitising and instrumentalising women's roles in their communities for CT or CVE purposes is a second problem. For example, women left behind in their communities whose relatives have been involved in IS-terrorist networks (either killed in battle, are incarcerated or are still abroad) may be at risk of being co-opted by government for intelligence purposes; they are offered welfare support including much needed financial support in the absence of their husbands or male relatives. This approach fails to recognise the real security and welfare concerns of women, and puts them at risk of alienation and ostracism from their communities; "though it may produce results in the short-term, in the long-term it will destroy the social fabric of the society".¹¹⁰

There is a balance between offering support and mitigating security risks that does not involve securitising women and their communities. These measures require investment in long-term sustainability to develop genuine resilience and build reform within communities. Developing well-supported,

¹⁰⁵ UN Women, *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325* (New York: UN Women, 2015), Chapter 9, <[wps.unwomen.org/pdf/CH09.pdf](https://www.unwomen.org/pdf/CH09.pdf)> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

¹⁰⁶ Brown, 'Gender and Countering Islamic State Radicalisation'.

¹⁰⁷ True and Eddyono, 'Preventing Violent Extremism'.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ UN Women, *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace*.

financed and regularly monitored programs to empower women and their families should be prioritised. Local governments should work with these individuals to improve access to education—religious and secular—to develop critical thinking skills and other vocational training initiatives to enable women to provide confident single parenting care.

Often, government-led initiatives are more inclined to reach affected communities by partnering with self-appointed ‘representatives’ claiming to speak on behalf of their communities. These organisations are usually male dominated, have their own intentions and do not always have access to the most vulnerable individuals.¹¹¹ Furthermore, in conservative communities, women are not always allowed access to certain resources or places, meaning they may never be engaged with ‘official’ community engagement initiatives.

A much better approach would be to enhance already existing initiatives at the grassroots level, often delivering unique, tailored, first-hand support in a trusted manner. This includes activities such as legal representation, financial, emotional, childcare and healthcare support.

Example from the field: *RUSI's field research on patterns of gendered 'radicalisation' to IS in four Western Muslim communities (The Netherlands, the United Kingdom, France and Canada) demonstrated that gendered resources contribute towards different pathways into and out of radicalisation for men and women—such as access to public and private spaces, and social networks and groups—both online and offline. Cultural restrictions often influence the dynamics between men and women in these communities and must be considered when trying to understand how individuals radicalise, and where this process takes place.*

Marginalisation of Women from Social and Political Life: Thirdly, policy and legislation that is perceived to target specific communities based on race or ethnicity has led to whole communities feeling targeted. Women in Muslim communities are often disproportionately affected by new policy and legislation, enforcing certain codes of conduct regarding dress: for example, Austria's recently imposed veil ban,¹¹² France and Turkey's longstanding laws on secularity, and the controversial attempt to enact a ‘burkini ban’ in France in 2016.¹¹³ Additionally, Muslim women are more vulnerable to the

¹¹¹ OSCE, *Women and Terrorist Radicalization Final Report* (Vienna: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 2013), <www.osce.org/atu/99919?download=true> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

¹¹² Mary Bulman, ‘Austrian Face Veil Ban Comes into Force Under New “Integration” Policy’, *The Independent*, 1 October 2017, <www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/austrian-face-veil-ban-burka-niqab-a7976531.html> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

¹¹³ Lizzie Dearden, ‘Burkini Ban: Why Is France Arresting Muslim Women for Wearing Full-Body Swimwear and Why Are People so Angry?’, *The Independent*, 24 August 2016, <www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/burkini-ban-why-is-france-arresting-muslim-

effects of hate crime, Islamophobic and xenophobic attacks or abuse from mainstream society due to wearing visible markers of their faith such as a hijab, niqab or abaya.

Despite this, some Muslim women actually started wearing the hijab over the past decade as a means to facilitate greater freedom for themselves, and to integrate into the public domain.¹¹⁴ Often, girls are denied personal freedoms due to the traditions imposed by a culture, rather than as a result of religious doctrine.¹¹⁵ If governments are encouraged to identify increased markers of religiosity such as wearing the hijab with signs of radicalisation, it may encourage misleading policy and operational interventions targeting whole communities unnecessarily. Doing so plays into the 'us versus them' narrative terrorist recruiters capitalise on.

Thus, "the introduction of social, political and legal restrictions on women's freedom of movement, dress, access to public and community places ... and the use of derogatory language towards women" is indicative of a larger problem that often "[marginalises] women from being at the centre of social and political life" and restricts their agency.¹¹⁶ If women are not integrated at the centre of CT, CVE and PVE program and policy designs, women will continue to be disproportionately negatively affected by the effects of such policies and programs.

The integration of gender perspectives into policy, operational, legislative and strategic responses to terrorism and violent extremism is important for effectiveness and inclusiveness. Thus, CVE processes need to target and integrate men and women in compliance with human rights standards, and in advancement of gender equality (SDG5).¹¹⁷

Example from the field: *RUSI's research found young Muslim women living in societies where the hijab or niqab has been banned, felt a sense of exclusion from Western society. These same women seek a sense of belonging and empowerment, which they may have found in Islamic State.*¹¹⁸

*Both RUSI and Monash research offered familiar insight into potential early warning signs of radicalisation, such as change of clothing, change of discussion topics, change in music taste.*¹¹⁹ *These factors may be indicative*

women-for-wearing-full-body-swimwear-and-why-are-people-a7207971.html> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

¹¹⁴ Katherine Brown, 'Realising Muslim Women's Rights: The Role of Islamic identity among British Muslim women', *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. 29 (2006), pp. 417-30.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Lee-Koo and True, 'Recognising Women's Roles in Countering Violent Extremism'.

¹¹⁷ United Nations, 'UN Sustainable Development Goals, Goal 5'.

¹¹⁸ Elizabeth Pearson and Emily Winterbotham, 'Women, Gender and Daesh Radicalisation', *The RUSI Journal*, vol. 162, no. 3 (2017), pp. 60-72.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.; True and Eddyono, 'Preventing Violent Extremism'.

of a radicalisation process when combined with other factors such as airing social grievances, identity issues, change in behaviour or friendship groups.

Conclusions

This research has outlined the varied and complex challenges facing Australia, and other international governments, regarding female involvement with IS-related terrorism and violent extremism. This research has reinforced the integral participation of women as perpetrators and preventers of violent extremism. It hopes to encourage a reassessment of existing CVE policy and practice in Australia, to address the complex challenges posed by men and women within the context of violent extremism.

This research has incorporated an assessment of existing CVE measures in Australia's national security architecture, which has demonstrated that current approaches to CVE do not adequately integrate gender perspectives; the inclusion of women in CVE efforts are often overlooked. Furthermore, initiatives that do attempt to incorporate female perspectives tend to reinforce gender stereotypes which result in limited scope and effectiveness. Existing government and civil society-led initiatives champion women's roles in the domestic sphere as mothers and wives, arguing that female maternal qualities provide 'unique' perspectives to spot radicalisation early. These initiatives are meant to be 'empowering'. Instead, they come across as patronising, and complicit in endorsing circumscribed gender roles.

As indicated by the GCTF and the OSCE, it is important to "distinguish between women as actors in CVE and the 'gendered' nature of violent extremism".¹²⁰ The gendered experiences of men and women with violent extremism affects the ways that they are recruited, their roles and responsibilities within an organisation, and how they are likely to disengage; gendered experiences need to be factored into CVE policy and processes.

For policy to be implemented effectively, clear aims and objectives need to be formulated, as suggested in the UN Secretary General's call for developing a National Action Plan, which Australia has not done yet. International multilateral organisations and states need to develop robust good practice towards integrating women's voices, skills and concerns within all aspects of countering and preventing violent extremism—including efforts to counter men's involvement in terrorism.¹²¹

The most valuable information about the security concerns of women, and the informal ways in which they already work to develop resilience to

¹²⁰ Global Counterterrorism Forum, 'Good Practices on Women and Countering Violent Extremism', 2015, <www.thegctf.org/Portals/1/Documents/Framework%20Documents/A/GCTF-Good-Practices-on-Women-and-CVE.pdf> [Accessed 5 April 2018].

¹²¹ Ibid.

radicalisation within communities, has come from primary sources and on the ground fieldwork. From Western, South-East Asian and South Asian communities, research has demonstrated that women do desire empowerment and equality, but in ways that they can define themselves. As demonstrated, women already play a range of valuable roles within their communities that extend far beyond the home and domestic environment. Policymakers need to invest in more data-driven research across a broader range of communities and societies to get a more in-depth and nuanced understanding of female involvement within narratives of violent extremism. Women's voices need to be central to program design and planning; only then will it be possible to work towards creating sustainable and effective CVE future initiatives.

Additionally, existing policy and programs that currently integrate gender within CVE need to be regularly assessed and evaluated, as pathways into and out of violent extremism are fluid. In doing so, we can broaden and deepen our understanding of the complex dimensions involved in these processes to develop more nuanced and effective CVE initiatives.

Recommendations for Australia

1. Develop best practice on gendered CVE initiatives. Consult and cooperate with existing regional and international research institutes working to advance female participation in design, implementation and evaluation of CVE policy and practice. This also includes regular evaluation of existing programs and policies to ensure accordance with international human rights standards. Furthermore, Australia should consider creating a Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism in accordance with Secretary General recommendations, alongside twenty-six OSCE nations that have done so.

2. Support closer alignment between WPS and CVE. CVE policymakers and practitioners can apply lessons learned from the WPS agenda when integrating gender perspectives at conceptual and practical levels. That includes appropriate gender training to ensure that women's concerns are adequately addressed and prevent the reproduction of negative stereotypes. The WPS coalition should consider integrating CVE in Australia's next National Action Plan.

3. Facilitate closer cooperation and information sharing between: a) States and territories; b) States/territories and communities. Regular exchange of existing government CT and CVE policy and practice between states and territories would be helpful to identify successful and ineffective measures. Furthermore, the concerns of communities should be taken into account when developing new policy. This would be greatly assisted by facilitating working groups within communities with appropriate representation from both sides.

Findings need to be made accessible and presented in a comprehensive way.

4. Invest in more data-driven research. Empirical studies, particularly with a focus on gender, are valuable for developing a broader understanding of roles women play within violent extremism and countering it. That will allow for more appropriate policy development and implementation.

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