



Arab Authoritarianism

The Incubators of Terror

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A key component of CIHRS' mandate is to help shape the understanding of and discourse around the most pressing human rights issues in the Arab region. CIHRS then seeks to coordinate and mobilize the key players and NGOs across the Arab world to work together to raise public awareness about these issues and to reach solutions in line with international human rights law.

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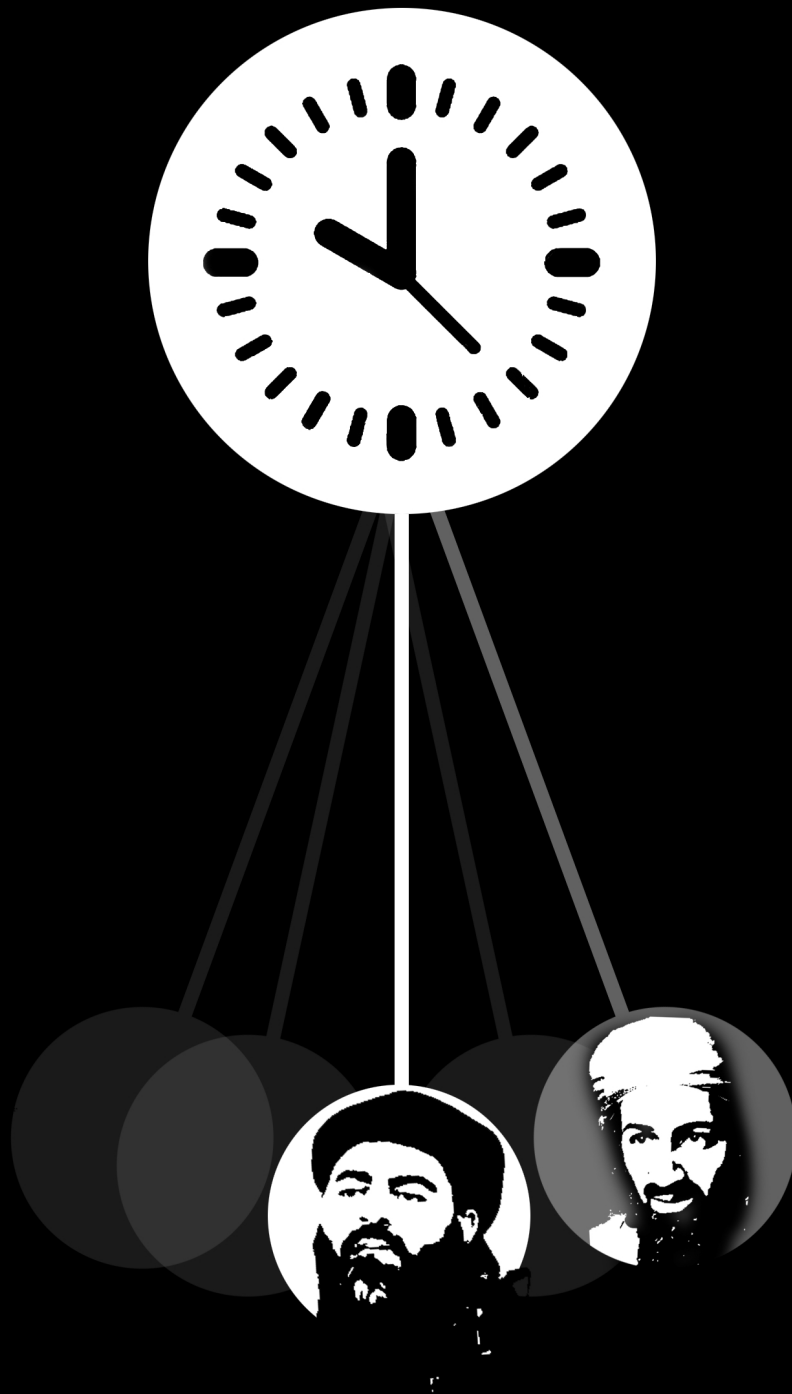
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THE DYNAMICS OF THE SOCIAL INCUBATION OF TERRORISM IN THE ARAB REGION

BAHEY ELDIN HASSAN

The Dynamics of the Social Incubation of Terrorism in the Arab Region

Bahey eldin Hassan¹

December 2015

For decades the Arab region has been plagued with terrorism, but it's the phenomenal qualitative evolution of terrorism and its exponential proliferation with the rise of the self-proclaimed Islamic State (*IS*, *ISIS*, *ISIL*, or *Daesh*) that elevated its importance when formulating policies within and towards the region. This evolution necessitates a multi-faceted examination of the phenomenon to ensure an accurate grasp of the situation and offer a correct diagnosis of the issue and its root causes. Addressing terrorism through a flawed strategy that reflects the misdiagnosis of the region's illnesses is a luxury the world could no longer afford.

The second generation of terrorism, brought about by al-Qaeda, which sprung from the interaction between Egyptian jihadi groups of the 1970s and Saudi Wahhabism and its sponsored Mujahideen during the Soviet-Afghan war in the 1980s, marked a significant evolution of terrorism that went unmatched until the rise of the third generation manifested by ISIS.

Through its consolidation of territory, ISIS has demonstrated that it has taken root in those territories through years of social incubation, enabled by an array of marginalizing policies. ISIS has also demonstrated that terrorism is no longer embodied by a small group of people with a behavior that could be solely attributed to a narrow list of ideological goals or inherent criminal behavior. This evolution signals a long period of political, social, economic, and religious incubation of what became one of the greatest threats to regional and international peace and security.

The governments of the different Arab countries, which have fallen prey to terrorism, are responsible for the current disastrous situations those countries are now facing. Despite those governments' current rhetoric on fighting terrorism, they remain directly or indirectly responsible for unleashing terrorism on their countries through closing down public spaces, their unwillingness to carry out reforms, their systematic discrimination and targeting of specific communities such as the Sunni in Syria and Iraq, or the Bedouin community in Egypt, and by committing mass atrocities against their civilian populations.

Bashar al-Assad, for example, responded to peaceful protests in Syria with brute force, and released jihadis from prison, with the intention of militarizing the Syrian revolution. He later projected the false image that the war was a zero-sum game between his regime and the jihadis. The same tactic was used, albeit on a smaller scale, after the overthrow of Egypt's Hosni Mubarak. The Supreme Council for the Armed Forces released imprisoned jihadis to inject radical Islamism to disrupt the liberal movement amidst the upris-

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ing. Even today, and while Egypt's Sinai continues to descend into jihadi violence, the government of President Abdelfatah al-Sisi continues to release imprisoned jihadis while detaining pro-democracy peaceful activists. These actions reveal who do Arab governments perceive as the real "strategic enemy" and their assumption that pro-democracy peaceful activists are a bigger threat to their rule than terrorism is.

The Arab states' so-called state institutions, which allegedly fight terrorism and who consider themselves to be the last barrier against the collapse of whatever degree of order that remains in the region, are the same entities that facilitated the creation of this new wave of terrorism. As such, blind support for these state institutions can never be part of the solution. Yassin al-Haj Saleh's eloquent essay in this book explores this dimension and articulates the complex dynamics between Arab autocrats, ISIS, and the international community.

The evolution of terrorism, and the fight against it in the Arab region, cannot be viewed separately from the gross human rights crimes committed against specific communities and minorities in the region. It is not uncommon to hear that some civilians in ISIS-held areas, are less scared of ISIS than they are of "liberation" by their governments and government-affiliated militias.² Similarly, the systematic abuse and marginalization of Bedouins in Sinai is one of the main barriers against addressing the growing insurgency there.³ Instead of trying to support and collaborate with the civilian population in Sinai, the Egyptian government collectively punishes the residents of Sinai through arbitrary detentions and torture, forced migration, and indiscriminately bombing civilian areas. These actions have created social incubators for terrorism and paved the way for insurgency. This issue is addressed by Mossad Abu Fajr in this book.

We can no longer ignore the relationship between the perpetration of human rights and humanitarian crimes committed by some governments and the rise of radicalization and the proliferation of terrorism. For example, and as explored by Anwar al-Bounni in this book, the use of internationally banned weapons, such as chemical weapons and barrel bombs, by Assad -in order to create waves of refugees to impact the realpolitik surrounding the Syrian crisis has fed the vicious cycle of violence and radicalization. Mokhtar Awad and Youssef Ahmed also highlight in their respective chapters the relationship between the Egyptian government policies' towards the Muslim Brotherhood and the radicalization of some of its youth.

The nexus between human rights crimes and radicalization is relative from one country to the other, as Saif Nasrawi and Messaoud Romdhani demonstrate in their chapters. Nasrawi explores the effect of marginalization of Sunnis in Maliki's Iraq and Romdhani examines the relationship between terrorism and economic grievances and marginalization in Tunisia.

² Patrick Cockburn, "Life under Isis: Sunnis face an even bleaker future in Iraq if the militants' reign of terror is finally defeated," The Independent, March 2015, available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/life-under-isis-sunnis-face-an-even-bleaker-future-in-iraq-if-the-militants-reign-of-terror-is-10117918.html>

³ In March 2016, a security source in Sinai stated that the counterterrorism operations in Sinai are being hindered by the support terrorists receive from local civilians, "Security Successes in Sinai," Al Ahram Weekly 31 March 2016, available at: <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/News/1593817/Security-successes-in-Sinai.aspx>

State corruption and dysfunctional institutions also play a role in exacerbating and fueling terrorism in the Arab region. On one hand, the collapse of national judicial institutions and accountability mechanisms continue to sustain the vacuum that terrorist organizations exploit for recruitment. On the other hand, states' religious discourse which is channeled through the official religious establishments, still fail to offer a credible counter narrative to that of terrorist organizations. In fact, elements of extremists' narratives can be found in the discourse of some Arab states' official religious establishments.⁴ The fact that there is an over representation of Arabs (compared to citizens of other Sunni-majority Asian states)⁵ within ISIS, is an indication that terrorism is a reflection of how dysfunctional Arab states and their institutions are, rather than being a mere reflection of an extremist ideology.

The international community must address terrorism and security in the region holistically, with respect to the specific characteristics of each country and should realize the interconnectivity between the different parts of the region. The Saudi-Iranian rivalry, and its manifestation as a sectarian strife promoted by both countries' religious establishments, is creating and shaping other conflicts across the region. In addition, the spillover effect from one country to another (such as the case of Syria and Iraq or Libya and Tunisia) will sabotage any attempt to address one country without putting the entire region into perspective.

The Arab region is an afflicted one, and must be approached by the international community as such. The disintegration of certain states brought about by civil wars and armed conflicts and their replacement by state-like terrorist entities, along with the massive death toll, and the horrifying number of refugees and displaced people in the region marking "the worst humanitarian crisis of our time"⁶, necessitates a new approach from the international community. While there are UN representatives and offices operating across the Arab region, there is a need to establish an internal United Nations mechanism,⁷ supervised by the UN Secretary General, to address the region as a whole, especially in light of the static impotence of the League of Arab States. Some Arab states in transition and in the process of becoming failed states, might require approaches as expansive as the ones used for Namibia or Kosovo,⁸ and which should take into consideration the enhancement and activation of accountability mechanisms to tackle the root causes of

4 This issue has been pointed out by CIHRS in its open letter to Arab monarchs and presidents in March 2015, available at: <http://www.cihrs.org/wp-content/uploads/201503//Arab-League-Letter1.pdf>

5 Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq, The Soufan Group December 2015, available at: http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/201512//TSG_ForeignFightersUpdate_FINAL3.pdf

6 The UNHCR has stated that there are more than 4.8 million registered refugees from Syria alone as of April 2016 while the IOM reports that more than 5 Million Syrians now live outside Syria, available at, <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>, <https://www.iom.int/countries/syria>, and <https://www.mercycorps.org/articles/iraq-jordan-lebanon-syria-turkey/quick-facts-what-you-need-know-about-syria-crisis>

7 For more information, see CIHRS memo to the UN Secretary General available at, <http://www.cihrs.org/?p=7965&lang=en>

8 This idea that was first raised in a joint workshop between CIHRS and Human Rights First (HRF) on sidelines of the UN summit on violent extremism in September 2015:
Is the solution Namibia-style UN responsibility for Arab states threatened with collapse?, CIHRS October 2015, available at: <http://www.cihrs.org/?p=17425&lang=en>

terrorism and the waves of refugees from the Arab region's failing states. In this context, the UN also has to enforce its resolutions on Palestine, and put an end to the Israeli disregard of those resolutions.

The centrality of human rights in any counterterrorism strategy transcends the moral commitment of holding on to the values and principles of human rights, as discussed by Ziad Abdeltawab in his chapter reviewing counterterrorism legislations in Egypt and Tunisia. As I pointed out in previous articles,⁹ the respect of human rights, especially when involving minorities and marginalized communities, should be realized as a precondition for regional and international peace and security.

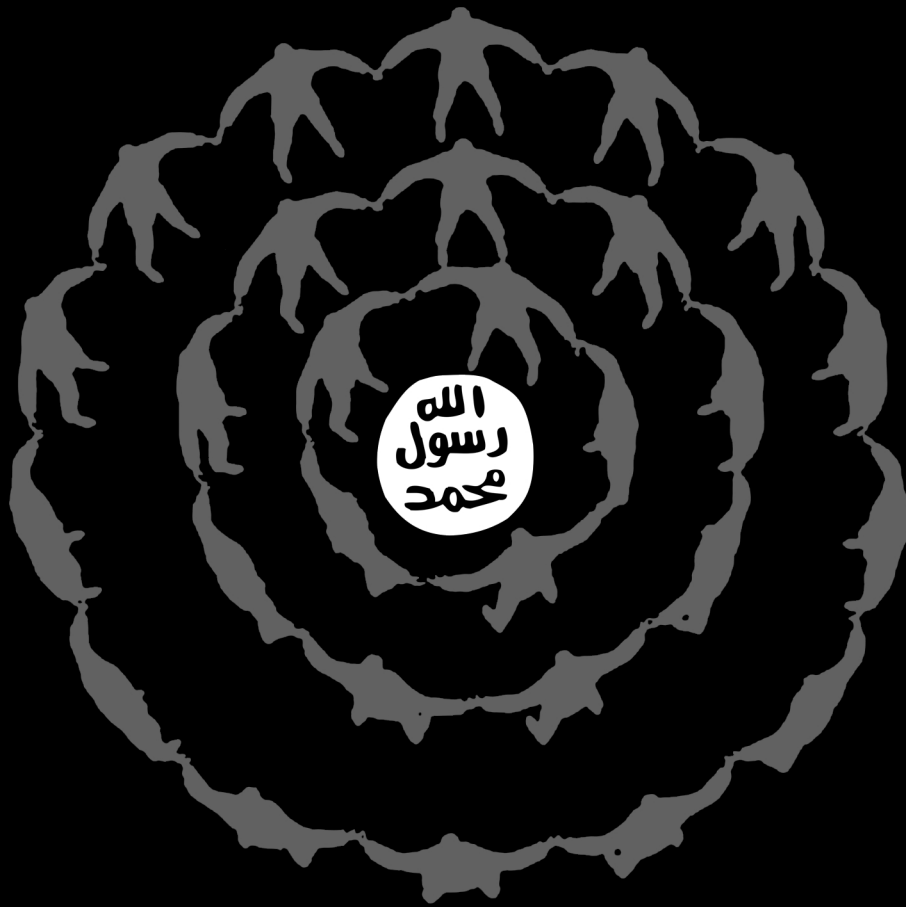
In 2002, CIHRS organized the first international symposium in the Middle East on respecting human rights while countering terrorism in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. In my introduction to that symposium's book, alarmed by the discourse of the ongoing "War against Terror" I wrote: "the scope of this war is restricted to combating the symptoms of the 'terrorism illness' without its root causes, political, social, economic, and cultural roots." Ironically, the introduction is dated August 30, 2002.

The birth of ISIS is a wakeup call. It tells us that the world cannot continue "business as usual" on the counterterrorism front. There is no way of winning this fight without combating the root causes of political, social and economic incubation of terrorism.

In light of the qualitative evolution of terrorism in the past couple of years, CIHRS and Human Rights First (HRF) organized an expert workshop on human rights and countering violent extremism (CVE) on the margins of the UN's World Leaders CVE Summit in September 2015. The papers first presented at the workshop, and now published in this book, along with the list of annexed supporting documents, aim to serve as a reference to effective approaches on countering terrorism and violent extremism from a human rights perspective.

I would like to thank all the authors, who dedicated their time and energy in the production of this book, as well as the participants of the workshop for their valuable input in the discussions. In particular, I would like to thank Youssef Ahmed, who helped coordinate the workshop and the production of this book, including reviewing the book's chapters and contributing to the editing process. I would also like to express my appreciation to HRF for its efforts in co-organizing the expert workshop and in particular, Neil Hicks, the Director of Human Rights Promotion at HRF, for his longstanding and consistent spirit of partnership as well as for contributing to this book with his insightful concluding chapter.

9 Bahey Eldin Hassan, "Injustice Kindled Middle East Chaos," CIHRS, May 2015, available at: <http://www.cihrs.org/?p=15015&lang=en> and Bahey Eldin Hassan, "In Reply to Abdelmoniem al-Said," Al Masry Al Youm 312015/12/, available at: <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/865909>



DAESH IN THE WORLD: THE IMPLICATION OF
THE EMERGENCE OF A SENSELESS ENTITY FOR
POLITICS AND RIGHTS

YASSIN AL-HAJ SALEH

Daesh in the World: The Implication of the Emergence of a Senseless Entity for Politics and Rights

Yassin al-Haj Saleh¹

September, 2015

This essay examines the implications of the rise of the Islamic State (IS or Daesh) for politics and rights in the Arab region and wider world, looking at the impact on three levels: first, what it means for people living directly under Daesh; second, how local governments have engaged with the rise of Daesh; and third, shifts in the conduct of the international powers occasioned by the rise of the terrorist entity. The essay begins with an attempt to sketch the defining features of Daesh, thus laying a basis for a discussion of the key political and rights issues.

On the Origins and Structure of Daesh

Daesh was born of the encounter between al-Qaeda and the Sunni Baathism of the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq following the US invasion in 2003. Al-Qaeda itself emerged in Afghanistan as a melding of Saudi Wahhabism and Egyptian Qutbism, aptly illustrated by the two primary al-Qaeda leaders, Osama Bin Laden, a Saudi, and Ayman al-Zawahiri, an Egyptian. Al-Qaeda took its early conception of divine governance, its combat-oriented stance, its extreme identification with specifically Sunni Islam, and its rejection of “intermediaries”—in practice, meaning art, culture, and history—from the Wahhabism that arose in Najd in the 18th century. From Egyptian Qutbism, it adopted the precept of rebelling against so-called Jahili governments—those seen as belonging to the pre-Islamic Age of Ignorance—as well as a more sophisticated conception of divine governance that delegates law-making powers to God alone and its tendency to declare entire states that were not ruled by God’s revelation as infidels. Together these influences gave rise to the contemporary tendency to live within religion, in a strictly regulated world of religious commandments and prohibitions, and a drive to expand this world by force through jihad, to cover Muslim nations and eventually the entire world. This worldview was only strengthened by the fact that living in the world, especially in the last quarter of the 20th century, did not bring dignity, justice, or a sense of rootedness in the world to many Muslims.

To understand the significance of living in religion, it is important to note that the history of Islam over 14 centuries is, in many respects, a history of Muslims adhering to their religion in the absence of, or outside of, any Islamic authority, and often in opposition to it. The governing authority was often an alien or outside power that plundered and de-

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mandated submission, and rarely did most regular Muslims relate to it personally. Muslims' ownership of religion, then, meant that they adapted it to suit their own lives and that religion lived within and among people, as opposed to a religion/ authority under which people lived and were governed that possessed the power to determine 'correct' religion. The historical bent of all Islamists, and particularly jihadi Salafis, is to wrest religion from the people and make them submit to it as an external authority.

In Iraq, in addition to its Najdi and Egyptian features, al-Qaeda took on Iraqi characteristics, largely thanks to Sunni officers from Saddam Hussein's intelligence service and military who found themselves excluded from power, not only stripped of their unfair privileges, but also of jobs and the opportunity to participate in public life in the new Iraq, in an emerging sectarian context that devalued their period and environments. Their exclusion coincided with al-Qaeda's entry to the country, which was facilitated by the dissolution of the Iraqi state and army, thus turning disaffected officers in more extreme directions, an evolution that had already begun in the 1990s and was initiated by Saddam Hussein himself. Iraqi Baathism by that time was utterly degraded, shorn of any emancipatory social content and having acquired Arab ethnic or racial dimensions and a regressive tribalist social and value system.

Though not alien to Saddam Hussein's regime, savagery was stoked in Iraq by the arrival a Jordanian jihadi and butcher, Abu Musaab al-Zarqawi, who declared the Islamic State of Iraq in 2006. Following a period of delinquency and a stint in prison, Zarqawi trained in jihad in Afghanistan. From there, he went to Iraq in the wake of the US invasion, where he personally slaughtered Western and other hostages and attacked Shia mosques, killing dozens each time, with a zeal that provoked the ire of Osama Bin Laden himself.

The leaders of Daesh today came of age under Saddam, growing accustomed to the cruelty of his world. They then encountered cruelty and hatred from the US occupiers and the new Shia rulers. Sons of a world that has never known politics, culture, or joy, they were born in the 1970s when Iraq was gradually sinking into political darkness in a world of oil rents and wars. Non-Iraqi Daesh members come from similar environments. They tend to be under 50, with many leaders in their 30s and 40s, and many have served time in prison.

The al-Qaeda and Saddam roots of Daesh share an imperial Islamic imagination that was Arabized in the 20th century. In Iraq it was spread in schools and the media and was never subject to serious critique. Notions of conquest, might, martial glory, and the seizure of countries and lands became a source of Arab national—specifically Baathist—and Islamic pride, a national destiny, not simply a result of historical contingencies. Daesh and al-Qaeda itself are forces for expansion, military domination, and the imposition of religious sovereignty in areas under their control.

In Syria at least, where Daesh is more savage, perhaps because it is outside its own environment and thus cut off from networks of social ties, Daesh is a combination of terrorist organization, totalitarian state, and colonial power. From its al-Qaeda roots, Daesh takes the idea of rebelling against the world—not in the sense of rebelling against forces and states or even laws that reflect the preferences and interests of the powerful and influen-

tial, but as an organizing principle of human existence. From this perspective, the world is not a public utility; one does not object to its organizing system in the name of a public interest or to make it fairer and more democratic. In contrast, the world must submit to the viewpoint and rules of Daesh to be acceptable. In this, Islamist organizations and leftist terrorist groups of the previous generation are similar, but Daesh, due to the influence of Saddam's intelligence officers, is more like a large intelligence apparatus than a terrorist group (the Nusra Front, in contrast, more closely resembles a terrorist organization). As such, Daesh takes a hostile position vis-à-vis not only the state and its representatives, but the community it controls as well. Its method of rule appears to be inherited from the Saddam regime, demonstrated by its affinity for murder as a first resort, to cow the populace and prevent the emergence of any resistance. As is well known, the first thing Saddam Hussein did when he removed Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr in 1979 was to kill several of his fellow leaders in the Baath Party, even as he also eliminated Iraqi communists and the Shia Dawa Party. Later, concurrent with the war with Iran, he launched the Anfal war against the Kurds and the chemical weapons massacre in Halabja in 1988.

At the same time, Daesh evinces some features of totalitarianism, derived from the doctrine of divine governance formulated by Abu al-Aala al-Mawdudi in the 1940s under the influence of the model of communist and Nazi totalitarian states. There is no such thing as public space, no intermediary bodies, no separation of public and private life. As in every totalitarian state, education is harnessed for indoctrination. It is militarized to groom youngsters to be soldiers for the state and functions as a tool for the pacification of the population and external expansion. For Daesh, totalitarianism represents a 'scientific,' infallible doctrine, jihadi Salafism or simply 'Islam' to its followers. It compels the local populace to live in its closed world, taking great pains to prevent the infiltration of any polluting influences from outside. This is why communications are so strictly controlled. Daesh eliminated independent internet receivers in al-Raqqa in July 2015, and online communications were routed exclusively through tightly monitored internet centers. Language, too, is being purged of its particularity, as foreign linguistic modes are imposed on people's experiences and lives, which was a common feature of the Soviet Union and similar states, and even Baathist Syria.

Two additional Daesh characteristics are associated with totalitarianism: first, continual movement and conflict, a permanent revolution against ordinary life. This is the source of the staged executions and the military pageantry, whose goal is to keep the ruled population docile and powerless. This permanent spectacle—the constant display of power by the ruling authority for the benefit of the ruled—is a prerequisite for the existence and effectiveness of totalitarian states. The second salient feature is external war and expansion and a principled rejection of peace. These two imperatives, noted by Hannah Arendt in her *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, can be subsumed under the concept of expansion: internal and external. In my view, totalitarianism is a domestic imperialism that expands internally at the expense of society and people's bodies and expands externally wherever it can. The myth of the Islamic Caliphate that valorizes and gratifies Muslims and devalues their enemies is the legitimizing doctrine of the Daesh entity, just as communism was the legitimizing doctrine of the Soviet Union.

From yet another perspective, Daesh resembles a colonial power based on expansion and occupation, similar to Israel and unlike France in Algeria, where the French did not expel Algerians. Daesh members are not residents of a geographic entity or state, but a globalized entity, an utterly modern and artificial entity based not on organic or inherited membership but voluntary association. Its military and religious cadres in particular come from dozens of countries. At the same time, the Daesh state entity is based on eliminating undesirables from the population, whether by expulsion or murder. In Syria, this has entailed major demographic shifts, tantamount to ethnic cleansing, after which the property of the expelled or murdered population is seized and used to house colonizers brought in to replace them. Our family's home in al-Raqqa was appropriated in 2014 and used to house a 'mujahid' from Uzbekistan. The same is true of my brother's house and the homes of many friends as well.

The Situation of the Populace in the Daesh State

The brief sketch above provides a preliminary idea of the status of the population under Daesh rule. Here is additional information.

Firstly, there is strict gender segregation. Women are prohibited from leaving the house alone, and outside the home they must be escorted by a male relative or guardian. Women wear black clothing exclusively with a black, two-ply veil that covers their faces. The same rule applies to non-Muslim 'People of the Book,' the one or two Christian Armenian families remaining in the city. Men must grow their beards, and male barbershops are forbidden. There is no dress standard for men, but a 60something doctor who wore a necktie found a Tunisian Daesh member in his 20s grabbing him by the tie and screaming in his face: "Why do you wear a halter around your neck, sheikh?"

Social studies and the natural sciences have been dropped from educational curricula, which are limited to various religious topics, Arabic, mathematics, and of course military-religious training. Executions usually take place in public squares where the largest number of people can watch. Forms of torture are innovative, while ancient forms of execution are employed, such as decapitation, crucifixion, and being thrown from a great height. There are also new forms of murder and burial: up to 3,000 people were thrown into a deep abyss north of Raqqa, known as al-Houta, some of whom were still alive at the time.

People do not generally suffer from food shortages, but they enjoy no political or social rights, or even a guaranteed right to life. The world of Daesh lies outside that of rights. Killing is as easy as drinking water.

The most prominent characteristic of Daesh relates to religious life. At first glance, Daesh seems to represent the victory of Islam and its power. Everything is Islamic through and through. In fact, however, Islam has become a tool of rule, or the major tool of rule, while also constituting the ideological and linguistic foundation for the Daesh world. Islam as a living personal belief or an independent, interpersonal social relationship is utterly effaced in favor of religion as an external power and force. While it may seem as if religion is being universalized, what is actually happening is the exact opposite: ownership of

religion is being stripped from the *umma*—the community of Muslims—and has become the sole possession of the Daesh authority. Whereas religion used to live within and among Muslim believers, today everyone is forced to live within the religion as a coercive, external power—that is, inside the linguistic, symbolic, political world imposed by Daesh. This is an unchanging world that remains untouched by time, a bubble that encases the populace, a prison. Protecting this prison is protecting the Daesh authority.

Just as there are no rights in this world, there is no politics, no culture, no sociology, and no faith. It is therefore best suited for the fools and madmen who populate religious mafias, despots who see themselves as demigods (the denial of intermediaries opens the door to the deification, not humanization, of people). This is humanity at point zero, worse even than the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century, not only because it joins totalitarianism to an intelligence apparatus, a terrorist organization, and settler colonialism, but also because it is a religious totalitarianism that at no time had any emancipatory content. It is immeasurably more culturally impoverished than secular totalitarianisms and infinitely less scientifically and technologically capable, which may ultimately limit the number of its victims though without eroding any of its innate eliminationist drive. On the purely religious level, this type of totalitarianism is cultivating the poorest and most hostile, authoritarian, primitive version of Sunni Islam.

Simply by recounting these aspects of life under the Daesh polity, we run the risk of seeing it as an object of inquiry like any other, as intelligible, thereby perhaps failing to grasp its senselessness and unintelligibility. Even more, we may fail to fully feel the horror of what we see, meaning we Syrians primarily, but also Muslims in general, who cannot deny some form of paternity with this annihilating ghoul that seeks to be the father of them all.

Daesh is the product of our madness; rather, it is the product of the paucity of reason and justice in our modern, contemporary societies. It summons a past that does not work in the fallen present. When spirits of the past appear in the present, they come as ghosts or evil spirits, as demons. Daesh is one such entity that has transformed what is ostensibly the general virtue of Muslims—their religion—into a general vice, a force for rape, murder, coercion, hatred, lies, and theft.

From another perspective, Daesh is also the product of the modern, contemporary world, the power centers in the West and especially the North, which have literally driven us mad with their backing of unfair, senseless practices and situations, even as they set the standards of reason and justice in the world today.

This is not about apportioning blame. Practically speaking, it is true that this religious madness is our own product, a product of our shortcoming and lassitude. We should begin now to confront the failures of our reason and justice without waiting for a change in or from the world. Changing our own situation—and we are a big part of the world—is our contribution to changing the world. This is about assuming responsibility, showing maturity and seriousness in confronting our own demons and evils. But it is perhaps also not wrong to say that analytically speaking, Daesh is a product of globalization, of East and West, present and past. The world in which Daesh emerged—one in which it has proved

attractive in numerous areas in Asia and Africa, enticing Europeans, Americans, and Russians—cannot offer the solution to senseless phenomena such as Daesh. It is itself senseless in some, though different ways. The madness of Daesh is ours; its language is ours, its ‘reason’ is ours, its conscience is ours.

In any case, the American role in nurturing the Afghan root of the contemporary jihadi movement is well known. There is also the Iraqi laboratory, and before that the longstanding Saudi and Gulf incubator: huge sums of cash from a rentier economy spent on manifold forms of reckless foolishness, from casinos to superfluous weaponry that keeps US and European labs afloat to the acquisition of things and massive properties. Religious foolishness—the financing of senseless religious movements like al-Qaeda, the tributary of Daesh—is no different.

Daesh and the Assad State

The rise of Daesh in Syria gave the Assad regime a cause that corresponded to its basic instincts, first and foremost the drive to cling to power. It afforded a chance to win international legitimacy, by which I mean the legitimacy conferred by the consent of the strong, as opposed to a legitimacy based on the consent of Syrians. The appearance and rise of Daesh occasioned a near immediate reconsideration of the Assad regime, specifically among powers that for some time had tended to delegitimize it. Just four months after Daesh declared its independence from al-Qaeda, the chemical massacres in Ghouta in Damascus, on August 21, 2013, killed some 1,500 Syrians in one hour, one-third of them children. Following repeated threats of military sanctions on the regime, the US ultimately grasped at the Russian exit that allowed the regime to turn over its chemical weapons. This deplorable deal was a license to kill Syrians with other weapons, which was further facilitated by the existence of such an impossible entity as Daesh. In this sense, Daesh saved the Assad regime, and on three levels. First, it put the Assad regime’s crimes in a different perspective, there being another criminal entity whose crimes were far ‘sexier.’ In fact, Daesh itself cultivates such spectacles, suggesting strong performative and exhibitionist impulses among Daesh members, perhaps compensating for deep feelings of weakness and impotence. (In contrast, the Assad regime goes to great lengths to cover up its crimes, consistently denying them even when no one in the world doubts that it is the culprit.) Second, international pressure on the Assad regime eased, though it was already wavering due to the important security role the state plays, for Israel especially. Third and most importantly, it put revolutionaries in a no-win situation: they did not have the capacities to wage a battle on two fronts, but they could not wage it on one front either without forfeiting their cause itself. Even if they let Daesh be, Daesh—a force for both internal and external expansion, as noted above—would not let them be. This impossible situation led to the dissolution of the remnants of the neglected Free Army and erosion of the Syrian political opposition itself. The latter had defined itself in opposition to the Assad regime; with the appearance of Daesh, this was no longer sufficient.

And through this all, Daesh gave the Syrian regime a cause which Western powers, the US in particular, were quite willing to adopt: a war on terrorism. In his speech in July

2015, Bashar al-Assad spoke of terrorism repeatedly, but never once mentioned Daesh or al-Qaeda. It was clear that the little man sought to address the big men of today's world: terrorism is anyone that objects to his lethal regime, and he would be a partner in fighting it.

It is well known that the war on terror brings exceptions to rights and politics, along with an international warrant to deal with local populations as necessary. It may be said that people have neither rights nor politics in Syria in any case. True, but there can be no doubt that the Assad regime's involvement in the war on terror is the hidden force behind the refusal to see the atrocities it perpetrates against Syrians, the killing of dozens every day with barrel bombs, under torture, or through siege and starvation. While it is true that the Assad regime did not lack for reasons to brutally suppress its subjects, Daesh provided non-local parties with legitimate grounds to do the same. The military units with the Kurdish Democratic Union, the Syrian branch of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Turkey, uses the fight against Daesh as grounds to control the movement of the Arab, non-Kurdish, and even Kurdish populations in areas under their control, especially in Tel Abyad, which they took from Daesh in June 2015 after the latter had expelled the Kurdish population, seized their property, and killed many of them. An alleged link with Daesh provides a ready-made pretext for arrests of individuals and a reason to prevent families from returning to their homes and residents to their villages, and to loot locals' property. This takes place absent any body to receive complaints and while independent media and local or international rights bodies are denied entry to the area. Meanwhile, numerous Kurdish fighters are deployed from Turkey and elsewhere, receiving orders from the political-military command center located in the Qandil Mountains between Turkey and Iraq that is staffed with some senior Turkish Kurdish figures and in military coordination with the international coalition, especially the US. This will have potentially momentous consequences in the months and years to come, and all in an area that has never in Syria's modern history seen conflict between various ethnic and other population groups. Jaish al-Islam, a jihadi Salafi organization, is doing a similar thing. A Saudi-sponsored group based in Eastern Ghouta, it has forces in al-Qalamoun and northern Syria. The group also keeps a tight grip on the local community in Eastern Ghouta on the pretext of fighting Daesh. While not an entirely false pretext—Daesh did in fact have some pockets in the area—it has become an excuse for Zahran Alloush and his supporters to control the area and suppress any independent military or civilian group, as was seen in the confrontation with Jaish al-Umma early this year. (Jaish al-Umma is a local militia made up of groups that liberated Douma from the Assad regime in the fall of 2012.) This was followed by the execution of Abu Ali Kheiba, a popular anti-regime hero, and 40 other people in a public square in Douma. This is divorced from any clear strategy to unify forces to confront this regime. In August this year, thousands of people joined demonstrations in Saqba, located near Douma, to condemn the tyranny of the Jaish al-Islam militia.

In addition, some regional forces, in particular Egypt, have found it convenient to support the Bashar al-Assad regime with political backing and military equipment, also citing the need to fight Daesh and the Islamists. The Sisi regime, which came to power following a coup against Brotherhood rule in Egypt, has its own reasons for supporting a lethal re-

gime, most importantly that it normalizes its own conduct. The fate of Syria or Iraq is also held out as a lesson to Egyptians, making them more submissive to a military regime with fascist overtones. Clearly, Daesh—that melding of terrorist organization, settler colonialism, and fascist state—provides a strong pretense for solidarity among tyrants.

Daesh in the World

Internationally, the rise of Daesh reflected an impassiveness to the Syrian revolution and Syrians' emancipatory aspirations. In fact, this tendency preceded Daesh, but it was bolstered by its emergence and rise. International agencies working with Syrian refugees consistently complained of scarce resources, and the conditions of refugees in Lebanon and Jordan deteriorated, demonstrating the weak international solidarity with Syrians and the lack of international concern with their plight due to the regional security role played by the Assad regime and the rise of Daesh. Europe threw up legal, political, and security barriers in the face of the rising wave of Syrian refugees. As for the current wave of interest in and solidarity with refugees in European countries (in August and September 2015), it will be fleeting in my estimation; the general tendency will be toward restrictions and barriers.

The majority of Syrian refugees, and most of the population of Syria, does not possess travel documents. Syrians do not have a routine right to passports, which are withheld by the Assad regime as a punitive measure. The policy of the UN and international powers thus perpetuated Assad's policy in this respect, as they did not attempt to provide protection for those with no way out or facilitate their movement between states. I myself have an unhappy experience with this, not having a passport as well. Despite this, I am one of the lucky few who were able to travel with special documents occasionally and return to temporary stability.

When interest was shown in Syrian refugees, who today number more than four million, they were deprived of any political agency whatsoever, their plight reduced to the purely humanitarian. This is the defining feature of the wave of European sympathy, particularly Austrian and German, that followed from the discovery of the death of 71 refugees, most of them Syrian, in a closed container on a highway in Austria in August this year, as well as the extremely touching image of three-year-old Aylan Kurdi, whose small body was carried up on the Mediterranean shore in Turkey, which his family had left trying to make their way to Greece and then Europe. This swell of sympathy sees refugees as victims needing assistance—and assistance is in fact given—but it remains nearly silent on the political roots of their plight, as if they fled their country because of an earthquake or other natural disaster. In fact, this is lens through which the West generally views the rise of Daesh: as something related to the nature or constitution of Muslims or internal problems in their societies, rather than as a phenomenon that can be explained in terms of concrete history and general human experience.

The clearest political impact of the rise of Daesh is seen in the declining engagement with official Syrian opposition bodies, as Western powers have exploited divisions in the opposition to weaken everyone. This goes hand in hand with seeing Bashar al-Assad as

a potential partner in the future political arrangements in the country.

Prior to this, the US had sidelined Friends of the Syrian People, originally formed to offer support for Syrians outside the confines of the UN Security Council, which proved ineffective at addressing the problem due to repeated Russian and Chinese vetoes.

Daesh also restored the political and legal centrality of concepts like ‘security’ and ‘stability’—meaning the security and stability of the interests of influential local and international powers—thereby buoying the significance of a band of killers. It makes for an odd scene: powers generally thought to control the entire world dither and dawdle while a threat grows before their very eyes. They then turn all attention to confronting the threat while implying that everyone should be quaking in fear. This suggests either that the incompetence of these powers outstrips even their moral obtuseness, or that they were in need of such a terrible threat to control the population of our region and its countries. There are alternative explanations as well: the constitution of elites and institutions that produce policy and politicians in the world today no longer permits any mode of action beyond crisis management, not only in the Syrian conflict, but around the world. By its very nature, such a mode of operation not only marginalizes the moral dimensions of political and social conflicts; it marginalizes their political dimensions as well. In fact, it puts the ‘expert’ in the place of the politician or political actor and reduces politics to the technology of governing human populations.

This seems to me to be a major trend in politics worldwide, and it is no less a threat to established democracies than to democratization in other countries. In short, the West is still advanced and democratic, but it is no longer a force for global progress. Democratic countries exist, but there is no international democratic order, no global democratic dynamic. Just one more major crisis like the Syrian crisis may convert this stagnation into a global retreat from democracy or a turn to authoritarian democracy in which democratic populations abandon their rights to a technocratic political-security elite linked with big business and military and security industries.

Aside from the impact the rise of Daesh and its ilk has had on politics, security, and rights, it seems to me it has no less serious cultural and intellectual implications. It has served to unleash another wave of cultural essentialism and racism, or to prolong the wave first unleashed by the end of the Cold War and given renewed momentum by the terrorist attacks of September 11. This trend was further propelled by new dangers like Daesh and Islamic jihadi Salafism, as well as the needs of the Western ruling elite. This elite is both an institutional formation linked to the world of experts, research centers, and crisis management and a social formation related to the high bourgeoisie and its lifestyles and consumption patterns more than the world of ‘the people’ and social and international classes and conflicts. This, combined with the interruption of global progress, the loss of direction, and the end of history have perhaps amplified and universalized a type of individualism and social Darwinism. The previous wave of cultural essentialism blunted a feeling for others and the capacity for solidarity, resulting in a growing distance between humans even as the world appeared to become a “small village” (Marshall McLuhan). The situation in the world today seems paradoxical: people mix more than at any other time, but their engagement is limited, and there are hardly any intellectual forces and

trends or global institutions that invest in bringing humanity closer and transforming this into a global political force. Overall, it appears that models of engagement and interaction in the shadow of Daesh, locally and internationally, have become Daesh-like, meaning that they strengthen Daesh and do not constitute a break with the moral and political conditions that led to its emergence. The goal here is not to blame or accuse the world, but to question whether the response to the rise of Daesh has any impact on the entity, or even whether it may foster the appearance of similar entities. Daesh is of this world, not another world; it arose from within this world's mindset and justice, not from outside it. In any case, it is untrue that the response of the Assad regime or regional and international forces to the emergence of Daesh are creating anything new. These are all well-worn trajectories that precede Daesh and need it, not regrettable responses or exceptional paths that must be pursued to confront it.

Facing Daesh and its Kin

If the foregoing analysis is largely correct, it entails a need for a greater focus on three areas of concern for human rights organizations and all persons interested in issues of justice and ethics in the Arab world.

First, it requires better analyses of the international, cultural, and political condition and the reconstitution of the philosophy of human rights around the global situation and the human condition in today's world. This world is not an ally of human rights principles and equal human dignity for all people. This requires rethinking the principle of human rights itself. For example, the Syrian debate over the last two years has raised issues that merit additional discussion: the right to a dignified portrayal (the Abu Nadara cinema collective), the right to a personal grave, the right to religion (which I will address further below), the right to asylum and open borders for refugees, and the enforcement of internationally established refugee rights. The status of Syrian refugees in Arab states in particular is a moral and political outrage, and this is unrelated to the rise of Daesh. The situation was contemptible before Daesh and is deplorable in its wake.

Second, politics and human rights must be linked and a division between the two concepts resisted, not only because most human rights violations are political, but also because the humanization of politics requires a humane politics. That is, human conditions must be politicized, seen as the product of politics and the responsibility of public policy; human suffering everywhere must be viewed through the lens of politics. If politics is anathema to human rights—such that some people are seen as more human than others, some violations more worthy of attention than others, and Daesh's violations are taken more seriously than Bashar al-Assad's or vice-versa—then 'humane' policy would itself be devoid of politics, meaning political priorities would be determined based on considerations of efficacy and expediency, or security and stability, thus eroding the principle of justice and human dignity.

Third, in the Arab and Islamic sphere, there is a strong need for intellectual, political, and rights action on religious violations of human rights, including the right of humans and society to religion. The latter right is constantly violated by religio-political organizations

whose entire philosophy is based on the appropriation of religion and its reification as a weapon to be brandished against the populace as an absolute, sacred authority, thus compelling them to live in its confines the way farmers pen up their livestock in stables at night. Is the religious life of Muslims under Daesh better than religious life in secular Turkey, for example? Not in any way in my view.

But this is not the only realm to defend people's rights. We must explore Islamic thought, the Islamic rights regime and Islamic law, and the Islamic imagination as relates to reward and punishment to discover what made Daesh and its ilk possible. Islam is not Daesh, but Daesh is of Islam. When punishment includes eternal torture in hell, how can we deny that prisons of torture in Syria, Egypt, or elsewhere are not ethically consistent? How could Daesh not be a real possibility? There is also the problem of the *hudud* punishments and gender discrimination in marriage, inheritance, child custody, and testimony.

It seems to me that the most favorable political, rights-oriented ground from which to address these problems is as a defense of the right of ordinary people to religion—the right of people, not the state, to own religion—as a principal pillar of religious freedom. This is largely compatible with the actual historical trajectory in our societies over 1,400 years and with the principle of historicity itself. Problems arise from political schemes to appropriate religion, whether in the name of secularism or Islamism. The necessary critique of religious violations of human rights must always be joined with a defense of people's right to religion and human dignity. Critique in the name of human dignity should not single out the dignity of Islam or any religion, but it also should not flatter elite Islamists' conception of the dignity of religion. Such a conception is opposed to a humanist critique of religion and also severs the dignity of Islam from the dignity of Muslims and people in general, valorizing the former at the expense of the latter.

Aside from the right to religion, the principle of human dignity is based on the centrality of humanity, a critique of unifying, monochromatic religion, and humanity's fundamental subordination to it. The deification and unrestricted sovereignty of man could nearly destroy the planet, but man's subordination in the political and military Islamist model leads to the destruction of humanity and degraded forms of human life, associated with the deification of some people over others in the name of religion. Joining the right of everyone to religion with the right to critique religion could lead to more emancipatory, just conditions.

In conclusion, human rights activities have devoted important effort to non-religious ethics in our societies. In the current phase, issues related to the concept of human rights and their Western underpinnings are intersecting with issues associated with the rise of barbaric, senseless entities like Daesh as well as the moral poverty of Arab secularism—meaning, its poor emphasis on justice, freedom, equality, and mutual respect—and the weak ethical dimension in our culture. Given these conditions, it is therefore important to work on liberating reflections on ethics, morals, and rights from the straightjacket of both Islamic and Western frames of reference. We must show greater attention to our own experiences, which are one of, if not the most, distressing human experiences in the world today. We should not avail ourselves of the ready-made humanism and validity of intellectual and historical frames of reference for human rights, around which Arab orga-

nizations, like others, took shape. We do right by ourselves and to others no less if we recognize that concepts of rights and ethics are historical and contingent, the daughter of experience and historical tribulation. The experiences and tribulations we have faced put us in a position to lead a reconsideration of the international human rights agenda, in terms of its concepts and values, as well as on the level of policies, forces, and organization.

The issue is not one of authenticity or identity; it is not a matter of us having an Arab or Islamic say in such matters. The issue is human experiences in their various forms. Thanks to Daesh, today we represent the ultimate in inhumanity and humanity both. Walter Benjamin says there is no document of civilization that is not also a document of barbarism. We could say there is no condition of ultimate barbarism that is not also the ultimate humanity. The document is imperative as a testament—a testament to atrocity and resistance to atrocity. The document is that we think, write, and bear witness. Our historical penance for Daesh is that we contribute to changing the agenda of the global debate and changing the world itself to make Daesh no longer possible.



THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ISLAMIC STATE IN IRAQ: CONTEXT AND CAUSES

SAIF NASRAWI

The Establishment of the Islamic State in Iraq: Context and Causes

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Introduction

The capture of Mosul, Iraq's second most populated city in June 2014 by the Islamic State (IS) jihadi group demonstrated that violent extremism finds its roots in weak and dysfunctional government structures alongside other political, socio-cultural and geopolitical factors. There are multiple factors that can be traced to explain the genesis of IS in Iraq, most notably the Islamization of Iraqi society under Saddam Hussein's regime, the chaotic dismantling of state structures by the US occupying forces after 2003, and the highly disruptive regional meddling in the country's internal affairs. But IS's consolidation and its capturing of large parts of Iraqi territory can only be understood within the context of the exclusionary politics adopted by former Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and his government's failure to build democratic institutions in the war-torn nation.

The Rise of Radical Islam Prior to the 2003 US Occupation of Iraq

Immediately following its defeat in the first Gulf War of 1991, Saddam Hussein's regime faced its most serious domestic challenge, when Iraqi citizens in 14 out of the country's 18 governorates revolted against his dictatorship. The March 1991 uprising, mainly driven by disenfranchised Shia and Kurdish protestors witnessed the active participation of Shia religious groups, most notably the then Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), an Iran-based Shia militia which was founded in 1982. After the disintegration of the Iraqi military, SCIRI's militants seized the opportunity and crossed the border in an attempt to exploit long held Shia grievances in order to topple the regime. The uprising, however, was met with utmost brutality and failed to achieve its objectives.²

As a result of the destruction of Iraq's economy during the war, the growing alienation of its Shia majority population, the deteriorating socio-economic conditions caused by UN-imposed sanctions, and rising religiosity among the country's various ethnic and sectarian communities, the regime opted for a more "Islamic" outlook in both Shia and Sunni areas, in a hope of containing growing religious sentiments, but also to legitimize its crumbling grip on power. In 1993, Hussein launched the "Return to Faith Campaign" whereby religious rhetoric was included in the regime's media discourse, educational curricula and the ruling Party's propaganda and indoctrination programs.³ Construction

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² For more details on the March 1991 uprising, please refer to International Crisis Group report, Iraq 2 Backgrounder: What Lies Beneath, October 2002 (<http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-eastnorth-africa/iraq-iran-gulf/iraq/006-iraq-backgrounder-what-lies-beneath.aspx>).

³ Kyle Orton, "The Islamic State Was Coming Without the Invasion of Iraq," Word Press, Dec. 12, 2015, 3 <https://>

of religious schools, teaching centers and mosques were either encouraged and/or tolerated, albeit under heavy government control. In that context, the ground was laid for the breeding of hardline activists, both civilian and ex-military personnel,⁴ who would later join extremist groups to voice their concerns.

Violent Extremism in Post-Saddam Iraq

Soon after the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, and as a result of poor planning, and the uncritical acceptance of the discourses of the then Iraqi opposition abroad (especially Shia and Kurdish factions)⁵, the American Occupying Administration, better known as the Coalition Provisional Authority, had introduced some drastic measures which were seen as severely marginalizing the Sunni minority that ruled Iraq since the 1920s. These measures included the introduction of a deBa'athification policy that was translated into dismantling some key state institutions such as the Iraqi military, the intelligence and security services, the ruling party, and the Information Ministry. Alongside demolishing these institutions, a process of purging senior and middle ranked Ba'athists from key state bodies (especially the judiciary), had also ensued as the other pillar of that policy. And since Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath regime was heavily dependent on the Sunni minority to consolidate its rule, especially after 1990, the de-Ba'athification policy was perceived by the majority of Sunnis as an attempt to eradicate their political presence in any future Iraqi polity.⁶

The establishment of the Iraqi Governing Council in that same year also further alienated the Sunnis in Iraq. While the Governing Council did indeed include Sunni figures, unlike their Kurdish and Shia counterparts those Sunni personalities lacked any meaningful grass roots support and were viewed skeptically by members of their own sect. This was best reflected when Sunni factions decided to boycott the 2005 parliamentary elections, where in some Sunni-dominated regions like Anbar, for example, the voter turnout was as low as 2%.⁷ Sunni frustration with parliament was also illustrated later that year, when an overwhelming Sunni majority rejected the 2005 Constitution draft.⁸

kyleorton1991.wordpress.com/201512/12//the-islamic-state-was-coming-without-the-invasionof-iraq/

4 Lebanese Political Analyst Hazim al-Amin notes that all former Iraqi military and security personnel 4 who would later be recruited by IS and constitute its senior leadership had the rank of "colonel" or lower, an indicator, he believes, that reflects the growing influence of Islamism in Iraq after 1990, while the more senior military personnel--brigadier generals and higher--were indoctrinated by the Ba'ath Party's original national secularist ideology. Hazim al-Amin, "The Killing of Daesh's Second-in-Command," Al-Hayat, Aug. 30, 2015, <http://www.alhayat.com/Opinion/Hazem-AIAmin/10866804/%D985%D982%D8AA%D984-%D8B1%D8AC%D984-%C2AB%D8AF%D8A7%D8B9%D8B4C2BB-%D8A7%D984%D8AB%D8A7%D986%D98%A--%D8B9%D988%D8AF%D8A9-%D8A5%D984%D989-%D984%D8AD%D8B8%D8A9-%C2AB%D8A7%D984%D8AA%D988%D8AD%D8B4C2BB-%D8A7%D984%D8A8%D8B9%D8AB%D98A%D8A9>

5 Salah Al-Nasrawi, On Top of the Rubble: The End of the American Project in Iraq (in Arabic). Al-Mahrousa Center for Publication and Media Services, 2008.

6 Please refer to International Crisis Group's report, In Their Own Words: Reading the Iraqi Insurgency, 6 Feb. 2006 <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/iraq-iran-gulf/iraq/050-in-their-own-words-reading-the-iraqi-insurgency.aspx>.

7 Please refer to the Iraqi Parliamentary Election Entry in Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iraqi_parliamentary_election,_January_2005.

8 Please refer to the United States Institute for Peace Report, Iraq's Constitutional Process II: An Opportunity

Against such a background, the years between 2003 and 2005 saw the rise of the Iraqi insurgency, mostly comprised of Sunni factions that included former members of the security services of the Ba'ath regime, former military officers, and other Ba'ath party members.⁹ At the heart of that insurgency was the Iraqi branch of al-Qaeda, better known as the "Organization of Jihad's Base in Mesopotamia." And while the Ba'ath party was a self-proclaimed secular nationalist party, the Iraqi al-Qaeda group had successfully recruited members of the party, and gradually many Sunnis had started to define their political inspirations in a religious vocabulary.

This transformation is better explained by the interplay of several factors. Firstly, the newly-emerged political elite in Iraq after 2003 was dominated by members of religious Shia political parties such as the Islamic Dawa Party, the party of al-Maliki, the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, and the Sadrist Movement. The dominance of Islamic Shia parties, many of which had armed militias, has contributed to shaping Iraqi politics in the language of Shia political Islam, and thus inviting a similar reaction by Iraqi Sunnis.

Secondly, regional players, especially Iraq's neighbors, have heavily invested in perpetuating radical Islamism through channeling funds to extremist groups, providing recruits, training and lethal assistance, and adopting media discourses that only helped to further incite sectarian and religious divisions.¹⁰

Regional meddling and the hegemony of extremist discourses aside, the political and institutional developments that ensued following the December 2005 parliamentary elections and the selection of al-Maliki as prime minister six months later, remain the major causes behind the consolidation of the Islamic State group in Iraq's Sunni areas. Al-Maliki's exclusionary politics and concentration of powers have indeed turned Sunni regions into the perfect social incubator of the terrorist organization.

Al-Maliki's Reign and the Solidification of Terror

Throughout his eight-year tenure, al-Maliki implemented a divide-and-rule strategy that marginalized any credible Sunni leadership. That strategy was multifold and included political, legal and economic measures. Renowned politicians – mostly Sunni – have been cast aside pursuant to the Justice and Accountability Law¹¹ on the basis of alleged senior-level affiliation to the former Ba'ath party. Al-Maliki's control over the Justice and Accountability

Lost, Dec. 2005, <http://www.usip.org/publications/iraqs-constitutional-process-ii-opportunity-lost>

9 To better understand the role of Ba'athists, please refer to "How Saddam's Men Help Islamic State Rule," Reuters, Dec. 11, 2015, <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/mideast-crisis-iraq-islamicstate/>.

10 Henri Barkey, Scott Lasensky, and Phebe Marr, Iraq, Its Neighbors, and the United States: Competition, Crisis, and the Reordering of Power, US Institute of Peace Press, 2011.

11 In theory, the Justice and Accountability Law which was passed in January 2008 was intended to appease the Sunni minority which was dramatically impacted by the notorious de-Ba'athification law. The law allows for the reinstatement of former mid-ranking Ba'ath party cadres into government services after previously dismissing them on the basis of their party membership without any due legal process. In reality, however, al-Maliki controlled the Justice and Accountability Commission and re-enlisted only those whose loyalty he trusted. The manipulation of the law was particularly instrumental prior to the 2010 parliamentary elections when the Commission decided to disqualify more than 500 contenders, mostly Sunnis. For a more detailed analysis of the law, please refer to the Middle East Institute's report, De-Baathification in Iraq: How Not to Pursue Transitional Justice, Jan. 2014, <http://www.mei.edu/content/de-bathification-iraq-how-not-pursue-transitional-justice>

Commission only served his political ambitions for more power and contributed to further alienate moderate Sunni factions.

Prior to the 2010 parliamentary elections, for example, the Justice and Accountability Commission eliminated 70 candidates from the Sunni-backed National Iraqi Alliance (NIA) electoral list on grounds of past Ba'ath affiliation; though the excluded personalities included both Sunnis and Shias, the targeting of prominent Sunni politicians fortified the community's perceptions of political isolation. After the elections, the NIA, the large umbrella bloc led by former interim Prime Minister Iyad Allawi managed to garner the majority of votes. But the Iraqi Supreme Federal Court — composed of al-Maliki loyalists — exploited vague articles in the Constitution to provide an interpretation that enabled the al-Maliki bloc, the State of Law Coalition, to form the government despite coming second in the final overall election results.¹² Later, al-Maliki, pursued a policy of co-optation and intimidation, using the courts, financial promises and governmental appointments to expand his attack on the NIA. This signaled to Sunni constituencies that the formal political process would no longer provide them with peaceful and legitimate venues to influence policy-making.¹³ Sunni grievances were further exacerbated by enacting the Counterterrorism Law, which granted Shia-dominated security forces¹⁴ free hand in detaining Sunni activists, sometimes for months without charge. Al-Maliki's refusal to pass the General Amnesty Law reinforced the perception that Baghdad has been trying to alienate the Sunni minority.

In addition, the reluctance of al-Maliki's government to either integrate the Awakening Councils' militants, US-trained Sunni tribesmen who were largely credited with driving

12 Article 76 (1) of the 2005 Constitution states: 'The President of the Republic shall charge the nominee of the largest Council of Representatives bloc with the formation of the Council of Ministers within fifteen days from the date of the election of the President of the Republic.' Article 76, however, does not define the term 'bloc'. The NIA argued that Article 76 should grant the right to form a government to the party that won the largest number of seats; the State of Law coalition, on the other hand, argued that the provision should be interpreted to mean that the right to form a government fell to whichever parties could form the largest coalition after the election, even if the coalition did not include the party that won the largest number of seats. Eventually, the FSC adopted the State of Law's interpretation. Later, al-Maliki convinced smaller Shia factions to join force together, thus ensuring a majority during the vote of confidence.

13 Please refer to International Crisis Group's report, *Make or Break: Iraq's Sunnis and the State*, Aug 2013, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/iraq/make-or-break-iraq-s-sunnis-and-state>

14 Security conditions in Iraq were further complicated following the capture of Mosul by IS militants in June 2014, and the subsequent collapse of the Iraqi military. In order to protect their areas, dozens of Shia militias joined forces and declared the establishment of the Popular Mobilization Forces to coordinate their military activities. Despite Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi's repeated assertions that the Forces function under his government's supervision, many reports suggest otherwise, stirring speculations of uncontrolled military conduct and potential interfering in politics. On September 20, 2015, Human Rights Watch issued a 60-page report, analyzing the conduct of the Forces. The report levels accusations at particularly two armed groups within the umbrella organization and holds them responsible for the destruction of hundreds of civilian buildings in Tikrit with no military significance, signaling possible acts of unlawful retribution. Please see Human Rights Watch, *Ruinous Aftermath: Militias Abuses Following Iraq's Recapture of Tikrit*, <https://www.hrw.org/node/281164>. Other reports suggest that some of these militias have been growing more influential in dictating security and political matters in Shia-dominated areas, a potentially serious problem that can render the central government irrelevant. See, for example, Niqash Website's analysis, "After ISIL? Shiite Militias begin Entering Iraqi Politics," July 30, 2015, <http://www.niqash.org/en/articles/politics/5067/With-an-Eye-on-Future-Controversial-Militias-Perfect-Their-Political-Poses.htm>. Equally alarming is the Iranian role in arming, training, and controlling these Shia militias. That Iranian level of engagement has only contributed to the Islamic State's discourse that Iranian and Iraqi Shia forces have been trying to root out Sunnis, or at best drastically marginalize them politically. To better understand the Iranian role, see The Center for American and Arab Studies' analysis, "The Iraqi Offensive against ISIS: Ramifications and Possibilities," March 2015, <http://thinktankmonitor.org/analysis-032015-06-/>

away IS' terrorist fighters from urban centers into the desert between 2006 and 2009, into existing Iraqi security forces, or to continue paying their salaries and allow them to police their neighborhoods, had emphasized Baghdad's unwillingness to accommodate Sunnis, and would later push those militants, now unemployed and disenchanting, to join ranks with IS.¹⁵

Numerous international and local human rights groups have exposed the country's judicial system under al-Maliki and reported its flaws that included judicial appointments based on confessional rather than professional credentials, the systematic use of warrantless arrests, prolonged detentions without being taken before a judge, and security forces' use of torture, rape and other abuses during interrogations. In many cases, detainees claimed that they had been convicted on terrorism charges entirely based on testimony given to the court by a secret informant, whom they were not able to challenge.¹⁶

Sunnis, feeling left out by the political process, initially sought peaceful means to express their concerns and grievances by staging a series of protests and sit-ins in Sunni-dominated areas in 2012 and 2013. Instead of negotiating with leaders of the protest movement to reach a political compromise, al-Maliki government resorted to heavy-handed tactics to contain the protest movement by dispersing demonstrations by force and detaining and jailing its leaders. This forced Sunnis to pursue their political agenda through violent organizations, whether through Islamic State, or other smaller jihadi groups.¹⁷

Conclusions

Despite successful military campaigns by Iraqi government forces, backed by Shia militias and US-led Coalition air forces, to re-capture key cities throughout 2015, especially Tikrit and Mosul, the complete defeat of IS remains a far-fetched possibility in the medium-term. Unlike its earlier versions, IS has now been completely transformed from being a mere terrorist organization, present in rural areas or operating via loose networks of sleeper cells, into a pseudo-state, representing Sunnis, not only in Iraq, but in neighboring Syria as well. They have managed to either incorporate all key previous insurgent groups into their military and security structures, or obliterate the small factions that refused to join their ranks. They have developed sophisticated military, security, financial, and administrative structures, both material and discursive, which only resemble those of a proper nation-state. So far they have also proved to be extremely adaptive to chal-

15 For an interesting analysis on the fallout between Baghdad and the Awakening Council leaders and militants, please refer to International Crisis Group's report, Iraq: Falluja's Faustian Bargain, Apr. 2014, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/iraq-iran-gulf/iraq/150-iraq-falluja-sfaustian-bargain.aspx>

16 Please refer to Human Rights Watch's report, Iraq: Executions Surge but No Action on Reform: Promises to Improve Justice System Followed by Spate of Judicial Killings, Apr. 2013, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/25/04/iraq-executions-surge-no-action-reform>. Interestingly, nine of the top IS commanders, including its leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, spent sometime in the notorious Camp Bucca Prison. But like similar prison experience in history, it remains unclear to what degree their imprisonment conditions had actually contributed to their radicalization. For more details, please see the "Camp Bucca: The US prison that Became the Birthplace of Isis," The Independent, Nov. 4, 2014, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/camp-bucca-the-us-prison-that-became-the-birthplace-of-isis-9838905.html>

17 International Crisis Group, Make or Break: Iraq's Sunnis and the State, Aug 2013, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/iraq/make-or-break-iraq-s-sunnis-and-state>

lenging circumstances. When their black market oil supply chains were targeted, they developed elaborate schemes to raise tax revenues. They also introduced mandatory conscription to counterweigh the decrease in the influx of foreign fighters. Their indoctrination programs are comprehensive. Their Wahabi version of Islam is not only broadcast in their own media outlets, or preached via their mosques, but is also taught in university and school curricula. The language of their bureaucratic machinery, be it in the police, the judiciary, and other financial and administrative institutions, is heavily derived from traditional medieval Islamic sources.¹⁸

But most importantly, however, is that the root causes of their existence remain unchanged. The very nature of Iraq's polity, its ethnic and sect-based quota system, dysfunctional federal arrangements, high concentration of political and economic powers in the executive, and unprofessional and sectarian security forces are still intact. And there is nothing on the horizon which indicates a positive shifting trend. Iraqi political elites remain divided along ethnic and religious lines. A regional and international consensus to keep Iraq a united country is absent, and developments in the region, especially with the escalating tension between Iran and Saudi Arabia, are more likely to further fuel religious rifts in the country. To further complicate matters, the decline in oil prices, a trend that is predicted to continue until 2020, will further worsen the living conditions in a country heavily dependent on oil revenues and which has the world's largest government bureaucracy in proportion to its population.

18 For detailed examination of the nature and structures of IS, see "ISIS' Social Contract," Foreign Affairs, Jan. 10, 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/syria/201610-01-/isis-social-contract>, and "How to Defeat ISIS," Foreign Affairs, Jan. 4, 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/syria/201604-01-/how-defeat-isis>



TERRORISM IN SYRIA:
ORIGINS AND TRAJECTORY

ANWAR AL-BOUNNI

Terrorism in Syria: Origins and Trajectory

Anwar Al-bounni ¹

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Introduction

Syria had not experienced terrorism until the late 1970s, when the Muslim Brotherhood-associated Fighting Vanguard, also known as the Marwan Hadid Group, carried out a series of assassinations,² most famously of officer Mohammed Gharra in Hama. The group was also accused of assassinating the leading scholar of constitutional law, Mohammed al-Fadel, who tailored the Syrian constitution of 1972 to fit Hafez al-Assad, unleashing a major wave of protests. The Fighting Vanguard were also accused of carrying out several attacks in various Syrian provinces, the most notorious of which was the Aleppo Artillery School massacre, where an Islamist officer opened fire on his colleagues, killing some 80 cadets and non-commissioned officers.

Those attacks coincided with a wave of popular protests against the Ba'ath rule and popular action for civil liberties. However the attacks by the Fighting Vanguard provided the regime with a pretext to launch a brutal crackdown in the rebelling provinces of Hama, Idlib, and Aleppo; destroying more than half the city of Hama and killing more than 40,000 civilians. In Aleppo, two neighborhoods were razed, in addition to the destruction of several neighborhoods in Idlib and Jisr al-Shughur. As a result, the shadow of oppression lingered over Syria for the following several decades. The belief that Assad and his security apparatus contributed to the rise of the Fighting Vanguard and facilitated its missions, with the purpose of using their activities as an exculpation from the ferocious crushing of the Syrian society's peaceful dissent, is yet to be prove.

Terrorism as a Tool of Governance and Foreign Relations

This escalation of events, ushered in a new era of terrorism in Syria, one that was carried out by the political-security regime against Syrian society, and then against the region. The regime maintained influence over the Palestinian cause through terrorism, encouraging Palestinian factions to break away from the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), the legitimate representative of the Palestinians. The Syrian regime, using its terroristic tools, cornered the leadership of the PLO and its supporting community in Lebanon several times, committing massacres. Over various phases, Syria sponsored groups such as Abu Nidal's group (known as Revolutionary Fath), Fath alIntifada, and Ahmed

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² The Fighting Vanguard, or the Marwan Hadid Group, was named after a leading Muslim Brother who was killed by the Syrian authorities in Hama following major protests against the military coup and the Ba'ath Party's rise to power. These protests demanded a return to the constitution and the exercise of civil liberties. Hadid died in the Mazza Military Prison in 1976.

Jibril's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine General Command. The latter two groups are currently participating in the siege of the Yarmouk refugee camp near Damascus, shelling it and killing its residents. Another Syrian-sponsored group, Fath al-Islam, a few years ago brought the Nahr al-Barid camp in northern Lebanon to a humanitarian disaster.

For decades, Lebanon, which was seen as Syria's trump card, was also a major arena for the Syrian regime's regional terrorism, where it constantly meddled in the country's conflicts. Seeing that there is no room in this paper to fully explore the heinous actions committed against the Lebanese, we shall suffice with a few examples. Broadly speaking, the Syrian regime's actions were focused on killing dissidents, playing off warring factions against one another, and holding the present and future of Lebanon hostage as a bargaining chip with regional and international powers. To this end, the regime supported extremist forces, most prominently Hezbollah, over the last three decades, excluding and terrorizing the democratic forces which were allied with the resistance against the Israeli occupation in southern Lebanon, and which proposed democratic solutions to Lebanon's domestic conflict. The regime, with Hezbollah, thus assumed a monopoly over the resistance in order to control the border with Israel and subordinate the resistance to its own interests.

Using the same terroristic methodology, the Syrian regime manipulated the Kurdish crisis in Syria, Turkey, and Iraq. While the regime suppressed peaceful, democratic Syrian Kurdish parties, it sponsored the terrorist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and utilized it as a foreign policy card, especially against Turkey. Naturally, throughout its history, the security regime embraced various international terrorists fleeing their own countries, among them fugitive Nazis, to use them to its advantage whenever possible.³

Those practices and policies took place with the full knowledge and often silence—at times, even encouragement—of international super powers, leading many of us to believe that state terrorism had its own international protectors and sponsors that ensured its immunity to serve their common interests. It seems that the super powers capitalized on terrorism and allowed the Syrian regime to continue to terrorize the Syrian society to exercise influence over the region, which the Syrians, Palestinians, and Lebanese, as well as the Iraqi and Turkish peoples have paid a high price for at various stages.

Hafez al-Assad and his regime benefited from this international immunity, to consolidate his control over Lebanon by terrorizing and killing opponents; the most prominent victims are Kamal Jumblat and Rafiq al-Hariri, but this also extended to dozens of leaders and intellectuals and thousands of ordinary Lebanese citizens. The regime also established numerous terrorist groups, among them Jund al-Sham. When the international community took the decision to put an end to the civil war in Lebanon, the Syrian regime turned the Palestinian camps into reservoirs of violence ready to explode and engulf all of Lebanon whenever the regime wished. At this point, Syria's support for PKK's terrorism proved to be too much for Turkey, whose government threatened to invade Syria. Hafez al-Assad

³ Jenny Awford, From Hitler to Assad: How one of the world's most wanted Nazis was secretly employed by Syria as an agent of terror, The Daily Mail, 6/20/14/12/ Available at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2863568/From-Hitler-Assad-one-world-s-wanted-Nazis-secretly-employed-Syria-agent-terror.html#ixzz3ulq8ZzEI>

meekly submitted, suspending PKK actions and expelling the party's leader, Abdullah Ocalan, who had directed operations inside Turkey from his base in Syria.

The younger Assad followed in his father's footsteps, sponsoring and supporting terrorism through his state apparatus. As protests gained steam in Lebanon demanding the withdrawal of the Syrian army, he used terrorism to assassinate opposition figures. More than ten assassinations bore the clear imprints of the Assad regime, most notoriously the assassination of Lebanon's Prime Minister at the time, Rafiq al-Hariri. Assad's action however backfired and ultimately forced a Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon. Still, Assad was not deterred. His regime groomed Shaker al-Abasi, a former prisoner, and released him to establish Fath al-Islam, again using terrorism as means to meddle in Lebanon. It was hoped that the group would conduct terrorist activities, which would be contained by the Syrian regime's own tools among them Hezbollah thus restoring a direct Syrian role in Lebanon. When this plan failed, and facing attempts by the Lebanese state to assert its sovereignty, Syria, in coordination with Iran, unleashed the terrorism of Hezbollah on Beirut and Mt. Lebanon on May 7, 2008. Hezbollah's challenge to state authority in the public sphere, in preparation for seizing and controlling the levers of the state, was an alternative to direct Syrian occupation; though Syria had been forced to withdraw militarily from Lebanon, the regime had not withdrawn its security apparatus.

The events in Lebanon coincided with violent transformations in Iraq. With the beginning of the US-led military operations and the fall of Saddam Hussein, the Syrian dictatorship feared it would be next. As a result, it unleashed its weapon of terrorism, deploying Islamist jihadis and sending al-Qaeda elements who had been locked away in Syrian prisons into Iraq. Cooperating with terrorist organizations operating in Iraq, such as the remnants of the Ba'ath Party and Islamist extremists, the regime launched a war of attrition on the US army in Iraq, inflamed sectarian passions, and undermined the political process, using these elements as tools to ensure its own continuity and preserve its regional political role.

While this is only a very brief overview, it may help answer the question of how terrorism began in Syria. It demonstrates that the Syrian regime worked to create, foster, and sponsor terrorism abroad, while creating a climate for terrorism within Syria by mobilizing extremism in local contexts to achieve its foreign policy. These actions stoked animosity between Syrians as well, which facilitated the regime's control of the population and fostered terrorism through wide-scale, grave human rights violations.

Creating Terrorism Through Abuses

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights upholds several rights that cannot be violated or denied except under certain specific conditions and circumstances. But four of these fundamental rights are absolutely inalienable under any circumstances or pretext: the right to life; the rights to equality, non-discrimination, and a fair trial; the right of expression and opinion; and the right of legal personhood.

These rights have been repeatedly violated in Syria.

The right to life in Assad's Syria is a gift to Syrian citizens; they live only because Assad permits them to live. In Syria, this right is not inalienable, but contingent on loyalty to Assad himself. The authorities can sentence any citizen to death, whether through direct assassination or indirectly by the regime's shabiha, the secret police, or through death in detention without trial, which has been the fate of thousands of people—myself included as two failed attempts on my life were made in prison. Citizens may also be tried in Military Field Tribunals or the State Security Court, which have sentenced thousands of people to death for their opposition to the regime.

As to *the right to equality, non-discrimination, and a fair trial*, equality exists only within the narrow confines of the letters of the Syrian constitution. There is no legal means to compel the authorities to respect and apply it. Legal discrimination against those who oppose the regime is present in all areas of life in Syria, starting in primary

school, where students are forced to be "Ba'ath vanguards." Preparatory and secondary schools are the site of the paramilitary Revolutionary Youth, and the educational system starting at this level (age 13–15) includes weekly military training. Loyalists are given preferential entry to Syrian universities, and this discrimination extends in various forms to all areas of collective and individual life. To obtain a job in the government sector, security approval is mandatory and a rejection costs public servants their positions. Preference is given to Ba'athists in all cases, determined on the basis of a network of connections run by the ruling authority. Employment in the private sector is similarly dependent on security approval, seeing that employers may encounter problems with the authorities if they employ regime opponents. In any case, businesses cannot operate at all without a protector within the ruling authority to whom business owners pay kickbacks to ensure security approval of their enterprise and facilitate the necessary paperwork.

Exceptional courts govern all aspects of economic, social, and political life in Syria, from State Security Court and the Military Field Tribunal, to worker disciplinary committees, committees determining wages for agricultural work, property survey committees, and the property claims courts. The entire Supreme Judiciary Council is under the control of the head of the regime, who is also the general commander of the army. He has the right to issue laws and statutes, announce general amnesties, and appoint ministers. He is also the president of the Supreme Judiciary Council, in accordance with legal amendments introduced by Hafez al-Assad. In this, he is supported by the minister of justice, the deputy minister of justice, the head of the judicial inspection agency, the public prosecutor, the head of the Court of Cassation, and the two most senior judges on that court. In addition, judicial appointments require the approval of all four principal security agencies.

The right of legal personhood: Syrians have the right to nationality through birth and registration, but the authorities manipulate this right to exclude it from the purview of the courts, using it as a tool of control. The executive authority has the right to withdraw the citizenship of any Syrian by presidential decree pursuant to the recommendation of the minister of interior, as well as grant citizenship by decree. The authorities have manipulated this right especially in regards to the Kurds. In 1962, the regime conducted an exceptional, unannounced, one-day census in Hasaka, accepting no subsequent objections to it. More than 50,000 Syrians living in the area were not counted in the census and thus

denied citizenship. Today they number more than 300,000, living either with documents classifying them as foreigners or as the children of parents denied citizenship and thus unable to officially register them. In other words, more than 300,000 Syrians are currently living without legal personhood. Both Assads have exploited this to control and manipulate the Kurdish issue to serve their own political interests and cement their authority.

The Syrian regime's reputation in regards to *the right of freedom of expression and opinion* precedes it. For many years, Syria has been classified as one of the states most hostile to freedom of expression and opinion by all international organizations concerned with the matter. After his military coup, Hafez al-Assad inaugurated his rule by imposing a state of emergency and instituting measures to control public life from all aspects. Assad prohibited all political parties except for those existing under the umbrella of the National Progressive Front, led by the Ba'ath Party. He banned the formation of civic associations and dissolved existing groups. All old press licenses were revoked and new ones were only issued to the state and Ba'ath's papers, which were tightly controlled by his instruments in the National Front. He also prohibited assemblies of more than three people in public places as well as any meeting in a private place or home. Private radio and television were banned and the appointment of television and foreign news correspondents dependent on security-administrative permits issued by the ministry of information. And finally, people of independent opinions were arrested and detained.

The Option of Terrorism to Confront Popular Demands

While the regime was releasing hardened terrorists and extremists from its prisons to justify its brutality, it refused to release peaceful activists, and instead killed them in its prisons and detention centers. In the late 1970s, Hafez al-Assad allowed the Fighting Vanguard free rein of action and used this as a pretext for his subsequent crackdown. His son pursued the same tactic, releasing terrorists from Syrian prisons who were used by him to fight Americans in Iraq. Assad's ally, Iraq's former Prime Minister, Nouri al-Maliki, similarly allowed terrorists to "escape" from Iraqi prisons. Sponsored and funded by Iran, terrorists undermined the people's demands for freedom and dignity, and justified the Syrian regime's unprecedented brutality against his own people.

The regime exploited the cooperation and support of the international community for its ostensible war on terror. The international community's reluctant position on accountability and punishment for crimes was shelved in favor of an approach based solely on political solutions, which neatly fit into the regime's game. In fact, this had a role in fostering the belief, not only among the regime but among all players, that the international community's political solutions would encompass and cover all crimes. In turn, there was no deterrent to engaging in the most heinous acts with the political resolution, ultimately, wiping the slate clean. The international community's feeble stance on human rights crimes and violations, encouraged states like Iran and Russia, many Syrians, and foreign jihadists — including Hezbollah and Lebanese Shia groups as well as al-Qaeda jihadists — to kill, destroy, and commit crimes with impunity.

Kurdish extremists saw this a chance to enforce their own separatist agenda on the Syrian Kurds and the Syrian people, forming a militia aided by the regime to control areas under their influence and commit various crimes against Kurds and Arabs. Kurdish extremists engaged in ethnic cleansing, as a response to the policies of Arabization and forced displacement of Kurds, which were undertaken by the regime in the same areas in the 1960s.

Neighboring countries, Iran, Hezbollah, and Iraqi Shia groups saw it as an opportunity to engage in demographic cleansing in the areas under their control, engaging in Shia proselytization and killing those who did not comply. But this was not seen as a problem; after all, the international community had said that everyone would be a part of the future political resolution, which would cover up all their crimes. In fact, this only shored up their belief that the more Syrian blood they shed the greater chance they, like the regime, had for a seat at the negotiating table. The Lebanese example showed that the warlords of murder, and destruction became the lords of politics and diplomacy. Sudan, also offered another example; although Bashir had committed war crimes and was named in an arrest warrant from the International Criminal Court, he continued to occupy the presidency and meet leaders of the international community shamelessly.

Terrorism as a Byproduct of International Silence

Human rights violations in Syria, perpetrated with no action from the international community, preceded the Arab Spring, which began in Tunisia and spread to reach Syria, where the Syrian people felt that the time had come to shake off forty years of servitude. But the Syrian authorities met the uprising with the harshest types of state terrorism. It used its army directly to suppress the peaceful uprising from its earliest days in March 2011 in De-
raa province and eventually sieged it with tanks later that month.

Once more the international community stood idly by as the regime used the most violent, vicious forms of terrorism against its own people. In fact, it has consistently encouraged Assad's rule by declaring that it will not intervene to stop the bloodbath. The international super powers remained silent about crimes and impeded any attempts of holding criminals accountable. The tragedy has persisted for months and years while the international community watched the killing and destruction, perpetrated with the most lethal weapons and in the most heinous ways; it is as if it is watching a film that means nothing. Feelings of popular resentment have therefore festered, spite grew out of hope, and extremism increased as the regime killed peaceful, democratic activists who were fought by all states.

The bloody regime has dropped more than 5,250 barrel bomb over Syrian territories, including 2,000 after the issuance of UN Security Council Resolution 2139 of February 22, 2014. Barrel bombs have killed more than 12,500 people, among them 7,000 after the issuance of Resolution 2139 almost two years ago. Around 90 percent of those victims were civilians and 52 percent were women and children. Nevertheless, the international community continues to watch those crimes and the human tragedy without taking action to stop them and hold the perpetrators to account. All the statements and declarations it has issued are mere words, which were neither respected nor observed by anyone, even those who issue them.

After the UN Security Council issued resolutions prohibiting the use of chemical weapons, the Syrian regime again used such weapons more than 40 times. Despite these flagrant breaches of international resolutions, no one has taken a stance. Despite more than 300,000 victims and 3.5 million injured, the international community observes the carnage mutely, its only reaction was statements of condemnation. There is no attempt to even notify those committing the crimes that they may be prosecuted and pay the price for their deeds and that justice for the victims is coming.

Conclusion

The Syrian people, let down by the entire international community as it watched the regime massacre them, has renounced the values and principles to which the international community pays lip service to. In this context, they have become more than receptive to any savior under any banner who will defend their existence and sustain them.

I want you to imagine that every hour, two prisoners die in Syrian detention facilities from torture or inhumane conditions, over a period of suffering in which they wished to have died hundreds of times.

I want you to imagine the mothers, wives, and children of detainees held for months or perhaps years with no word of them. These women move from one security branch to another bearing photos of their loved ones—perhaps a detainee who's been released can tell them if they have encountered their relatives in prison. Maybe this detainee can reassure them that their relatives are still alive. These women are extorted by military and security personnel or go-betweens and lawyers linked to the security and military apparatus, who may offer information about a detainee's whereabouts, health status, or trial in exchange for large sums of money.

I want you to imagine a detention cell no bigger than 20 squared meters filled with more than 200 detainees who stand for days and weeks because there is no room to lie down or sit. The lucky ones are those who can lean on a wall. Imagine that they are subject to torture, including beatings, stress positions, suspension, electrocution, rape, starvation, and denial of medical care. Human rights organizations estimate that more than 50,000 detainees have died thus far due to torture and inhumane conditions in such facilities.

The fate of more than 150,000 detainees remains unknown. Most of them were arrested at military and security checkpoints, during security raids of residential quarters in areas under regime control, or in military raids of areas that slipped out of regime control. In most, men and youth are arbitrarily detained. Their loved ones have no news of them and they are not permitted visits or to contact attorneys. They spend months and years missing, without charge or trial, or even any news of their status. Despite some processes of reconciliation in certain areas, the authorities refuse to release detainees; even when demands are limited to female detainees, the authorities have refused, though they may occasionally release some long-term detainees. More than 3,000 women are still detained, and at times entire families are arrested, including women and children who are just a few months old.

Imagine the thousands of peaceful activists, hundreds of journalists, hundreds of doctors and pharmacists, the dozens of lawyers who are still detained. The amnesties have all covered people who bore arms, but not these peaceful activists.

See for a moment with the civilians who die in their sleep from toxic chemical gasses. Be with the father who searches for the body parts of his family under the rubble after a barrel bomb. Wait for some charity or benevolence from countries of refuge so you can feed your children or get a tent or a roof to take shelter under.

Imagine yourself without shelter after a barrel bomb or a mortar shell destroys the house which you spent your life building. Live for just one day under a full siege that prevents you from moving or finding a piece of bread, where your children may die of starvation or sickness in the absence of medicine that could save them. This is just a partial picture of the reality of the Syrian people's tragedies and suffering.

I want to add another fact: Syrian law prohibits the prosecution of any security, army, or police personnel without the prior approval of his superior, giving all security personnel immunity against punishment for their crimes, and enabling them to commit more.

I want you to put yourself now in the place of a people—half of them refugees and displaced persons without shelter, income, or aid—and imagine that groups of extremist, most of them from outside the country, come to rule, imposing their ideas and terrorizing, kidnapping, and killing peaceful activist and journalists. Then I want you to answer this question: where does all this unprecedented violence and terrorism come from and how can we fight it?

Extremist ideas have been imposed by violence throughout history. There is always someone who believes in them and in violence and justifies this with reference to noble objectives, higher interests, or divine commandments. Dictatorships have used them throughout history and have used terrorism to eliminate their enemies. Organizations and states have taken up terrorism under cover of nationalist slogans such as liberation, independence, and national unity.

The problem is not the extremist ideas; they exist in every religion, ideology, and political, intellectual, and belief system. They exist in every society and every age, but they were always crimes that were opposed on any grounds. The problem is finding an environment and a social, political, and cultural incubators to fosters those ideas. The problem is when human rights violations entail such degradation, poverty, and insult with no chance of self-defense or claiming rights through legitimate means— when all legal and peaceful avenues are blocked. People then turn to hidden divine or sacred forces to help them endure and become receptive to the ideas of extremists, who exploit the situation to achieve their own goals, facilitating the rise of an environment conducive to terrorism and extremism.

The bigger problem is that the international community does not prevent terrorism conducted by states against their own people or others citing the pretext of legitimacy, international relations, and interests. It focuses its efforts on symptoms while sidelining real terrorism or its main drivers, nourishing and fostering it. Terrorism then, only grows more extreme, more brutal, and the whole world enters into a vicious cycle that everyone suf-

fers from. The truth is that if the issue is not addressed in a genuine fashion, the coming years will be a catastrophe for everyone.

Extremist thought needs an opposing extremist thought to justify its existence. Each side uses the other's violent extremism to justify their own conduct and mobilize supporters. They are two sides of the same coin; they need one another, and if one side did not exist, the other would create it. This is what dictatorships have done and continue to do, creating the monster of terrorism either directly or indirectly as a result of their brutal oppression.

What could possibly be a more propitious climate than that which oppression, injustice, and degradation are rampant, and where justice and means of peaceful expression are absent? When real justice is absent, or is made absent, victims turn to other means to claim their rights, and who can blame them when faced with international neglect and incapacity?

There are those in Syria who are manufacturing terrorism by creating the necessary climate for it to thrive and providing the fuel to keep it going.

There are factories of death and terrorism in detention centers, in the air of poison gas, and in siege and starvation under the threat of barrel bombs. There can be no talk of combating terrorism or initiating any political resolution to the Syrian crisis before putting an end to this.

The international community is actually participating in the manufacturing of terrorism by standing by and taking no action to stop crimes being committed. It is doing so by precluding justice for victims and failing to send the message that criminals will be held accountable for their crimes and that there is no escape from punishment. When the international community does take action, it does so partially, employing selective justice by ignoring some crimes and focusing on others. This selectivity judges crimes based on the perpetrators, their religion, nationality, or politics, or based on the religion and nationality of the victim. Major crimes are thus overlooked if their perpetrators hold aloft the banner of secularism or the protection of minorities, or if the victim is of a certain religion. The heart of the problem is the selectivity and distinction made between terrorism committed by a state -and its armyagainst its people (which is overlooked) and the terrorism of small, armed groups against the same people.

When the Syrian regime killed more than 200,000 people and destroyed half of Syria over three years, the international community waffled, citing the stance of Russia and China and the difficulty of reaching an international position. Yet when ISIS killed no more than dozens of people, among them foreigners, the international community did not wait for Russia, China, or Security Council resolutions, but formed a military alliance and began striking in less than a week.

The selectivity of dealing with the Syrian regime despite the crimes and acts of terrorism it has committed -against its own people and others in the regionfor over 40 years instead of holding it accountable, creates terrorism and fosters its conducive environment. The consequences will be dire as it encourages the regime to commit more crimes and stoke resentment, which breeds more counter terrorism and more violence.

The entire international community is implicated in the creation and support of terrorism. There can never be ranking or preference between terrorism. Any discourse that does not respond to the basic principles of human rights, especially the principle of justice for all and the universality of human rights regardless of the identity, religion, sect, or nationalities of the criminal and the victim, and does not include a commitment to combat terrorism regardless of the identity, religion, or nationality of the perpetrator and the victim will only fuel more terrorism. Such a discourse or action will be meaningless; it is a futile waste of time at the expense of the blood and suffering of the Syrian people. It will only create more terrorism and threaten the global peace and security for which you are responsible.



SINAI: STATE, SOCIETY, AND TERRORISM

MOSSAD ABO FAJR

Sinai: State, Society, and Terrorism

Mossad Abo Fajr¹

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Introduction

“The Bedouin of Sinai hold Islam as their religion, but none of them know the rules of Islam. In fact, none among them know the rules of prayer. I’ve mixed with them for several years and haven’t seen any of them pray, aside from a handful who had mixed in the cities. Those who do, don’t pray at the five ordained times, but whenever it occurs to them to pray. Were it not for their celebration of the Feast of the Sacrifice (Eid al-Adha), and their mentioning of the Prophet, swearing to him, and saying prayers for him, I wouldn’t have known that they were Muslims.” Those lines were written by Naoum Shuqeir in his book on The Ancient and Modern History of Sinai and its Geography. Written in 1916, the book is considered the most significant, and perhaps the first, reference on Sinai today.

Shuqeir adds, “In their desert lie dozens of tombs of saints. They commend them with religious respect, swear oaths and solemn vows to them, and visit them every year.

When visiting them, they illuminate their tombs and make sacrifices, camels to the prophets amongst them and sheep or goats for the saints. The prophets are the Prophet Aaron, the Prophet Saleh, the Prophet Abu Taleb, and the Prophet Moses. All of them in the lands of al-Tur (known today as southern Sinai).”

In the foregoing excerpt, Shuqeir seems to be saying that not only do the Bedouin care little about religion, but that they have virtually formed their own. There is no prophet by the name of Abu Taleb in Islam, unless perhaps the reference is to Prophet Mohammed’s uncle, who is not a prophet anyway.

More importantly, this excerpt raises a basic question: when did religion in its current form begin to penetrate Sinai, ultimately turning it into, as prominent US Republican Senator John McCain has said, one of the most violent fronts with ISIS.

The foundations of terrorism in Sinai, as we see today, were certainly formed over several phases, three of which will be discussed in this paper.

The First Phase

When the Muslim Brotherhood left Egyptian cities and villages to fight in Palestine in 1948, they naturally passed through Sinai, and used it as a transit point. The Brotherhood contacted some families in Arish, among them was al-Sherif clan, whose origins are traced to Prophet Mohammed. One of the family’s members was Sheikh Kamel al-Sherif, who later fled to Jordan after the Brotherhood’s clash with President Gamal

¹ Mossad Abu Fajr is an Egyptian activist from Sinai

Abd al-Nasser and ended up becoming the Jordanian minister of Religious Endowments. The Brotherhood did not just simply use these families as their transit stations, but also recruited from them and trained them using weaponry in areas of Central Sinai, such as Sadd al-Rawafia. Hassan al-Banna, the Brotherhood's founder and first General Guide of the, chose Kamel al-Sherif as a general commander for their brigades in Palestine, who later wrote a book about the Brotherhood's combat experience in Palestine, titled *The Brotherhood and the Palestine War*, considered the first reference on the topic.

The Second phase

At a panel discussion at the Tagammu Party headquarters in Cairo, Amin al-Huweidi, the head of General Intelligence in the Nasser era, spoke about the two biggest challenges to the officers' coup of 1952. One of these was the Black Hand, an extremist Palestinian nationalist organization that successfully infiltrated Sinai and recruited from its residents. The recruits launched successive cross-border attacks on Israel from Sinai, causing the nascent Egyptian state embarrassment, leading to the decision of eliminating the group.

The state used several tactics in this war, one of which was flooding the area with drugs. More importantly, however, it sponsored a sheikh from Khan Younes in the Gaza Strip, to spread the Ahmediya Sufi order. Remnants of this order still exist in Sinai today, most significantly the shrine of Sheikh Salman Bin Arada in Sheikh Zuweid. In the 1950s and 60s, this Sufi order grew and maintained many places of worship, evolving into a paramilitary organization that used force to "enjoin the good and forbid the evil." This was reflected in a song, sung by Bedouin girls at the time, that started: "and a religious man has prayer beads in his hand because his masters want him to" which gave expression to their anger towards the order and its members, who prohibited them from celebrating and dancing at feasts.

The Sufi order was not only hostile against women. It also undermined numerous cultural values of the local community, such as ways of celebrating feasts. It even touched one of the principal Bedouin values, hospitality. Traditionally the Bedouin would meet guests in their homes or the tribal meeting place, but the order forced them to meet guests in the *zawiya*, or religious space. It also compelled the Bedouin to pray and fast. The internal intelligence office of the order began monitoring Bedouin men's observance of religious rites, fostering hypocrisy among the tribesmen. Some would fast in public and still break the fast in private, fearing punishment from the order's leaders, most of whom were previous leaders of the Black Hand, such as Sheikh Khalaf al-Khalfat.

This violent conduct was more than what the Bedouins could bear, and prompted some of the Bedouins to rebel. Perhaps believing it had gone too far, General Intelligence sent Abu Ahmed back to Khan Younes and created a schism within the order led by Sheikh Eid Abu Jarir, a man known for his deep ties to intelligence. After the Egyptian defeat in the Six-Day War in 1967, Abu Jarir helped the Egyptian state recruit several men of the order as fighters in the Arab Sinai Organization, created by Egyptian intelligence after the defeat to launch attacks against Israel and their collaborators in Sinai. As a result, the Bedouin became too frightened to accompany Israelis, even when buying goods at the market.

The Third Phase

In the 1980s and 90s, the Bedouins who had gone to Egyptian universities returned, bringing with them what the Bedouin described as a “new religion.” The returning Bedouins were influenced by Wahhabi Salafism, which later produced ISIS or the Sinai Province fighters. These fighters are described by Israeli media as the most violent and boldest of the ISIS fighters.

The State’s Relationship to Sinai

“Sinai is a bone with a little meat on it. I want to gnaw off the meat and toss the bone.” According to Mohammed Hassanein Haikal, in his book *The Secret Negotiations Between the Arabs and Israel*, President Sadat spoke those words, in reference to the Suez Canal and oil. This suggestive phrase perfectly captures the Egyptian state’s relationship with the Sinai Peninsula. The state only considered the inhabitants of Sinai Egyptians on paper, which led it to demonize them. The Sinai poet Salem Abu Shabana explained: “I’m a Bedouin, the deceptive trickster, the drug runner, the one who steals the shoes of soldiers of the imaginary battle.”

This stereotype is reflected in Egyptian media, film, and television serials, where Bedouins are typically drug traffickers or Israeli spies. A movie released after the 2011 uprising also projected the image that Bedouin women work as prostitutes, sparking anger among the Bedouin community, many of whom met in the Nuweiba mountains to consider a response. Being present at that meeting, I explained that art should not be met with violence and that violence was the final means by which a person claims his right in our era, defusing the highly charged situation.

The state’s distorted outlook, aptly summarized by Sadat, has led it to approach Sinai tribes as potential and presumed enemies. Instead of devising development plans that would advance the community and bring socioeconomic stability, the state opted to infiltrate these communities. Such infiltration could only be carried out by disman-

fling the local social, cultural, economic, and political structures. The state therefore focused on two primary tools: religion and drug trafficking, or smuggling in general.

Not only did the Egyptian state fail to consider development plans for Sinai; it also prevented others from doing so. A European ambassador told me that his country had proposed the construction of mobile hospitals, wells, and tourism schools, but the Egyptian bureaucracy impeded the plans until they were dropped. The ambassador was appalled at the state’s reaction to development projects aimed at the local communities in Sinai.

While the Egyptian state did not perceive Sinai’s residents as Egyptian citizens, Bedouin tribes did not attempt to counter this distorted outlook by struggling for their rights as citizens of Egypt. In fact, they too did not consider themselves Egyptians.

This was noted by Israeli journalist Ehud Yaari in a lecture at the Washington Institute in 2011.²

² Ehud Yaari and Normand St. Pierre discussed the emergence of Sinai as a new frontier of conflict in the region and what could be done to arrest this development at a Washington Institute policy forum on November 16, 2011. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=orzQ62vjPzk>.

Sinai Tribes and Terrorism

Aside from the distorted outlook held by both, the Egyptian State and Sinai's residents, towards one another, the real problem in Sinai is one of citizenship. This problem is what rendered Sinai so abjectly poor and has also left Sinai with a high incarceration rate. There is almost no home in the peninsula without one member, and of ten more, who had spent time in a prison or a detention facility, at times more than once, further inflaming the relationship between the state and Sinai's tribes.

It is within this charged relationship, between the state and Sinai's residents, that terrorism emerged, constituting a challenge for both parties. It appears, however, that both sides are using terrorism against each other. The state aims to prove to citizens that it is what stands between them and terrorism, but it does so through grave violations against civilians, which in turn, leads citizens to believe that the primary objective of the war in Sinai is breaking their spirit and will. On the other hand, the tribes seem unconcerned with the state's failure to eradicate terrorism, despite the yearslong war, during which, the state sustained serious losses.

This poses the question of whether the Sinai residents sympathize with terrorism or support it in anyway or not. Seeing that there is no accurate data on support for terrorism in Sinai, one is forced to rely on impressions gleaned from interpersonal communication and social media. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the number of Sinai residents sympathetic to terrorism is extremely small, and is present in one of three segments limited to members of religious groups, such as the Brotherhood or salafis, or to citizens who have been directly harmed by army operations.

The first segment, which consists of Brotherhood members or sympathizers, hopes that terrorism in Sinai will be an important tool to undermine what they call the military take-over of 2013. This type of sympathy is visible and evident from monitoring the Brotherhood's social media and traditional media outlets.

The second segment, consisting of local religious groups, presume that terrorism would be able to vanquish the Egyptian state, which in turn will inaugurate the establishment of an Islamic emirate in Sinai. Those, however and at the end of the day, are Bedouin tribesmen who are looking for any solution, divine or profane, to the Sinaistate predicament.

The third segment is ordinary citizens who have been directly harmed by the state in the course of its war on terrorism, and therefore find in terrorist violence a means to quell their desire for retribution for the violations they faced, which by all means are severe and should not be overlooked.

The Local Population's Relationship with the Army

Ancient Egyptian papyri show that strong pharaohs were the ones who inaugurated their reigns with campaigns against the tribes living in Sinai. Pharaonic statuary commemorates those campaigns, for example, pharaonic tablets number 111 and 112 in the Egyptian Museum in Tahrir Square, depict Snefru grabbing a Sinai tribesman from his forelock

by his left hand while his right hand is holding a club about to strike them tribesman. The accompanying inscription commemorates the great god Snefru as the conqueror of nations and the eternal giver of strength, permanence, and comfort.

Moving forward to the modern era, we find that Mohammed Ali mobilized tribes from Marsa Matrouh to wage a war against Sinai's tribes. Traces of this war could still be seen south of Arish in a cemetery known by locals as the "westerners' cemetery," seeing that it holds the bodies of the western fighters recruited by Mohammed Ali. When that campaign failed, Ibrahim, Mohammed Ali's son, waged a war against the Sinai tribes with his own armies, which led to the near genocide of the Sawarka tribe, the biggest tribe in Sinai.

As these incidents demonstrate that, culturally, the relationship between Sinai tribes and the army is extremely complex and fraught. A few years ago, before the beginning of the war on terrorism, a Bedouin woman told me how "the states" kept the army away from them and if were it not for those "states," the army would have trampled over them. By "states," she was referring to the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) as well as Israel, which under the Camp David Accords is permitted a small army presence in Sinai. Her words were proven correct seeing that when Israel agreed to the Egyptian army's entry to Sinai, the army committed serious violations against the local population.

The army has never allowed Sinai residents any active role in the war on terrorism aside from recruiting them as spies and informants. Those recruited are usually members of the smuggling and drug groups who have been arrested by the army and give

the choice of either spying for the army or being sentenced to prison. Those who choose to work for the army may eventually find themselves prisoners of ISIS.

The army's inability to protect those informants often results in them having to live with their families in army barracks. The case of Abd al-Majid al-Manii, who resides with his family in the 101st brigade of the war command center in Arish, is a prime example. Manii has been convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment in more than one case, including two sentences for murder. In 2011, he shot and killed a man in connection with a land dispute and in the other case, he shot and killed his brother-in-law in connection with an inheritance dispute. It important to highlight that this is the same Abd al-Majid al-Manii, whom the Egyptian media presents as a leader in the war on terrorism.³

The Result

The violence began with the Taba bombings of 2004, followed by the bombings in Sharm al-Sheikh in 2005. In those two bombings, as well as in the Hilton Hotel Taba one, dozens of people were killed and injured. The state's response was extremely violent in turn, especially to the Taba bombings. For example, the state chose extremely provocative times to carry out house raids, such as at sunset during Ramadan—a sacred hour when all fasting Muslims break their fast. The raids were largely conducted by soldiers coming through windows and over walls instead of through doors. This campaign resulted in the

³ See a press interview conducted with al-Manii at <http://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/728160>.

arrest of thousands of tribesmen, including children under the age of 16 and women,⁴ which constitutes a grave insult by the tribal society's standards.

Numerous international and local human rights organizations proposed solutions to the Egyptian state, first and foremost the need to respect human rights and integrate the Sinai tribes into the state. But the state ignored all these recommendations, instead proceeding with its tactics of fostering either smuggling or religion. The state fostered the establishment of Islamic courts that ruled based on Wahhabi Salafi interpretations of Islamic law. Disputes between citizens were not referred to the civilian or customary courts, but to the religious courts, which included the court of Sheikh Asaad Bek, whose sessions were attended by security commanders, police officers, and intelligence officials.

After the January 25 uprising, the number of religious courts proliferated and expanded, assuming control of all judicial activity, which was accompanied by a severe spike in violence. The attacks started with the desecration of churches and the killing and expulsion of Christians but later on evolved to coordinated, big-scale attacks on police stations in the heart of Arish. In one of the attacks, which directly targeted a military barrack south of Rafah, nearly all the army soldiers were killed and their armored vehicle was seized and managed to cross the borders into Israel before being neutralized by Israeli forces. Later, a new stage of violence began, largely involving the abduction of soldiers as hostages in exchange for the release of Islamists in Egyptian prisons.

The reaction from Cairo, whether under the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces' management of the transitional period, or under the Morsi presidency, was feeble, almost disinterested, probably due to their preoccupation with the consolidation of their authority and struggling for power, rather than by the events on the eastern border.

Shortly before June 30, Islamist groups began threatening to use violence, stating that any attempt to touch President Morsi would be an attempt to wind the clock back to pre-January 25, which they would not permit. Later they announced that Morsi's fall would mean a turn to arms and the declaration of an Islamic emirate in Sinai. These Islamist groups, or at least some of them, were true to their words. As soon as Morsi was deposed, police and army headquarters were attacked and soldiers were kidnapped and killed.

It is at this point that the army intervened with force, seemingly with the goal of humiliating ordinary citizens rather than with fighting terrorism. The army was like a person who had been humiliated; but instead of fighting the instigator, he fights those who witnessed his humiliation. If a mine exploded on the road near its equipment, it would demolish the five houses closest to the site of the explosion, as in the case of Mohammed al-Ghoul and that of his brother, son, and their neighbors, in the Wali Lafi area. The army did not stop at blowing up locals' homes, it also fired artillery shells from its barracks toward civilian homes, blowing up dozens of houses and killing hundreds, among them the home of Jaber Abu Qatfan, whose home was demolished while his family was inside, killing his daughter and sister.

When a citizen is killed, his family cannot claim the body until they sign an affidavit declaring that the killer is unknown, which means that no one will be charged for the murder.

⁴ "Mass Arrests After Sinai Bombs, BBC, Feb 23, 2005, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4287445.stm

Hundreds of people were abducted and some were killed, with their bodies left on the road. The rest were detained in the notorious Azouli military facility in Is- mailiya, where inmates suffer inhumane conditions.

Thousands of olive trees were uprooted, allegedly for being used by terrorists to hide. A curfew, now in effect for more than two years, was imposed from 6 pm to 6 am.

Communication networks are systematically cut for more than eight hours every day. Sinai was off limits to human rights organizations and press, so the world could not find out what was happening. Journalists and local activists were arrested to intimidate others; journalist Ahmed Abu Dhira and Hassan Hantoush, a former member of Hamdin Sab- bahi's presidential campaign were both previously detained at the Azouli military prison.

Ordinary citizens are stuck between two forces fighting on their land. While the first, the state, does not view them as Egyptian citizens, the second force, the Islamist ex- tremists, sees them as a nation of sinners and miscreants. They escape the clutches of one only to come under the thumb of the other. This distorted outlook meant that

Sinai Province has no qualms about assaulting and killing Sinai citizens, and in fact it has tortured, killed, and massacred hundreds. Sinai Province uses the same torture methods as State Security.

Recommendations

The solution to terror is to uphold human rights and dignity for Egyptians in general and more specifically for the people of Sinai, which should be translated to policies that aim at establishing a state of justice, citizenship, pluralism, and respect for hu- man rights. This is the fundamental foundation for a genuine solution for Sinai and the Middle East in general; to deliver it from the talons of terrorism and dictatorship. These are two sides of the same coin; in fact, there can be no life for dictatorship without ideas that produce terrorism, and there can be no life for ideas that lead to ter- rorism without dictatorship.

But Sinai appears to be a unique case, as General Adel Suleiman, the head of the Fo- rum for Strategic Dialogue and Civilian-Military Relations, argues. The Egyptian state considers the peninsula to be an arena for military operations. Its residents are not citi- zens, but people living in the battlefield. This mentality must be dismantled, without delay, and exchanged for a mentality centered on citizenship. Sinai now re- quires several rapid interventions:

1. The provision of urgent aid for thousands of displaced people and others whose homes have been destroyed.
2. The army forces must be replaced by trained counterterrorism forces, and the tac- tics supplanted by tactics based on intelligence and rapid response, provided that those forc- es operate under judicial oversight in order to minimize transgressions against civilians. The state today is combating terrorism with the army using a Soviet-like doctrine, lim- iting its modus operandi to two major tactics:
 - The spread of military barracks and outposts whose main objective is to estab- lish

a presence on the ground with the sole aim of projecting and protecting that military presence.

- Launching day-long raids from the 101st brigade in Arish which usually takes place from 6 am until the evening, which makes it easy to predict their movements, place land mines in their paths, and attack them with missiles. These tactics entail extreme material losses. Barracks outposts fire bullets and artillery randomly and spontaneously, leading to the flight of most civilian population living close to those barracks.
3. The tribes of Sinai must be brought in as a genuine party in the war on terrorism, and this cannot happen without recognizing them as Egyptian citizens and recognizing their cultural, political, and economic rights and proposing development plans that are compatible with their culture and demographic composition as well as allowing them to partake in the drafting of those plans, setting their objectives, and in their implementation. The state must also pledge to provide appropriate, genuine compensation, consistent with global standards, for state violations against the tribes that took place before and after the January 25 revolution. This entails studying experiences in which peoples in the Middle East confronted terrorism. I think the most successful of these is the experience of the Kurds against Daesh. The Israeli experiment with recruiting Negev tribes should also be studied. The desert reconnaissance brigade of the Israeli army, led by Bedouin Lt. Col. Wahid al-Hazil, headed off the infiltration of terrorists crossing into Israel from Sinai, after they killed soldiers at an Egyptian military outpost, seized their armored vehicle, and crossed the border at Karam Abu Salem.
 4. Countries that sell weapons to the army should not only accept the army's vow that it will not use such weapons against civilians, but should establish an oversight mechanism to ensure compliance on the ground, with the objective of ending or at least minimizing violations against civilians to conform with international standards.
 5. Lift the cruel siege on Sinai imposed by the army and guarantee freedom of movement for local and international human rights organizations; the state should also lift obstacles to the entry of the local, regional, and international press to Sinai.



THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD:
TOWARDS VIOLENT EXTREMISM?

YOUSSEF AHMED

The Muslim Brotherhood: Towards Violent Extremism?

Youssef Ahmed¹

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Introduction

In 2013, President Abdel Fatah al-Sisi, Egypt's then Minister of Defense, overthrew President Mohamed Morsi after mass protests calling for early elections. The protests were partly inspired by the little progress made towards economic and political reform demonstrated by Morsi, in addition to the profound skepticism held by several segments of the Egyptian society against the Muslim Brotherhood. Upon overthrowing Morsi, President Sisi's regime- who ran for and won the presidential elections almost unopposed in 2014- adopted an immensely anti-Brotherhood discourse. The regime soon declared war on terrorism (initially blamed on the Brotherhood), referring to the Islamic insurgency, which predominantly took place in Sinai and which intensified immediately after the military takeover. Whilst the jihadi group Ansar Beit Al Maqdi declared responsibility for the insurgency,² the Sisi regime capitalized on it to justify the unprecedentedly harsh crackdown on the Brotherhood; with 41,000 arrested (including secular-leaning members of the opposition)³ and over 3,150 –mainly Islamist- protestors killed in the span of two months.⁴

Since the military takeover, scholars and experts have warned of a radicalization effect that the takeover and the subsequent violent repression will have on the Brotherhood in particular, and mainstream Islamist movements in general. Scholars and experts argue that the repression that followed Morsi's removal might induce a metamorphosis, transforming the Brotherhood into a radical group that is similar to the Islamic State or al-Qaeda.

This short paper seeks to make a connection between the Egyptian regime's policy and discourse towards the Muslim Brotherhood, and the increasingly violent tendencies that cadres within the Brotherhood have started to demonstrate. The paper makes its case with two arguments, that a) the Brotherhood is in fact going through a process of change, one that is more confrontational and more likely to slip into a violent confrontation with the state; and b) that this process of change (regardless of whether it successfully takes

1 Youssef Ahmed is a researcher at the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies

2 Ansar Bait Al Maqdes (ABM) is a Sinai-based jihadist group that started carrying out operations after the 2011 uprising. The intensity of the group's operations increased after Morsi was deposed. In late 2014, the group swore allegiance to the Islamic State, which controls large swaths of land across Iraq and Syria, and henceforth ABM changed its name to Welayet Sinaa (Sinai Province).

3 Joe Stork, Political Prisoners in Egypt, (Human Rights Watch, 2015), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/06/03/egypts-political-prisoners>

4 Joe Stork, Political Prisoners in Egypt, (Human Rights Watch, 2015), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/06/03/egypts-political-prisoners>

place or not) has been instigated by the regime's harsh crackdown and violent repression.

Background

On June 30, 2013, the army responded to mass protests calling for early elections by giving Morsi an ultimatum, either Morsi appeases the secular opposition or the army steps in, leaving little room for speculation on the meaning of the latter option. On July 2, Morsi delivered a 45-minute speech, widely referred to as the "Legitimacy Speech," due to the fact that the word "legitimacy" was used 56 times in the context of democracy and the constitution.⁵ The following day, Sisi, along with a 5 number of secular and Islamist members of the opposition, gave a statement announcing that Adly Mansour, head of the Supreme Constitutional Court, would serve as an interim president until elections are held, while Morsi was held incommunicado in an undisclosed location.

Immediately afterwards, the Brotherhood started mobilizing mass rallies and protests in support of Morsi and "legitimacy" and organized several sit-ins, the most prominent of which was the Rab'a Square sit-in. The Rab'a sit-in reflected a dichotomy often present in the Brotherhood. While the Brotherhood leadership asserted its commitment to non-violence and demanded the restoration of the "Presidents legitimacy" when talking in formal circles and to Western media, the sit-ins podium was laden with rhetoric that fanned sectarianism and violence. The ambience of the Rab'a sit-in evoked the spirit of collision and confrontation.

As observed by Hazem Kandil:

During the forty-day-long sit-in around Cairo's Rab'a al-'Adawiya mosque, political rivals were religiously condemned; images of Prophet Muhammad's epic battles were conjured; biblical stories, from David and Moses to Armageddon, were invoked; claims that Archangel Gabriel prayed at the Islamist campsite were flaunted; and the sacred visions of holy men and virgin girls were relayed in anticipation of the upcoming victory.⁶

There are several explanations to the Brotherhood's dichotomous approach to Morsi's removal. One, which is noted by Kandil, is that the Brotherhood's belief system, led them to assume that upon confrontation, divine intervention will come to their rescue, within a framework of religious determinism.⁷ The other explanation, however, is that the Brotherhood, at the time, being practically abandoned by all non-Islamist and some Islamist forces, did not have the luxury of adjusting the seemingly-jihadi rhetoric to fit its ideological

5 Youtube, President Mohamed Morsi's speech on 022013/07/, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O0Uqap-cX8Y>,

6 Hazem Kandil, Religious Determinism: Unlocking the Ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood, (UCLA, 2014), p. 2

7 ibid

preferences. The fact that the Brotherhood was in desperate need of support from whoever is willing to give it, meant that it was willing to let those supporters hear whatever it was that motivates them. In other words, the Brotherhood was not willing to risk breaking the “anti-coup” lines over a matter of rhetoric.

The pseudo-dormant Islamic insurgency in Sinai, however, increased after Morsi’s removal, and despite the Islamic State affiliate, Ansar Bait Al Maqdis jihadi group taking responsibility for it, the new regime and the media capitalized on the sit-ins’ rhetoric to make a casual connection between the Brotherhood and the insurgency.

On July 24, President Sisi, in a speech, asked the people to take to the streets to give the army a mandate to confront “violence and potential terrorism.” A large number of protesters obliged him and took to the streets to demonstrate their support.⁸ On August 14, the security forces violently dispersed the Rab’a and Al Nahda pro-Morsi sit-ins in what was later described by Human Rights Watch as “the most bloody incidents of mass unlawful killings of largely peaceful protesters in recent history,” with an estimate of 904 deaths of predominantly unarmed protestors.⁹ While the regime argued that the pro-Morsi protestors in the sit-ins were heavily armed, Human Rights Watch concluded in its report, which followed a year-long investigation, that despite that there were, in fact, armed protestors, “they were few in numbers.”¹⁰

Along with the dispersals, the regime initiated a nation-wide crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood. The Brotherhood claims that since the initiation of the crackdown and until May 2014, 29,000 of its members (including several members of the Guidance Bureau and the General Guide, Mohamed Badie) have been arrested.¹¹ The regime further capitalized on the Islamic insurgency in Sinai, which had significantly intensified after the violence at Rab’a, along with other low-scale violence in Greater Cairo and Delta provinces to justify its crackdown. On the December 25, the interim cabinet announced that the Brotherhood was a terrorist organization rendering all its members and supporters subject to imprisonment according to Article 86 of the Egyptian penal code.¹² However, evidence directly linking the Brotherhood to the violence in Sinai or the rest of Egypt has never produced, while the Brotherhood’s leadership kept stressing its commitment to non-violence.

Currently, the Brotherhood’s top leadership (including Morsi) is either in jail (serving sentences or pending trials on different accounts) or have gone underground. Several figures however, such as Deputy General Guide Mahmoud Ezzat and Secretary General Mahmoud Hussein have managed to flee Egypt before being arrested. It is noteworthy

8 “Egyptian Army Chief Calls for Street Protests,” BBC News, July. 24, 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-23434809>

9 All According to Plan: The Rab’a Massacre and Mass Killings of Protestors in Egypt, Human Rights Watch, August 2014, Available at: <http://www.hrw.org/node/127942>.

10 *ibid*

11 Joe Stork, Political Prisoners in Egypt, Human Rights Watch, 2015, <http://www.hrw.org/news/201506/03//egypt-s-political-prisoners>, Accessed on 05/2015/05/

12 Muhannad Sabry, “Egypt Declares Muslim Brotherhood Terrorist Group,” Al Monitor, Dec. 26, 2013, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/201312//egypt-brotherhood-terrorist-organization-cabinet.html>

that this government crackdown is far more intense than any other crackdown the Brotherhood has witnessed in terms of intensity and scope in Egypt.

The Roots of the Schism

Different Currents

To explain the schism within the Brotherhood, which has manifested in the past few months it is important to highlight that there have traditionally been different blocs inside the Brotherhood. The grouping of those blocs could take several shapes and forms, however, in the context of this paper, the distinction between the old guard and the young reformist bloc will suffice.

The origins of the current blocs can be traced back to the 1970s, when the Brotherhood's 3rd General Guide, Umar al-Telmissany, decided to revitalize the Brotherhood in the aftermath of the Nasser regime crackdown. Upon Anwar al-Sadat's tactical decision to allow the Muslim Brotherhood back into Egyptian political life to counterweight leftist movements, al-Telmissany relied heavily on the very active Salafi movement among university students to reinvigorate the Brotherhood's ranks. While the injection of young Salafi blood into the ranks of the Brotherhood did achieve its goal of rebuilding the organization, it also had two- presumably- unintended consequences. The first was the introduction of the Salafi ideology to the Brotherhood, a strand of Islam that is considerably more literalist and extreme than the one the Brotherhood has traditionally subscribed to. The other is the presence of young cadres that had a strong preference towards activism, which did not bode well with the policy of non-confrontation propagated by Hassan al-Banna, and later institutionalized by his successor Hassan al-Houdaybi.

Young members of the Salafi movement who joined the ranks of the Brotherhood in the 1970s, such as Abdelmoniem Abul Foutouh and Aboul Ela Madi, have grown to become prominent figures within the Brotherhood's reformist bloc. On the other hand, figures like Mohamed Badie, Khayrat al-Shater, and Mohamed Morsi are considered as an extension of the Old Guard bloc.

While the source of friction between the two blocs partly pertained to the old guard's monopoly over power and the marginalization of the Reformists bloc from the decision-making process as well as the matter of the democratization of the group, other arguments were linked to the Brotherhood's identity and activities. The two points of interest here are the version of Islam the Brotherhood subscribes to and how confrontational the Brotherhood should get with the government.

Due to the exposure reformists had in the parliament and the syndicates in the 1980s, they became more prone to compromise and became flexible political players. As a result, it was the reformers who initiated and supported the Brotherhood's process of moderation. For pragmatic reasons, the reformer's position on pluralism and minority rights started taking priority over the implementation of shari'a law. The Old Guard, however, were much more resistant towards supporting women rights and Coptic Christians rights

in Egypt.¹³ This could be attributed to the fact that most of them had either spent years in jail with minimal social interaction outside Brotherhood circles, or had fled Nasser's persecution to Persian Gulf countries, such as Saudi Arabia, where they were exposed to literalist Salafi interpretations of Islam.

The reformists' attitude towards progressive change clashed with the old guard's preference of gradualism and non-confrontation with the regime. The old guard predominantly viewed direct confrontation with the regime as a fight they could not win. Witnessing Nasser's crackdown firsthand made the old guard reluctant to push the regime's buttons.

The attempt by Brotherhood reformist Aboul Ela Madi to form a political party in 1996 serves as a prime example of the old guard's wariness of provoking the regime. While the old guard's anger with Madi and his group had validly stemmed from the fact that the move was not sanctioned by the Brotherhood's leadership, it was also largely attributed to their apprehension of the regime's reaction. Even if the subsequent expulsion of Mady from the Brotherhood was due to his insubordination, the fact that he, along with several other reformists, went behind the backs of the leadership signifies the reformists' frustration with the old guard's rigidity and resistance to meaningful change.¹⁴ Furthermore, Mohamed Badie, the Brotherhood's General Guide, toned down the Brotherhood's "oppositional rhetoric," referring to Mubarak as "father of all Egyptians" in one instance, and claiming that the Brotherhood was never an adversary of the regime.

The uprising in 2011, however, marked a new phase of confrontation between the Brotherhood's old guard leadership and the reformist bloc. The decision to join the protests that instigated the overthrow of Mubarak was itself one of the points that made this friction more visible, where young cadres and reformists were frustrated with the leadership's reluctance to join the protests. Incidents such as negotiating with Omar Suleiman, Mubarak's director of intelligence, before the latter's overthrow, along with the leadership's alleged complicity with the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) during the latter's management of the transitional period, as well as deciding, despite earlier promises, to push for a candidate for the presidential elections, have been major sources of discontent with the Brotherhood's leadership.

More importantly however, the 2011 uprising acted as a medium that facilitated an unprecedented amount of interaction between Brotherhood rank and file members who did not necessarily have much interaction outside Brotherhood circles, and secular activists and revolutionary youths. Although measuring the influence that secular activists had on the Brotherhood's rank and file members during the uprising is not the focus of this paper, the exposure Brotherhood members had to revolutionary ideas at that point cannot go unnoticed.

Upon the overthrow of Morsi in 2013, the growing discontent with the old guard leadership began to produce serious repercussions that the magnitude of which is yet to be seen.

13 Carrie Rofseky Wickham, *The Muslim Brotherhood: Evolution of an Islamist Movement*, (Princeton University Press, 2013), pp. 1324-

14 *ibid*

The Post-30 June Schism

In the short period after the crackdown, credible reporting or information about the Brotherhood's activities has shrunk. Aside from calls for peaceful demonstrations, and news of members and supporters who have been targeted by security forces, little was heard from the Brotherhood. In January 2015, the Brotherhood's website issued a statement declaring the election of "young Mohamed Montasser" as the group's new media spokesman to reflect the Brotherhood's "vision for revolutionary struggle."¹⁵ While that statement (and subsequent ones) did not directly call for violence, it constituted a major shift from the Brotherhood's earlier statements reaffirming its position on nonviolence.

In the first signs of the long-foreseen clash between the Brotherhood's old guard and its young reformists, Mohamed Ghozlan, the Brotherhood's former spokesman who belongs to the old guard, issued a statement on the May 23, 2015, reaffirming that rejection of violence is one of the "Brotherhood's constants."¹⁶ On May 28, the Brotherhood's website (controlled by Montasser) announced that it accepts and celebrates the so-called Kenana Call.¹⁷ The Kenana Call, a statement signed by ten religious organizations and 159 religious scholars, openly called for violence against the Egyptian state. The themes of "retribution" and "self-defense" carried out against the security forces, along with journalists and members of the judiciary who support the regime, stood in strong contrast to the Brotherhood's rhetoric and discourse over the year that followed the overthrow of Morsi.¹⁸ The endorsement of the statement marked a profound shift in strategy, even if it was only supported by certain segments and cadres within the Brotherhood.

On the same day, the Brotherhood's Secretary General, Mahmoud Hussein, issued a statement that with Badie in prison, and as pursuant to Brotherhood regulations, Mahmoud Ezzat would be the General Guide's Deputy. It is important to note that those two figures, along with Ghozlan, belong to the old guard.¹⁹ Immediately after the announcement, Montasser issued a statement on the Brotherhood's official Facebook page, claiming that internal elections would be held in February 2014 and confirmed Badie as the General Guide and himself as a media spokesman. Montasser claimed that the elec-

15 The Muslim Brotherhood, "Statement on Appointment of Brotherhood's Media Spokesman," Ikhwan Online, Jan. 1, 2015, <https://www.ikhwanonline.com/BrotherhoodStatements/4/Default.aspx>

16 "Muhammad Ghozlan: Pacifism and Rejection of Violence are Our Constants," Moheet News, May. 31, 2015, <http://moheet.com/20152268192/23/05//%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%AF-22-%D8%B4%D987%D8%B1%D8%A7-%D985%D986-%D8%A7%D984%D8%A7%D8%AE%D8%AA%D981%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D985%D8%AD%D985%D988%D8%AF-%D8%BA%D8%B2%D984%D8%A7%D986-%D8%A7%D984%D8%B3%D984.html#.VX1zZkbvjBs>

17 "Statement by the Muslim Brotherhood on the (Kenana Call)," Ikhwan Online, May. 25, 2015, <https://www.ikhwanonline.com/BrotherhoodStatements/50/Default.aspx>

18 Egypt Call, available at: <http://egyptcall.org>.

19 "Contradiction within the Brotherhood," Dotmsr News, May 28, 2015, <http://www.dotmsr.com/details/%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%B7-%D981%D98A-%D8%A7%D984%D8%A5%D8%AE%D988%D8%A7%D986-%D8%AD%D8%B3%D98A%D986-%D8%B9%D8%B2%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D984%D982%D8%A7%D8%A6%D985-%D8%A8%D8%A3%D8%B9%D985%D8%A7%D984-%D8%A7%D984%D985%D8%B1%D8%B4%D8%AF-%D988-%D985%D986%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D8%AF%D98A%D8%B9-%D981%D98A-%D985%D983%D8%A7%D986%D987%>

tions, which also formulated a committee to manage the crisis, would be carried out in accordance with the Brotherhood's internal regulations and with the knowledge of the leadership.

It is clear from these incidents that the young reformists who took control of the Brotherhood's activities -at least on the ground- were in a position to transform their criticism of the old guard's inaction into a new policy and direction for the Brotherhood. It seems that the old guard's policy of strict non-confrontation was beginning to wane. It is important to point out that the more radical (in terms of religion) members of the Brotherhood have traditionally been loyal to the leadership and aligned with the old guard to balance the effect of the reformists' embrace of quasi-liberal values. When asked about the Brotherhood's conflictive statements during an interview on al-Jazeera, Montasser replied that "the Brotherhood, as a whole, has undertaken the revolutionary path as a strategy and will not deviate from it." Montasser added in a statement that "the revolutionary path... with all its mechanisms is an irreversible strategic choice."²⁰

So far, there has not been any significant shifts in the nature of the Brotherhood's activities as a whole. Only time will tell whether its shift in rhetoric would be matched by a proportionately corresponding shift in strategy towards violent resistance. It is important, however, to note that Brotherhood statements that have insinuated the need to resort to violence, have constantly highlighted retribution against the Sisi regime as a primary justification.

Explaining the Shift

Arguments explaining Islamic violent extremism typically belong to one of two main schools of thought; a) ideologically-driven violent extremism; and b) extremism resulting from violations of rights and/or political marginalization.

Ideologically-Driven Extremism

Ideologically driven extremism, one that is founded on Islamism, aims at establishing an Islamic state, based on a notion embraced by all jihadi groups: al-hakimeya. As noted by John Calvert, the notion as conceived by Sayyid Qutb,²¹ "is the exclusive prerogative of God who alone is qualified to fashion principles appropriate to the proper functioning of social, political and economic order."²² In that light, the notion of al-hakimeya rendered man-made laws, forms of governance, and social and economic doctrines unfit or unqualified to manage and control mankind.

Unlike jihadi groups, who fight to enforce God's sovereignty or al-hakimeya, the Brotherhood's fight would aim to reinstate a leader whose legitimacy -in their view- is founded

²⁰ Facebook, The official page of the Muslim Brotherhood's Media Spokesman, May 28, 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/M.B.SPOKESMAN1>

²¹ Sayyid Qutb was a Brotherhood leader who is considered by many as the founder of modern Jihadi thought. Ironically, Qutb's ideas and writings are widely-believed to be a byproduct of the torture and maltreatment he faced in prison during Jamal Abd al-Nasser's era, before his execution in 1966.

²² John Calvert, Sayyid Qutb and the Origins of Radical Islamism, (C. Hurst & Co, 2010), p. 215.

upon popular sovereignty. Furthermore, the reformist trend in the Brotherhood has always advocated for the embrace of democratic reforms and quasi-liberal ideals, while the non-confrontational old guard have been more reluctant to embrace those values due to their more religiously conservative nature. Therefore, the seemingly radicalized (towards violence) reformists' bloc is less likely to be drawn to Sayid Qutb's extremist notion of al-hakimeya. The absence of this notion from the Brotherhood's anticipated shift to violence is what distinguishes it from jihadi groups.

As explained in the earlier section, voices within the Brotherhood who appear more willing to call for violence against the government reiterate restoring what they perceive as the "legitimacy" of an elected president, and restitution from "the coup's leaders". The grounds for calling for violence within the Brotherhood ranks -while obviously religious in tone- do not share the common themes present in Jihadi violent extremists' rhetoric and ideological frameworks. This radicalization, which is founded on grounds that could also apply to secular groups, appear to contradict with arguments claiming that the radicalization taking place within the Brotherhood is primarily driven by their religious ideology.

Violation of Rights

Theories which posit violation of rights and marginalization as the driver behind violent radicalization seem to fit the case of the Brotherhood more coherently than the argument of ideologically-driven radicalization. In the following section, certain fundamental rights will be highlighted to examine how the Egyptian regime's policy and discourse is responsible for the radicalization within the Brotherhood. The most fundamental rights of a large section of Brotherhood followers and leaders have been blatantly and repeatedly violated by the government. Incidents of forced disappearances, arbitrary arrests, extrajudicial killings, and mass death sentences in trials lacking due process have been documented by rights groups,²³ and have been noted by the international community.²⁴ A report by Amnesty International highlighted several incidents of deaths in custody, torture, arbitrary arrest and unfair trials in Egypt that took place from July 2013 to July 2014.

The drive of the Brotherhood towards violent extremism is evidently perched on the impunity of security forces and the complete loss of faith in the judiciary system. It is important to note that in pre-2011 Egypt, Brotherhood members frustrated with what they perceived as the Brotherhood leadership's ineptitude and inactiveness translated their frustration within legitimate political channels, as in the case of Aboul Ela Mady's attempt to form a political party. However, given the lack of room for political participation in Egypt, the persecution of the Brotherhood, and the continued violations of their human rights, any attempts to take action within the Brotherhood, is very likely to be in the form of violence, as in the case with Mohamed Montasser's group and the newly elected leadership.

23 Human Rights Watch, "Egypt: Police Account for Deadly Raid in Question," July. 31, 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/07/egypt-police-account-deadly-raid-question>.

Human Rights Watch, Egypt: Scant Evidence for Mass Convictions, Apr. 18, 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/04/egypt-scant-evidence-mass-convictions>.

24 Several countries have voiced their concern about the deteriorating situation of human rights in Egypt, the most recent of which were oral interventions by the delegations of the US, EU, Denmark, and Iceland in the United Nations Human Rights Council's 30th session in Geneva on Sept. 21, 2015.

On another level, radicalization of the Brotherhood members does not have to manifest in a change in the Brotherhood's policy or through its support of other violent groups. Some reports indicate that young Brotherhood members have abandoned the organization and now serve, or have become interested, in the Islamic State's affiliate in Sinai's.²⁵ A recent article in the Intercept discussed the plight of Mohamed Soltan, an American citizen and the son of a senior member of the Brotherhood, who was arrested in the aftermath of the Rab'a Square dispersal but eventually released and deported to the US after a 400-day hunger strike. Aside from the accounts of torture and maltreatment Soltan spoke of, he describes how ISIS prisoners have attempted to convince other detainees of their cause by capitalizing on the regime's brutality.²⁶ In the same article, the Brookings Institute's Shadi Hamid noted: "We know that imprisonment in such brutal circumstances often has a radicalizing effect, but it also represents a kind of networking opportunity, where people from diverse walks of life suddenly find themselves behind bars together."²⁷

Countering Violent Extremism

CVE is a long and multidimensional process that should be adapted to the environment where it is being executed. Elements of a comprehensive CVE strategy are meant to address factors of radicalization such as political, economic and social grievances. One of the cornerstones of CVE is the integration of minorities in society. For example, the recent attack in Paris, claimed by ISIS, raises a few questions about the integration of Arab minorities in France, and whether the West, especially Europe, could do more to ensure the full integration of all its citizens.

The importance of integration comes from the fact that extremist groups tend to operate in the binaries of good and evil, right and wrong, and us and them, which is often associated with a strong sense of collective identity. Della Porta observed in her study of German and Italian radical groups in the 20th century that the process of "dehumanizing" the enemy serves to "deny responsibility for the brutality inflicted on one's victims."²⁸ The same feature can be observed in jihadi groups, who propagate a binary of Muslim versus infidel. Therefore, good integration mechanisms help prevent potential recruits from disconnecting from society and sliding down the path of radicalization. Upon the military takeover in Egypt, pro-regime media adopted an extremely polarizing rhetoric, with Egypt on one end and the Brotherhood on the other. The regime in effect, did the opposite of what should be done to de-escalate the situation. Instead it facilitated the creation of a rift between the Brotherhood and the rest of Egyptian society. The facilitation of this binary

25 "Egypt's Death Sentences Further Radicalize MB Youth," Al Monitor, Jun. 24, 2015, <http://www.almonitor.com/pulse/originals/201506//egypt-sinai-muslim-brotherhood-terrorism-death-sentences.html>.

26 Murtaza Hussain, "ISIS Recruitment Thrives in Brutal Prisons Run by US-Backed Egypt," Nov. 24, 2015, The Intercept, <https://theintercept.com/201524/11//isis-recruitment-thrives-in-brutal-prisons-run-by-us-backed-egypt/>

27 *ibid*

28 Donatella della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 1734-

would make it easier for the Brotherhood to collectively resort to violence, as it begins seeing itself as separate from Egyptian society. More importantly, members of the Brotherhood who experience social rejection, will be vulnerable to a) remain committed to the Brotherhood even if its leadership decides to turn to violence; or b) join jihadi groups, such as Sinai Province or Ajnad Misr, who would offer them acceptance and a platform to fight the state and society which had rejected them.

Conclusion

The Egyptian government needs to take serious steps to avoid a full transition of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, or its members, towards violent extremism. Unlike the insurgency in Sinai, which the regime has failed by several accounts to properly address,²⁹ an insurgency carried out by the Brotherhood would be substantially harder to contain. Jihadi organizations have traditionally operated underground in remote areas such as Sinai and the southern provinces of Egypt, however the Brotherhood has strong grassroots in Cairo, Giza, and the Nile Delta. If the Brotherhood or a large portion of its members decide to fully adopt a violent approach towards the government or society, the regime would face an insurgency carried out by a group with a vastly complex communication network, operating in heavily populated areas. This decision would make the state's heavy hand security approach, such as the one being executed in Sinai, even more futile, and cost lives and stability. Instead, preventing the radicalization of individual Brotherhood members will serve to help cut jihadi groups recruitment channels.

The regime's continuation of its uncompromising, confrontational approach, one which is based on constant violations of the rights of frustrated youths from all segments of the society, risks dragging the entire country into a vicious cycle of violence. The more the regime engages in violence and violations, the harder it will be to initiate a reconciliation process in the future, which as history has demonstrated, is the only way to bring about long-standing durable stability and economic prosperity.

Releasing political prisoners and revising arbitrary laws curbing basic rights and freedoms, and guaranteeing fair trials and retrials for all those convicted in what could easily be described as kangaroo courts, are essential steps that need to be taken by the regime to launch a process of reconciliation and deter any ongoing processes of radicalization to violent extremism among different segments of Egyptian society. In the short term, the Egyptian government needs to ensure that its prisons are not breeding grounds for radicalization, by improving the conditions of detainees and ensuring their humane treatment. The government also needs to ensure that prisons are not used by jihadi prisoners to recruit other Islamist and secular prisoners.

29 Ruth Michaelson, "Egypt Self-inflicted Slaughter," The Daily Beast, July 3, 2015, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/201503/07//egypt-s-self-inflicted-slaughter.html>



COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM
IN A PROTO-INSURGENCY ENVIRONMENT:
THE CASE OF ISLAMIST EXTREMISM IN EGYPT

MOKHTAR AWAD

Countering Violent Extremism in a Proto-Insurgency Environment: The Case of Islamist Extremism in Egypt

Mokhtar Awad¹

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This short paper is adapted from a longer study: “Egypt’s Escalating Islamist Insurgency,” published by the Carnegie Middle East Center, October 2015 with the authors’ permission. The evidence and conclusions herein are drawn from this study, which was conducted over the course of two years and is thus the primary reference.

Members of the Muslim Brotherhood and their Islamist supporters are waging an evolving low-level insurgency across Egypt’s mainland in an effort to topple the Sisi government. Although a political event—the July 2013 popularly backed military coup that ousted the Muslim Brotherhood from power—triggered this would be insurgency, factors ranging from ideology, human rights abuses, to primal revenge fuel the ongoing violence. The types of actors are also diverse and the intensity of their violence varied. Some are committed Salafi jihadis like the Islamic State’s Sinai Province while others subscribe to different Islamist tendencies. Despite this, the Egyptian government has adopted an ineffective one-size fits all approach to an increasingly complex and multidimensional insurgency.

This paper will focus on the often-ignored threat emanating from pro-Muslim Brotherhood non-Salafi jihadi actors that largely operate in the Egyptian mainland. Although these actors are amateurs and far less lethal than the Islamic State affiliate Sinai Province, they are in fact far more numerous and constitute a large reservoir of angry Islamist youth ripe for jihadi recruitment. The Egyptian government has failed to put forward a strategy to tackle this growing extremism. Although implementing common countering violent extremism, or CVE, practices in Egypt are difficult due to the political nature that is at the heart of the crisis, this paper will argue that the Egyptian government may still implement elements of a CVE strategy in order to counter the rising tide of extremism among Islamist youth. This paper will offer a brief overview of the political dynamics that have given rise to the current crisis in Egypt, map the violent actors, and focus on radicalization drivers. The paper will argue that a successful approach would address both human rights abuses and extremist Islamist ideology that incites violence as drivers for radicalization. Finally, in the case of a budding insurgency like that of Egypt’s, targeted community engagement to both rehabilitate ties between security forces and locals and build resilience against extremism is critical.

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Background

In the spring of 2013, secular activists opposed to what they saw as ineffective and repressive Muslim Brotherhood rule organized a petition campaign called “Rebel” to gather signatures demanding early presidential elections and mass protests on the anniversary of Morsi’s inauguration on June 30, 2013. Millions of Egyptians responded to the protest call, which escalated to demanding Morsi’s overthrow. Fearing the worst—a military coup—and to show their strength to deter such action, the Muslim Brotherhood and their Islamist allies staked out sites for two major protest camps in heavily populated areas in Cairo (Rabaa Square) and Giza (Nahda Square) two days before the June 30 protests. On July 3, 2013, then Minister of Defense Abdel Fatah El Sisi, flanked by senior figures such as the Grand Sheikh of Al Azhar and the Coptic Pope, declared the suspension of the constitution and the appointment of an interim president, effectively ousting Morsi in what amounted to be a popularly-backed military coup.

Immediately following Sisi’s declaration, sporadic acts of violence targeting security forces took place across Egypt in apparent retaliation.² The Islamist protest camps swelled in size with hundreds of thousands vowing not to leave before Morsi’s return. Incendiary Salafist preachers riled up the crowds and offered a venomous sectarian discourse, blaming Christians for the coup and vowing revenge for what has transpired.

Islamist preachers such as the now imprisoned Safwat Hegazy led protesters on multiple occasions to direct confrontations with security forces resulting in dozens of deaths. With every incident of mass killing, the bloody countdown towards the inevitable clearing of the protest camps neared and all efforts to settle the conflict peacefully failed. Rabaa Square became the Brotherhood’s Mecca and soon its Karbala as giving it up was to be at a very high cost.³ As the Brotherhood senior leadership were either arrested or went into hiding younger members of the group and others who were not formally members became de-facto leaders making fateful decisions on strategy and confrontation. On August 14, 2013, security forces cleared the protest campsites using disproportionate and indiscriminate force in response to Molotov cocktails, rocks, and sporadic firing allegedly coming from some protesters. In the aftermath almost 1000 Islamists and their supporters died, in what amounted to be a massacre.⁴ On that day a new generation of militant Islamist youth was forged, the product of ideological conviction, religious incitement, and state violence.

The Evolution and Landscape of Islamist Violence

Following the bloody clearing of Islamist protest camps, Islamists and their supporters perpetuated numerous acts of violence⁵. In the Sinai, Salafi Jihadi militants killed over

2 Ben Wedeman. Reza Sayah and Chelsea J. Carter, 26 dead, more than 850 wounded as post-coup violence hits Egypt, BBC, 06/2013/07/, available at: <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/05/07/world/meast/egypt-coup/index.html>.

3 Samuel Tadros, The Brotherhood Divided: Current Trends in Islamist Ideology 19/2015/08/, available at: www.hudson.org/research/11530-the-brotherhood-divided.

4 Mokhtar Awad and Mostafa Hashem, Egypt’s Escalating Islamist Insurgency, Carnegie Middle East Center, 21/2015/10/, available at: <http://carnegie-mec.org/publications/?fa=61683>.

5 Ibid. Awad and Hashem, Egypt’s Escalating Islamist Insurgency.

60 soldiers in the month of July 2013 alone,⁶ more than all soldiers killed in the peninsula since the 1973 Yom Kippur War. In Upper Egypt, Christians faced terror as Islamists burned down dozens of Churches and attacked them. This escalated to Islamists briefly seizing the town of Delga, Minya from July to September 2013 and terrorizing Christians there. Closer to Cairo, the Islamist stronghold of Kerdasa, Giza flared up. Islamists in the town and their supporters ransacked a local police station and massacred the officers and soldiers inside. Authorities only established control after heavy gun battles.

In these simultaneous acts of violence, many of which were spontaneous, Egypt saw a brief glimpse of what a total showdown between Islamists and the government may look like. Islamist strongholds could easily turn to pockets of Islamist resistance. Locals who are Islamists or support them against the government could mercilessly kill security forces. Christians could become easy targets as their property, houses of worship, and person were at risk of attack. Finally, Salafi jihadis such as those in the Sinai looking for excuses for their jihad could exploit the situation.

Although the Salafi jihadi insurgency in the Sinai intensified in the subsequent months, the other violent incidents in mainland Egypt briefly scaled back. Without leadership, Islamists in the mainland who did not follow the violent orthodoxy of Salafi jihadism could not agree on any one tactic. Low intensity violence was the result of this organizational chaos, but it was as a consequence also unorganized and ineffective. More importantly many Islamists, specifically the older generation, feared the trajectory of armed insurgency knowing they cannot win such a fight against the security forces. What happened next is that what remained of the Islamist leadership urged protests and simply turned a blind eye to low-level acts of violence like burning police cars and other acts of sabotage.

Islamist youth were itching for a fight. They now had a vendetta against the state. What brewed was a toxic mix of a desire for primal revenge encouraged by ideological conviction and religious incitement. They justified this turn to violence as religiously proper and politically legitimate for it drew—they argued—from the revolutionary legitimacy of the popular 2011 revolt against Hosni Mubarak and was standing up for the legitimacy of Morsi's claim to the Presidency and defeat of a "counter-revolution."

At first this new strand of Islamist youth violence was contained to Egypt's university campuses, which acted like incubators as students organized together and won over the support of sympathetic students who now championed the same cause. Security forces responded to student riots with increasing levels of violence that killed even more youth. Female students partook and this led to unprecedented numbers of Islamist women being arrested. Numerous pictures of security forces manhandling young women circulated, which infuriated Islamists. Allegations of sexual abuse and rape were rife. Abusing women had been a sort of "red line" in the state's long running battle against Islamists. In a conservative patriarchal society like Egypt the issue of "female honor" is sacrosanct to even non-religious conservative folk. As a result, such images and rape allegations

helped in winning over sympathizers furious with the state's blatant disregard for traditional conservative norms. The dark side of the issue of female honor is that it is used to

⁶ Patrick Kingsley, "Egyptian Authorities Recapture Islamist-Held Town," Guardian, September 16, 2013, www.theguardian.com/world/2013/sep/16/egyptian-police-recapture-islamist-town-delga.

blindly justify so-called honor killings or acts of “avenging honor” like beating the victim or perpetrator. For Islamist activists and especially those sitting on the fence with regards to using violence against security forces, female sexual abuse acted as a powerful trigger.

In this chaotic cycle of violence, one dead body or alleged sexual abuse victim drew the anger of not only his or her family but also friends and neighbors who may have not had grievances against the government but now sought revenge. As the Islamists were the ones championing the anti-government cause, these otherwise non-political youth and other citizens became easily acculturated by the Islamist discourse and effectively joined their ranks. The same dynamic has played out on a much larger scale across Islamist strongholds in various towns. Indiscriminate killings and arrests by security forces in these strongholds dragged in non-political locals or others who may have simply benefited from the work of Islamist charities and thus were already sympathetic. These locals too effectively joined the ranks of the anti-government Islamists in solidarity as they came to believe in their cause. Furthermore, due to their grievance and the religious incitement, these youth and other locals became willing to use violence to champion what was now a holy cause.

The first groups that organized themselves to carry out violence generally stuck to Molotov cocktails and occasionally used guns to kill alleged thugs or fire at police. They justified this as an act of “self-defense.” The groups’ names were telling. One was called Molotov while the other Wala’ or Set Fire. The majority however did not have names and simply became called the “Unknowns” and engaged in acts of violence that ranged from arson to occasionally using live fire, although they were nominally abiding by their counterintuitive motto that anything short of murder is considered “non-violent.” This type of violence was taxing on security forces as losses mounted. The anarchic discourse of the groups and the low intensity of their violence made it seem that this could be a temporary phase. Angry Islamist youth simply “venting.” But their message was uncompromising and signaled their desire to seek revenge no matter what.

A song at the time by Islamist activists captured these sentiments⁷:

*I say it with my heart and tongue,
I say it with all my being,
Oh treacherous people after
today,
There is no peacefulness with
a criminal,
I went out and said “Peaceful,”
but the bullets of
treachery hit me,*

⁷ The song can be accessed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLJNQI1dwhk>

*And my sister, I see her suffering
in prison,
How do you want me to be
peaceful?
With a butcher that justifies
killing me without cause?
And ate my flesh and burned
my bones? What else will I
wait for?
They add to my pain and
wounds,
I shall leave behind my kindness
with my struggle,
And live awake with my
weapon,
My resoluteness, my vendetta,
and my faith.*

These early violent youths were easy to track and arrest due to their heavy use of social media, which revealed personal information. Hundreds more were steadily being sent to prisons and even allegedly some secret ones where torture was rampant.⁸ Security forces were both desperate to extract information on these groups' activities and at the same time due to the detainees' young age, believed they could be deterred. This tactic worked, but it yielded a short-term result. In a pattern that is likely to repeat, all the security forces were able to accomplish with their scorched earth tactic was neutralize the weakest links and drive the more serious violent activists underground. Most importantly, brutal prison conditions and torture poured more fuel on the fire raging inside these youth. Security forces also indiscriminately arrested anyone suspected of illegal activity and numerous cases of forced disappearances took place. The violent Islamist youth were now avenging their comrades who were being tortured in prison, again, under the pretext that their religiously justified and revolutionarily legitimate cause allowed them to resort to violence in response to such human rights abuses.

Another phenomenon is that as the number of street protesters decreased due to disillusionment and fear of arrest, some youth in turn became disillusioned and lost interest in violence. While for others this same disillusionment had a completely opposite effect of pushing them towards more brazen violence or completely abandoning their group of

⁸ Patrick Kingsley, "Egypt's Secret Prison: 'Disappeared' Face Torture in Azouli Military Jail," Guardian, June 22, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/22/disappeared-egyptians-torture-secret-military-prison>.

Muslim Brothers and Islamists whom they now see have sold out and seek to join more committed Salafi jihadis.

After a relative quiet in the summer of 2014 new groups emerged in the fall and spring that now urged popular resistance and openly embraced the use of firearms. Throughout 2014 and 2015 several media channels, websites, and social media pages either directly funded or operated by the Muslim Brotherhood or close supporters incessantly urged escalation and incitement on religious grounds. It was no surprise that these Islamist channels cheered on these new groups when they appeared. One example is when a guest on the Muslim Brotherhood funded Masr Al An channel⁹ called on one of the most lethal groups yet, Revolutionary Punishment, to turn its guns on pro-regime media figures.¹⁰

As this evolution of non-Salafi jihadi violent group was taking place new Salafi jihadi groups were springing up in the mainland and the existing Salafi jihadi group of Ansar Bayt al Maqdis was waging a far more intense insurgency in the Sinai. One of the groups that operated in the mainland is called Ajnad Misr, and is pro-al Qaeda, while the Ansar Bayt al Maqdis (ABM) group pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in November 2014 becoming its Sinai Province (SP).

All of these Salafi Jihadi groups exploited Islamist grievances to justify their violence and win over recruits. Ajnad Misr, for instance, called its violent operations part of a “retribution” campaign against the government and focused in detail on issues such as female sexual abuse and the Islamists that died in Rabaa. SP sought to capitalize on its killing of hundreds of Egyptian security forces to present itself as the standard-bearer of the Egyptian jihad.

These Salafi jihadi groups, although dangerous, do not pose an existential threat to the Egyptian government as they are mostly fighting in remote areas or small in size. What changes this equation however is whether they are able to tap into the reservoir of angry Islamist youth and direct these non-Salafi Jihadi groups to their far more sophisticated and lethal methods. By doing so, they would introduce armed jihadi rebellion to pockets of Islamist grievance across Egypt and bring back an environment similar to the chaos immediately following Rabaa when Islamists and their supporters were out in numbers attacking the government and minorities.

9 The Brotherhood officially denies its affiliation with any channel, but media reporting based on interviews with workers and the authors’ own interviews with Brotherhood leaders indicated that the channel is linked to and funded by the group. See Ahmad Gamal al-Din, Brotherhood Disagreements Divide Misr al An, [in Arabic] Al Akhbar, 62014/11/, www.al-akhbar.com/node/219128; the link is also a widely accepted fact in contemporary writings on the subject that are published on Islamist-leaning websites. See Mohamed el-Atr, How Does the Misr al An Crisis Reveal the Brotherhood’s Sins? [in Arabic] Sasa Post, 232015/08/, <https://www.sasapost.com/misr-alaan-tv/>. The subject of these channels has also been exhaustively covered by BBC Monitoring, see Pro-Brotherhood Media Air Calls for Violence, BBC 232015/02/, www.bbc.co.uk/monitoring/probrotherhood-media-air-calls-for-violence; Egypt’s Brotherhood Expands Media Machine, BBC, 082014/12/, www.bbc.co.uk/monitoring/egypts-brotherhood-expands-media-machine; Egypt’s Brotherhood Media in Freefall, BBC, 032015/09/, www.bbc.co.uk/monitoring/egypts-brotherhood-media-machine-in-freefall.

10 “Chancellor Mohamed Awad Calls on Resistance Movements to Target the Media Figures Instigating Against the Revolutionaries,” YouTube video, posted by “Misr al-An Cannel,” 26012015/, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=115AtAiNiD0>.

Implementing CVE Strategies in a Proto-Insurgency Environment

As outlined, the government's approach has thus far been exclusively focused on security responses. Violent activists are neutralized by arresting or killing them and torture is widely used as the go-to tactic to extract information and as a deterrence.

A successful CVE strategy would start with seriously addressing human rights abuses. Such abuses provide the toxic environment for radicalization and grievances Salafi jihadis exploit. But policymakers should also take into account that human rights abuses alone are not a driver for radicalization or can be easily taken as the primary driver. Religious ideologues that incite victims and others to respond to human rights abuses with violence play a key role, especially when this violence is organized or when victims or those wishing to "avenge" them join ideological and organized violent groups. Human rights abuses are thus a key grievance for exploitation among many. This does not belittle its significance but rather places it in the right context in order to better inform a comprehensive policy solution.

In the case of Egypt, other than ending the use of torture, releasing non-violent offenders, improving prison conditions, and separating Salafi jihadis from non-Salafi jihadi Islamists in prisons, the government can take immediate steps like relaxing visitation conditions and restrictions on goods and luxuries that can be brought to prisoners. This will help alleviate some of the pressure and keep the detained connected to his or her family and not feel completely hopeless and become easier prey to jihadi recruiters. Such measures alone are of course insufficient but can be proposed in authoritarian countries like Egypt where it is recognized that measures such as ending torture are unlikely to happen without the comprehensive and lengthy process of security sector reform. Other solutions can also be explored such as fining the families of juvenile offenders who commit non-lethal acts like arson or throwing Molotovs as opposed to detention.

The much more difficult challenge is that of promoting a counter narrative to the religious ideologues who incite violence and exploit grievances such as human rights abuses. In the case of Egypt, it is even more difficult because a political crisis that requires settlement is at the heart of the conflict. Nevertheless, a counter narrative is necessary and may still be useful in deterring Islamist youths from joining Salafi Jihadi groups. The government has paid lip service and relies on al-Azhar to provide this. However, in practice, not much worth mentioning has been accomplished by the religious institution and more importantly it fundamentally lacks the tools to engage a young generation even if it has a message nailed down. The government should take a broader approach and not simply rely on al-Azhar but rather a diverse number of thinkers and scholars who can each independently construct their own counter narrative. For instance, nonviolent Salafis can reach the devout youth, al-Azhar may reach those uncertain of their beliefs and may find a moderate Imam appealing, while political thinkers, perhaps reformed jihadis, can engage those youth who view themselves as Islamist revolutionaries. This maximizes the chances that different counter narratives may reach different segments that may respond differently.

All of these efforts must be across various online platforms and executed by NGOs that would have the independence and creativity to find the best modern methods to reach at risk youth. Ultimately, no counter narrative strategy can truly be successful in the short or even medium term as Islamist ideologues in fact exploit interpretations of religion that ordinary young men already grow up with and learn in school. Not only do school curriculums fail to instill values of citizenship, pluralism, and religious tolerance but in some cases they even instruct hatred of the other. This means that the real battle is in the classrooms and a long-term counter radicalization effort that focuses on countering extremist narratives would have to include an overhaul of curriculums in religious, government-run, and private schools.

Finally, the government must strategically intervene in Islamist strongholds to challenge Islamist authority, rehabilitate relations between security forces and locals, and make these communities more resilient against extremism by building youth centers and providing other government services. In the case of Egypt, many Islamist strongholds are well known and due to the nature of the police state, information on local leaders and tribal makeup is also known to the government. A specially trained unit that integrates police and army officers, as well as both the police and military intelligence branches, could be set up with the goal of rehabilitating relations in these communities by reaching out to local leaders or tribal/family elders. This community outreach unit would seek to alienate extremist Islamists. The government can help ensure the success of this strategy by rewarding cooperation with increased government services and local projects that employ residents in poor strongholds. A job by itself does not de-radicalize a violent Islamist youth or provide an off ramp for someone who is at risk, rather when the environment in the community improves, the transformation may become harder and his or her parents would have a stronger incentive to intervene as they will see how their child can get a better life.

Matruh Province: A Possible Blueprint

The government's own actions in the province of Matruh in 2013 are instructive and could—to an extent—provide a blueprint for this sort of local level reconciliation. Although Matruh borders Libya, a failed state, with smuggling activity rampant and Salafis dominating public life, the government was able to pacify this Islamist stronghold for now.

On the day of Rabaa's bloody dispersal, the main Salafi Sheikh aligned with the Alexandria based Salafi Call, Ali Ghalab, stood before an angry crowd and incited chaos and violence ensued. Rather than confronting swarms of furious Salafis with brute force alone, the military intelligence relied on its deep knowledge of the tribal makeup and intervened to offer blood money to families of victims who were killed by the government and free trips to make pilgrimage to Mecca. Instead of arresting or torturing the rebellious Sheikh Ghalab, military intelligence opted for engaging him and manipulating him to think that with his actions he would turn Matruh into another Sinai. Although this is far from the best of practices it was nevertheless a non-violent tactic that produced results and deescalated. Finally, the government promised to release all non-violent offenders from the area.

The crisis was resolved within a matter of days. Before the bloody month of August was over Sheikh Ghalab stood to speak in a grand ceremony put together by the government to commemorate Matruh Day and the newly negotiated “reconciliation.” This arrangement was not perfect.

For instance, the government failed to sufficiently counter the ideological Islamist narrative present and engage the youth directly. More importantly, it did not release all the promised prisoners. Nevertheless, the government neutralized the threat of violence by local Islamists. Since the government had started a peaceful dialogue, locals who were angry with the government not holding its part of the bargain did not easily resort to violence and continued to engage the government in the framework of peaceful dialogue. The military also continued to show respect. When a year later police officers on a major highway accidentally killed local notables, mistaking them for terrorists who recently carried out an attack, the military apologized and attended the victims’ funerals. The military intelligence officer largely responsible for this local reconciliation, General Alaa Abu Zeid, is now Matruh’s governor.

Matruh remains the only province where such government sponsored “reconciliation” has taken place and offers cautious hope that the Egyptian government could adapt and recalibrate its approach towards violent Islamist extremism. But it remains to be seen if the government will take the initiative and put forward a comprehensive CVE strategy for the rest of Egypt.



THE TERRORISM BATTLE IN TUNISIA: ROOTS, REALITY, AND CHALLENGES

MESSAOUD ROMDHANI

The Terrorism Battle in Tunisia: Roots, Reality, and Challenges

Messaoud Romdhani¹

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“Democracy is fragile because it does not possess the entire truth...If it claims to possess it, it becomes something else, a dictatorship perhaps,”

French philosopher Edgar Morin, Manouba University, May 29, 2015

Introduction

Five years after the spark of the Tunisian revolution in Sidi Bouzid, one of the most deprived regions in Tunisia for decades, all eyes are on Tunisia, which may actually realize the aspirations of the Arab Spring for freedom, democracy, and social justice. This was the slogan taken up by tens of thousands of citizens, at their forefront young people who broke the fear barrier and saw their dream begin to take shape with the uprising.

Tunisia's path has diverged from that of all other Arab Spring countries. It avoided the slide into civil war and the return of dictatorship, and its elite drafted an enlightened constitution - pioneers in the Arab region. It organized a series of fair, transparent elections and saw the historical reconciliation of political Islam and modernity. Yet, the risk of a setback persists, and several factors could potentially herald a turn to chaos. These factors are regional, especially as relates to Tunisia's southern neighbor, Libya, which still has not found stability despite numerous talks between various political factions. They are also internal factors that may lead to chaos, seen in the escalation of terrorist attacks, which have moved from the mountains and border regions to cities and tourist resorts. There are several factors that may feed terrorism in Tunisia, among them the loss of hope in the efficacy of political and civic action, despair at social conditions, and fear of reproducing past dictatorships.

After the attack targeting foreign tourists at Sousse on June 26, 2015, Time Magazine wrote that Tunisia “may be the Arab Spring's closest thing to a success story, but Tunisia is gaining another less hopeful reputation—as the world's biggest contributor of foreign fighters to the conflict in Syria and Iraq. As many as 3,000 Tunisians have left to join ISIS and other extremist groups since March 2011...Hundreds have returned to Tunisia...all too ready to bring the conflict home with them.”² The US-based magazine asked a question often posed by many analysts: how did Tunisia, the birthplace and hope of the Arab Spring, become a wellspring for jihadists? How did the contagion of terrorism find its way to Tunisia?

¹ Messaoud Romdhani is a Tunisian Human Rights Activist

² Naina Bejakal, “Tunisia's Jihadist Pipeline,” Time, Jul. 20, 2015.

The answer, according to *Time Magazine*, is that “many of the complaints that triggered the country’s Jasmine Revolution—a stagnant economy, endemic corruption, youth unemployment—still linger.” This makes Tunisian youth susceptible to recruiters for the Islamic State (IS, also known as ISIS or ISIL).³

Post-Revolution Tunisia

In 2012, just a few months after the first elections in Tunisia, when the conflict between “secularists” and “Islamists” over identity, culture, and Islam was at its peak, I noted at a panel hosted by the French Gabriel Péri Foundation⁴ and attended by several civil society organizations that the Tunisian revolution was not motivated only by a desire for democracy and freedom or in response to religious repression and an identity crisis.

Rather, it was, at its base, a popular revolt against a regime that deployed oppression in order to loot the country, a regime that attempted to strangle politics to privatize the state and sideline society. The young people who rejected Ben Ali’s speech of January 13, 2011, were less interested in the political concessions he made, which were applauded by several opposition political parties, than in realizing their aspirations for

social justice, regional equity, and employment.

I observed at the same panel that politicians’ current bickering over marginal issues, the lack of a socioeconomic vision that breaks with the past, and the failure to address young people’s growing despair at the possibility of changing their conditions will only further exacerbate the situation, complicate politics, and promote a culture of hopelessness. In turn, this can only bring extremism and violence. I cited French journalist Jean-Michel Quatrepoint’s observation that “fascism does not descend from the sky. It is nourished by the impoverishment of peoples, the resentment of the middle classes, and the blindness of the elite,” who are not attentive to the profound changes within their societies.⁵

I did not claim that terrorism in Tunisia always stems from poverty and deprivation—although many analyses support this—because the causes are multiple and stem from political, economic, social, cultural, and psychological factors. It is difficult for researchers to pinpoint any one cause, and generalizations may be misleading. Moreover, we cannot confront the phenomenon without a multidimensional diagnosis, for a precise, well-considered diagnosis may point to appropriate solutions.

The Roots of Terrorism

In an article titled “Seeking the Roots of Terrorism,” Alan B. Krueger and Jitka Malecková note that after the 9/11 attacks “a consensus quickly emerged that poverty and lack of education were major causes of terrorist acts and supports for terrorism.”⁶ The belief

3 Ibid

4 Les Défis Economiques et Sociaux, Fondation Gabriel Péri, Tunis, Mar. 25–26, 2012.

5 La Crise globale (Miunenuits, 2008).

6 The New Republic, Jun. 24, 2002.

was prevalent, they observed, among politicians, journalists, scholars, and policymakers in the US that poverty and deprivation were the primary drivers of terrorism. George W. Bush gave expression to this belief in a speech in Mexico, saying, “We fight against poverty because hope is an answer to terror.”⁷ But this belief did not change US policy under President Bush, which largely countered terrorism with military solutions, which I believe only facilitated its growth.

In fact, many American officials share Bush’s belief. President Barack Obama believes that terrorists exploit injustice faced by citizens in Muslim-majority countries. This injustice is partly economic, when millions of people, especially youth, are impoverished and have no hope in the future.⁸ How, then, should terrorism be confronted? Many US analysts affirm the role of education, proclaiming that it is the only way to eliminate terrorism,⁹ perhaps because it can be a guarantee for social mobility.

Despite the importance of analyses of the link between poverty, education, and terrorism, they do not always stand up to the test of reality, whether for terrorist acts around the world or in Tunisia. This belief is premised on an assumption that the Islamic world, living with poverty, deprivation, and backwardness, is uncomfortable with all the trappings of prosperity and Western development. It also eclipses, consciously or not, all other political and civilizational issues. Poverty, deprivation, ignorance, and a lack of basic utilities is the lot of a fifth of humanity, in Africa, Asia, America, and nearly every continent, but that does not necessarily mean these poor, uneducated people are envious, extremists, or terrorists. According to one survey, “Three quarters of persons charged with terrorism crimes abroad, especially around the September 11 attacks, belong to the middle class or higher; 90 percent were raised in cohesive families and 63 percent enrolled in university. They are considered the best of their communities, those whose families sent them abroad to continue their studies.”¹⁰

What is happening in Tunisia does not always demonstrate the correlation of poverty, deprivation, and ignorance with terrorism. In contrast, terrorists often come from the middle class and have an excellent university education. Jaber al-Khashnawi and Yassine al-Abidi, who carried out the attack on the Bardo Museum in March 2015, killing dozens of tourists, hail from the middle class and are well-educated. According to those who knew them, they were fully engaged in life before becoming involved in extremism. “I was watching the Bardo attack on television and cursing the killings,” said al-Abidi’s brother. “I never imagined that my brother, who was friendly, handsome, and loved life, could carry out this heinous attack.”¹¹ Hinda al-Saidi, who was killed in a Special Forces assault on a terrorist group, is another example of the failure of the entire society. According to her

7 Ibid

8 Omer Taspinar, “You Can’t Understand Why People Join ISIS without Understanding Relative Deprivation,” *The Huffington Post*, Mar. 25, 2015.

9 Sarah Brockhoff, Time Krieger, and Daniel Meierrieks, “Great Expectations and Hard Times—The (Nontrivial) Impact of Education on Domestic Terrorism,” Jan. 2012, quoting controversial American Nobel Prize winner and intellectual Elie Wiesel.

10 Adel Amer, *Sada al-Balad*, Aug. 29, 2014.

11 *L’OBS Monde*, Mar. 23, 2013.

French professor,¹² she was a serious, outstanding student, open to life. Living with her family in Marsa, a tiny suburb, she “adored painting and loved intellectual discussions.”¹³

The revolution that demanded freedom, democracy, human rights, and social justice; the revolution that rose as a roar demanding regional equities, an end to poverty, and jobs for tens of thousands of unemployed youth; the revolution that produced the High Authority for the Realization of the Objectives of the Revolution, Political Reform, and Democratic Transition, which included political parties, civil society groups, and public figures and passed numerous laws; the one that produced the independent election authority that organized the first democratic elections in Tunisia and perhaps the Arab world—this revolution also opened the door to manifestations of extremism, which exploited the fragile situation on the border, especially in light of the civil war in Libya, state weakness, and the new space for freedom.

Post-Revolution Chaos Helped Extremist Movements to Reconstitute

A letter written by the Uqba Ibn Nafi Brigade,¹⁴ which was planning to bring down the Ben Ali regime and establish the first Islamic emirate in North Africa, to Abu Musaab Abd al-Wadud, the commander of al-Qaeda in North Africa, explains why jihadists flocked to Tunisia:

It is well known that the fruit of the Arab revolutions is of benefit to the mujahideen. Our duty in the face of these changes and developments, which have begun to bring bounty, is to exploit available human possibilities. Perhaps God will open the way for us and make us a cause for the revivification of the firebrand of jihad in the Land of Kairouan.¹⁵

In the initial process of building Ansar al-Sharia, Seif Allah Ben Hassine, known as Abou lyadh, relied on a base of his formerly imprisoned supporters who were released immediately after the revolution in a controversial general amnesty.

Adel Hamdi, who was arrested in Ben Gardane, was detained in 2001 with friends in Milan. He was deported to Tunisia, where he spent seven years in prison with Abou lyadh and the founders of Ansar al-Sharia, all of whom had been imprisoned in connection with terrorism cases: Mohammed al-Awadi, Adel al-Saidi, Lutfi al-Zayn, and Rida al-Sabtawi. Two Ennahda leaders—Sadok Chorou and Habib Louz—were jailed with them in the

12 Jeune Afrique no. 2843, July 5–11, 2015.

13 Ibid

14 The Uqba Ibn Nafi Brigade, whose Algerian leader Luqman Abu Sakhr was killed, is a jihadi group that has taken refuge in Mt. Chambi, in the Kasserine province, near the Algerian border. Tunisian authorities say it is responsible for several terrorist attacks, including the Bardo attack of Mar. 18, 2015, which claimed the lives of 21 tourists. The group pledged its allegiance to ISIS in Sep. 2014, calling on it to “overstep borders and smash the thrones of tyrants in every place.” See for example al-Sabah News, Mar. 29, 2015.

15 Unpublished sermon found in Mt. al-Sanak, Kasserine province, on Dec. 10, 2012, from lawyer Reda al-Radawi, in the Chokri Belaid assassination case.

same cell. They held their first conference in Soukra in April 2011, attended by the same two former Ennahda prisoners.

In August 2011, Abou Iyadh received the oath of allegiance (*bay'a*) in his home from a group of young men, most of them former prisoners who had been released under a general amnesty. They included al-Shadli al-Adwani, Hussein al-Kheleifi, Lutfi al-Zayn, Kamal al-Gadhgadhi (the killer of Chokri Belaid), Mohammed al-Awadi, Boubacar Hakim (the main suspect in the assassination of al-Brahmi), and Ezzeddine Abdellaoui (who conducted surveillance of al-Brahmi's home). In the meeting, Abou Iyadh told them he intended to set up a training camp in the Libyan city of Derna, to acquire expertise, and return to Tunisia to carry out armed action in order to establish an Islamic state.

On February 1, 2012, nine Kalashnikovs, two boxes of ammunition, and a gun with a silencer and ammunition were moved by car from al-Dhahyba, in the Tataouine province. Two people were in the vehicle: Helmi al-Ratibi, a former prisoner convicted in the Suleiman terrorism case in 2006, and Wajdi Benmahmoud, a former prison convicted in terrorism cases under Ben Ali. They were heading to Sidi Bouzid when they got into a firefight with soldiers.

It is clear from the foregoing that the Tunisian jihadi movement relied on a reservoir of recently released prisoners in order to gradually chart its course over three stages:

- Organizational build-up: as soon as he was released in early March 2011, Abu Iyadh held meetings in his home in Hammam Lif and then in Sousse with Sheikh al-Khatib al-Idrissi, which led to the establishment of the first postrevolution Salafi jihadi organization. He surrounded himself with a group of former prisoners from the al-Marnaqiya Prison and April 9 Prison. He also sought to absorb the Milan group and jihadis who had taken part in the Iraqi war, seeing them as source of strength in his project to shift Tunisia from a territory for spreading the mission of Islam (*da'wa*) to a territory for jihad.
- Outreach tents: Ansar al-Sharia launched its activities with the slogan "Hear from us, not about us." They saw marginalized areas as potential reservoirs for youth energy, socially and psychologically groomed to accept extremism. The group also attempted to take over as many mosques as possible by removing their imams and replacing them with their own partisans, while focusing on people with records of violence, drugs, and other common crimes when recruiting.
- Building the underground military and security apparatus: this stage followed peaceful missionary outreach. The organization began to prepare for battle and for the administration of Mt. Chambi, near the Kasserine district bordering Algeria, and it supplied its people there with material and human resources. This stage saw the Salafi jihadi movement return to underground work as a result of violent confrontations with security.

Over these three stages of the post-revolution development of Ansar al-Sharia, the most salient features of its leadership were that most were former prisoners, convicted in connection with terrorism cases, and many had acquired combat experience in previous training exercises supervised by their military command. Here we must question the effi-

cacy of the security, judicial, and prison system in rehabilitating former inmates released from Ben Ali's prisons after the revolution. There are three reasons for the failure:

- The absence of intellectual revisionist undertakings: Tunisian Salafi jihadism is the only movement to come out of prisons without having undergone any revisionist process like al-Gamaa al-Islamiya in Egypt or the Fighting Group in Libya. The significance of this process is that it opens the door to an intellectual discussion and a different reading of Islam that accepts difference, and may thus change the attitudes of some about the necessity of political change through arms.
- The precarious socioeconomic situation of some recently released prisoners: prior to the revolution, they were pursued by security and banned from working; after the revolution, they had no stable source of livelihood, especially considering their modest level of educational attainment. While political movements employed their members and took care of them, these people were left without horizons or future.
- State weakness after the revolution: I mean here the dissolution and disappearance of the state apparatus, the authorities' inability to make appropriate decisions, and the emergence of a political attitude that refused to take any legal measure against lawbreakers. This was compounded by the weakness and incapacity of the security apparatus and its unpreparedness to deal with complex new challenges and developments.

A report issued by the International Crisis Group after the attacks in Bardo (March 2015) and Sousse (June 2015) amply dissected the illusion of capability that Ben Ali's regime bestowed on the internal security service. The report added that despite a higher budget and the recruitment of thousands of new cadres after the revolution, the internal security apparatus lacks a comprehensive, effective counterterrorism strategy.¹⁶

The Battle for Mosques: from Bourguiba to the Revolution

Like other institutions, mosques in the Bourguiba era were subordinated to the state apparatus. The first president of independent Tunisia attempted to use religion and the mosque to promote his opinions and vision of the modern state. He asked the sheikhs of Zitouna to support him in the issuance of a personal status code (1956) that criminalized polygamy, required both spouses' consent for divorce, and set a minimum age of marriage; the sheikhs responded by finding juridical bases in law for these provisions. Bourguiba also abandoned traditional institutions like the *ahbas*, the institution managing religious property bequests. The state further assumed a monopoly on religion by integrating it into a ministerial portfolio and appointing the national mufti and mosque imams.

Although Bourguiba tamed the religious establishment and brought it under almost total state control, the establishment began to rebel and chafe under these restrictions with the emergence of the Islamist movement. This movement evolved into Ennahda in the late 1970s and assumed its place on the Tunisian political scene in the early 1980s, but was soon subject to persecution and imprisonment after the bombings in Sousse and

¹⁶ "Reform and Security Strategy in Tunisia," Middle East and North Africa Report no. 161, Jul. 23, 2015.

Monastir, which injured 13 tourists in 1986. This allowed the security establishment, fronted by Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, to assume center stage and set Ben Ali on course to the presidency, against the backdrop of Bourguiba's presumed weakness and old age and the deterioration of the security situation in the country.

From his first years of rule, Ben Ali confronted Ennahda and imprisoned most of its leaders, with others fleeing abroad to avoid abuse and prison. The management of mosques shifted from the state apparatus to the security apparatus, and all mosques were subject to security oversight by State Security and the ruling party, the Democratic Constitutional Rally(RDC).¹⁷

Mosques in this period were only opened at prayer times. Moreover, the movements of religious youth were monitored and the Friday sermon hewed to the official discourse. Nevertheless, this did not prevent their exploitation by jihadis, who recruited hundreds of young people to volunteer for the jihad, especially after the occupation of Iraq in 2003.

Bringing Mosques under Control

The fall of Ben Ali, the declining power of the security authority, and the flight of many so-called state imams left a vacuum. The old state religious establishment was unable to withstand an onslaught of organized youth intent on turning the mosque into a vital space and outlet for the dissemination of their new extremist discourse. Worshippers began hearing unfamiliar sermons, whether by Ansar al-Sharia or other preachers who sprouted up everywhere. Tunisians listened in astonishment to new, unfamiliar fatwas on the legality of customary marriage, the need to circumcise their daughters, and the virtues of the application of Islamic law.

In its preamble, the Tunisian constitution states that the country adopts a moderate Islam that is open to other cultures. The document also gives the state a religious mission, but this could not long withstand the winds of extremism, for several reasons:

- The absence of a religious discourse in mosques with independence, credibility, and persuasive power. The state apparatus, the overt and covert tussle between political Islam and the official religious establishment, and the debilitation of the Zitouna establishment—all these factors precluded the crystallization of an enlightened religious discourse reflecting hundreds of years of openness, rational inquiry, and diversity in Tunisia.
- A fertile climate for extremism fostered since the Ben Ali era, which turned the mosque into a locus of surveillance, the confiscation of ideas, and an aversion to religious inquiry and dialogue, as a result of security and judicial monitoring.
- The absence of a legal framework clearly defining the content of religious discourse, compatible with the course of changes in the country, or a framework to regulate the boundaries between religion and politics.
- Civil societys turn away from the religious sphere, rather than engaging with it to cement the traditions of debate and dialogue.

¹⁷ "al-Masajid fi Tunis, hal hiya kharija 'an al-saytara, wa li-madha?" al-Shuruq online, Jul. 9, 2015.

An Awareness of Incapacity

Al-Shuruq newspaper published a document issued by the government in January 2015 that recognized that mosques in the country were a fragile space with the potential to foster chaos and lack of restraint, saying they are “a space that lags behind the transitional process in the country.” The lack of a tradition of independent debate meant that they could not compete with the influx of Salafi ideas and discourse.¹⁸

Ennahda and the Control of Mosques

With the exit of the Troika and the coming of the Mehdi Jomaa consensus government, the need to contain mosques came to the fore. Although it was then easy to identify mosques that were under the control of extremist groups, regaining this space -where partisan politics and religion mixed- proved more difficult, especially with accusations that the Minister of Religious Affairs under the Ennahda government, Nouredine Khadmi, was exploiting mosques to promote extremism and recruit fighters for Syria.¹⁹

In early 2014, in an interview with *al-Shuruq*, the secretary-general of the Mosque Functionaries Union, Bashir al-Urfawi, said that many mosques were still subordinate to political actors: 800 mosques were under the control of Ennahda, then in power, while 40 were controlled by the Salafi jihadi movement. He alleged that the outgoing Minister of Religious Affairs had appointed imams based on their political loyalty to Ennahda and that these appointments should thus be reviewed.²⁰ These accusations seemed to be confirmed in early August 2015 when Khadmi was relieved of his imam post at the al-Fath Mosque as part of a campaign launched by the Habib Essid government on extremist groups, “which since the revolution have intentionally exploited mosques to indoctrinate and recruit youth to fight in Syria, Iraq, and Libya.”²¹ One Ennahda leader considered the decision “arbitrary, both administratively and politically,” but other parties demanded that Khadmi be sued, especially in connection with enabling young people to travel to jihadi hotspots.²²

Model of Moderation and Tolerance?

After the Bardo and Sousse attacks in March and June 2015 respectively targeted foreign tourists and hence the Tunisian economy, many questions were raised about the effectiveness of security interventions, the preparedness of the security forces and their ability to confront the challenge of terrorism, and the speed of movement of “lone wolves.”²³ Even more questions were asked about the Tunisian model—the model of

18 Ibid

19 “Tunis tamna’ 5 alaf jihadi min al-safar ila Suriya,” *al-Arab*, Aug. 7, 2013.

20 *Tunisie Numérique*, Feb. 10, 2014.

21 *Al-Arabiya*, Aug. 9, 2015.

22 Ibid

23 “Lone wolves” is a term used to describe individuals who mount armed attacks on places difficult to access by groups. The strategy is used by various jihadi movements, including ISIS.

religious tolerance and moderation that had launched the Arab Spring and stirred the stagnant waters of near despair. How could a country that has taken so many steps on the path of democracy, with the drafting of a constitution and the holding of transparent and fair elections, be the number-one exporter of jihadis? How could the sunny Tunisian coastal resorts become a grave for innocent tourists who had come to spend a vacation in a country thought to be among the most secure and stable?

The Search for Other Motives

Amy Zalman, an expert in global terrorism, argues that “a sense of deprivation helps fuel terrorism. Terrorism may be considered a politics of extreme frustration, which is the feeling that one wants to change a situation, but has no power to do so . . . Frustration may be a response to material deprivation, but it may also be an answer to the long term deprivation of a group or society from what it perceives to be rightfully its own.”²⁴ In other words, extremists are not always motivated by poverty and need, but may act based on a sense of injustice. These are new motives for extremism: the perceived absence of justice and fairness. Often advocates of extremism will support their discourses with examples of how in today’s world injustice holds sway over the values of justice, intolerance over tolerance, and extremism over moderation.

In Tunisia, injustice was a motive of the revolution. It was injustice that spurred Bouazizi, the itinerant vegetable vendor in Sidi Bouzid, to set himself on fire, letting the revolutionary genie out of the bottle and prompting citizens, young and old, to demand development and social justice.

Protests in the interior provinces began in 2008 in the Gafsa mining basin, with months of near daily sit-ins, strikes, and demonstrations. The leaders of these protests were not the marginalized and unemployed, but trade union leaders working in primary and secondary education, health, and the civil service. They sought not only employment and an end to poverty, but protested against the policy of marginalization and corruption and for a share in local sources of wealth.

Sidi Bouzid, Kasserine, Menzel Bouzaiane, Thala, Kairouan, and other disadvantaged areas were moving in the same direction: a rejection of the social injustice produced by the independence state, which focused on growth at the expense of development, supported in this by international and regional financial institutions such as the World Bank, the EU, and the IMF. These institutions believed that 5 percent growth in Tunisia was sufficient to make it “the African miracle” and realize social peace. But this growth was quantitative and did not entail real development; it sidelined interior regions and set up businesses in incentive zones. The country’s coastal strip, which comprises only one-fourth of the area of Tunisia, was home to 60 percent of public investment and 80 percent of private investment.²⁵

24 “Lone wolves” is a term used to describe individuals who mount armed attacks on places difficult to access by groups. The strategy is used by various jihadi movements, including ISIS.

25 Omar al-Hadi, *al-Tanmiya al-jihawiya ba’d al-thawra, al-waqi’ wa-l-afaq*, May 15, 2011.

Politics Eclipses All

The revolution should not have stopped with the realization of political demands as conceived by the political, partisan, union, and rights elites in the High Authority for the Realization of the Goals of Revolution: the first and second elections, and the drafting of the constitution. Throughout this period, patience was wearing thin, as reflected by ongoing protests, sit-ins, caravans from Sidi Bouzid to the capital, and unrests in Menzel Bouzaiane, Siliana, Kef, and the southern regions, suggesting that some revolutionary demands remained unfulfilled and that peaceful protest had begun to lose its efficacy.

That's why I think American researcher Monica Marks is largely correct in her analysis. Marks observed that Salafis in Tunisia largely hail from the middle and lower classes, typically in their 20s and 30s, and are of the same social class as the young people drowning in the Mediterranean trying to reach Europe. These young men, who come from cities like Kasserine and Sidi Bouzid, are the ones who revolted against the Ben Ali regime in order to improve their social conditions. Today they "tend to feel angry, voiceless, and rejected by an elite class of educated secularists living on the coasts."²⁶

Marginalization and "*Hogra*" (*disdain*)

"Rejected" is not the word being used by angry youth in Tunisia. Before and after the revolution, two words have been used to give expression to the reservoirs of rage: marginalization and *hogra*. The latter, originally an Algerian dialectical expression, refers to viewing others with scorn or contempt. Residents of the interior regions see marginalization and disdain as intertwined, for marginalization is perceived as intentional, resulting from the self-perceived superiority of the ruling class of the coast and the capital, which views the residents of the interior regions with contempt or disdain. Giving expression to the perceived discrimination between citizens of the capital and those of the interior cities, inhabitants of the latter often held aloft signs proclaiming "No to hogra" "Enough with hogra" or "Dignity for you is a livelihood and dignity for me is an end to hogra." In what I believe to have aptly summarized the sensibility of the interior cities' youth, a young man wrote in the Tunisia Sat forum on hogra and marginalization:

Marginalization is when you feel you're a tenth-class citizen and your only sin is that where you were born doesn't register in the eye of those who rule the country.

Hogra is when you see the wealth of your region going to everyone else but the people of your region.

Hogra is when your accent, your manner, and your simplicity become caricatures for jokes, sarcasm, and laughter on television serials and programs.

Hogra is when you look around and find the only trace of the state in the water department, the mail, the electric company, and central security.

²⁶ "Who Are Tunisia's Salafis?" Foreign Policy, Sep. 28, 2012.

For health, education, culture, and entertainment, you just need to take a taxi and join the march of civilization far from your area, to find a sign declaring that “You do not belong to this world.”

Hogra is when you spread out a map of Tunisia to find that university hospitals, major universities, and development projects are centered in certain areas of this decentralized country. Marginalization is when your region produces terrorists and soldiers: the first kills the second or vice-versa, and youth of other regions laugh at them.

Hogra is when you hear that doctors refuse to come to your “peripheral” area, seeing it as a kind of punishment and exile, and one of them says, “I’m not willing to go to hell.”²⁷

Sociologist Sami Omar observes that “the perception in interior regions that the authorities hold them in contempt threatens social peace in the country because it leads to the explosion of a new kind of opposition—a popular opposition that rejects the central authority and thus undermines its legitimacy.”²⁸ This perceived contempt is one of the drivers of the revolution according to an article published one week after Bouazizi’s self-immolation. In it, Lamine Bouazizi, a local activist of Sidi Bouzid, says that protests expanded after Mohamed Bouazizi had set himself on fire to protest his degradation and poor conditions, but that the angry multitudes invoked all the daily, growing problems that had become distilled into a sense of exclusion and perceived contempt.²⁹

Dialogue with a Big Stick

In a video released by Forza Tounes in late August 2015,³⁰ marginalized, unemployed young people living in a suburb of the capital talk about the daily torment they face from security personnel when leaving their homes and how they are detained for no reason at times. It is easy to invent a false charge, and they may spend months or a year or two in prison. When arrested, they face all manner of humiliations and torture: curses and insults at them, their mother, or their sister. One man spoke of seeing another hung by a rope for hours, forced to urinate on himself. Another had his shoulder broken. One of the young men said that he came out during the revolution chanting, “Bread and water yes, Ben Ali no.” He hoped his torment would end after the revolution and he would get a dignified job. Today he says, “No job, no dignity.” According to the same testimony, security personnel always tell them, “We won’t leave anyone but the women in this neighborhood.” One of the young men concludes that this means some will be falsely imprisoned, others will board the death boats, and a third segment will join extremist groups in Libya, motivated by resentment and rage.

²⁷ Jul. 10, 2015

²⁸ “al-Ya’s wa-l-ihbat yadfa’an bi-‘asharat min al-shabab al-tunisi ila-l-intihar,” Middle East Online, Feb. 10, 2015

²⁹ Al-Mawqif, Dec. 24, 2010.

³⁰ Tfarjou Fina Torture, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WR09AYVgixY>.

Eight advocacy groups, including the Journalists Syndicate, the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network, and the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights, issued a statement on the video noting that “the oppression and injustice targeting youth” faces them with “catastrophic choices like extremism, violence, or plunging into a death boat, as is clear on this tape.”³¹

Terrorism Law: Reproducing the Past

On December 10, 2003, the Ben Ali regime seized the opportunity of the global effort against terrorism to pass a law on the suppression of terrorism and money laundering. The law was directed not only at terrorists, but at opponents and critics of the regime. Its overly broad, vague provisions were used to bring unjust charges against many people. The new law approved on July 25, 2015 by the parliament just a few short weeks after the Sousse terrorist attack differs little from the old law, according to Tunisian and international rights groups. Once again, the law defines terrorism in “overly broad, vague” terms, allowing terrorist charges to be filed for “peaceful demonstrations accompanied by some disorder.”³²

Protests against the new law also targeted its death penalty provisions, which did not exist in the old law, and the extension of detention without recourse to a lawyer or family from 6 to 15 days, which is enough time to extract confessions under torture, as well as the threat the law poses to public and private liberties.

In their rush to increase criminal penalties, the authorities have thus set aside the reasons driving thousands of young people to extremism. Instead of cementing the rule of law and compliance with constitutional provisions to preclude resentment, they have turned to a purely punitive approach, although this policy has proved to be a failure internationally, regionally, and nationally.

Absence of a Political Framework During and After the Ben Ali Era

What escapes many analysts is that the youth who raised revolutionary slogans of freedom, dignity, and social justice were not acting within the framework of any particular political thought or ideology seeing that the old regime left no space for political or partisan action. These slogans, therefore, were general expressions that reflected no political depth or deeper meaning. After the revolution, youth participation in political parties did not exceed 5 percent; similarly, their electoral participation was very limited, as was their representation in government.

One polling center organized a workshop on youth disengagement from political and electoral life after the last elections, based on dialogue with young people. The center concluded, “The reasons are found in the state of frustration and despair that afflicted the youth cohort during the dictatorship, as well as the negative role of the media, which in-

31 “Min ajl wad’ hadd li-l-tajawuzat al-amniya,” Sep. 1, 2015.

32 “Qanun mukafahat al-irhab wa man’ ghasl al-amwal yushakkil khataran ‘ala huquq al-insan,” Tunisian Radio online, Aug. 1, 2015.

flated the role of politicians without devoting attention to the importance of young people as an active element or their claim on political action.”³³

The absence of a political framework and the attendant aversion to civic action left the public sphere open to extremist ideologies, which, in a climate of freedom combined with an enervated, hesitant central authority, found an open field that encouraged the spread of their ideas, not only in mosques and public spaces, but also in the media and social media platforms.

Charitable Associations

Given the political vacuum and young people’s non-involvement in parties that did not reflect their aspirations or demands, charitable associations became active, exploiting the openness of the post-revolution climate and the lack of oversight of their funding activities and the legality and limits of their activities. Young people found in these associations what they were looking for. In addition to abundant funding, the associations offered an ethical and ideological dimension beyond the manipulation of politicians, who, according to some youth, “traded on youth issues to mobilize support.”³⁴ Charity, helping the poor, meeting their basic needs—associations offered these with no expectation of reward, save perhaps in the afterlife, and no requirements except a devotion to religion in all its dimensions, occasionally including jihad. As one put it, “we don’t care about politicians, whom we consider ignorant infidels. We are doing what our religion dictates. We help the needy and guide them to the teachings of our Islamic religion in the Quran and the Sunna of God’s prophet. With argument and persuasion, we call them to the jihad in God’s path, if they have this capability.”³⁵

After the disorder and slackness of 2011 to 2013, the authorities began looking more closely at civic associations, particularly after it was found that dozens of these charitable associations had been implicated in terrorism.

On April 21, 2015, the paper *Akhir Khabar* reported that 157 charitable groups whose activities had been suspended pending a court case were linked to Ansar al-Sharia, which since the summer of 2013 had been classified as a terrorist organization. The paper published a detailed list of the charities, most of which, according to the fairly credible paper, were engaged in Salafi outreach activities under cover of charitable work. Some were active also despite their questionable legal status. At times these groups enjoy foreign funding far beyond expectations. The Tunisia Charitable Association, for example, obtained nearly one million dinars in foreign funding. In addition, during the previous presidency, they received public funding that did not adhere to legal procedures, according to the government secretary-general.³⁶

33 Al-Taqrir, Dec. 1, 2014.

34 Ibid

35 Jun. 2012

36 Al-Shuruq, Jan. 6, 2015.

Undermining the Concept of Citizenship

The Tunisian constitution is grounded in the concept of citizenship, and all processes of democratic change revolve around the role of the citizen. But the concept of citizenship has been much distorted, attenuated, and confused by the lack of attention to citizens' social conditions, especially in the interior provinces. Citizenship is not merely a geographic signifier of belonging to the nation's territory, but carries numerous dimensions, among them identity, which is the set of an individual's opinions, beliefs, values, and ideas.

During a three-day trip to various border provinces with a group of journalists,³⁷ I observed a total lack of the concept of citizenship among most young people we interviewed. They said that they live wholly in the parallel economy with nothing to link them to the central state. They believe the nation has ignored them and has not upheld their dignity by providing them with work and a dignified existence. In turn, they do not feel they belong to it. More seriously, they feel no need to defend it. I believe the eroded sense of citizenship and geographic, social, and cultural belonging creates fertile ground for extremism. It allows Tunisian identity with its geographic, civilizational, and historical elements to be supplanted by another, transnational

identity. Extremism since Abu al-Alaa al-Mawdudi, one of the spiritual fathers of the jihadi movement, does not recognize geographic boundaries or national belonging. Mawdudi's sermons, correspondence, and books, as well as the literature of Sayyid Qutb and Abu Bakr Naji, have been found frequently with the Mt. Chambi mujahideen who have been arrested or killed.

According to Mawdudi:

Islam is not a normal religion like other religions in the world, and Muslim nations are not like normal nations. Muslim nations are very special because they have a command from Allah to rule the entire world and to be over every nation in the world...The goal of Islam is to rule the entire world and submit all of mankind to the faith of Islam...In order for Islam to fulfill that goal, Islam can use every power available every way it can be used to bring worldwide revolution. This is jihad.

Conclusion

Terrorism in Tunisia has evolved over several stages since 2011, from outreach and charitable work, to security and military ambushes that killed dozens of soldiers, to political assassinations to foment chaos and bring down the state, and finally to strikes at the country's economic interests, seen in the Bardo and Sousse attacks. Extremists benefited from the general legislative amnesty, with hundreds being released from prison and

37 A trip I took with investigative journalists Sana al-Sebouï and Walid al-Majri.

38 Ghaffar Hussain, "The Real Roots of Extremism," *The Guardian*, Oct. 17, 2008.

then founding Ansar al-Sharia. They then took advantage of state confusion and chaos after the revolution to spread their message among youth, exploiting “liberated” mosques and other platforms, such as the Kairouan Media Institute, the Bayariq Foundation, social media, and foreign-funded Quranic and charitable foundations.

They further benefitted from the nebulous political discourse, which, since the first months following the elections, had not veered from the open conflict between Islamists and their allies and all other opposition parties. Terrorism became the object of debate and mutual recriminations over who bore responsibility for the growing phenomenon. Extremism meanwhile took root, spread, and flourished among young people who had despaired of changing their social conditions and lost faith in politics and thus found jihadi action attractive. Terrorism, in fact, did find some popular welcome in various border areas, which assisted in the execution of terrorist attacks.

Today, we are at crossroads. Either we equip democracy in Tunisia with the elements of success—adopting a development approach that establishes geographic justice, restoring hope and faith in politics among young people, entrenching democracy, completing constitutional institutions, respecting the constitution, and in turn protecting the democratic experiment from setbacks, slides into chaos, and violence and extremism—or we continue the same policy of ignoring urgent social issues, with all the risks this entails.

For its part, the security establishment is in need of a clear plan: “Without an [internal security forces] reform that would allow for the formulation of a holistic security strategy, Tunisia will continue to stumble from crisis to crisis as its regional environment deteriorates and political and social tensions increase...”³⁹

In dealing with religious extremism, two issues have not yet received adequate attention from the elite: the confused relationship between religion and the state and the development of a discourse of moderate political Islam in Tunisia.

Paving the Way for an Independent Islam

I agree almost entirely with Abd al-Latif al-Harmasi, sociology professor and author of *Takfir in Islamic Society from the Perspective of the Sociology of Religions*, when he says that religious reform and turning societies away from the extremism does not mean adopting rationalism that seeks to dry up the wellsprings of religion. Rather, we must find the necessary compromise between rationalism and spirituality. But what I wish to stress is that reforming the religious establishment and spurring it to confront extremism requires independence for this establishment and the space to engage in rational inquiry and dialogue, in order to evolve and fill the space created by decades of state control of religion and state exploitation of religion to promote its programs and choices. This has undermined the discourse of both the political authority and the religious establishment.

Although I agree with the intellectuals’ panel and their demand for oversight of all mosques and religious institutions,⁴⁰ I note that such oversight should not be of a political or ideo-

39 “Reform and Security Strategy in Tunisia.”

40 National Panel of Intellectuals to Counter Terrorism and Defend the Nation State and Democracy, Conference Palace, Aug. 12, 2012.

logical nature, which would reproduce the past. It must be instead legal oversight that requires everyone to respect the rules of democracy and avoids political exploitation by any party. This does not mean leaving the religious establishment to operate outside the bounds of the law and constitution. Rather, it means lifting state tutelage of the religious establishment, to restore the latter's credibility.

Moderate Political Islam to Address Extremism

On December 21, 2014, Tunisia successfully carried off its second elections. In contrast to the first elections in October 2011, when the Islamist Ennahda party won and turned to two small parties to support its control over the constituent assembly in an attempt to pass its own draft constitution and view of society, the latest elections ushered in new equations of power, shaped heavily by the years of the democratic transition with its successes, failures, and tremors of violence. Tunisia has thus achieved "a marriage of moderate Islam with secular democracy."⁴¹ This is unique in the Arab world, not only because it spurred Ennahda to accept the rules of the democratic game, but because, more importantly, that movement has developed its discourse, modes of operation, and its relationship with other political parties. It made numerous concessions and abandoned power when it realized it could not cope with the scope of the political, economic, and security challenges following several terrorist attacks and two political assassinations that nearly thwarted the democratic transition altogether. "The roof was about to collapse on top of everybody's heads," said Ennahda leader Rachid al-Ghannouchi, "were it not from God guiding us to save the situation with dialogue and then withdraw from the government."⁴²

According to American circles, the movement "constitutes a model for Arab Islamists, with its peaceful nature and its engagement with its local and regional environment, in terms of its political pragmatism, its respect for the democratic game, and its acceptance of others as actors and partners in administering the country's affairs."⁴³

The movement clearly paid a high price for considering Ansar al-Sharia part of the "Islamist front" and their youth "part of the revolutionary youth and one of its major components." It also paid for its two years of dawdling before confronting the excesses of Ansar al-Sharia. Ghannouchi's appeals to Abou lyadh and his peers to be patient in the implementation of Islamic law and abide by the rules of Islam did not garner the hoped-for response. Instead, a political Islam that wants to find its place on the public political scene found itself at odds with a militant Islam that seeks only to impose its doctrine and ideas with violence and the force of arms.

I think that today Ennahda's experience of governance and the failure of other regional experiments have made it more mature. It accepted a constitution that guarantees civil nature of the state and fundamental liberties, including freedom of conscience and belief and the proscription of *takfir*. It also accepted a nominal presence in the government to

41 Michal Kranz, "The Tunisian Miracle: A Marriage of Moderate Islam and Secular Democracy," The Gate, Jan. 20, 2015.

42 "Li-madha qabilat al-nahda bi-sharaka ghayr mutakafi'a?" al-Jazeera Online, Feb. 11, 2015.

43 Al-Arabi al-Jadid, Mar. 17, 2015.

avoid further conflicts and allow itself the necessary space to evaluate its own experience. Its leader has explicitly rejected violence and extremism, and it, along with other parties, has helped Tunisia avoid many pitfalls. Official circles in the West also believe that Ennahda is an important ally in the war on terrorism⁴⁴ and that moderate, non-violent political Islam can prop up the Arab democratic project. This idea has also begun to take root among many Tunisian elites as well, who have followed the evolution of the movement's discourse and positions and believe that the confrontation with terrorist groups must also come from within political Islam, to rob these groups of their claim to sole possession of religious discourse and interpretation.

True, Ennahda still has some way to go to rid itself of the burden of the past and the hawks who have not embraced the pragmatism of the movement's leadership. It is also true that the movement's acceptance of the results of the ballot box and the principle of the peaceful rotation of power must be matched by a revision of the assumptions and references that prevailed for decades among Ennahda ideologues and followers—namely, that Islam is not only religion, worship, and an ethical system, but a unique system of governance, non-historical, fit for every time and place. This can be considered firmly refuted by the manifold historical contexts and developments known by humanity.

In sum, although important steps have been taken to establish a new relationship between Islam and democracy and separate moderate Islam from terrorism, violence, and extremism, further steps are needed. They should be supplemented by a review and critique of Ennahda's entire past, both ideological and operational. Without this, the potential for relapse remains and suspicion of a duplicitous discourse will persist.

44 Ibid



ASSESSING COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM STRATEGIES IN EGYPT AND TUNISIA

ZIAD ABDEL TAWAB

Assessing Countering Violent Extremism Strategies in Egypt and Tunisia

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Within less than a month from each other, from January 14 to February 11, 2011 Tunisia and Egypt underwent democratic uprisings that provided unlimited hope for the region. Four years later, also within the span of a month, Tunisia and Egypt adopted two deeply flawed and highly criticized anti-terrorism legislations that cast doubt, on the prospects of reform in both countries.

Between 2011 and 2015 both countries were battling to refurbish political, legal and societal structures that were weakened by decades of authoritarian policies. While Tunisia was successful in re-building a constitutional order, Egypt is still facing a series of critical setbacks. The constitutional reality does not change the fact that both countries are facing a variety of challenges that range from a lack of political participation, high unemployment rates, poverty, marginalization, and centralization of power, and issues related to the independence of the judiciary, and failure to implement security-sector reform. Another common factor between both countries is the unprecedented wave of violent extremism that has struck the region.

Official interpretations from both Egypt and Tunisia have attributed the rise of violent extremism to the weakening of state structures following the 2011 uprisings. In both countries the uprisings were a direct result of structural police violence, torture and systematic closure of public spaces. Indeed, one of the main calls of the Tunisian and Egyptian protesters was to dismantle police state- like structures. Both deposed presidents, Ben-Ali of Tunisia and Mubarak of Egypt, had defended the police-state structure under the pretext of combating terrorism. These structures were not only criticized for their inability to prevent terrorism – the 2002 Ghriba Synagogue bombing in Tunisia and the 2005 Sharm El Sheikh attacks in Egypt remain as evidence – but also created a conducive environment for breeding terrorist cells in both countries. The illusion of safety in Tunisia was shaken when the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat was discovered operating within its borders in 2007 at the peak of Ben Ali's repressive policies. Egypt's Sinai had already been viewed as playground for al-Qaeda-affiliated groups since 2004.

The post-2011 attacks that have claimed the lives of hundreds of civilians and security forces are a direct consequence of neglecting the root causes of terrorism in both countries. This negligence is linked to the world-order post-September 11, which has prioritized countering terrorism strategies over preventing youth radicalization. Egypt and Tunisia have not been exceptions. Both countries have, in fact, taken decisions that have led to a further radicalization and destabilization of their respective societies. In 2003,

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Tunisia passed an anti-terrorism law that infamously targeted peaceful political opponents rather than terrorist groups. The Tunisian government confessed that in almost six years the number of people prosecuted under this law was more than 1000 individuals.² When Egypt enacted constitutional amendments in 2007, the newly added Article 179 allowed the president to refer suspects in terrorism cases to “any judiciary body stipulated in the constitution or law,” thus cementing the role of exceptional courts. The same article also gives the state a constitutional cover to issue a counterterrorism law that suspends sections of the constitution that guarantee personal freedoms, protect the sanctity of private life and the home, and prohibit warrantless arrests, searches, and the monitoring of personal communication. It should be noted that the Egyptian government already had a counterterrorism law in place since 1992.

These legal provisions, introduced prior to the 2011 uprisings, represented a broad and dangerous expansion of Egyptian and Tunisian governments’ powers to investigate, arrest, detain, and prosecute individuals at the expense of due process, judicial oversight, and public transparency. Not only did they restrict or violate the rights of suspects, they also stifled peaceful political dissent and targeted particular religious, ethnic, or social groups.

Before 2011, both Egypt and Tunisia seemed to have been convinced that closing off the public sphere under the pretext of combating terrorism would reduce national and international pressures for them to apply democratic reform agendas and would provide them with legal tools to continue to oppress their populations. Both governments wrongfully thought that this would be a guarantor of stability for their autocratic rule. However, the abusive nature and application of these laws were the driving factor behind the uprisings that deposed both political systems, additionally they were the main drivers for the wave of violent extremism that both countries have been suffering since 2011.

Almost a decade later, both governments have decided to resort to even more extreme laws. Laws that would only destabilize both countries, weaken world peace and security, and ensure similar acts as Islamic State’s in Iraq, Syria and Libya.³ In a recent statement, the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (based both in Egypt and Tunisia) and Human Rights First (based in the US), have stressed that “violations by the state, whether in the form of police brutality, mass arrests and arbitrary detentions, or discriminatory treatment, foster distrust between vulnerable communities and the authorities. Violent extremism thrives on these types of grievances”.⁴

2 The UN special rapporteur on countering terrorism provides a figure, given to him by the government, of 1,123 persons prosecuted through 2009. United Nations Human Rights Council, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, Martin Scheinin, on his mission to Tunisia, December 28, 2010, A/HRC/1651/Add.2

3 Tunisia is the largest country in terms of contribution of foreign fighters joining ISIL, with a estimate of 1500-3000 militants. See The International Center for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence available at <http://icsr.info/201501/foreign-fightertotal-syriairaq-now-exceeds-20000-surpasses-afghanistan-conflict-1980s/>

4 Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies and Human Rights First, “Letter to President Obama on CVE Summit,” February 13, 2015

If there is one conclusion that we can draw from the failure of the counter terrorism strategies in both Egypt and Tunis since 2001, it would be that preventing radicalization that leads to violent extremism is based on long-term factors such as strong governance, an inclusive political process, community participation and accountable and responsive justice and security services.⁵

In fact, community participation is key in any prospect of preventing radicalization that leads to violent extremism. This includes civil society organizations like trade unions, community groups, and human rights groups. A flourishing civil society is able 1. to provide a counter narrative to the discourse of radicalized groups, 2. help in the de-radicalization and integration processes of former fighters, and 3. monitor the performance of those responsible for combating terrorism to ensure that they are not responsible for the further escalation of radicalism.

These three features are what the recently adopted counter-terrorism laws in Egypt and Tunisia are undermining. According to an analysis produced by national human rights groups in Egypt and international human rights groups working in Tunis, both laws use vague and include poorly-worded definitions of terrorism. This would legally allow the government of Egypt to label all persons demanding constitutional or legal changes as terrorists, and would allow the government of Tunisia to qualify a demonstration accompanied by a certain amount of disorder as an act of terrorism. Not only is the danger that it allows the repression of certain peaceful actions that are not terroristic in nature as stipulated in international law, but that it also curtails the ability of civil society organizations to freely interact with their stakeholders and criticize state practices through reports or peaceful protests. Additionally, both laws gag the media in violation of the constitutions of Egypt and Tunisia. The adopted laws impose numerous restrictions on freedom of opinion, expression and the press, which would only decrease the ability of civil society groups to use media outlets to disseminate information on de-radicalization.

Political openings in Tunisia and Egypt would be a determinant factor in preventing violent extremism. The ability of a state to ask all its national forces to contribute with different tactics to counter violent extremism in a transparent and accountable process is certainly more successful than having the security forces take up the role alone without any public and judicial oversight.

Tunisia still stands a better chance than Egypt to succeed in preventing radicalization that leads to violent extremism. In fact, Tunisia remains the only democratic hope that emerged out of the Arab revolutions. Its political elite has managed to create and preserve a public space with a vibrant and active civil society. Throughout the past four years it has acquired a credibility that would allow it to take on a responsible role in Tunisia's plans to counter violent extremism. Student unions and trade unions have developed over the years to become a true locomotive for change. Human rights groups with young professional Tunisians have started to emerge since 2011. These young professionals can craft

<http://www.cihrs.org/wp-content/uploads/201502/Letter-to-President-Obama-on-CVE-Summit-from-Human-Rights-First-and-CIHRS.pdf>

5 See Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, "Preventing Terrorism and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism: A Community-Policing Approach," <http://www.osce.org/atu/111438?download=true>

specific strategies that would address and ultimately eradicate the root causes of violent extremism. The government needs to be open to these ideas and foster them. It also has to listen to criticism from those groups and respond constructively to their worries.

Under Ben Ali, civil society was repressed and its role was limited under the pretext of combating terrorism. However, if the current government is more sincere about the need to counter terrorism than Ben Ali was, it should start immediate consultations with civil society on how human rights are essential in preventing and combating violent extremism. The social and media attacks directed at civil society organizations in Tunis which opposed the draconian provisions of the 2015 anti-terrorism law pose an existential challenge to the nascent human rights movement which aims to steer the country and its delicate political coalition towards a constructive direction. These attacks need to be faced with a counter narrative by the government that explains and highlights the role of civil society. If the government is not able to empower civil society at this stage, it will certainly fail in its long-term plan to prevent radicalization.

Civil society in Tunis has a chance to create a permanent forum in which all stakeholders can exercise the collective responsibility to address the root causes of extremism in a radical, systematic, and comprehensive way. This includes finding sustainable solutions for marginalization issues, equity standards, reforming educational syllabi, but most importantly, creating a market that can absorb the increasing demand of educated youth for work, and avoiding a rise in unemployment. These are issues that have been overlooked by the successive Tunisian governments. De-radicalization plans should also be discussed, civil society should be able to develop strategies of engagement with prison officials and agree on a contingency plan on how to address the problem of foreign fighters. Tunisian fighters that have joined IS in Libya and elsewhere, are soon to return. The world has not witnessed a phenomenon as brutal as IS since the Nazis and Khmer Rouge. Learning how to deal with those challenges in a comprehensive manner, and setting up strategies for re-integration and rehabilitation is crucial.

Egypt, however, seems to be more consumed in squashing peaceful political opposition, whether Islamist or secular, and undermining the rule of law rather than preventing radicalization that leads to violent extremism. The daily unprecedented repressive practices of the Egyptian government – not to mention the socioeconomic hardships that helps breeding violent extremisms – has been regrettably an encouraging factor for youth radicalization. The Egyptian government's quest to exterminate civil society and human rights groups that mainly work on promoting tolerance and anti-violence seems to precede its counterinsurgency strategies. The recently adopted 2015 anti-terrorism law has put restrictions on the ability of NGOs to criticize governmental policies and the ability of independent media to cover events and report about them freely. Article 35 of the law unjustly sanctions anyone who publishes or even promotes "untrue" news about acts of terrorism or news that contradicts official Defense Ministry statements about counterterrorism operations. The 2015 law covers a wide range of conduct far beyond what is generally understood as terrorism by defining the term using broad and open-ended language. While governments have publicly defended the exceptional powers available to police and other state authorities under this law, by referencing the threat of terrorism,

sometimes those powers cover conduct that has little connection to potential attacks. Unlike Tunisian legislators, Egyptian lawmakers deem civil society and the media enemies of the state. In a recent statement by the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Human Rights Watch was considered a supporter of terrorist organizations and groups.

Egyptian liberal human rights organizations are subjected to immense restrictions and are facing real threats of closing down their operations. Some groups, especially those working on cultural issues, have already closed. In fact, security-affiliated media outlets, have declared all those opposing state practices as traitors and terrorist sympathizers.

Egypt has very low chances of successfully countering violent extremism. Current state practices have proven to be very effective in fueling radicalization amongst youth. Egypt is no longer just facing an insurgency in the Sinai Peninsula, but is also facing the rise of new violent extremist groups in the heart of Cairo with more than 42,000 people, mostly youth, being arrested in relation to their political activities over two years. Hundreds have died as a result of torture in detention facilities. More youths will continue to radicalize if the state does not immediately and radically alter its policies. What makes this harder to realize, is the genuine persistence of the ruling elite in Egypt not to hold parliamentary elections. In fact, Egypt has been without a parliament since mid-2012. Terrorism would only flourish in absence of real, meaningful and impactful political life, rule of law and public sphere.

Only when the roots of radicalization are properly addressed will the government of Egypt be able to start an inclusive political process through which it can address the rise violent extremism in a comprehensive manner.

Tunisia's counter-violent extremism strategy is as vulnerable as its nascent democratic experience. When compared to Egypt, the quantity and quality of attacks against government officials and tourists are less intense. Nevertheless, they are an indicator that the country could go down the wrong path if the government does not develop a comprehensive strategy to prevent extremism and ensure de-radicalization. The success of such a strategy would depend on a variety of factors, including the ability of the current government to open up creative spaces through which civil society can help eradicate the discourse of violent extremism in society. Decades of oppression by old political dictators has weakened the ability of human rights groups to develop socio-cultural discourses that appeal to the public. In addition, the government needs to develop modern and equitable social and economic policies that would be aimed at combating marginalization and poverty and which are capable of enhancing the educational and health sectors.

Countering violent extremism is also based on strategic policies that ensure effective military and security handling of extremist - and this can only happen through security sector reform. A recent report by the International Crisis Group describes the Tunisian counter terrorism policing and military strategies to be ad hoc and dysfunctional. Prioritizing the reform of this sector, benefiting from other experiences in Ireland and Spain, would be indispensable in countering insurgency operations in the eastern and western side of the country.

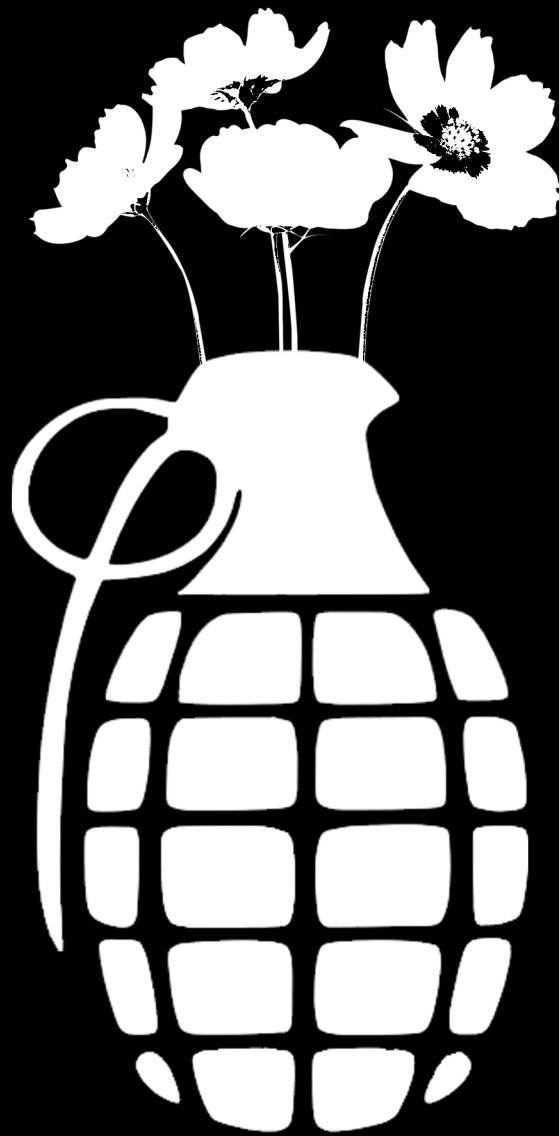
Additionally, finding a comprehensive political solution to the war in Libya is crucial. Egypt has favored military solutions to the conflict in Libya while Tunisia has encouraged a UN-led political dialogue in the country. Further destabilization of the conflict in Libya through continuous military and para-military operations would exacerbate the conflict and provide more ground for IS to gain territory and plan operations in neighboring countries.

Moreover, the international community should be vigilant at ensuring that Tunisia does not deviate from the path to democracy as Egypt did. The political and public space that exists today in Tunisia is what prevented the country from going through a path similar to that of Egypt. This space has enabled the possibility for dialogue and tolerance, and it needs to be fostered in order to achieve change on the security level.

The political discourse of the Tunisian government is far better than its Egyptian counterpart. On June 30, 2015, during a speech at the funeral of Egypt's public prosecutor, President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi said that "the prompt hand of justice is tied by laws, and we can't wait for that." He promised to amend laws "to implement law and justice in the fastest possible time. . . .If the judge orders the death penalty, we will implement the death penalty. If he orders a life sentence, we will implement the life sentence." As he left the funeral, Sisi told a group of judges "No courts would work this way, under those circumstances . . . This could work with normal people. But [for] the people who are not (normal) only prompt laws would work with them." Such a statement, coming from the president, reflects two years of continuous incitement to violence by pro and antigovernment media groups.

In a marked difference, when declaring the state of emergency after the Sousse terrorist attack, President Beji Caid Essebsi, stated on a televised speech that, "we are not blaming anyone, but we are calling on everyone to feel and act responsibly. If such incidents happen again, the state will collapse. It is the duty of the president to take a stance." He followed: "Despite this, we should respect freedom of expression and freedom of the press. However, those who are exercising their rights should respect the exceptional status that Tunisia is facing so that they don't create circumstances that would not help us in combating terrorism."

This striking distinction between Sisi and Essebsi's discourses is indicative of a difference in political will to improve the situation. In Tunisia, there seems to be a political will to change the status quo, while in Egypt, the state only exacerbates the problems it faces.



TO PREVENT VIOLENT EXTREMISM
PROMOTE HUMAN RIGHTS

NEIL HICKS

To Prevent Violent Extremism Promote Human Rights

Overview of a Workshop Convened by the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies And Human Rights First, New York, September 30, 2015

Neil Hicks¹

December, 2015

The Promise and Problems of the U.S. Government's Countering Violent Extremism Initiative

The workshop primarily brought together U.S. government officials involved in developing and building support – both internationally and within the U.S. policy process – for President Obama's Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) initiative and human rights activists from the Middle East and East Africa. As such, it was an examination of the potential for the CVE approach to countering terrorism to be favorable for the advancement of human rights.

President Obama laid out the substance of the strategy at a Global Summit on Countering Violent Extremism in Washington on February 19, 2015. The strategy offers the possibility for countries in many parts of the world to break out of a destructive cycle of conflict between religious extremism and repressive authoritarian governance – a cycle of destruction that has often been intensified by narrow, militaristic and security-centric measures designed to counter the threat of terrorism.

President Obama's strategy has four elements:

1. Maintaining the military fight against terrorist organizations and ending conflicts that have become magnets for violent extremism, notably in Syria.
2. Confronting the ideologies that inspire terrorists like ISIL and al-Shabab.
3. Addressing economic grievances and corruption.
4. Addressing the political grievances that terrorists exploit, like denial of human rights and basic freedoms.

Having witnessed the damage to human rights – both in terms of the proliferation of violations and the weakening of well-established international norms and standards, inflicted by the largely U.S. instigated “global war on terrorism” – since the 9/11 terrorist attacks of 2001, there are ample reasons to be skeptical whether the commendable emphasis on human rights in the rhetoric describing the CVE initiative will be implemented as policy. Activists pointed to the challenge of translating rhetorical commitments by policy makers to the operational level so that the security forces engaged in counterterrorism operations uphold human rights in practice.

¹ Neil Hicks is Director of Human Rights Promotion at Human Rights First.

U.S. government officials who took part in the workshop made the case that the CVE initiative represented a “learning based progression” in counterterrorism policy, grounded in the lessons learned since the 9/11 attacks of 2001. These lessons include the recognition that “hard” military and security centric approaches to countering the threat from violent extremism are insufficient alone, and that a more comprehensive, holistic approach is called for. One official went as far as to claim that “the notion of a military only solution [to violent extremism] has been disproved at this point.”

The exchanges at the workshop pointed to the context specific particularities of the policy challenges presented by violent extremism in different countries, while also identifying and emphasizing what President Obama has referred to as the “undeniable link” between human rights violations and fueling violent extremism. This link provides opportunities for human rights activists to make their advocacy more effective by pointing out to policy makers, especially those in the areas of national security and counterterrorism, that when they disregard or violate human rights they are undermining their own efforts.

The renewed emphasis on prevention and non-military approaches presents an opportunity to strengthen human rights advocacy by enabling activists to argue that promoting and protecting human rights is not only morally right, but also vital to effective security policy.

U.S. officials challenged civil society activists to work to create a persuasive body of empirical research demonstrating how violations of human rights contribute to the conditions in which violent extremism can take root and grow.

This is not the first time that the need to promote and protect human rights has been recognized by the United States government and by the international community. Unfortunately, for too long, too many governments have paid lip-service to the need to uphold human rights while countering terrorism, but have nonetheless adopted policies that violated human rights in the name of countering terrorism. The United Nations Global Counterterrorism Strategy adopted in 2006, which built on a flurry of largely U.S. led activity after 2001, emphasized the need “to ensure respect for human rights for all and the rule of law as the fundamental basis of the fight against terrorism.” There is therefore an element of *déjà-vu* about the human rights elements of the CVE strategy.

Human rights have too often been regarded as an optional extra to the serious business of upholding security, or even as something of an obstacle. It is still common to hear policy makers speak about the need to balance security and counterterrorism measures against obligations to uphold human rights standards. Such a balance is elusive and time and time again appeals to security have carried more weight than efforts to safeguard basic rights and freedoms. Counterterrorism and national security policy should turn away from an approach that sees respect for human rights as something that has to be balanced against the need to maintain order and stability; and turn towards an approach that recognizes human rights promotion and protection as an integral, essential part of upholding security.

It was perhaps telling, and certainly not a positive signal, that the Leaders’ Summit convened by President Obama at the United Nations in New York on September 29 placed

an emphasis on “Countering ISIL” and relegated the preventive aspects of the CVE strategy (elements 2 – 4) to a lower place on the agenda.

The president was surely correct in his remarks in February when he spoke about the “need to break the cycles of conflict – especially sectarian conflict – that have become magnets for violent extremism.” It was therefore troubling that at the Leaders’ Summit in New York government leaders supposedly allied with the United States in the struggle against violent extremism voiced divergent, and sometimes flatly contradictory, views about the Syria conflict. Some prioritize the fight against the Assad regime, others the fight against ISIL; some emphasize that there is “no military solution” to the conflict, while others push for more military intervention. Tragically, there is no end in sight to the conflict in Syria and its repercussions continue to spread throughout the region and beyond.

So if the tensions between kinetic counterterrorism measures and human rights are not resolved by the CVE approach, and if conflicts that are driving violent extremism continue to rage, can a strategy in which one of its four pillars seems questionable be useful?

Elements 2 – 4 of the CVE strategy have focused attention on under-used tools in the counterterrorism and CVE toolbox — not least prioritizing the promotion and protection of human rights. It appears likely that these aspects of the strategy will be adopted and amplified by the UN Secretary General when he sets out his Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism in 2016.² The language of “countering” violent extremism is problematic and even self-defeating since it stigmatizes any possible problem area /potential push factor as something that must be countered and therefore as an enemy. Hence the insistence on “preventing” in the Secretary General’s plan of action.

An emphasis on prevention, on PVE rather than CVE, would offer a more internally coherent strategy, and the possibility of a shift away from counterproductive counter-terrorism policies that fail to prioritize human rights. As we have seen, governments are willing to give their support to counterterrorism measures that do not impact their own internal governance practices.

Greater emphasis on encouraging states to uphold their human rights commitments, not only because it is their obligation in international law, but because it serves the shared interest in reducing the instability and destruction caused by terrorist violence would add weight to multilateral efforts to promote and protect human rights.

A preventive CVE strategy is an opportunity to set a new, more constructive global trend. It will require sustained U.S. leadership if it is to have an impact on the way the international community deals with the transnational threat of terrorism and violent extremism.

Enabling civil society activists to participate in the official development of CVE policy, and emphasizing that the free functioning of independent civil society organizations is an essential element of the CVE strategy, sends an important message around the world. Too many governments have abused new legislation, ostensibly adopted to counter terrorism, to place restrictions on the legitimate activities of civil society organizations, in-

² The UN Secretary General Plan of Action for Preventing Violent Extremism was released shortly after this chapter was submitted by the author. The Plan of Action could be accessed through this link: <https://undg.org/wp-content/uploads/201602/SG-Plan-of-Action-to-Prevent-Violent-Extremism-1.pdf>

cluding human rights organizations, and thereby undermined global efforts to combat terrorism and extremism.

In many countries independent civil society organizations have seen their space for activity contracting. They have faced restrictions on freedoms of assembly, association and expression, and official threats and criminal prosecutions for seeking to hold state institutions and government officials accountable for violations of human rights, or just for being an independent voice on issues facing their countries.

Skepticism also stems from the actual bi-lateral relationships that the United States maintains with many states that are facing challenges from the threat of terrorism, which also engage in systematic violations of human rights. Following the logic of the CVE strategy it should not be any surprise that these two conditions often coincide: states that violate human rights systematically also face challenges from violent extremism and terrorism.

If the United States is to effectively champion a more comprehensive, preventive strategy to counter violent extremism then it must consistently show its commitment to implement this strategy in each of its bilateral relationships with states facing challenges from terrorism.

Context Specific Examples

Discussion at the workshop highlighted the multiple drivers of violent extremism in different geographical locations, which point to the need for custom designed, multifaceted policy responses appropriate to each diverse context.

In Egypt, severe repression of Islamists and the Muslim Brotherhood in particular has driven elements within the Muslim Brotherhood towards violent confrontation with the authorities. Violent extremist groups have been strengthened by the disastrous political trajectory of the Brotherhood: from being a majority in the parliament, through the Freedom and Justice Party, and having one of its leaders, Mohamed Morsi, elected as Egypt's first civilian president in 2012 to military take-over in July 2013, the killing of hundreds of its supporters in street protests and the jailing of tens of thousands more in a continuing state backed campaign of repression marked by disregard of national and international legal standards.

While there is a legitimate debate to be had about the sincerity of the Brotherhood's long-term commitment to open, pluralistic politics; the Egyptian authorities' decision to remove a democratically elected president, and then to subject his supporters to a sustained wave of state reprisals of a brutality not seen in Egypt since the 1950s and 60s cannot fail to have fueled the narrative of violent Islamist extremists. Such extremists point to the plight of the Brotherhood in Egypt and draw two lessons: 1) State structures will never allow a democratically elected Islamist party to govern; and 2) the Islamist project can only be advanced through violent means, such as those advocated by al-Qaeda and the so-called Islamic State. In that respect, the lawless repression imposed on the Brotherhood and its supporters in Egypt since July 2013 has been a driver of violent extremism on a national and regional level.

With the Brotherhood's senior political leadership, who had over decades agreed upon and implemented a program of engagement with non-violent elective politics, in jail or in exile, more radical elements, who favor violent confrontation with the state, are gaining influence. Continuing attacks against police and military personnel, and against members of the judiciary are the products of this turn towards violent extremism by some Islamists in Egypt.

The harsh treatment inflicted on Islamist detainees in Egyptian prisons where use of torture is on the increase and sexual humiliation is commonly used also fuels grievances that are exploited by violent extremists. The increasing use of secret unregulated detention centers and arbitrary detention removes oversight and facilitates abuses against detainees only exacerbates the problem.

Islamists are not the only victims of state violence and repression in Egypt and yet it is Islamist groups, notably Ansar Beit al-Maqdes which later declared itself to be the Sinai Province of the self-proclaimed Islamic State, that have been involved in most of the violent attacks since the military takeover. This points to the relevance of Islamist ideology as a mobilizing factor in violent extremism. Other persecuted groups, like secular youth activists associated with the 2011 uprising, or Copts, have not turned to political violence in the same way that some Islamists, including some part of Muslim Brotherhood supporters, have.

The conflict in Sinai pre-dated the military takeover of 2013, but the situation has worsened since the removal of the Morsi government. Sinai is distant from Egypt's major population centers in the Nile valley and has long been relatively underdeveloped. Recent development of tourist resorts has not benefited the local population and have exacerbated tensions with periodic incidents of violence against tourists in resort areas. The area was also increasingly lawless with smugglers and criminal gangs operating often in connivance with corrupt state officials.

The weakness of state structures in the Sinai region has facilitated its becoming a focal point of violent extremism in Egypt. A local activist described it as "a military zone caught in a spiral of terrorism, corruption and violence with thousands detained, hundreds killed and hundreds of houses destroyed." Oversight of operations by security forces in Sinai has never been strong, but with the imposition of restrictions on press coverage of events in Sinai, criminal penalties for casting doubt on official accounts of security incidents and a worsening security situation there is effectively no oversight, and little public attention inside or outside Egypt, to an increasingly violent conflict.

Absence of state control over territory has been a factor in the development of violent extremism in Syria and Iraq. Syria also presents one of the clearest examples of the self-sustaining symbiotic relationship between a repressive government and terrorism. Leaders across the Middle East and Africa often seek to build legitimacy by portraying themselves as engaged in a life or death struggle protecting their nation against terrorism, in so doing they have an interest in making their opposition appear to be as extreme as possible. Suppressing non-violent political opponents by restricting access to the media, and access to the political process means that the political choice becomes polarized

between the authoritarian incumbent and the violent extremist alternative. This fuels violent extremism at the expense of non-violent, pluralistic politics. Syria is an extreme case of the government using terrorism to legitimize violent repression, thereby contributing to the growth of the most visible global violent extremist threat: the so called Islamic State.

The massive humanitarian crisis in Syria also illustrates the fact that terrorism is primarily a problem of the non-Western world. By far the greatest number of victims of terrorism perpetrated by Islamist extremist groups have been Muslim citizens of majority Muslim countries, notably Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan. It is a grim irony that multilateral efforts to end the Syria conflict only moved up the policy agenda after high-profile terrorist attacks in the West, like the Paris attacks of November 2015, and after the mass migration of refugees fleeing conflict in Syria and Iraq into the European Union. This gives the impression that Western governments only care about violent extremism when it has a direct impact on them, and that they are indifferent to the suffering of millions of victims of conflict in non-Western countries. It is easy to see how this perceived lack of empathy might itself fuel grievances on which violent extremism can feed.

The devastating conflict in Syria and Iraq has been fueled by sectarian incitement fueling divisions between Shia and Sunni Muslims. In Iraq, the al-Maliki government empowered Shia militias, which carried out brutal reprisals against Sunni Iraqis in central and western Iraq, blamed for having supported the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein and its repression of Iraq's Shias. Counterterrorism laws implemented by the al-Maliki government gave Shia dominated security forces powers to detain Sunnis without charge or trial, fueling what degenerated into a sectarian witch hunt. Disaffected Iraqi Sunnis, excluded from their positions in the security forces and other state institutions became a core base constituency for ISIL.

In Syria, Sunnis in eastern Syria have been a major target of repression from the Assad government dominated by the minority Alawite sect. These sectarian fault lines have been exacerbated by the strong backing for the Assad regime from the Shia government in Tehran, and the deployment of Shia Hezbollah fighters, from Lebanon, and military advisers from Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps on the government's side. Sunni powers like Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Turkey have provided support to forces opposed to the Assad regime, including highly sectarian violent extremist groups. The proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia has heightened the sectarian character of the conflict and thereby made sectarianism a primary driver of violent extremism in many parts of the region with conflicts in Yemen and continuing tensions in Bahrain and within Saudi Arabia being worsened by sectarian incitement.

The human rights discourse of the Obama administration, which is a central part of its CVE strategy, has been devalued in practice. The tide of instability that has taken the place of initial optimism after the Arab Spring uprisings in 2011 has paralyzed Western policy makers. In the United States, the Obama administration had set as its goal disengagement from conflicts in the Middle East. In the absence of political will or popular support, the administration has determined that it cannot exert sufficient weight or influence to shape events in conflict zones from Libya to Syria, to Yemen and Iraq. This has left a void, which the U.S. and other Western governments have encouraged their

traditional authoritarian partners to fill. Thus the United States has turned a blind eye to the sustained repression of non-violent demands for more representative government in Bahrain, and has abetted the consolidation of power of Egypt's repressive former military leader, President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, sustained by massive injections of financial support from autocratic monarchies in the Gulf, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

The Obama administration's single-minded pursuit of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action deal to prevent the development of nuclear weapons by the Iranian government also had human rights costs. In return for acceptance of the deal by skeptical allies, like Saudi Arabia, the administration gave its support to Saudi Arabia's military operations in Yemen. The priority given to the nuclear deal has meant that less pressure has been applied to Iran to rein in its support for the murderous tactics pursued by its ally, President Assad in Syria, than might otherwise have been the case.

The Tunisian context provides a point of contrast. The negative experiences of other North African countries, notably Libya and Egypt where uprising and revolution have produced resurgent authoritarianism or chaotic internal conflict, are a cautionary tale. Avoiding falling into the declining spiral of a destructive binary struggle between authoritarianism and violent extremism is something that binds Tunisians together, despite abiding political differences, a weak economy and a fragile internal security situation.

Tunisia is not paradise; its discontented youth have provided thousands of foreign fighters to ISIL in Syria. In part this is a product of the lingering harm inflicted by decades of authoritarian rule, notably the weakening of traditional religious power centers, tainted by close association with state authorities. Corruption, youth unemployment and lack of opportunity fuel grievances, especially among educated youth, who have ready access to the Internet and social media. Like other Arab authoritarian governments, the Ben Ali regime suppressed non-violent Islamism thereby ensuring that violent Islamists could make the case that they offered the only viable path to advance the Islamist political project.

This type of tactic, which is common to authoritarian regimes of the past and present in the Arab region, provides ideal conditions for the growth of violent extremism. When political dialogue is forbidden and discredited, extremists are empowered and extremist ideology vindicated. Suggesting that all Islamism is inevitably violent is self-fulfilling. It is especially dangerous in states where a significant proportion, or even the majority, of the political opposition to the government identifies as Islamist. By suppressing other types of political expression and organization, squeezing pluralism out of the system, authoritarian states have made this problem worse.

Tunisia's democratic transition has particular importance to the struggle against violent extremism on a regional and global level. It offers an alternative way that breaks out of the vicious circle of perpetual conflict between authoritarianism and extremism. To succeed, Tunisia will need the sustained support of the international community; it will also need to continue to implement in practice the maxim that fighting terrorism is not just something that the state does for its people; it is something that people are motivated to do for themselves in partnership with the state and the security forces, but also through strong, independent civil society organizations.

Conclusions

A narrow military - security approach has contributed to radicalization and expansion of terrorist violence in several Arab countries during the last two years. A short-term interest in intelligence cooperation with authoritarian governments has too often prevailed over the long-term imperative to end oppressive governance that has rightly been identified as a major driver of violent extremism.

Promoting good governance, the rule of law, and respect for human rights are not constraints but essential tools in countering violent extremism. To effectively combat violent extremism all governments must tackle social and economic marginalization, implement human rights protections for all their people, and stamp out the spread of extremist ideologies that incite hatred and violence.

- National counterterrorism measures that are not rooted in respect for human rights risk being counterproductive. When governments stifle peaceful dissent, muzzle the media, and prevent the legitimate activities of non-violent civil society organizations, they are not countering extremism; they are fomenting it.
- Respect for religious freedom is an essential part of CVE strategy. The extremist discourse of some governmental religious institutions is part of the problem; independence and de-politicization of those institutions is an essential part of the solution. A comprehensive CVE strategy must address the religious and ideological narratives that lure the vulnerable and disenfranchised segments of society to violent extremism. To be effective as counterweights to extremist discourse, religious institutions must be—and be seen to be— independent of political control, and governments must ensure that diverse religious views are tolerated.
- Closing space for civil society and peaceful political activities facilitates the expansion of violent extremism and terrorism. Conversely, respecting fundamental freedoms, especially the freedom of assembly and association, is one of the most important defense mechanisms against violent extremism. Crackdowns on political dissent and diminishing space for political freedom reinforces extremist narratives and directly contributes to the radicalization of youths.
- The armed conflicts that are taking place in the Middle East and elsewhere are serving as a breeding ground for violent extremism. The United States, because of its unique reach and influence, has an inescapable responsibility to lead and energize multilateral efforts through the United Nations to end these devastating conflicts. The absence of effective conflict resolution mechanisms, on both national and international levels, is one of the greatest challenges to the execution of a comprehensive CVE strategy.
- Bringing an end to the armed conflicts in Syria, Yemen, and Libya and ensuring that the post-conflict phases are built on inclusive peace processes that uphold the values of democracy and plurality.
- To narrow the remaining gap between the positive rhetoric on a more holistic approach to combating violent extremism and the counterproductive practices of too many states, independent UN monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, as well as sim-

ilar mechanisms at the regional levels, should be strengthened so that states are held to account for their practices and cannot just pay lip-service to best practices, while failing to implement them.

- If the multilateral CVE process is to result in much-needed lasting changes in the way states address the threat of violent extremism, and if more effective preventive policies are to be implemented, then the United States must sustain its engagement in providing leadership to a more comprehensive multilateral CVE strategy and, just as importantly, implement the principles of that strategy in each of its bi-lateral relationships, particularly with states facing challenges from the threat of terrorism that also engage in systematic violations of human rights.

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ANNEXES



General Assembly Distr.: General
20 September 2006

Sixtieth session
Agenda items 46 and 120

Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 8 September 2006

[without reference to a Main Committee (A/60/L.62)]

60/288. The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy

The General Assembly,

Guided by the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, and reaffirming its role under the Charter, including on questions related to international peace and security,

Reiterating its strong condemnation of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, committed by whomever, wherever and for whatever purposes, as it constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security,

Reaffirming the Declaration on Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism, contained in the annex to General Assembly resolution 49/60 of 9 December 1994, the Declaration to Supplement the 1994 Declaration on Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism, contained in the annex to General Assembly resolution 51/210 of 17 December 1996, and the 2005 World Summit Outcome,¹ in particular its section on terrorism,

Recalling all General Assembly resolutions on measures to eliminate international terrorism, including resolution 46/51 of 9 December 1991, and Security Council resolutions on threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts, as well as relevant resolutions of the General Assembly on the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism,

Recalling also that, in the 2005 World Summit Outcome, world leaders rededicated themselves to support all efforts to uphold the sovereign equality of all States, respect their territorial integrity and political independence, to refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force in any manner inconsistent with the purposes and principles of the United Nations, to uphold the resolution of disputes by peaceful means and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, the right to self-determination of peoples which remain under colonial domination or foreign occupation, non-interference in the internal affairs of States, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for the equal rights of all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion, international cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural or humanitarian character, and the fulfilment in good faith of the obligations assumed in accordance with the Charter,

Recalling further the mandate contained in the 2005 World Summit Outcome that the General Assembly should develop without delay the elements identified by the Secretary-General for a counter-terrorism strategy, with a view to adopting and implementing a strategy to promote comprehensive, coordinated and consistent responses, at the national, regional and international levels, to counter terrorism, which also takes into account the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism,

¹ See resolution 60/1.

Reaffirming that acts, methods and practices of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations are activities aimed at the destruction of human rights, fundamental freedoms and democracy, threatening territorial integrity, security of States and destabilizing legitimately constituted Governments, and that the international community should take the necessary steps to enhance cooperation to prevent and combat terrorism,

Reaffirming also that terrorism cannot and should not be associated with any religion, nationality, civilization or ethnic group,

Reaffirming further Member States' determination to make every effort to reach an agreement on and conclude a comprehensive convention on international terrorism, including by resolving the outstanding issues related to the legal definition and scope of the acts covered by the convention, so that it can serve as an effective instrument to counter terrorism,

Continuing to acknowledge that the question of convening a high-level conference under the auspices of the United Nations to formulate an international response to terrorism in all its forms and manifestations could be considered,

Recognizing that development, peace and security, and human rights are interlinked and mutually reinforcing,

Bearing in mind the need to address the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism,

Affirming Member States' determination to continue to do all they can to resolve conflict, end foreign occupation, confront oppression, eradicate poverty, promote sustained economic growth, sustainable development, global prosperity, good governance, human rights for all and rule of law, improve intercultural understanding and ensure respect for all religions, religious values, beliefs or cultures,

1. *Expresses its appreciation* for the report entitled "Uniting against terrorism: recommendations for a global counter-terrorism strategy" submitted by the Secretary-General to the General Assembly;²

2. *Adopts* the present resolution and its annex as the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy ("the Strategy");

3. *Decides*, without prejudice to the continuation of the discussion in its relevant committees of all their agenda items related to terrorism and counter-terrorism, to undertake the following steps for the effective follow-up of the Strategy:

(a) To launch the Strategy at a high-level segment of its sixty-first session;

(b) To examine in two years progress made in the implementation of the Strategy, and to consider updating it to respond to changes, recognizing that many of the measures contained in the Strategy can be achieved immediately, some will require sustained work through the coming few years and some should be treated as long-term objectives;

(c) To invite the Secretary-General to contribute to the future deliberations of the General Assembly on the review of the implementation and updating of the Strategy;

² A/60/825

(d) To encourage Member States, the United Nations and other appropriate international, regional and subregional organizations to support the implementation of the Strategy, including through mobilizing resources and expertise;

(e) To further encourage non-governmental organizations and civil society to engage, as appropriate, on how to enhance efforts to implement the Strategy;

4. *Decides* to include in the provisional agenda of its sixty-second session an item entitled “The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy”.

*99th plenary meeting
8 September 2006*

Annex

Plan of action

We, the States Members of the United Nations, resolve:

1. To consistently, unequivocally and strongly condemn terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, committed by whomever, wherever and for whatever purposes, as it constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security;

2. To take urgent action to prevent and combat terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and, in particular:

(a) To consider becoming parties without delay to the existing international conventions and protocols against terrorism, and implementing them, and to make every effort to reach an agreement on and conclude a comprehensive convention on international terrorism;

(b) To implement all General Assembly resolutions on measures to eliminate international terrorism and relevant General Assembly resolutions on the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism;

(c) To implement all Security Council resolutions related to international terrorism and to cooperate fully with the counter-terrorism subsidiary bodies of the Security Council in the fulfilment of their tasks, recognizing that many States continue to require assistance in implementing these resolutions;

3. To recognize that international cooperation and any measures that we undertake to prevent and combat terrorism must comply with our obligations under international law, including the Charter of the United Nations and relevant international conventions and protocols, in particular human rights law, refugee law and international humanitarian law.

I. Measures to address the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism

We resolve to undertake the following measures aimed at addressing the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism, including but not limited to prolonged unresolved conflicts, dehumanization of victims of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, lack of the rule of law and violations of human rights, ethnic, national and religious discrimination, political exclusion, socio-economic marginalization and lack of good governance, while recognizing that none of these conditions can excuse or justify acts of terrorism:

1. To continue to strengthen and make best possible use of the capacities of the United Nations in areas such as conflict prevention, negotiation, mediation, conciliation, judicial settlement, rule of law, peacekeeping and peacebuilding, in order to contribute to the successful prevention and peaceful resolution of prolonged

unresolved conflicts. We recognize that the peaceful resolution of such conflicts would contribute to strengthening the global fight against terrorism;

2. To continue to arrange under the auspices of the United Nations initiatives and programmes to promote dialogue, tolerance and understanding among civilizations, cultures, peoples and religions, and to promote mutual respect for and prevent the defamation of religions, religious values, beliefs and cultures. In this regard, we welcome the launching by the Secretary-General of the initiative on the Alliance of Civilizations. We also welcome similar initiatives that have been taken in other parts of the world;

3. To promote a culture of peace, justice and human development, ethnic, national and religious tolerance and respect for all religions, religious values, beliefs or cultures by establishing and encouraging, as appropriate, education and public awareness programmes involving all sectors of society. In this regard, we encourage the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization to play a key role, including through inter-faith and intra-faith dialogue and dialogue among civilizations;

4. To continue to work to adopt such measures as may be necessary and appropriate and in accordance with our respective obligations under international law to prohibit by law incitement to commit a terrorist act or acts and prevent such conduct;

5. To reiterate our determination to ensure the timely and full realization of the development goals and objectives agreed at the major United Nations conferences and summits, including the Millennium Development Goals. We reaffirm our commitment to eradicate poverty and promote sustained economic growth, sustainable development and global prosperity for all;

6. To pursue and reinforce development and social inclusion agendas at every level as goals in themselves, recognizing that success in this area, especially on youth unemployment, could reduce marginalization and the subsequent sense of victimization that propels extremism and the recruitment of terrorists;

7. To encourage the United Nations system as a whole to scale up the cooperation and assistance it is already conducting in the fields of rule of law, human rights and good governance to support sustained economic and social development;

8. To consider putting in place, on a voluntary basis, national systems of assistance that would promote the needs of victims of terrorism and their families and facilitate the normalization of their lives. In this regard, we encourage States to request the relevant United Nations entities to help them to develop such national systems. We will also strive to promote international solidarity in support of victims and foster the involvement of civil society in a global campaign against terrorism and for its condemnation. This could include exploring at the General Assembly the possibility of developing practical mechanisms to provide assistance to victims.

II. Measures to prevent and combat terrorism

We resolve to undertake the following measures to prevent and combat terrorism, in particular by denying terrorists access to the means to carry out their attacks, to their targets and to the desired impact of their attacks:

1. To refrain from organizing, instigating, facilitating, participating in, financing, encouraging or tolerating terrorist activities and to take appropriate practical measures to ensure that our respective territories are not used for terrorist

installations or training camps, or for the preparation or organization of terrorist acts intended to be committed against other States or their citizens;

2. To cooperate fully in the fight against terrorism, in accordance with our obligations under international law, in order to find, deny safe haven and bring to justice, on the basis of the principle of extradite or prosecute, any person who supports, facilitates, participates or attempts to participate in the financing, planning, preparation or perpetration of terrorist acts or provides safe havens;

3. To ensure the apprehension and prosecution or extradition of perpetrators of terrorist acts, in accordance with the relevant provisions of national and international law, in particular human rights law, refugee law and international humanitarian law. We will endeavour to conclude and implement to that effect mutual judicial assistance and extradition agreements and to strengthen cooperation between law enforcement agencies;

4. To intensify cooperation, as appropriate, in exchanging timely and accurate information concerning the prevention and combating of terrorism;

5. To strengthen coordination and cooperation among States in combating crimes that might be connected with terrorism, including drug trafficking in all its aspects, illicit arms trade, in particular of small arms and light weapons, including man-portable air defence systems, money-laundering and smuggling of nuclear, chemical, biological, radiological and other potentially deadly materials;

6. To consider becoming parties without delay to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime³ and to the three protocols supplementing it,⁴ and implementing them;

7. To take appropriate measures, before granting asylum, for the purpose of ensuring that the asylum-seeker has not engaged in terrorist activities and, after granting asylum, for the purpose of ensuring that the refugee status is not used in a manner contrary to the provisions set out in section II, paragraph 1, above;

8. To encourage relevant regional and subregional organizations to create or strengthen counter-terrorism mechanisms or centres. Should they require cooperation and assistance to this end, we encourage the Counter-Terrorism Committee and its Executive Directorate and, where consistent with their existing mandates, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the International Criminal Police Organization, to facilitate its provision;

9. To acknowledge that the question of creating an international centre to fight terrorism could be considered, as part of international efforts to enhance the fight against terrorism;

10. To encourage States to implement the comprehensive international standards embodied in the Forty Recommendations on Money-Laundering and Nine Special Recommendations on Terrorist Financing of the Financial Action Task Force, recognizing that States may require assistance in implementing them;

11. To invite the United Nations system to develop, together with Member States, a single comprehensive database on biological incidents, ensuring that it is complementary to the biocrimes database contemplated by the International Criminal Police Organization. We also encourage the Secretary-General to update the roster of

³ Resolution 55/25, annex I.

⁴ Resolution 55/25, annexes II and III; and resolution 55/255, annex.

experts and laboratories, as well as the technical guidelines and procedures, available to him for the timely and efficient investigation of alleged use. In addition, we note the importance of the proposal of the Secretary-General to bring together, within the framework of the United Nations, the major biotechnology stakeholders, including industry, the scientific community, civil society and Governments, into a common programme aimed at ensuring that biotechnology advances are not used for terrorist or other criminal purposes but for the public good, with due respect for the basic international norms on intellectual property rights;

12. To work with the United Nations with due regard to confidentiality, respecting human rights and in compliance with other obligations under international law, to explore ways and means to:

(a) Coordinate efforts at the international and regional levels to counter terrorism in all its forms and manifestations on the Internet;

(b) Use the Internet as a tool for countering the spread of terrorism, while recognizing that States may require assistance in this regard;

13. To step up national efforts and bilateral, subregional, regional and international cooperation, as appropriate, to improve border and customs controls in order to prevent and detect the movement of terrorists and prevent and detect the illicit traffic in, inter alia, small arms and light weapons, conventional ammunition and explosives, and nuclear, chemical, biological or radiological weapons and materials, while recognizing that States may require assistance to that effect;

14. To encourage the Counter-Terrorism Committee and its Executive Directorate to continue to work with States, at their request, to facilitate the adoption of legislation and administrative measures to implement the terrorist travel-related obligations and to identify best practices in this area, drawing whenever possible on those developed by technical international organizations, such as the International Civil Aviation Organization, the World Customs Organization and the International Criminal Police Organization;

15. To encourage the Committee established pursuant to Security Council resolution 1267 (1999) to continue to work to strengthen the effectiveness of the travel ban under the United Nations sanctions regime against AlQaida and the Taliban and associated individuals and entities, as well as to ensure, as a matter of priority, that fair and transparent procedures exist for placing individuals and entities on its lists, for removing them and for granting humanitarian exceptions. In this regard, we encourage States to share information, including by widely distributing the International Criminal Police Organization/United Nations special notices concerning people subject to this sanctions regime;

16. To step up efforts and cooperation at every level, as appropriate, to improve the security of manufacturing and issuing identity and travel documents and to prevent and detect their alteration or fraudulent use, while recognizing that States may require assistance in doing so. In this regard, we invite the International Criminal Police Organization to enhance its database on stolen and lost travel documents, and we will endeavour to make full use of this tool, as appropriate, in particular by sharing relevant information;

17. To invite the United Nations to improve coordination in planning a response to a terrorist attack using nuclear, chemical, biological or radiological weapons or materials, in particular by reviewing and improving the effectiveness of the existing inter-agency coordination mechanisms for assistance delivery, relief operations and victim support, so that all States can receive adequate assistance. In this

regard, we invite the General Assembly and the Security Council to develop guidelines for the necessary cooperation and assistance in the event of a terrorist attack using weapons of mass destruction;

18. To step up all efforts to improve the security and protection of particularly vulnerable targets, such as infrastructure and public places, as well as the response to terrorist attacks and other disasters, in particular in the area of civil protection, while recognizing that States may require assistance to this effect.

III. Measures to build States' capacity to prevent and combat terrorism and to strengthen the role of the United Nations system in this regard

We recognize that capacity-building in all States is a core element of the global counter-terrorism effort, and resolve to undertake the following measures to develop State capacity to prevent and combat terrorism and enhance coordination and coherence within the United Nations system in promoting international cooperation in countering terrorism:

1. To encourage Member States to consider making voluntary contributions to United Nations counter-terrorism cooperation and technical assistance projects, and to explore additional sources of funding in this regard. We also encourage the United Nations to consider reaching out to the private sector for contributions to capacity-building programmes, in particular in the areas of port, maritime and civil aviation security;

2. To take advantage of the framework provided by relevant international, regional and subregional organizations to share best practices in counter-terrorism capacity-building, and to facilitate their contributions to the international community's efforts in this area;

3. To consider establishing appropriate mechanisms to rationalize States' reporting requirements in the field of counter-terrorism and eliminate duplication of reporting requests, taking into account and respecting the different mandates of the General Assembly, the Security Council and its subsidiary bodies that deal with counter-terrorism;

4. To encourage measures, including regular informal meetings, to enhance, as appropriate, more frequent exchanges of information on cooperation and technical assistance among Member States, United Nations bodies dealing with counter-terrorism, relevant specialized agencies, relevant international, regional and subregional organizations and the donor community, to develop States' capacities to implement relevant United Nations resolutions;

5. To welcome the intention of the Secretary-General to institutionalize, within existing resources, the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force within the Secretariat in order to ensure overall coordination and coherence in the counter-terrorism efforts of the United Nations system;

6. To encourage the Counter-Terrorism Committee and its Executive Directorate to continue to improve the coherence and efficiency of technical assistance delivery in the field of counter-terrorism, in particular by strengthening its dialogue with States and relevant international, regional and subregional organizations and working closely, including by sharing information, with all bilateral and multilateral technical assistance providers;

7. To encourage the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, including its Terrorism Prevention Branch, to enhance, in close consultation with the Counter-Terrorism Committee and its Executive Directorate, its provision of technical

assistance to States, upon request, to facilitate the implementation of the international conventions and protocols related to the prevention and suppression of terrorism and relevant United Nations resolutions;

8. To encourage the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the International Criminal Police Organization to enhance cooperation with States to help them to comply fully with international norms and obligations to combat money-laundering and the financing of terrorism;

9. To encourage the International Atomic Energy Agency and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to continue their efforts, within their respective mandates, in helping States to build capacity to prevent terrorists from accessing nuclear, chemical or radiological materials, to ensure security at related facilities and to respond effectively in the event of an attack using such materials;

10. To encourage the World Health Organization to step up its technical assistance to help States to improve their public health systems to prevent and prepare for biological attacks by terrorists;

11. To continue to work within the United Nations system to support the reform and modernization of border management systems, facilities and institutions at the national, regional and international levels;

12. To encourage the International Maritime Organization, the World Customs Organization and the International Civil Aviation Organization to strengthen their cooperation, work with States to identify any national shortfalls in areas of transport security and provide assistance, upon request, to address them;

13. To encourage the United Nations to work with Member States and relevant international, regional and subregional organizations to identify and share best practices to prevent terrorist attacks on particularly vulnerable targets. We invite the International Criminal Police Organization to work with the Secretary-General so that he can submit proposals to this effect. We also recognize the importance of developing public-private partnerships in this area.

IV. Measures to ensure respect for human rights for all and the rule of law as the fundamental basis of the fight against terrorism

We resolve to undertake the following measures, reaffirming that the promotion and protection of human rights for all and the rule of law is essential to all components of the Strategy, recognizing that effective counter-terrorism measures and the protection of human rights are not conflicting goals, but complementary and mutually reinforcing, and stressing the need to promote and protect the rights of victims of terrorism:

1. To reaffirm that General Assembly resolution 60/158 of 16 December 2005 provides the fundamental framework for the “Protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism”;

2. To reaffirm that States must ensure that any measures taken to combat terrorism comply with their obligations under international law, in particular human rights law, refugee law and international humanitarian law;

3. To consider becoming parties without delay to the core international instruments on human rights law, refugee law and international humanitarian law, and implementing them, as well as to consider accepting the competence of international and relevant regional human rights monitoring bodies;

4. To make every effort to develop and maintain an effective and rule of law-based national criminal justice system that can ensure, in accordance with our obligations under international law, that any person who participates in the financing, planning, preparation or perpetration of terrorist acts or in support of terrorist acts is brought to justice, on the basis of the principle to extradite or prosecute, with due respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and that such terrorist acts are established as serious criminal offences in domestic laws and regulations. We recognize that States may require assistance in developing and maintaining such effective and rule of law-based criminal justice systems, and we encourage them to resort to the technical assistance delivered, inter alia, by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime;

5. To reaffirm the important role of the United Nations system in strengthening the international legal architecture by promoting the rule of law, respect for human rights and effective criminal justice systems, which constitute the fundamental basis of our common fight against terrorism;

6. To support the Human Rights Council and to contribute, as it takes shape, to its work on the question of the promotion and protection of human rights for all in the fight against terrorism;

7. To support the strengthening of the operational capacity of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, with a particular emphasis on increasing field operations and presences. The Office should continue to play a lead role in examining the question of protecting human rights while countering terrorism, by making general recommendations on the human rights obligations of States and providing them with assistance and advice, in particular in the area of raising awareness of international human rights law among national law-enforcement agencies, at the request of States;

8. To support the role of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism. The Special Rapporteur should continue to support the efforts of States and offer concrete advice by corresponding with Governments, making country visits, liaising with the United Nations and regional organizations and reporting on these issues.

Paris Declration¹

On Means of Renweing Religious Discourse

“There would be no novel religious discourse without comprehensive political reform”

At the invitation of the Cairo institute for Human Rights Studies ,The Conferral Meeting On Practical Means Of Renewing Religious Discourse was held in Paris from the 12th to the 13th of August 2003 gathering a distinguished group of thinkers ,researchers and human rights advocates from 8 different nations within the Arab world) nearly thirty intellectual ,researcher and jurist .(Throughout Six sessions ,working papers were submitted by the following authors :Ahmad Abd al-Mo'tti Hegazi ,Dr.Al-Baqquer al-Affif ,Jamal al-Banna ,Salah al-Jorshi ,Dr .Faisal Deraj ,Dr.Nasr abu Zeid .The dialogue focused on the papers ,taking the form of oral criticism at times and written form at another ,in an atmosphere of sobriety ,commitment and depth ;a sincere feeling of responsibility prevailed among the thinkers and researchers whose participation expressed their individual intellectual standpoints and not representing any parties ,organizations or any organized groups.

The working papers and dialogues were centered on the answer to a fundamental question :How can we reconcile between the modern world which attained a degree of technological ,social ,political ,and cultural progress without losing cultural specificity or facing isolation from the world which is rapidly changing while we remain in our stationary condition.

The primary conclusions of this meeting are summarized in the following points:

- I. The renewal of religious thought 'was a fundamental endeavor in the journey of Arab Islamic Culture ever since the dawn of Islam followed by al-Mutazala ,Ibn Rushd)Averroës ,(Sufism ,and al-Safa brotherhood ,and other spheres of enlightenment ,and in modernity ,religious thought witnessed consecutive generations of intellectual contributions and progressive enterprises beginning from Hassan al -Attar ,Riffa'a al-Tahtawi and Ibn Badis to Jamal al-Din al-Afghani .Mohamed Abdu and Kheir al-Din al-Tunsi ,Shebli Shmayel and al -Taher al-Haddad and not lastly with ,Taha Hussein, Ali Abdel-Razik and Khaled Mohamed Khaled and Mahmoud Mohamed Taha ,Hussein Muruwa and their recent disciples.
- II .The renewal of religious discourse is of vital necessity advancing from the fact that this renewal is a central axial point in crossing over the wide chasm that separates the Arab and Islamic worlds from the advanced world.
- III .Renewal of Islamic discourse is of deep ,internal necessity) Arab -Islamic (origi-

¹ This meeting was held within the framework of the programme' :Enhancing the role of the Civil Society in decision making in the Arab world . 'A programme adopted by the CIHRS in co-ordination with the International Federation for Human Rights and the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network and supported by the European Union) EU.(

nating from the Arab and Muslim refusal of their deteriorating condition in the world; it is a necessity unrelated to major nations despite some form of tangency occurring sometimes ;it is a task which is not restricted to the efforts of enlightened men of religion rather it must be one of the primary tasks of thinkers ,intellectuals and human rights organizations ,advancing from the view which regards man as a central higher value ;and the importance of arbitrating the mind (Logos) in the issues of life.

IV .Necessity of distinction between' Islam 'and' History of the Muslims . 'Thereupon, the political history of Muslims is a human history filled with what should be criticized and breached.

V .In spite of the diversity of the participants 'views and their approaches regarding this renewal and its forms ,they have agreed unanimously upon this fundamental truth :the renewal of religious discourse is a primary factor in the renewal of political, social lives within the Arab world ,and so any renewal of religious discourse will not be achieved without any commencement of comprehensive political reform laying the foundations of a democratic state which believes in pluralism ,protects public and individual freedom ,and the individuals 'rights to freedom of thought and choice .An indispensable right without which freedom of scientific research would not be available especially in the field of social studies.

VI .The renewal of religious discourse will not bear its desired fruit without cultural, societal reformation which advances from belief in the relativity of knowledge and human beings 'right to speculate ,and this entails the creation of comprehensive intellectual ,social ,and political conditions and to dissociate the correlation between despotic political powers and ,haggard ,backward and extremist religious thought.

VII .The greatest barrier facing the renewal of religious discourse in the Arab world is the political manipulation of religion by governments ,extremist groups and a few political parties to serve their own goals .In addition to the prevailing claims of clash of civilizations in the Arab and western worlds .The deep rooted feelings of inequity and insecurity(as a result of languor of the majority of western governments to support the just causes of the Arab peoples 'while taking hostile positions towards them especially in the Palestinian issue) plays a central role in strengthening and confirming the extremist religious discourse and in bestowing popularity upon it although it opposes the people's interest on the long run.

VIII .Three main currents were developed through sophisticated discussions:

The First Current :Which views that the Quran bears all the answers and that a sound ,correct reading of religion will reveal the abundance in renewal ,freedom and rationality ,progress ,justice and consultation and respect for the other .It is a belief and a code of life (*shariah*).

The Second Current :Proponents of such trend believe in the historicity of texts and the necessity of *ijtihad* on levels of reading the text .The meanings will not present themselves to the reader but they are inferred in light of historical experience whereas the Quranic text itself has employed historical language .Hence ,every possible reading is contingent upon given history where it reveals the importance of subjugating be-

queathed interpretation to criticism regarding it as a reading which reflects its own time and accordingly ,places it in light of our current daily experience and the recent conditions of our lives.

1. Facilitate obtaining current religious information using the internet ,cassettes and video tapes ,books and simplified booklets.
2. Organize special training courses on renewing religious discourse for mosque preachers, imams and editors of pages featuring religion in newspapers, scriptwriters and human rights activists.

Develop a website on the Internet in order to create a free forum for the discussions of issues pertaining to the renewal of religious discourse and establish a data bank intended exclusively for renewing religious discourse.

11. Importance of introducing Sufi thought and trends of popular religiosity.
12. Urge civil society's organization, jurists and intellectuals to embark upon long term strategic dialogue with the groups of political Islam on the issue of religion's role in the society and man's status within their discourse.
13. Incites Islamic scholars (ulama) and thinkers to understand the necessity of debating the theological foundations of violence, extremism and terrorism and not restricting themselves to the refutation and condemnation of crimes based upon them.
14. Call upon Islamic scholars and thinkers to halt the blind use of religion's holiness in order to instigate confiscation of thought, literature, and exertion of the mind. Religious and moral commitment obliges them to hear the questions raised by the society on the basis of differentiating between Islam as a religion and fiqh as information produced by faqihs and researchers (essentially human) and what is needed in order to reconcile between Islamic thought and requisites of physical, societal and moral advancement in the modern age.
15. Refuse the confiscation of any book or publication. Instant action must be taken by human rights organizations to republish any book confiscated by any security agency or authority or religious institution in any Arab country.
16. Consideration of the Declaration of Human Rights in Islam and to criticize it as a model of unnecessary bonds imposed by political regimes and social forces upon practicing basic and indispensable rights and freedoms. A discussion of the declaration's status as related to the system of human rights and the extent of its compatibility with international standards and the aspirations of Islam.
17. Importance of the dialogue's continuity among researchers, thinkers and jurists in order that this meeting becomes a lasting intellectual, cultural, jural forum for renewing religious discourse.
18. Necessity of extending dialogue to encompass different sects. The reform is not limited to men of religion but encompasses the entire society especially sectors of creativity (writers and artists), media, education, parties, syndicates, organizations of civil society and university professors, women apart from religious preachers and scientists.

19. Necessity of taking certain groups into special consideration such as women, youth, children and the poor, the marginalized and other elements deprived of any means of power.
20. Importance of discussing in the upcoming meetings: the issues of freedom of thought, belief and scientific research, artistic and literary creation and the status of women and children.
21. Publication of the papers and deliberations of this meeting in a special booklet.

The List of the Participants in the conferral meeting on Practical Means of Renewing Religious Discourse

	Name	Occupation	Country of Birth/ Residence
1	Ahmad Abdel-Mo'tti Hejazi	Poet and Writer in al-Ahram newspaper	Egypt
2	Idris al-Yazmi	Trustee of the international federation for human rights	Morocco/France
3	Dr.Anwar Mog'ith	Professor of Philosophy at Helwan University	Egypt
4	Dr.Ussama Khalil	Islamic Writer	Egypt/France
5	Al-Baqquer al-Affif	Islamic Thinker	Sudan/UK
6	Bahey al-din Hassan	Director of Cairo institute for Human Rights Studies	Egypt
7	Jamal al-Banna	Islamic thinker	Egypt
8	Helmi Salim	Poet (coordinator of Meeting)	Egypt
9	Dr.Haydar Ibrahim	Academician and Political thinker	Sudan
10	Khamees Qosaila	Trustee of	Tunisia/France
11	Khamees Shemari	Jural expert and consultant	Tunisia/France
12	Darwish al-Haluji	Writer and Translator	Egypt/France
13	Suliman Bushwaighar	Jural Expert	Libya/Switzerland
14	Salah al-din al-Jorshi	Islamic thinker-Vice president of Tunisian Human Rights League	Tunisia
15	Zeinab Radwan	Dean of the faculty of sciences (Dar al-Oloum)	Egypt
16	Dr.Atef Ahmad	Researcher specialized in Islamic Thought	Egypt
17	Dr.Abdel Hussein Sha'ban	President of the Iraqi Network for Development and Proliferation of Human Rights Culture	Iraq/U.K
18	Dr.Abdel Salam Hassan	Jural Expert and Legal consultant	Sudan/U.K
19	Dr.Ghanim Gawad	Al-Imam al Khuni charity institution	Iraq/U.K

20	Fabiola Badawi	Journalist	Egypt/France
21	Dr.Faisal Deraj	Writer and Literary Critic	Palestine/Jordan
22	Karim Mururwa	Thinker and Politician	Lebanon
23	Kamal al-Gandoubi	Vice president of the Euro-Mediterranean network for human rights	Tunisia/France
24	Dr.Magdi Abdel Hafiz	Philosophy Professor at Helwan University	Egypt
25	Dr.Mohamed Barada	Writer and Literary Critic	Morocco/France
26	Dr.Mahmoud Ishmael	Professor Of Islamic History	Egypt
27	Dr.Mustafa al-Tawati	University Professor	Tunisia
28	Dr.Nasr Abu Zeid	Professor of Islamic Studies	Egypt/ The Netherlands
29	Dr. Yuhanna Qulta	Deputy of Patriarch of Egyptian Catholics	Egypt



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President Obama Urged to Underscore Link Between Repression and Rising Violent Extremism During Leaders' Summit

September 24, 2015. | [International Advocacy Program](#)

Human Rights First and the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS) today urged President Obama to press for firm commitments from governments taking part in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Leaders' Summit on Countering ISIL and Violent Extremism to implement a comprehensive strategy to address the root causes of terrorism and violent extremism. The call came in a letter asking the president to reinforce messages from his remarks during the February 2015 Summit on Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), stressing the obligations of states to protect the human rights and freedoms in order to achieve lasting stability and security. The Leaders' Summit will take place on September 29th.



"While military, intelligence, and security tools are essential to the fight against violent extremism, they are not sufficient to the task; a more comprehensive strategy is badly needed," wrote Human Rights First President and CEO Elisa Massimino and CIHRS Director Bahey eldin Hassan. "Such a comprehensive approach will require governments to adopt policies that reflect the reality that promoting good governance, the rule of law, and respect for human rights are not constraints but essential tools in countering violent extremism. To effectively combat violent extremism all governments must tackle social and economic marginalization, implement human rights protections for all their people, and stamp out the spread of extremist ideologies that incite hatred and violence."

The organizations urged President Obama to highlight the following points during the Leaders' Summit:

- National counterterrorism measures that are not rooted in respect for human rights risk being counterproductive. When governments stifle peaceful dissent, muzzle the media, and prevent the legitimate activities of non-violent civil society organizations, they are not countering extremism; they are fomenting it.
- Respect for religious freedom is an essential part of CVE strategy. The extremist discourse of some governmental religious institutions is part of the problem; independence and de-politicization of those institutions is an essential part of the solution. A comprehensive CVE strategy must address the religious and ideological narratives that lure the vulnerable and disenfranchised segments of society to violent extremism. To be effective as counterweights to extremist discourse, religious institutions must be—and be seen to be— independent of political control, and governments must ensure that diverse religious views are tolerated.
- Closing space for civil society and peaceful political activities facilitates the expansion of violent extremism and terrorism. Conversely, respecting fundamental freedoms, especially the freedom of assembly and association, is one of the most important defense mechanisms against violent extremism. Crackdowns on political dissent and diminishing space for political freedom reinforces extremist narratives and directly contributes to the radicalization of youths.

"The armed conflicts that are taking place in the Middle East and elsewhere are serving as a breeding ground for violent extremism. We believe that the United States, because of its unique reach and influence, has an inescapable responsibility to lead and energize multilateral efforts through the United Nations to end these devastating conflicts," added Massimino and Hassan.



President Obama Urged to Prioritize Human Rights at White House Summit on Countering Violent Extremism

February 13, 2015. | [International Advocacy Program](#)

Human Rights First and the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies today urged President Obama to make clear at the White House's upcoming Summit on Countering Violent Extremism that advancing human rights, accountability and the rule of law must be at the heart of any sustainable and effective strategy to combat violent extremism. Any strategy will require international partners to make progress on protecting human rights and the rule of law in their home countries. The call came in a [letter](#) to the president in advance of next week's Summit, scheduled for February 18-20.



"We applaud your leadership in convening next week's White House Summit on Countering Violent Extremism, and we welcome your efforts to include civil society representatives with experience in dealing with these issues in the Summit," wrote Human Rights First President and CEO Elisa Massimino and Cairo Institute Director Bahey eldin Hassan. "We know that violent extremists abuse and seek to destroy human rights. We also know that human rights violations perpetrated by governments fuel instability and create a climate in which violent extremism flourishes. Violent extremists and repressive, authoritarian governments feed off of each other in a deadly—and mutually reinforcing—cycle. We urge you to use the Summit to develop short and long term strategies to break it."

The Summit will bring together representatives from law enforcement, civil society, and partner nations, including representatives from U.S. military allies in the Middle East involved in the struggle against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). They are expected to discuss international efforts to prevent the rise of violent extremism.

"Governments that incite hatred and promote extreme interpretations of religion through their official religious institutions, state-sponsored media, and educational curricula are not part of the solution to violent extremism—they are part of the problem," noted the [letter](#). "Any effective strategy to combat violent extremism must call out and condemn these practices. We urge you to speak out clearly against the financial support flowing from the wealthy Gulf monarchies to extremist ideologues and movements, and the extremist incitement from religious leaders based in their countries. Likewise, you should condemn the practice of turning political protests into sectarian conflicts, whether this tactic is employed by the Assad regime in Syria or by authoritarian monarchies, like Bahrain."

Several of the nations that are a part of the anti-ISIL coalition including Egypt, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, have resisted calls by their citizens for inclusive and representative government. These U.S. allies instead restrict the basic rights and freedoms of their citizens by targeting members of civil society and voices of dissent with arrests and trials that flout the rule of law. Human Rights First notes that human rights violations perpetrated by governments fuel instability and create a climate in which violent extremism can flourish.

"Above all, we urge you to make clear that the United States stands against the denial of basic rights and freedoms of speech, assembly, and religion by the governments of its regional allies such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates and recognizes these abuses as part of what fuels violent extremism around the world," emphasized the [letter](#). "The extreme intolerance of allies like Saudi Arabia, where advocates of non-violent dialogue about religion are lashed in public, emboldens violent extremists who kill satirists and cartoonists in Paris."

**26 Rights organizations in an open letter to Arab Monarchs and Presidents:
“ISIS” is the offspring of repressive policies and practices as well as the
prevailing religious discourse in the Arab World**

March 19, 2015

Dr. Nabil al-Arabi

Secretary-General of the League of Arab States

(Kindly, forward a copy to kings and presidents of Arab states)

On the occasion of the coming Arab League summit, the undersigned rights organizations from the Arab world extend their best wishes for a successful meeting, hoping that the 26th Arab summit¹ helps to forge strategies that can meet the momentous challenges facing peoples in the region on the political, economic, social, cultural, and religious fronts.

It has been decided that counterterrorism will be the principal topic of the summit, in light of the spread of violent extremism and terrorism across the Arab region, the ability of extremist movements to swallow up considerable portions of Syria and Iraq and establish a state there, and the blows struck by terrorism that pose grave dangers in Libya, Egypt, and Yemen.

The Arab summit could be a golden opportunity to reconsider the policies that have led the Arab region to this catastrophic juncture, unprecedented in the modern age, offering the chance to devise an effective strategy based on lessons learned. The unilateral focus on security and military solutions to terrorist organizations has proven an abject failure regionally and internationally, especially since September 2001. The birth and rapid expansion of ISIS is the fruit of this failure and this strategy, which ignored the deep political and religious roots of this phenomenon in its contemporary form in the region and its spread to other areas of the globe.

Arab kings and presidents must pause to carefully consider the fact that terrorist organizations have failed to take root in any country in the world with an entrenched legacy of the rule of law, democracy, and equality for ethnic and religious minorities, whereas terrorist groups swept over Iraq and Syria in a matter of days, establishing a far-flung “state” that still stands impervious to attacks from an international coalition of more than 60 states. Indeed, this state has managed to establish a “province” in Egypt and take control of two cities in Libya.

It is no coincidence that ISIS established itself in Iraq and Syria; this is no aberration or the result of a far-fetched international conspiracy but a creation of its beneficiaries. The rulers of these two countries opened a path for ISIS through their practice of the

¹ <http://www.mfaconf.gov.eg/>

cruellest, bloodiest forms of political, ethnic, and religious persecution against their peoples over several decades, from the rule of Saddam Hussein and al-Maliki to the Assads, both father and son, demonstrating a brutality that is no less barbaric than the crimes of ISIS. In fact, it is difficult to say which is more savage and ruthless: wiping out Kurdish civilians with chemical weapons in northern Iraq and bombing Shia civilian populations in southern Iraq and Sunni civilians in Hama in Syria or beheading prisoners, enslaving minority women, and killing male civilian prisoners.

There is an important difference, of course: state rulers did not boast of their crimes before the cameras as ISIS does today. The League of Arab States uttered not a word about the massacres of these rulers, only to wake up to just one of the consequences of decades of systematic repression. At the same time, these presidents—especially Saddam Hussein and Hafiz al-Assad—offered strategic services to several major powers from time to time at the expense of Iran, Palestine, and Lebanon, ensuring that these powers would remain silent about their crimes. But the most significant and far-reaching strategic service these two regimes offered turned out to be those they gave to ISIS.

The historic responsibility that rests on the shoulders of Arab kings and presidents and this summit requires them to confront this painful fact and to admit it to their peoples and to themselves. Today there are among the participants of the summit who continue these same policies. They have even convinced themselves, more than their people, that they are the best hope to avoid the fate of Syria and Iraq.

There is a second, no less painful fact that must be admitted: the “extremist” religious rhetoric of ISIS does not differ fundamentally from the rhetoric of state religious institutions in several major Arab states that is disseminated through educational curricula and religious media outlets and their cultural publications, which are sold to the general public at nominal cost, subsidized by taxpayers. The citizens and police and military personnel who fall victim every day to terrorist attacks in several Arab states contributed despite themselves, through the taxes they pay, to the ideological grooming of these terrorist monsters. What sets the religious rhetoric of some Arab governments apart from that of ISIS is not its “moderation,” as claimed by the political discourse of Arab governments, but the fact that this rhetoric criminalizes criticism of state rulers, whoever they may be.

It is ironic that the summit will make a decision about the proposal to establish a unified Arab force to confront terrorism, to be financed jointly from the treasuries of participating states, even as these same treasuries finance an extremist religious discourse by which growing numbers of individuals from inside and outside the Arab region are every day recruited by these same terrorist groups it now proposes to fight. Some of these treasuries also finance every day repressive, authoritarian policies, practices, and legislation, which also push growing numbers of citizens—Islamists and secularists—to the brink of despair, extremism, and violence and create a fertile environment for the recruitment of new fighters with terrorist groups, which will be fought by a force now financed by these same treasuries.

Certainly, the failure of the international community to demonstrate the political will needed to implement numerous UN resolutions on the occupied Palestinian territories has also facilitated the mission of terrorist groups to recruit fighters and sympathizers.

Finally, the undersigned organizations urge you to amend the Arab Counterterrorism Convention to bring it into compliance with international standards. As is, the convention constitutes a grave threat to human rights while also having failed to put an end to terrorist activity in the Arab world.

We hope the resolutions that come out of the Arab summit are up to the challenges facing the peoples in this part of the world. We offer our best wishes for a successful summit.

Signatory organizations:

- 1. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies - Egypt**
- 2. Association Vigilance - Tunisia**
- 3. Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights - Bahrain**
- 4. Center for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance - Egypt**
- 5. Damascus Center for Human Rights Studies - Syria**
- 6. Egyptian Commission for rights and freedoms - Egypt**
- 7. El-Nadeem Centre for the rehabilitation of victims of violence and torture - Egypt**
- 8. Hesham Mobarak Law Center - Egypt**
- 9. Human Rights First - KSA**
- 10. Human Rights Training and Information Center – Yemen**
- 11. Libyan Judges Organization - Libya**
- 12. Libyan Network for Human Rights Defenders - Libya**
- 13. Libyan Organization for Legal Aid - Libya**
- 14. Masryoon Against Religious Discrimination - Egypt**
- 15. Mercy association for the defense of internal displaced persons - Libya**
- 16. Palestinian Human Rights Organization - Palestine**
- 17. Sudan Human Rights Monitor - Sudan**
- 18. The Committee for the Respect of Liberties and Human Rights in Tunis – Tunisia**
- 19. The Egyptian Association for Community Participation Enhancement - Egypt**
- 20. The Egyptian Foundation for the Advancement of Childhood Conditions - Egypt**
- 21. The Human Rights Legal Assistance Group - Egypt**
- 22. The Moroccan Human Rights Forum - Morocco**
- 23. The Tunisian Forum for Social and Economic Rights - Tunisia**
- 24. Tunisian Association for Democratic Women – Tunisia**
- 25. Tunisian League for Human Rights – Tunisia**
- 26. Yemen Organization for Defending Rights and Democratic Freedoms – Yemen**