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## Issue Brief

*(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)*

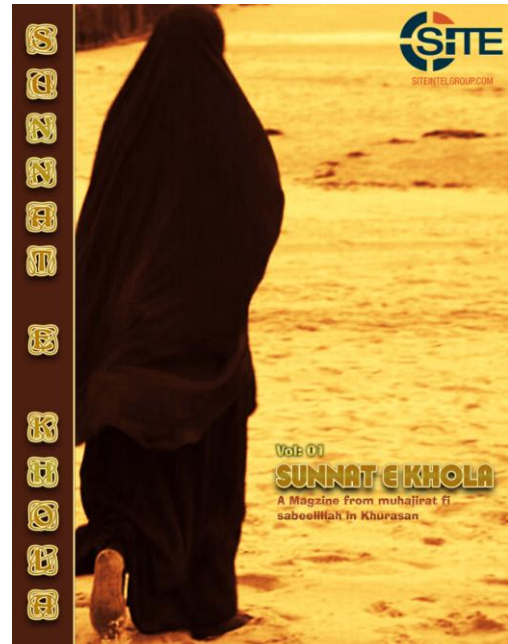
# Sunnat-e-Khola, or The Way of Khola

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In a clear attempt to re-establish their hold, broaden its reach and woo females to join the group, the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), published *Sunnat-e-Khola, or The Way Of Khola*, a magazine tailored specifically for women on August 1, 2017. Named after a female fighter during the time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH),<sup>1</sup> the magazine calls on females 'jihadists' to join the TTP and take up jihad. The magazine also gives advice for would-be female militants, urging women to organise secret gatherings, as well as physical training classes for "like-minded sisters", to learn how to operate grenades and weapons and to spread literature reflecting on the obligation of jihad.<sup>2</sup>



As an exclusive feature, the magazine includes an interview with the wife of TTP leader Fazlullah, whose name is not mentioned. She talks about the training she received in "Islamic ways" and justifies underage marriage as a "necessity to prevent moral destruction of the society", by giving her personal account of being married at the age of 14.<sup>3</sup> She also states how the TTP aims to "provoke women of Islam to come forward and join the ranks of mujahedeen (holy warriors of) Islam."<sup>4</sup> The magazine also includes an article by a Lahore-based medical professional, Dr. Khaula bint Abdul Aziz, on her journey from 'ignorance' (associated with worldly education) to 'guidance' (the life of 'jihad'), as well as a letter,

<sup>1</sup> "Tehreek-e-Taliban launches women's magazine", *Express Tribune*, August 9, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> "Jihadi glamour: TTP launches women's magazine", *Dawn*, August 2, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1349061>

<sup>3</sup> "Magazine lunched to convince women to join TTP", *The News*, August 1, 2017, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/220566-Magazine-launched-to-convince-women-to-join-TTP>

<sup>4</sup> Frud Bezhan, "Pakistani Taliban Chases Jihadi Pack With New Women's Magazine," *Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty*, August 2, 2017, <https://www.rferl.org/a/pakistani-taliban-womens-magazine-islamic-state-recruitment/28655271.html>

written by a six-year-old child, named Omar Mujahid in which he talks about how he and his mother help and look after mujahideen, and how eagerly he waits to participate in 'jihad'.<sup>5</sup>

Although the TTP had claimed in 2014 that it had 500 female suicide bombers ready to launch attacks in the country, and in fact have taken responsibility for several female suicide attacks in Pakistan, including its first female suicide attack in 2007 near a military check post in Peshawar,<sup>6</sup> Khyber Puktunkhwa, followed by attack in December, 2010 at a World Food Program centre in Bajaur agency, FATA, killing 45 and injuring 80;<sup>7</sup> and female suicide attack on a police station in Dera Ismial Khan, Khyber Puktunkhwa in June 2011, which killed 10<sup>8</sup>, this is the first time the TTP has publically and openly crossed the gender divide and reached out to women. Clearly, the move is a departure from the TTP's traditional target audience (chiefly male), as well as mode of outreach, as the group is now relying on different modes of social media. Hence, it appears that the TTP is adopting and following the existing trend among other terrorist /extremist groups such as Daesh and al-Qaeda, who rely heavily on social media and have active female participation.

While female participation has become a common and key feature in terrorist groups such as the al-Qaeda and more prominently in the ISIS, such as the Al-Khansa Brigade of ISIS, made up of wives and homemakers who are recruiters, trainers of women suicide bombers, propagandists, fund-raisers and operate checkpoints and participate in home raids.<sup>9</sup> Whereas in the TTP, the role of women has traditionally been low key and limited to say the least.

However, it seems that the TTP too is now relying on tactics adopted by the ISIS to not only propagate its views, but more importantly move beyond gender, appeal to and eventually strengthen their ranks within a new strata in the society - the urban educated female class.

This newfound dependence on social media and reaching out to the female community appears to be another attempt on part of the TTP to regain its area of influence since its ouster as a result of numerous military operations by Pakistan military, operation Zarb-e-Azb being the first initiated in June

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<sup>5</sup> Marvi Sirmed, "Sunnat-e-Khola," *Daily Times*, August 17, 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Akbar Ahmed, *The Thistle and the Drone: How America's War on Terror Became a Global War on Tribal Islam?*, Vanguard Books, 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Sara Mahmood, "Pakistan's Women Jihadis," *The Diplomat*, April 06, 2017, <http://thediplomat.com/2017/04/pakistans-women-jihadis/>

<sup>8</sup> "Female Suicide Bomber Targets Pakistani Police Post," *Voice of America*, August 10, 2011, <https://www.voanews.com/a/female-suicide-bomber-targets-pakistan-police-post-127511143/143656.html>

<sup>9</sup> Farahnaz Ispahani (2016) *Women and Islamist Extremism: Gender Rights Under the Shadow of Jihad*, *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, 14:2, 101-104, DOI:10.1080/15570274.2016.1184445

2014. Since the operation, the group has not only suffered internal divisions, but has continuously lost territory as a result of which the TTP has relocated itself across the border into Afghanistan, where the provinces of Kunar, Nuristan,<sup>10</sup> Paktika, Gardaiz, Nangarhar and Pakita became the TTP's launching pads for cross border attacks into Pakistan.<sup>11</sup> Despite its dwindling presence, the TTP have been responsible for major attacks in Pakistan, including the attack on the Pakistani air force base, Badaber in Peshawar, in September 2015, the attack on the Army Public School in December 2015 which left 140 children dead,<sup>12</sup> attack on Bacha Khan University in January 2016, and more recently in February 2017, Pakistan witnessed its bloodiest week when a series of attacks took place throughout the country (Karachi, Lahore and Khyber Pukhtunkhwa), where more than 100 were killed due to attacks by the TTP, Jamaat-ul-Ahrar and Islamic State.

While the TTP's physical presence has been largely eliminated in FATA, due to the military successes of operation Zarb-e-Azb, Radd-ul-Fasaad, and operations in Khyber agency, its increasing dependence on social media to propagate its ideology and re-establish its hold is a dangerous trend that should not be taken lightly and needs to be strictly monitored. Social media has proved to be an easy, relatively cheap and effective tool for terrorist groups, as one has seen in the case of Naureen Leghari, a medical student from Hyderabad who had joined the IS through social media.<sup>13</sup>

Hence, the threat of terrorism is still at large and it remains to be seen how successful the TTP will be at gaining new recruits (if at all) through its new effort.

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<sup>10</sup> Jon Boone, "Pakistani Taliban selects hardliner Mullah Fazlullah as new leader," *The Guardian*, November 8, 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/07/pakistani-taliban-mullah-fazlullah-leader-malala-yousafzai>

<sup>11</sup> Ammarah Rabbani, "Prospects of Hostilities on Western Border for Pakistan," *The Conflict Monitoring Center*, <http://www.cmcpk.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/cba-complete-report.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> "TTP bases in Afghanistan: Evidence mounts on Afghan origin of Badhaber attack," *Express Tribune*, September 20, 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Mohammad Hussain Khan and Imran Gabol, "Woman held after encounter in Lahore went to Syria for training", *Dawn*, April 17, 2017.