Women and Radicalism in Saudi Arabia

Women and Radicalism in Saudi Arabia

By

Hend T. Alsudairy

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Women and Radicalism in Saudi Arabia

By Hend T. Alsudairy

This book first published 2022

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-5275-8210-8
ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-8210-1

To the dear soul of my father
who bravely challenged death threats for the sake of his country

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS

AQ	Al-Qaeda
AQC	Al-Qaeda Central Command
KAU	King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah
KPI	Key performance indicator
KSU	King Saud University, Riyadh
WAMY	World Assembly of Muslim Youth

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is the outcome of a lot of reading and following the news and is based on facts, as it is meant to be a historical document. It studies the radical Islam movement in Saudi Arabia from the 1960s to 2019 and tries to expose the causes of female terrorism or extremism to highlight the dark tunnel of such radicalism and to help others to recognise it before it is too late to be redeemed. However, many have provided assistance and help in bringing this study to light.

I would like to express my deep and sincere gratitude to all those who stood beside me with their advice, references, or information. Thank you to Mr Khaled Aladdad, an expert in the political Islam movements, who was so generous with his discussions and provided some valuable references. I cannot thank Mr Mansour Alnogaidan enough for all his support. Thank you also to Mrs Huda Alsaleh, Dr Hessnaa Alqunayeer, and Dr Latifah Alshaalan for their generous gestures in readily providing all their related writings, which I highly appreciate. I thank Mr Nasser Alhuzaimi for his willingness to reply to all my calls regarding the period before 1979 and for his book *Days with Juhaiman: I was with Aljamah Alsalfyah Almuhtasbah* that he sent to me as a witness of a great historical event in modern Saudi history.

I also owe a great sense of gratitude to my friend Mervat Alsajjan for her Master's thesis, the theme of which is women's participation in terrorism. In addition, a thank you is owed to Dr Mustafa Abdelwahid, dean of the library at Alfaisal University, for his assistance and book suggestions. Thank you to Dr Nasser Alhujelan for his prompt help and cooperation, and, of course, to Dr Said Alsaid for providing me with the necessary references.

I am indebted to the Saudi painter Najlaa Alsaleem, who was so generous with me and added a beautiful touch to the book's cover and theme. She gladly sent me many pictures of her artistic works that signify the book's theme to choose from, which was a difficult task as they are pieces of beautiful art. The painting on the book's cover title is titled "The Women Runners".

Last but not least, I would like to thank Ms Rebecca Gladders and Mr Adam Rummens from Cambridge Scholars for their continuous help and assistance at the end of this project and all the wonderful team at Cambridge Scholars.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this book is to study the Saudi women who are radicals or, worse, prone to terrorism in order to present the potential female terrorist and the role she sometimes plays behind the pretence of her claims about humanitarian issues and why she has taken this path. There is a need for this study as this issue has not been fully explored. Besides, this book is written for the sake of the coming generation to distinguish between real, religious, moderate, and extremist ideologies and to help improve counterterrorist methods and policies.

Terrorism and women's involvement in it have attracted different disciplines, where the focuses differ based on the approach(es) used, but most of the literature does not read the Saudi woman's involvement, and if it tackles it, then it is from the perspective of an outside observer who may not have first-hand information as most of the relevant literature is written in Arabic and mostly by a few Saudi observers. Hence, the female role has not yet received the attention her male counterpart has, yet this is a must as it widens the perspective on international terrorism. The role of the woman is not limited only to that of a messenger or a go-between; it is more dangerous than was assumed.

In this book, I will attempt to answer these questions: Why does the Jihadi Saudi woman join such extremist groups? Does she have different reasons to men, and how much is she willing to sacrifice? What is the age range of the participants? How do they get involved? Family ties? Friends? The internet? What are their motivations? What are their roles? Do they have official positions in their workplace or society? Is there still any risk of Saudi young women joining terrorist organisations? What is the marital status of the Saudi women joining or supporting terrorist organisations?

The book also will attempt to discuss names and figures who have been officially designated as terrorists by the Saudi government, as well as those who have been arrested and put on trial due to their support of terrorism or its ideology, helping in creating rich soil for recruitment.

Terrorism usually results from multiple reasons, not only psychological but also economic, political, religious, and sociological factors, among others. As terrorism is a multicausal phenomenon, it would be simplistic and wrong to explain an act of terrorism by one factor, such as the psychological need of the terrorist to carry out an act of violence.

Women have been leaders and, mostly, followers of terrorist organisations and groups for centuries; nevertheless, the mass media and collective consciousness typically depict female terrorists as snoopers in a totally male arena. Therefore, the implementation of anti- and counterterrorist policies must not be influenced by the mass media's images of female terrorists because they do not reflect the reality.

Lately, the world has shifted to a more preventative attitude regarding terrorism and women's role in it, as now there is an approach that considers the causes and conditions of women supporting such radical movements.

Many studies have tried to answer the question of why women join terrorist entities. Some of these refer to economic gender inequality, a lack of female leadership, and poverty. Many women also suffer from other challenges in their communities. These range from 'honour crimes' to female genital mutilation, forced marriages, and the general common ideology in some societies according to which women's bodies are created sinfully.

Other researchers believe that, for a lot of women, the major reason for joining a terrorist organisation is the search for a sense of belonging and power that they were denied in their communities, embracing an extremist ideology and accepting the new supporting roles opening up for women within those radical structures, even though, in truth, these organisations look at them as second-class citizens.

Radical religious groups started recruiting women who are willing to play a crucial part in influencing their families and contributing to terror acts because it is well-known that women can use their influence in recruiting other women or – worse – deceive them until they fall victim to groups like Boko Haram, ISIS, al-Qaeda, or any other terrorist movement.

On the other hand, many studies state that terrorists are often unemployed and mostly socially alienated. Those with little education may join terrorist groups out of a need for recognition; others might want to apply their skills as bomb-makers. More educated young people may be motivated more by genuine political or religious convictions. Although the circumstances vary, the result of this gradual process is that the individual, often with the help of a family member or friend with terrorist contacts, turns to terrorism. However, joining a terrorist group is not an easy process. Over a period that may extend to a year or more, a recruit generally moves in slow, gradual steps towards full membership.

Terrorist organisations like al-Qaeda or ISIS pretend or believe that they are defending Islam, claiming to apply Islam's teachings and legislation. They express their hostility and rage towards western countries, and especially since the invasion of Iraq in 2003, feelings of defeat and

bitterness have spread over most of the Muslim world. They make demands to apply Islamic legislation in the state. These demands differ among the Islamists:

> While institutional Islamists strive to create a Sharia-based state through the existing political system, violent Islamists attempt to create such a state by any means necessary, including acts of violence. While all violent Islamist groups desire a society ruled by Sharia law, they differ significantly over the interpretation and implementation of Sharia law as well as what constitutes appropriate uses of violence. Strategic and ideological differences exist between global jihadi groups like the Islamic State.[1]

These differences among them are what led some women who share their beliefs to join ISIS and abandon al-Qaeda. It is surprising that some Saudi women would support or join such violent entities, as it is well-known that Saudi Arabia's legislation is based on Sharia. If the case is so, why do these women revolt against it and help in destroying their people and cities?

Women's participation in 'jihad' organisations or support of terrorist entities is a perplexing issue that has attracted the interest of many sectors like security departments, social studies scholars, and policymakers. The case of Saudi women, which is at the core of this book, is even more confusing for many reasons; they are not needy, as most studies stress by underlining poverty, as many of them are highly educated and employed. Most importantly, they live in an Islamic country, so why do they immigrate to another troubled place that pretends to apply Islamic legislation? Reputation, for a Saudi citizen, is part of his/her identity, and any tarnishing of that reputation will affect the family, not only the person. This is made clear in the declaring of the names of the female terrorists arrested; only a few of their names are revealed as, out of respect for the family, the authorities rarely announce names except for those that have already written them and exposed themselves. Hence, for a woman to join such entities is to bring shame on the whole family, except, of course, for those who came from families where some of their members are already involved. Many families have expressed their regret about what their daughters have done.

Hence, many did not believe in and were in shock at the increasing number of women involved with either al-Qaeda or ISIS. This involvement took different manifestations before it became a security issue. The role of the woman used to be, and still sometimes is, to support and sympathise until around 2004, when women were assigned many unprecedented roles in Saudi Arabia by terrorist entities. These organisations, although they call for patriarchy and are against women's empowerment and consider this a kind of western conspiracy, altered their views when they discovered the

important and beneficial roles a woman can perform in a conservative society. So, the jihadi woman went gradually from a traditional housewife to a logistic helper, financial supporter, and recruiter, to an immigrant into the areas of terrorist organisations, leaving their families behind to suffer the shame:

> 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. Women have played multiple roles within terrorist organisations from facilitators and recruiters to suicide bombers.[2]

They have participated in killing their own people and celebrated terrorist attacks on their own country, although no Saudi woman has been connected to an actual bombing except for one, who expressed her wish to perform a suicidal operation. They have been, as the reader will discover in the coming chapters, involved in all activities of terrorism, from mere sympathisers to active participants. They are the ideal medium for terrorist groups as they are less suspected and searched less often:

> Female terrorism is growing. This makes society more dangerous, as women rarely are seen as a typical participant in this type of activities, which makes it easier for her to pass borders, and come closer to targets; all this to cause as much damage as possible.[3]

Their danger arises from being trusted as mothers, which leads them to raise their children to be terrorists; they have proved themselves to be a success in logistical operations and female recruiting. They have also proved themselves worthy of many tasks and have been helped in that by stereotyping. They are viewed as passive, feminine, kind, and weak, and all of that makes them less suspicious than men and thus able to carry many tasks successfully. This is proven in al-Qaeda's lamentation over the arrest of Haila Alqusair, one of their important members; they even named a school after her in the city of Ar Raqqah. Many parts of terrorist attacks can be handled by women without being noticed, like observing the selected target for an operation, collecting information regarding an operation's target, checking the security level of the place, storing weapons and hiding fighters and wanted persons, or facilitating financial support to flee with the help of other persons. These dangerous, deadly forms of assistance have been overlooked for a long time, as the focus was mostly on men as the expected violent agent.

Saudis, like all the world, have watched the *munqabah* women holding signboards and demanding the release of their husbands, brothers, or fathers who were imprisoned for criminal acts. They were falsely claiming their innocence in their demonstrations, which were posted on social media. Later, it became obvious to society that most of them had criminal associations with terrorist organisations.

The coming chapters will go through the evolution of women's role(s) in terrorist groups to understand why some Saudi women joined them, what women's primary tasks within terrorist organisations are, how they are recruited and how they recruit other women, and, most importantly, what her motivations are to join such organisations. They will also highlight those who joined ISIS as it became more appealing with its offensive-oriented jihad rather than a defensive-oriented one. This added a sense of glory, power, and strength at a time when many Muslim countries suffered from others' interference in their affairs and when many uprisings led to nothing except destroying the country's economy and unity.

Ten years have passed since the assassination of Osama Bin Laden, but his ideology did not die with him as, in May 2021, al-Qaeda promised more operations against the USA and its allies. With the American troops' withdrawal from Afghanistan, the danger of a more insidious terrorist situation has grown as al-Qaeda became part of the Islamic Emirate there in alliance with the Haqqani network.[4] The shadow of more violence to come is appearing and, with that, the revival of extreme ideologies of which countries and societies should be aware.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has witnessed a few slight radical movements, but the dangerous one, which began in 1410 AH (corresponding to 1990 AD), was the beginning of the takfiri ideological form of terrorism. This was characterised by a transition from the stage of planning, preparation for implementation, and exploitation of the political conditions. The table below shows the most significant terrorist attacks and the number of people killed or injured.

Year	Venue	Killed	Injured
2001	Al-Khobar explosion	1 American	4 non-Saudis
May 2003	3 car bombs attacking 3 compounds for Arab and American residents	20 people	194 people
Mar 2003	Killed while waiting at a stop light in the street	1 Briton	-
Jun 2003	Al-Jubail	1 American Marine	-
Jul 2003	Al-Jouf	4 terrorists	-
Jul 2003	Riyadh shooting	6 terrorists + 1 policeman	-
Aug 2003	Raid in Al-Suwaidi neighbourhood, Riyadh	3 policemen	2 policemen
Aug 2003	Raid in apartment, Riyadh	3 terrorists + 1 policeman	4 policemen
Nov 2003	Al-Muhaia compound explosion	12 people	122 people
Apr 2004	General Dept. of Traffic attacked by suicide bombers	4 policemen + 1 civilian	148 people
Apr 2004	Al-Qassim region	4 policemen	-
Apr 2004	Riyadh	1 terrorist + 1 policeman	4 policemen
Apr 2004	Check point Om Sadrah	4 policemen	-
2004	Armed men attack Yanbu Industrial City	5 non-Saudis + policemen	14 people
May 2004	Armed men attack Al-Waha Oil Co., Al-Kobar	-	- (25 hostages taken)
May 2004	Buraidah	4 terrorists + 2 policemen	5 terrorists + 2 policemen
May 2004	Car used in terrorist attack discovered in Buraidah	-	-
June 2004	Riyadh	Irish photographer	British BBC Correspondent
June 2004	Riyadh	-	1 Saudi civilian
June 2004	American's house	1 American	-
June 2004	Electronics company	1 American	-

June 2004	American held hostage	1 American	-
Dec 2004	Failed attack on American Council, Jeddah	3 terrorists + a number of non-American civilians	-
Dec 2004	Failed operation on American embassy	3 terrorists + a number of civilians	American
Dec 2004	Simultaneous operation between Ministry of Interior and emergency forces	2 terrorists	--
June 2005	Assassination of a member of Intelligence Dept.	1 person	-
Feb 2006	Failed operation on Abqaiq Refinery	2 policemen	-
May 2006	Shooting at American Embassy	-	-
May 2006	Shooting at American Council, Jeddah	-	1 terrorist
Feb 2007	French travellers attacked	4 Frenchmen	-
2006 – 2008	Security raids on different Saudi cities against terrorists	-	-
Aug 2009	Failed assassination of HRH Mohammad Bin Naif	-	-
Oct 2009	Confrontation with Al-Qaeda on southern border	2 terrorists	-
Jul 2011	Yemeni border	2 people	1 person
Nov 2012	Yemeni border	2 policemen	-
Nov 2012	Southern border	2 policemen	-
Apr 2014	Al-Wadiah border – suicide bombers	4 people	9 people
Nov 2014	Al-Awamiyah, near police station	-	1 person
Nov 2014	Al-Dalwah	10 civilians	13 people
Jan 2015	Northern border	3 people	2 people
Mar 2015	Police car, Riyadh	-	2 policemen

May 2015	Explosion in a mosque, Al-Qatif	23 civilians	101 people
May 2015	Suicide bombers, Al-Damam	4 people	4 people
Jul 2015	Khamis Mushait	1 people	2 people
Aug 2015	Suicide bombers explode a mosque, Abha	15 people	33 people
Oct 2015	Suicide bombers in a mosque, Najran	2 people	25 people
Jan 2016	Explosion in Al-Rida mosque, Al-Hasa	2 policemen + 2 civilians	18 people
Feb 2016	Al-Qassim	1	-
Apr 2016	Explosion in Al-Kharj	1	-
Jun 2016	Al-Qatif	1	-
Jul 2016	Explosion in Al-Madinah	4 policemen	5 people
2017	Various attempts stopped by Saudi policemen before being put into action		

Table. Terrorist incidents in Saudi Arabia.

Notes

[1] Devorah Margolin, "The Changing Roles of Women in Violent Islamist Groups," in *Perspectives on the Future of Women, Gender, & Violent Extremism*, ed. Audrey Alexander (Washington, DC: George Washington University), 40.

[2] Sofia Patel and Jacqeline Westermann, "Women and Islamic States Terrorism: As Assessment of How Gender Perspectives Are Integrated in Countering Violent Extremism Policy and Practices," *Security Challenges* 14, no. 2 (2018): 53.

[3] Anna Lundborg Regnér, "A Greater Evil – The Emerging Role of Women in al Qaeda: A Comparative Study of al Qaeda Central and al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula on the Employment of Women" (BA thesis, Uppsala University, 2017), 4.

[4] European Eye on Radicalization, "Not Losing Sight of the Enemy: The False Promise of 'Moderate Jihadism'," *European Eye on Radicalization*, September 24, 2021, https://eeradicalization.com/not-losing-sight-of-the-enemy-the-false-promise-of-moderate-jihadism/.

CHAPTER ONE

THE ANCESTRY OF THE SAUDI JIHADI WOMAN

This chapter will focus on the meaning of terrorism and the historical background of terrorism that originated from the Arabian Peninsula. It will also shed light on the female terrorist in this region of the world and the difference between terrorism and jihad in Islam, as 100% of the Saudi population are Muslims. This will prepare the reader to understand why some contemporary women in Saudi have chosen this criminal path.

A definition of terrorism is necessary before delving into the discussion. According to an Arab Interior Ministers Council meeting in 1998, the first item states that it is:

> Any act of violence or threat, regardless of its causes and goals, that is to enable any criminal project either solely or within a team and aims at spreading terror; endangering others' lives, freedom, or security; causing damage to the environment or to public/private property; or taking over, occupying, or exposing one of the national resources to danger.[1]

This definition goes in hand with that of the Islamic Fiqh Council in 2002:

> Any aggression done either by an individual, group or country, whether this be abusing a person in his religion, life, mentality, money or honour, and this includes all kinds of intimidation, threat of harm, unlawful killing, and any other types of threat like banditry.[2]

An international definition was announced in 1994 by the General Assembly's Declaration on Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism, which stated in resolution 49/60 that terrorism includes:

> criminal acts intended or calculated to provoke a state of terror in the general public, a group of persons or particular persons for political purposes … are in any circumstances unjustifiable, whatever the considerations of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or other nature that may be invoked to justify them.[3]

So, all the definitions specify similar and almost identical crimes. However, the acts of terrorism performed against Saudi Arabia by Saudi jihadi women are carried out under the pretence of jihad. Therefore, what is jihad from the Islamic point of view? It has two meanings: first, a sacred war to defend Islam and its territory against enemies who are waging a war against Muslims and attacking Muslims' lands. The second meaning has nothing to do with fighting or war, and it is addressed to the individual; it is jihad against one's own evil desires and intentions and aims at purifying the self.

Islam prohibits the killing of civilians and destroying the property of either Muslims or non-Muslims. The word 'jihad' in the context of fighting and killing Muslims and civilians of any nation does not exist in early Islamic literature. If one considers the war that the first caliph Abu Bakr waged against some tribes who refused to pay their alms (*zakat*), the reason was because this is one of the pillars of the Islamic faith. This war was called Horoub Alredah (Apostasy Wars, or Rebellion Wars) (632–633 AD). It started because those who refused to pay the *zakat* were viewed as neglecting one of the major pillars of the Islamic faith. Moreover, no woman is mentioned as having participated in them except as a victim who lost one or more of her male relatives.

The dramatic turn of events happened during the reign of the fourth Caliph Ali Bin Taleb, cousin of the prophet Mohamed (pbh), in 658. In that year, a war broke between two factions of Muslims: Caliph Ali's army and the governor of Alsham (now Syria and Lebanon), Muawiyah Bin Abi-Sufyan, for reasons I will not discuss here as they will distract the reader from the book's major issue. Ali was inclined to accept a treaty rather than shed the Muslims' blood, but some of his army did not accept that and viewed Muawiyah as a usurper and objected to the decision. However, Ali ignored their objection, so they formed a movement called *Alkhawarij.* This movement considered both Ali and Muawiyah infidels, and they believed that they should fight and kill them both.

This movement is the first politically dissident movement in Islam, and they committed many crimes, always targeting top officials of the state. The movement, as mentioned, had a political basis rather than a religious one. Whether it was a terrorist movement or not depends on how one looks at it. One of the principles of Islamic jurisprudence, in most sects of Islam, is to respect and follow the head of the state. Many examples in Islamic history manifest this principle; for example, Omar Bin Alkhatab was against sending the famous warrior Khaled Bin Alwaleed, who was trusted by the prophet, to the Apostasy Wars as a leader, but when the Caliph Abu Bakr insisted, Omar gave in immediately and accepted the decision.

The Alkhawarij movement brought female participation to the stage. She was present as a recruiter, fighter, and preacher. The Khawarij woman believed in the cause of the movement, and many famous names are documented. They rejoiced in killing the 'other.' The most famous is Gazalah Alshaybaniah, a beautiful pure Arab woman who was married to one of their leaders, and she herself was a leader. She did not hesitate to enter the mosque, which is a place of worship, to preach against the state and encourage people to fight it. She revolted against the accepted custom as Muslim women usually take the back rows during prayers, but Gazalah ascended the mosque's tribune. Even her death was on the battlefield. Even old women were supporting the cause within the Alkhawarij movement, such as Jaheezah, mother of their leader Shabeeb, who used to accompany her son and his army. The woman was also a recruiter, as was the case with Omran Bin Hattan, who fell in love with an Alkhawarij woman and joined the movement for her sake.

Then came another terrorist movement, a very famous one in world history: the Assassins. They were established around the eleventh century. This movement was famous for committing murders in public places and using hashish, but there is no mention of women among them as they were only for the entertainment of the members. Their ideology was to kill whomever they believed was not a Muslim, even if he was of Islamic descent. They considered that an achievement, as their leader Hasan Alsabah rejoiced in the murder of the chief minister Nizam Almulk: "Killing this devil is the gate to heaven, it is open now."[4] This movement's only connection with today's al-Qaeda and ISIS movements is committing their crimes in public places and thereby aiming to frighten people.

This is just a short history of the ancestors of the contemporary Saudi jihadi woman. Of course, these events took place north of the Arabian Peninsula and elsewhere; the connection is that most female Saudi terrorists are pure Arabs, and so were the previous 'terrorists' in the peninsula. Even though these areas are not within Saudi Arabia now, those contemporary terrorists descend from the same tribal lines, as their ancestors' tribes still exist.

There have been many movements in the Arab world within which women were active, but these were wars and movements for independence, and since the region of Saudi Arabia has never been colonised, it was largely left to its own devices. All wars were among tribes over water sources or leadership in a certain area.

However, no more women joined terrorist movements in the peninsula from that date on, but there were women fighting the Turkish army to defend their city and people, such as the famous Galyiah Albgumiah. History

documents the bravery and wisdom of this woman among her tribe, the Albgum. The incident took place in the eighteenth century during the era of the First Saudi State. This woman was rich and used her wealth to support her people and fight the Turkish army. Some describe her as an old lady, others as a middle-aged woman with a strong personality. She is considered in Saudi history as a nationalist and a fighter defending her state. But in the second millennium, the Saudi woman became an active undercover player, with Saudi custom enabling her to provide much logistical support for terrorism. Of course, there were other non-Saudi women, but I will not discuss them here as they are out of this study's scope.

Saudi custom highly appreciates shyness and a low voice in a woman, which contradicts her being an active terrorist. Some extremist clerics appreciated women's interest in what they call 'jihad' on the one hand and, at the same time, looked down on them; one of them announced that medical treatment for women is not a requirement and is the husband's responsibility, and others believe the working woman's salary should be spent on the house while traditionally and religiously that is the husband's task. An example of the exclusion of women happened in 2006 when

> 165 mufti, judges and Islamic professors in Islamic studies signed a commending statement against the revision of the official religious curriculum, 18 of whom had occupied high posts in the religious corps…. We can say that this statement is the statement of the people who encouraged such religious rhetoric … where the *daaiah* has constructed his own image.[5]

Moreover, this statement does not include any female name or signature in the list. The woman has been a problem and a motive for criticising the government whenever a policy of enabling her is implemented:

> In the *sahween*'s statements, the woman became a KPI of the officials' work; anyone who would give her the right to work or express herself would naturally be put on the list of deviants and symbols of corruption … as if the latter [the woman] were a corrupted creature.[6]

With such extremist views of women, it is surprising why they join radical and terrorist movements that look down on women and do not add to the woman's benefits.

As al-Qaeda branched into Iraq and Syria, Saudi terrorist women started to move and act. This is contrary to the Saudi life rhythm. Saudi Arabia is a very quiet, peaceful country, and its population is pious, living in harmony with each other, especially in the Central Province, as most of its people have been there forever. When the news of some well-known families'

names being announced as families of terrorists was reported, the local society was shocked and could not believe that these women could be so heartless towards their own people and could even sacrifice their own children by sending them to fight in Iraq and Syria, convincing them they would be martyrs. They were killing their own families and destroying their own country. The country went through many bloody attacks with the help of these women, who were the best instruments for using custom and tradition for mobility without being noticed. Usually, the woman is highly respected, and no one would dare to stop her and check her while she is wearing her niqab, which they use as a cover. Even men have used it to pretend they are women so they can pass by unnoticed, as happened with one radical who disguised himself in a woman's niqab and garments. A similar case happened during the Algerian war for independence when the veil became 'both a dress and a mask', facilitating women's operational utility during the revolution.[7]

These techniques and individuals' inclination to terrorism have cost Saudi Arabia a lot. It has gone through many bloody attacks that have targeted its infrastructure and civilians as well as military men, as the previous Table shows. Most of this was done with the help of the smooth discretion of Saudi jihadi women's cooperation. The peaceful streets of Saudi cities became distorted with huge blocks of cement at governmental buildings' entrances to prevent any terrorist attack. I have not even mentioned the other operations that Saudi intelligence stopped before they were put into action.

But how did the female jihadi originate in Saudi Arabia? The story started with the establishment of the al-Qaeda movement in Afghanistan during its war with the Soviet Union. This movement has always been associated with Osama Bin Laden, a Saudi national before his citizenship was stripped from him, but the truth is that he was not the establisher of it, nor its first leader.[8] Nevertheless, that war was supported by most Muslims, not only Saudis, as it was jihad in its Islamic manifestation, presented as a war of self-defence against a non-religious (and Marxist) country interfering in a Muslim country. Jihad had been forgotten for centuries, and this war was a resurrection of the early days of Islam when the first Muslims were defending their beliefs. Religion was banned in 1917 within the Soviet Union, so there was an understanding among Muslims to support the Afghan war for independence. To support the Afghan people, many Saudi women denoted their jewellery, but male fighters were very few in number in the 1980s, as stated by Kameel Altaweel: "The number of Arab fighters did not exceed 15 in 1984."[9] Moreover, those fighters and supporters were in harmony with their government and its laws:

> Many Gulf volunteers do not have problems with their governments, which apply Islamic rules (in many aspects of life), even if not all are like Saudi Arabia.[10]

In 1989, Afghanistan triumphed against the Soviet Union's invasion, and the most natural thing to happen then was for all volunteer fighters to go back to their countries. Instead, the Iraqi-Kurdish Abu Ayoub Aliraqi established al-Qaeda, as Altaweel states:

> Al-Qaeda was established in late 1988 or early 1989. Its first Emir was the Kurdish-Iraqi Abu Ayoub, who was assassinated in the Pakistani tribal region.[11]

The association of al-Qaeda with Bin Laden is strange, given he joined the Afghan war later than other Arab fighters who joined the Soviet–Afghan War early on.

During the Afghan war, Saudi women were not involved in any way except for moral support, as Thomas Hegghammer states:

> Like most militant Islamist organizations, the QAP [al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula] was an almost exclusively male organization. While most QAP militants had left their families behind, some wives accompanied their husbands in their underground existence. A handful of these wives performed minor logistical and media-related tasks for the organization, but none were involved in operations.[12]

However, there is a mention of one woman called Umm Omar Almacciah. The name may refer to her Saudi town (Mecca) or at least surely gives the impression of the early Islamic era, which the name denotes. This woman was an elderly lady who believed in the war's cause to the extent she encouraged her son to join the Afghan Muslims. What is surprising is her active role at that time, which would later be followed by the next generation of female extremists, although their causes differed. She encouraged women to help and donate to the Afghans. She herself used to send food to the battlefield. According to Maher Farghaly,[13] she went as far as visiting the battlefield. Her name does not come up in later writings about terrorism, however, and she was most probably unideological and simply a devoted Muslim, thinking she was helping her Muslim brothers.

The well-known history of al-Qaeda and its terrorist attacks across the world do not need to be discussed here. Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out that there is no mention of any Saudi women who really participated at that time unless one considers Umm Hamzah, Bin Laden's wife, who was famous among Arab-Afghan families as a participant. She was supportive,

and her husband depended on her greatly. She was keen to marry a real mujahed, though her family were not enthusiastic about this marriage:

> When Bin Laden proposed to her, her family were distressed, as she would be his second wife, but she insisted, as she wanted to marry a real mujahed.[14]

This is the only documented mention of a Saudi woman cooperating with al-Qaeda in Afghanistan.

The whole scene changed with the arrival of the American troops in the Kingdom to cooperate with the Saudi army in fighting against Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Many radicals were suspicious and were not happy to see non-Muslim troops step onto the Arabian Peninsula, although the officials clearly announced that the American troops had a mission and would leave once it was accomplished. Hence, events took a dramatic turn as Bin Laden presented himself as the defender of Islam and started criticising the Saudi government and its cooperation with the infidels. Loud accusations against Saudi Arabia started to spread, accusing the government of being a non-Islamic state:

> Some religious men accused the Saudi government of being a non-Islamic system. … A Sufi movement published a book in 1992 that was printed in Peshawar, in the north of Pakistan, where many Saudis were trained in arms. The book shed light on the foreign rules that have been incorporated within the Saudi juridical system and that make it non-Islamic.[15]

With this tone and rhetoric, the jihad became targeted against Saudi Arabia itself. Then ISIS emerged in 2004, branching out from al-Qaeda in Syria and Iraq as a reaction to the Americans' invasion of Iraq in 2003. The two movements target 'non-Muslims', but they differ on other things like fighting the Shiite sect that led to the split between them.

ISIS was headed by the Jordanian Abu Musab Alzarqawi, who was killed in 2006. ISIS' unrealistic project is to establish an Islamic Caliphate. This movement captured almost a third of Syria and 40% of Iraq, but in 2017, they lost 95% of their territory. The Saudi jihadi woman's participation started under ISIS, and their attacks were directed towards their own country, which they believe is not Muslim, and they sacrificed their families and their young children for the sake of their goal. The Arab world (Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Iraq, Syria, etc.) suffered and lost many civilians as well as soldiers and policemen alike. They encouraged horrible crimes that took place in Saudi Arabia, and Saudis still agonise when they remember their young brothers who turned against their parents and killed them as they were convinced they were not Muslims, even though Islam

does not teach that, especially in relation to one's parents. They were told they would go to heaven as a reward for their crime.

The next chapter will discuss and bring to light the local and international motivations for the Saudi jihadi woman and how she differs from other international or Arab terrorists, as well as how these motivations encourage women and youth to join terrorist movements. Familial relations and their impact on suiciders will also be examined in the fourth chapter.

Notes

[1] Emirates Centre for Strategic Research, *Altahwlat Alrahnah wa Dourah Almhtal fee Ehdath Altageer fee Alalam Alarabi* [Contemporary Changes and their Potential Role in Making Changes in the Arab World] [in Arabic] (Abu Dhabi: Emirates Centre for Strategic Research, 2007), 127.
[2] Ibid., 465.
[3] Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Human Rights, Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism. Fact Sheet No. 32.* https://www.ohchr.org/documents/publications/factsheet32en.pdf, 6.
[4] Jonathan Roland, *Osama: The Making of a Terrorist* [in Arabic] (Beirut: Dar Alnahar, 2004), 22.
[5] Fouad Ebraheem, *Alsalfyah Aljyhadyah fee Alsaudia* [The Selfi Jihadi in Saudi] [in Arabic] (Beirut: Dar Alsaqi, 2009), 230.
[6] Ibid., 237.
[7] Karla J. Cunningham, "Cross-Regional Trends in Female Terrorism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 26, no. 3 (2003): 171–195.
[8] Kameel Altaweel, *Al Qaeda and its Sisters: The Story of Jihadi Arabs* (Beirut: Dar Alsaqi, 2007), 34
[9] Ibid., 15.
[10] Ibid., 45.
[11] Ibid., 34.
[12] Thomas Hegghammer, "Terrorist Recruitment and Radicalization in Saudi Arabia," *Middle East Policy Council* XIII, no. 4 (2006): 39–60.
[13] Maher Farghaly, *Almaraah Aljihadeeh wa Alkhrouj an Aldour Altakleedy* [The Jihadi Woman and Abandoning the Traditional Role], https://maherfarghaly.com.
[14] Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* [in Arabic] (Cairo: Kalemat, 2008), 282.
[15] Ebraheem, *Alsalfyah Aljyhadyah fee Alsaudia*, 75.

Chapter Two

Local and International Events and Motivations

As the reader has seen, Saudi Arabia has paid a high price in its people and its infrastructure through terrorist attacks that were mostly carried out by its own people. One wonders, where does this violence come from? How deep are its roots? Radicalism in Saudi Arabia has its roots in ideological or distorted religious views that have influenced mostly simple and common people. The irony is that although many of the Saudi jihadi women are educated, they were nevertheless convinced by such an ugly ideology.

When did the seeds of this ideology start? It started way back in the 1960s, though many mistakenly date it to the 1980s. In 1965, an event took place in Almadinah Almunawwarah, where a few students from the Islamic University (its students are from all over the world) committed an offence, following which the government had to deport two of them from the country and strip them of their Saudi nationality. The incident happened as follows: after the Aljumah (Friday) noon prayer, a number of the university's students broke stores' windows and destroyed mannequins and some photos. The reason for that was their belief that these things are against Islam as some people believe that any kind of sculpture of a human being is a kind of competition with God's creation.

Shortly after this incident, another major event took place, one that would mark a new radical era, the consequences of which the country still suffers from. In discussing this event, I will heavily consult and cite Nasser Alhuzaimy as he was involved in the movement and was a witness within it. The event was the formation of a group called 'Aljamah Alsalfyah Almuhtasbah.' Its aim, as its members announced at that time, was to recall the old Salafi methods and teachings. It started with only six people, one of whom was Juhaiman Alotaiby.[1] This group, which would be a movement later on, was not a secret one. They went to the Grand Mufti Abdulaziz Bin Baz and discussed it with him. Their aim was to recruit Muslims and fight heresies and follow the correct approach of the old Salafi with their

voluntary work, so it was blessed by the Grand Mufti, who took it at face value. He paid for the first house of the group (Aljamah):

> The group visited Alshaikh [Abdulaziz Bin Baz], who was at Almadinah during that time, and told him about their intention to establish a group and that their goal was the Salafi approach and to fight heresies, and to go by the Quran and Sunnah and to judge by them … so that how it started publicly. Alshaikh Bin Baz paid the rent for their house, which was a big house with a lot of space for lectures and classes and many rooms.[2]

But their intentions became ideological and took a different, radical turn in the 1970s. The takfiri ideology influenced some of the members when they came into contact with members of the Egyptian movement (Takfir wal-Hijra), whose influence also reached some of the Islamic University's students. This movement brought with it political approaches like the new attitude towards the head of state. Not only that, but the Aljihad movement also coloured their ideology:

> The Ikhwan [Brotherhood] house hosted many visitors, among them those who were illegally staying in the kingdom and were from Egypt; most of them were Egyptian universities' students belonging to Islamic groups. Later on, it became known that they were members of the Aljihad or Takfir wal-Hijra movements.[3]

Naturally, this mixture of many approaches, in addition to the background of the leader Juhaiman, led to a distorted understanding of Islam and its teachings. This group became a movement and took a different approach from the Saudi religious mainstream and constitution. As there were four official Sunni Islam sects in Saudi Arabia at that time and each region is mostly dominated by one of them, the movement rejected all of them and based its views and principles on the Quran and Sunnah (the Prophet's sayings and actions), even though all Islamic sects are built on that. It is also a difficult thing to evaluate without using Islamic jurisprudence, as there are certain Quranic verses that were meant for certain historical incidents and cannot be generalised. Strong knowledge of the Arabic language is also needed to understand and interpret the intended meanings of Quranic verses. That led to a confrontation between this movement, whose members called themselves the Ikhwan (Brotherhood) (and that has a story too), and the official religious men in 1978, although it actually originally started in 1976. The Ikhwan started to argue and reject official views. Their insistence on rejecting all sects, besides asking critical questions, raised suspicions about them among the official clerics. That also led them to be observed and viewed as radicals. They adopted weak or unknown fatwas:

> Some of the things that made the well-known clerics dislike them are their adoption of a fatwa that says 'prayer is better than sleep' [which is used in all sects] and that it should be said in the first athan, not the second…. Also, they rejected the *almehrab* (sanctum) as they view it as heresy; their evidence is that, during the Prophet's time, there was none. It was a later invention. They went as far as closing *mehrab* in their area with cement blocks…. Some young students who were seeking Islamic studies started to keep their shoes on while in the Prophet's mosque, and that aggravated and provoked the common people and resulted in fights with them…. The problem was the movement's attitude towards these violations, which approved such things … moreover, Juhaiman, the leader, advocated such behaviour.[4]

As mentioned above, the members of this circle call themselves the 'Brotherhood.' This label has a historical origin that reflects on the present, and it had a major influence on Juhaiman's intentions and psychology. In the early years of the Third Saudi State's establishment, during the era of the founder, King Abdulaziz Al Saud, there was a section of his army called the 'Brotherood,' who were mostly Bedouins. The name came from brotherhood in Islam. These people fought with the king's army and helped in securing the state, but when the king started reforming and modernising the country, they revolted against his sovereignty and continued to raid other tribes, which had become a crime under the new state's laws. The title of the king was King of Hejaz and Najd. A battle was fought between the two armies in a place called Sabilla in the region of Najd in 1929, where King Abdulaziz defeated the Ikhwan:

> Ibn Muammar, the king's Army commander, gave the order to fire. The result was devastating, and within seconds almost all the advancing tribesmen had been killed or seriously wounded. When the surviving Ikwan saw what happened, they immediately started to withdraw.[5]

One of the rebels was Sultan ibn Bijad from the Otaibah tribe, one of the biggest tribes in Saudi Arabia. King Abdulaziz sent him to prison, where he died, and that was the end of the Ikhwan's rebellion.

Juhaiman belonged to the same tribe and could not forget the death of his tribal kinsman. Alhuzaimy describes the results of that event on Juhaiman's personality and many others like him:

> His Majesty chastised ibn Bijad with the words, 'you are nothing, Bijad. You thought you were someone, but it is Aldawish [the prince of the Mutair tribe] who was clever!' Ibn Bijad and two of his followers were then promptly imprisoned and sent to Riyadh in chains.[6]

This humiliating defeat was not easily digested by ibn Bijad's people, as Alhuzaimy states:

> This incident left a feeling of unfairness among all the Brotherhood in general and especially within the town of Sajir; a new generation grew up with inherited hate for the government and an impulse to revolt against it. For example, Juhaiman used to work as a smuggler before becoming religious. This environment is what constructed his personality. … Juhaiman's father was a close friend of Sultan bin Bijad. He even advised him against surrendering, and that explains Juhaiman's refusal to surrender on the first time he was wanted for justice in 1978.[7]

He considered ibn Bijad and his companions martyrs and that they were killed for nothing. Juhaiman's version of the 'fairness' shown towards his tribe's rebels, plus his limited exposure to the outside world and education, made him ready to be a rebel himself as a manifestation of heroism.

With this arrogance and grudge, Juhaiman's personality was filled with hate and contempt for non-tribal people; at the same time, he was very arrogant and proud of his own tribe and ancestry. He always considered the Bedouins above the *hader* (people living in cities): "the Bedouins have special characteristics in which the *hader* are lacking, like insight, patience and the ability to endure hardship."[8] It is ironic how this semi-illiterate, arrogant person became a leader. This person did not receive or even complete his introductory education, though many have written that he was a graduate of the Islamic University. Alhuzaimy, his old companion and a former member of the movement, denies this:

> It is always said that Juhaiman is an Islamic University graduate or one of Dar Alhadeeth's students at Almadinah Almnurah. The truth is that Juhaiman only attended school to grade four [he studied as an adult, not as a child], and the reason he attended school was his ambition to be upgraded in his career as the driver of a water tanker with the National Guard…. Many were surprised and wondered, if he is not educated, how can he write those texts? Actually, Juhaiman hated writing, and his handwriting was very bad … he used to express his ideas orally, and Ahmed Almulem or Mohammed Algahtany would write and edit them. Juhaiman has a strong memory that helps him to recall all his references.[9]

His distaste for education was obvious, and he publicly denounced the official schools as well as government jobs; he and other Ikhwan members rejected such jobs and scorned them, as they viewed the government as illegal. Paradoxically, they illegally used to build their houses in a certain section of the city at night so no one would notice their work, and they even