TERROR OVERSEAS: UNDERSTANDING THE GCC COUNTER EXTREMISM AND COUNTER TERRORISM TRENDS

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Najah Al-Otaibi

Executive Summary

- Since the Arab Spring in 2011, terrorism has found an increasingly fertile breeding ground in the six member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)- the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; the United Arab Emirates (UAE); Qatar; the Kingdom of Bahrain; Kuwait; and the Sultanate of Oman. Terrorist groups, such as the Islamic State (ISIS) and their affiliates, as well as external states, such as Iran, have sought to exploit this potential threat for geopolitical reasons. According to the University of Maryland's Global Terrorism Database, between 2012 and 2016 terrorism-related attacks killed 414[1] nationals, expatriates, and security personnel in four of the six GCC countries: Saudi Arabia, Bahrain Kuwait and the UAE.

- Political and security pressure have galvanised the GCC governments to identify and mobilise against the threat posed by extremism and terrorism in a number of divergent and imaginative ways. The countries have joined many international conventions in a bid to fight terrorism. The huge revenues of oil and energy of the GCC countries have allowed them to pursue a wide range of anti-terrorism programmes – some of which have been more successful than others. Richer countries, such as Saudi Arabia, have faced more specific terror threats than others, like Oman, and their spending on anti-terror programmes reflects this.

- Over recent years, a number of the GCC countries have broadened their anti-extremism programmes from solely domestic ones to international templates that are relevant to all. For example, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain initiated global counter extremism centres. The approach in the UAE is subtly different - and some would argue more imaginative and creative with their 'Ministry of Happiness and Tolerance'. Qatar, a country that has escaped direct terror threats is also using sovereign wealth – primarily through the 'Qatar Foundation – to target the root causes of terrorism outside its borders, not least in North Africa. The approach in Kuwait has been different yet still, where authorities have used the state's drama and media industry to highlight the risk of indoctrination among the disenfranchised young. Cultural tolerance programmes in Oman reflect the country's own moderate 'Ibadi' version of Islam, which it seeks to promote abroad.

- The scale of the terrorism threat is highlighted by the increasingly sophisticated and pervasive online reach of jihadist recruitment. A large, young, online population makes GCC countries especially vulnerable to online radicalisation. The problem has been exacerbated as a result of widespread internet and social media penetration throughout the region, which increases opportunities for online extremism to flourish. Online recruitment goes hand in hand with online fund raising and money laundering. Domestically, all countries have adopted additional anti-terrorism laws and strengthened their security services in an effort to maintain domestic stability. Cyber-based legislation and agencies have been established to detect, prevent and discourage the spread of extremism and extremist propaganda and stop online recruitment by terrorist groups. Additionally, anti-money-laundering laws and surveillance of financial transactions have been used to in an effort to prevent terrorism financing.

- Despite the need for greater action, some anti-terrorism laws have been used to silence and eliminate critics of the government and certain sections of the population. Some GCC countries have used anti-terror legislation to silence and even execute vocal critics. Vague definitions of 'terrorism' in legislation have allowed governments to exploit control and suppress dissent.

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[1] Global Terrorism Database, available at: https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/, *University of Maryland*, last visited: 11 December 2017.

Ostensibly GCC countries say they are addressing this abuse of power with reforms to improve human rights. But the jury is still out when it comes to how successful these moves have been. Ignoring these considerations while implementing sophisticated anti-terrorism and extremism procedures will make it difficult to achieve the desired goal of stopping terrorism.

- Western countries, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, are the Gulf countries' main allies and providers of training, intelligence, personnel and other resources to combat extremism. The UK should seek to deepen its engagement with Gulf nations beyond intelligence cooperation. By getting involved with more civil society initiatives addressing the root causes and threats of terrorism, and thereby challenging ISIS's own propaganda machine, the West can have a greater impact and hopefully lessen the need for clumsy GCC legislation which so often stifles legitimate political opposition.

Contents

Introduction

Rich in oil and natural resources, Gulf countries enjoyed a charmed and prosperous existence for decades. Supported politically by the West and with ever expanding coffers, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) – the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, the Kingdom of Bahrain, Kuwait and the Sultanate of Oman – had little idea of, and was ill-prepared for, the threat Islamic extremism would eventually pose.

Strategically, the region has been home to significant Western interest and investment: the US Fifth Fleet is based in Manama, Bahrain, while Qatar is the home of 'Al Udeid', the US centre for Air Combined Operations. Such deployments and historical alliances, however, did little to help the countries' understanding of the nascent threat posed by groups such as Al Qaeda and latterly the Islamic State (ISIS). This has now changed. Responding to extremism has become a key policy priority for the GCC governments who have realised that, after experiencing a series of violent attacks, they are just as vulnerable to terrorism as countries that are mired in conflicts.

This report examines the counterterrorism and counter-extremism measures that have been adopted by the six member states of the GCC in response to the appeal of terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS. It considers how each Gulf State addresses and tackles violent extremism through the adoption of designated policies and regulations and, where applicable, the creation of designated counter-extremism centres that seek to educate, re-educate and deradicalise extremist citizens. The report concludes with recommendations for the UK government to engage with counter-extremism and anti-terrorism measures in the Gulf region to help increase the progress that has been made over recent years. In doing so, it seeks to identify ways in which the UK may be able to assist these countries, which will also help UK security by preventing overseas threats from being able to spread.

2. Background

The member states of the GCC – sometimes referred to as "Khaleeji states" – share similar cultures, economies and religious heritage. To varying degrees, all have enjoyed rapid economic growth as a result of oil and gas revenues, and all have benefitted from the military protection of Western allies. However, since the outbreak of the Arab Spring revolutions in 2011, terrorist attacks, especially by Islamist-affiliated groups, have affected four of the six GCC countries, killing 414 people between 2012 and 2016, according to the University of Maryland's Global Terrorism Database.[2] The fragility of the political situation and of security in neighbouring countries – Syria, Iraq and Yemen – has enabled this expansion of violent attacks.

The GCC governments have adopted a number of programmes aimed at preventing religious extremism, especially strains associated with violent ideologies that fuel terrorism. These programmes complemented some of the anti-extremism approaches that were implemented in the wake of the events of 11 September 2001, when countries in the region were accused by some in the United States of having links to the attack. At that stage, the Gulf governments responded by amending their educational curricula, adopting a number of policies designed to strengthen control of the religious discourse, launching programmes designed to rehabilitate would-be extremists, and signing a number of regional and international conventions against terrorism. However, many of these measures were not fully publicised, and thus details about their effectiveness – in terms of stopping citizens from joining extremist organisations, curbing their appeal, or even limiting terrorism by stopping terrorist financing – remain unclear.

Gulf citizens' sympathy for terrorist groups which are Islamic in nature has been one of the main challenges facing the attempted crackdown on extremism and terrorism in the wider Gulf region. Qatar, a country from which relatively few citizens have travelled abroad to join jihadist groups in Syria and Iraq, contains a high number of supporters of terrorists groups such as ISIS. This is demonstrated by Qatari Facebook and Twitter users. A study which analysed sympathy with ISIS posts in various countries found that 47% of the social media posts in Qatar which referenced ISIS did so in terms that expressed pro-ISIS sentiments.[3]

The Arab Centre for Research and Studies – quoting the Dubai-based Institute for Near East and Gulf Military Analysis (INEGMA) – estimated that the number of Gulf-based fighters joining terrorist organisations was in excess of 5,500 in 2015.[4] As a result, and perhaps unsurprisingly, the number of violent attacks occurring in some of the Gulf States has been high. It is estimated that between 2012 and 2016 there were more than 120 terrorist attacks in Bahrain (see table1),[5] resulting in the death of 22 people.[6] The situation has been even more pronounced in Saudi Arabia. In just one year, 2016, it was reported that the country had foiled more than 400 terror plots.[7]

[2] Between the years 2012 and 2016, 414 people were killed in the GCC as a result of terrorism. See Global Terrorism Database, available at: https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/, *University of Maryland*, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[3] 'Qatar: Extremism & Counter-Extremism', *Counter Extremism Project*, 2017, available at: https://www.counterextremism.com/countries/qatar, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[4] 'Preliminary Assessment: Programs to combat extremism among youth in the Gulf states', *The Arab Centre for Research and Studies*, 10 March 2016, available at: http://www.acrseg.org/39994, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[5] 'Terrorism in Bahrain', *World Data*, 2016, available at: https://www.worlddata.info/asia/bahrain/terrorism.php, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[6] Ibid
[7] 'Saudi Arabia: An unprecedented year for terrorism', *The New Arab*, 29 December 2016, available at: https://tinyurl.com/ydguc8sc, last visited: 11 December 2017.

ISIS remains an active terrorist threat within the borders of the Gulf States. The group's aspiration – to establish stricter interpretations of Islam – leads it to consider the Gulf States' rulers as violators of the faith by, for instance, allying with non-believing states. Thus, local government establishments, oil infrastructure and related sites, as well as Western interests, have all been targets for terrorism.

Of concern to governments in the Gulf States is the growing number of young people joining terrorist groups abroad. Saudi Arabia has seen 3,000 of its nationals join ISIS, making the Kingdom the second highest source of jihadists.[8] Kuwait has seen 100 of its young people become fighters,[9] with Qatar and UAE producing 15 fighters, and Bahrain 12.[10] (No data is available for the Sultanate of Oman.) With regard to these statistics, the ruling elites and policymakers in the Gulf have warned of the danger of the spread of extremism among their citizens, and of the need to adopt preventative measures to avert acts of terrorism. King Salman of Saudi Arabia has described religious extremism as the "biggest challenge facing the nation".[11]

The spread of extremism in the Gulf region stems from ideological and political motivations and is compounded by a relatively large youth population. In Bahrain, Oman and Qatar, citizens in the 15–29 age group represent approximately one-third of the population.[12] That demographic represents nearly a quarter of the population in the UAE and Saudi Arabia.[13] These young people are intensively active online, and their heavy usage of social media and mobile phones increases their risk of online recruitment. Increasing use of modern communications technology has facilitated exposure to messaging by extremist groups, who use the internet as a platform to recruit individuals and incite them to carry out violence

Table 1: List of countries' recorded terrorist attacks 2012–2016[14]

Country	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total
Saudi Arabia	6	6	14	103	124	253
Kuwait	0	0	0	0	2	2
Qatar	0	0	0	1	0	1
Bahrain	26	52	41	18	3	140
UAE	0	1	2	0	0	3
Oman	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

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[8] Al-Osaimi, N., 'The Saudi Approach to Returning Jihadis', *Tony Blair Institute for Global Change*, 7 July 2016, available at: https://institute.global/insight/co-existence/saudi-approach-returning-jihadis, last visited: 26 January 2018.

[9] 'Increasing number of Kuwaiti fighters with ISIS', *Al-Arab*, 11 November 2014, available at: http://www.alarab.co.uk/?id=36885, last visited: 26 January 2018.

[10] Neumann, P., 'Foreign fighter total in Syria/Iraq now exceeds 20,000; surpasses Afghanistan conflict in the 1980s', *ICSR*, 26 January 2015, available at: http://icsr.info/2015/01/foreign-fighter-total-syriairaq-now-exceeds-20000-surpasses-afghanistan-conflict-1980s/, last visited: 26 January 2018.

[11] 'King Salman: Extremism and terrorism are the most dangerous thing facing our Arab nation', *Asharq Al-Awsat*, 30 March 2017, available at: https://tinyurl.com/yb9v9988 , last visited: 26 January 2018.

[12] Sayre, E. and Tarik Yousef, *Young Generation Awakening: Economics, Society, and Policy on the Eve of the Arab Spring* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 90.

[13] ibid.

[14] Global Terrorism Database, available at: https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/, *University of Maryland*.

3. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

3.1 Background: Terrorism in Saudi Arabia

The government of Saudi Arabia has a long history of fighting against terrorism. Indeed, the country has been subject to 335 terrorist attacks since 1979.[15] The threat of terrorism has increased still further in the twenty-first century, owing to the collapse of regimes in neighbouring countries such as Iraq and Syria, as well as to the emergence of revolutionary groups seeking to recast the region's political order. Collectively, these trends have created a fertile environment for radical organisations to flourish.

Between 2012 and 2016, terrorism in Saudi Arabia resulted in death and injury to more than 300 nationals, expatriate residents and security personnel.[16] In 2016 alone, more than 124 violent attacks were attributed to Islamic extremists operating largely on behalf of ISIS, across a number of different Saudi cities (see table 1). The danger of terrorism in the Kingdom lies in the fact that many of its nationals are ideologically drawn to the primary cause of terrorist groups' – the creation of a state governed according to a stricter Islamic law, or *khilafa*. Strong levels of support can be attributed to ideological beliefs relating to the Islamic interpretation applied in the country, which flow from the *Hanbali* version of Islam – one of the four traditional Sunni Islamic schools, and the one which significantly influenced the *Wahhabi*-Salafist movement in the nineteenth century.

This school has been adopted as the official Islamic model in the country since the beginning of the modern state in 1932, and has been strengthened since the emergence of the *Sahwa*, 'the Islamic awakening'. This expression refers to a political Islam that emerged in 1979, based on a Salafist Islamic social and ideological movement and supported by Muslim Brotherhood advocates in Saudi Arabia. Although the movement was supported by the Saudi State during the period of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, it soon clashed with them, after prominent members of the movement demanded that the government apply a stricter social and political governance and stop military cooperation with the USA during the second Gulf War. Such thought has, as a result, influenced many citizens' understanding of Islamic principles, such as the role of jihad and the creed of *al-wala wa'l-bara*, an Arabic term in Islam meaning "loyalty for Muslims and disavowal of non-Muslims for the sake of Allah". These concepts have long fed a feeling of hatred towards non-believers of Islam.

Considering the relationships between Saudi Arabia's *Wahhabi* Islam, the country's political system and its socio-political environment, religious recruitment has been an undefeated security challenge for the Kingdom. At least 3,000 Saudi jihadists have responded to ISIS recruiters to fight alongside the group in Syria and Iraq.[17] Approximately 760 of those have returned home.[18] The Saudi regime has become ever more anxious about the danger of Islamist groups returning from abroad, seeing the flow as a potential

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[15] AlKater, K., 'Learn about Saudi Arabia's efforts to combat terrorism', *Asharqalawsat*, 12 May 2017, available at: https://tinyurl.com/y79nfcf6, last visited: 29 January 2018.
[16] Toumi, H., 'Saudi Arabia targeted with 128 terror attacks in 15 years', *Gulf News*, 6 December 2016, available at: http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/saudi-arabia/saudi-arabia-targeted-with-128-terror-attacks-in-15-years-1.1941031, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[17] Al-Osaimi, N., 'The Saudi Approach to Returning Jihadist', *Tony Blair Institute for Global Change*, 7 July 2016.
[18] ibid.

threat to its rule over the country. This is evident in the promise to modernise Islam by Mohammed Bin Salman, the Saudi Crown Prince, who has stated that "We will not spend 30 years of our lives dealing with extremist ideologies. We will destroy them today and immediately".[19]

Even before these moves, the country had devoted considerable resources to tackling domestic extremism. As terrorism incidents continued to grow in the Kingdom, and international opinion criticised it out of a belief that it had exported extremism to other countries, the government sought to respond to claims it found humiliating. It sought to build a long-term framework for countering violent extremism. However, dealing with domestic radicalism – especially its online manifestations – has proven to be the most challenging aspect. Indeed, most of the terrorist attacks in the country have been committed by Saudi citizens, around 70% of whom were recruited online.[20]

The introduction of the internet in Saudi Arabia in the late 1990s facilitated the distribution of violent Islamist ideologies and propaganda, especially among latent sympathisers towards Islamist groups such as Al-Qaeda. This was enabled by insufficient supervision being exercised over content, especially fatwas (religious edicts) issued by radical clerics encouraging violent jihad. There are estimated to be 23 million internet users in Saudi Arabia,[21] and Saudis are among the world's most prolific users of Twitter, with 41% of the country using the service.[22] Such high usage has allowed extremists to characterise their views as mainstream, despite inviting viewers of their propaganda to perform violent jihad.

3.2 Anti-Terrorism Laws and International Conventions

The Saudi Arabian government has actively participated in the global fight against terrorism by participating in a number of international conventions. Along with 41 other countries, it launched an Islamic alliance to counter the threat of ISIS, and the country is also part of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS.[23] In addition, Saudi Arabia works alongside the USA in leading the Counter-ISIS Coalition's Counter-Finance Working Group (CIFG),[24] and has participated in combined military action to defeat the organisation. The Saudi Arabian Financial Intelligence Unit (SAFIU), meanwhile, is a part of the Egmont Group's Financial Intelligence Unit which specialises in tracking money laundering and the financing of terrorism.[25]

Both ISIS and Al-Qaeda have worked to incite individuals to carry out acts of violence within the Kingdom. In the face of repeated attempts to attack Saudi security forces and the Saudi population, especially Shia Muslims, the government has arrested a large number of individuals suspected of being members of terrorist cells. In 2017 there were more than 5,000 detainees in Saudi prisons, many of whom had been convicted on terror-related charges.[26]

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[19] McLaughlin, E. C., 'Saudi crown prince promises "a more moderate Islam"', *CNN*, 25 October 2017, available at: http://edition.cnn.com/2017/10/24/middleeast/saudi-arabia-prince-more-moderate-islam/index.html, last visited: 26 January 2018.

[20] 'The formation of an "electronic army" to confront terrorists', *Al-Sakinah*, 20 December 2016, available at: https://www.assakina.com/awareness-net/rebounds/95928.html, last visited: 26 January 2018.

[21] 'Number of internet users in Saudi Arabia from 2015 to 2022 (in millions)', *Statista*, 2017, available at: https://www.statista.com/statistics/462959/internet-users-saudi-arabia/, last visited: 26 January 2018.

[22] '41 percent of Saudis have Twitter accounts: study', *Al-Arabiya*, 11 March 2015, available at: https://english.alarabiya.net/en/media/digital/2015/03/11/41-percent-of-Saudis-have-Twitter-accounts-study-.html, last visited: 26 January 2018.

[23] 'Country Reports on Terrorism 2016', *United States Department of State Publication Bureau of Counterterrorism*, July 2017, available at: https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/272488.pdf, last visited: 26 January 2018, p. 447.

[24] ibid.

[25] 'About', Egmont Group, available at: https://www.egmontgroup.org/en/content/about, last visited: 26 January 2018.

[26] 'Statement of the detainees in the mabahith prisons', *Nafethah*, Saudi Minister of Interior, 2017, available at: https://www.nafethah.gov.sa/ar/web/guest/inmate-list, last visited: 26 January 2018.

Terrorist financing remains a major challenge. The government has strengthened the provisions of the Law for Crimes of Terrorism and its Financing, in order to restrict activity affecting three neighbouring countries: Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. The existing counterterrorism legislation, as of 2014, contains 41 Articles.[27] However, vague provisions allow the authorities to criminalise freedom of expression, and to authorise excessive use of police powers without judicial oversight. The wide range of acts defined as "terrorism" includes intentions to "insult the reputation of the country" or "harm public order". This gives the state room to prosecute peaceful activists, a matter that has been highlighted in detail by Human Rights Watch.[28] In 2015, a Saudi woman who was imprisoned for driving was referred to a court established to try terrorism cases.[29] Prosecutors used the anti-terrorism legislation to charge her for damaging the reputation of the country, on the basis that she had been in contact with foreign media. In January of 2016, Saudi Arabia executed 47 people convicted of terrorism-related charges.[30] Among those executed was a harsh critic of the Saudi government, Nimr Al-Nimr, a prominent opposition Shiite cleric and an adherent of absolute *wilayat al-faqih* (the ruling political ideology in Iran). Al-Nimr's charges were related to his support of protests that erupted in the city of Al-Qatif in 2011, where the Shia majority have long complained of marginalisation.[31] He threatened to separate the city from Saudi Arabia and form a Shiite state with neighbouring Bahrain if the demands of the Shia population were not met.[32]

3.3 Specific Initiatives and Institutions

Mohamed Bin Naif Centre for Counselling and Care

For the past 15 years, Saudi Arabia has been operating a large-scale counselling programme for prisoners in Saudi jails, a programme supported by the Interior Ministry. This practice has been supported by the Mohamed Bin Naif Centre for Counselling and Care, which was established in 2006 to aid rehabilitation by offering special care programmes to people convicted of "immoderate thoughts", such as terrorism. The formation of the centre was influenced by the need to address the increasing number of jihadist groups operating in the Arabian Peninsula. These groups have an organisational structure, military expertise and ideologies and seek to propagate violence.[33]

The centre aims to promote intellectual rehabilitation among extremists, militants and their supporters. In doing so, it strives to promote the concept of moderation across society. The approach to treating jihadist rests on three tracks.[34] First, it offers ideological counselling through structured debate with approved Islamic scholars.[35] The second phase, rehabilitation, is for those who respond positively.[36] At this stage, extremists are engaged in vocational training to prepare for reintegration into normal life. Lastly,

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[27] 'Saudi Arabia: What can the new terrorism law achieve?', *BBC*, 3 February 2014, available at:
http://www.bbc.com/arabic/interactivity/2014/02/140203_comments_saudi_new_terrorism_law, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[28] 'Saudi Arabia: Counterterrorism Apparatus Targets Rights Activists', *Human Rights Watch*, 26 May 2017, available at:
https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/05/26/saudi-arabia-counterterrorism-apparatus-targets-rights-activists, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[29] 'Two women referred to "terror" court for driving in Saudi Arabia', *The Guardian*, 25 December 2014, available at:
 https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/25/women-charged-saudi-arabia-driving-ban-terror-court, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[30] Sly, L., 'Saudi Arabia's execution of cleric ignites fury in Iran', *The Washington Post*, 2 January 2016, available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/saudi-arabia-executes-47-people-including-prominent-shiite-cleric/2016/01/02/01bfee06-198e-4eb6-ab5e-a5bcc8fb85c6_story.html?utm_term=.8a4a24d073f2, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[31] McDowell, A., 'Shi'ite cleric among 47 executed in Saudi Arabia, stirring anger in region', *Reuters*, 2 January 2016, available at:
https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-security/shiite-cleric-among-47-executed-in-saudi-arabia-stirring-anger-in-region-idUSKBN0UG03B20160102, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[32] 'Who is the Sheikh Nimr Al Nimr', *BBC Arabic*, 2 January 2016, Available at:
http://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast/2016/01/160102_saudi_cleric_sheikh_nimr, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[33] Casptack, A., 'Deradicalization Programs in Saudi Arabia: A Case Study', *Middle East Institute*, 10 June 2015, available at:
http://www.mei.edu/content/deradicalization-programs-saudi-arabia-case-study, last visited: 26 January 2018, p. 10.
[34] 'Mohamed Bin Naif Centre for Counselling and Care', available at: http://www.mncc.org.sa, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[35] ibid.
[36] ibid.

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the centre maintains a "care" phase for successful graduates, and provides financial support and social benefits to ease their reintegration into society.[37]

Since the inception of the rehabilitation programme, 3,360 inmates have graduated from the centre.[38] In addition, of the total "graduates", 123 were previously detained by US authorities at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.[39] Since the establishment of the centre, there have been some remarkable successes. One report indicates that it has achieved a success rate of approximately 80%, with the remaining 20% being considered "hard-core" figures who, despite undergoing the deradicalisation process, find themselves radicalised once more after being integrated into society.[40]

There are various critics of the centre, as well as of the rehabilitation it offers. Some argue that the Saudi government does not actually teach that jihadist beliefs are wrong.[41] Others argue that the deradicalisation effort is ineffective,[42] owing to the fact that some graduates return to extremism. Said al-Shihri, a radical who underwent the rehabilitation programme at the centre, ended up becoming deputy leader of Al-Qaeda in Yemen, and masterminded the terrorist attack against the US embassy in Sana'a in 2008.[43] Likewise, when ISIS claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing of an Ismaili mosque in the city of Najran in southern Saudi Arabia, which killed or injured 27 people, the bomber was reported to be one of those who had been treated at the centre. More than half of the 73 individuals detained in 2014 for their alleged connection to ISIS attack on a Saudi Shiite mosque at Al-Dalwah village were found to be former graduates of the centre too.[44]

Defenders of the centre suggest that the success the Saudi government has had in deradicalising youths has not been replicated in any other country, especially Western countries,[45] and that the centre therefore warrants greater attention and praise for being a rare case of a body that has achieved real success in helping change the views of jihadists.[46]

The Al-Sakinah Campaign

Another initiative has been Al-Sakinah. Launched in 2005, Al-Sakinah was the earliest anti-online radicalisation initiative in Saudi Arabia, aimed at fighting extremism and recruitment over the internet. It was launched as a response to a deadly wave of Al-Qaeda attacks that struck Saudi Arabia between 2003 and 2006. In the years preceding the attacks, the number of Islamist websites in the country had grown rapidly, rising from a few thousand to 17,000.[47] In response, the government proposed a series of cyber-based initiatives. For example, anyone charged with setting up a radical website, promoting an

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[37] ibid.
[38] 'Mohammed bin Nayef Centre reveals the support of 8,000 beneficiaries ... 120 returned from "Guantanamo"', *Mohamed Bin Naif Centre for Counselling and Care*, 2017, available at: https://www.nafethah.gov.sa/ar/web/guest/detail?articleId=82696, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[39] ibid.
[40] ibid.
[41] Mallonee, L., 'Step inside a Saudi Rehab Prison for Jihadists' *Wired*, 31 March 2017, available at: https://www.wired.com/2017/03/david-degner-jihad-rehab/, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[42] Mazzetti, M., 'No. 2 Leader of Al Qaeda in Yemen Is Killed', *The New York Times*, 24 January 2013, available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/25/world/middleeast/said-ali-al-shihri-qaeda-leader-in-yemen-is-dead.html, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[43] ibid.
[44] 'Saudi Arabia defends Al-Monasahah program after the Dalwa incident', *Al-Arab*, 27 November 2014, available at: http://www.alarabonline.org/?id=39049, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[45] Casptack, A., 'Deradicalization Program in Saudi Arabia: A Case Study', *Middle East Institute* (2015), p. 10.
[46] Ansary, F., 'Combating Extremism: A Brief Overview of Saudi Arabia's Approach', *Middle East Policy Council* (2008), 15(2), available at: http://www.mepc.org/combating-extremism-brief-overview-saudi-arabias-approach, last visited: 26 January 2018, p. 111.
[47] Qusti, R., 'Experts Recommend Special Laws to Combat Terror', *Arab News*, 5 December 2007, available at: http://www.arabnews.com/node/306390, last visited: 26 January 2018.

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extremist's groups activities or communicating with such a group became liable for a ten-year jail sentence and a hefty fine.[48]

Al-Sakinah operates by targeting extremists and individuals operating in the cyber world. It enables the authorities to engage them in dialogue and discussion over social media and to challenge their beliefs. The campaign uses specialists and moderate Islamic scholars to interact with individuals who have adopted hard-line views, in an effort to change their perception of Islam by highlighting the misconceptions, and raises awareness about the dangers of extremist ideas. According to a report published on Al-Sakinah's own website in 2015, the campaign was able to persuade 1,500 interlocutors out of a total number of 3,250, a success rate of just under 50%.[49] The campaign also claims that the discussions with moderate religious specialists encourage Saudi citizens to be more willing to work with the authorities in their efforts to combat extremism online.[50] Those responsible for Al-Sakinah signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the UAE Sawab Centre to run a mutual campaign to promote moderation. The programme was launched in 2017 and targeted 650 online sympathisers with extremist groups. According to officials, the mission managed to convince 74 men and women to give up extremist thoughts.[51]

The cultural and media war against extremism is part of a broader Saudi effort to fight extremism. A controversial TV series entitled *Gharabeeb Al Soud* ("Black Crows") was produced and shown by a Saudi state-funded Television Channel, MBC, during the holy month of Ramadan in 2017. The series focused on ISIS' female recruiting and presented events based on real-life stories of women, jihadi brides and children who have been recruited by ISIS, in order to show the suffering and misery they experienced after joining the organisation.[52]

The King Abdullah Bin Abdul-Aziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID)

Saudi Arabia has pledged significant resources to fight terrorism through specialised centres. The launch of a major interfaith dialogue initiative in 2012, known as the King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID), marked Saudi Arabia's largest anti-extremism initiative. It seeks to "foster dialogue among people of different faiths and cultures".[53] This intergovernmental organisation consists of a board of directors made up of a variety of representatives from differing world religions.[54] The centre was established in 2012[55] and was described by a Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs publication as part of a broader effort to promote dialogue between religions and cultures and to combat extremism and terror.[56] It was inaugurated with a highly publicised visit by the

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[48] 'Year imprisonment and a fine not exceeding 500,000 riyals for threats, extortion, wiretapping and defamation of others', *Al-Riyadh*, 16 January 2008, available at: http://www.alriyadh.com/311987, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[49] 'The Sakinah Campaign: The decline of more than (1500) oblique', *Al-Sakinah*, 18 May 2011, available at: http://www.assakina.com/news/news3/7908.html, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[50] Boucek, C., 'The Sakinah campaign and internet counter-radicalization in Saudi Arabia', *CTC Sentinel*, 15 August 2008, available at: https://ctc.usma.edu/posts/the-sakinah-campaign-and-internet-counter-radicalization-in-saudi-arabia, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[51] 'Saudi Emirati Advisors Return 75 People to Right', *Al-Watan*, 6 October 2017, available at: http://www.alwatan.com.sa/Politics/News_Detail.aspx?ArticleID=317122, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[52] Khalaf, H., 'MBC to air Arabic drama series focusing on ISIL's female recruits', *The National*, 16 May 2017, available at: https://www.thenational.ae/arts-culture/television/mbc-to-air-arabic-drama-series-focusing-on-isil-s-female-recruits-1.33284, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[53] 'Who We Are', *King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue*, available at: https://www.kaiciid.org/who-we-are, last visited: 27 January 2018.
[54] 'The board of directors', *King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue*, available at: https://www.kaiciid.org/who-we-are, last visited: 11 December 2017.
[55] ibid.
[56] 'King Abdullah Interfaith and Intercultural Dialogue Center Opened', *Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, Washington*, DC, 26 November 2012, available at: https://saudiembassy.net/news/king-abdullah-interfaith-and-intercultural-dialogue-center-opened , last visited: 27 January 2018.

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then Saudi King, Abdullah, to Pope Benedict XVI in November of 2007. It was hoped that the first ever collaboration between the Head of the Roman Catholic Church and a Saudi monarch could help to foster a more moderate Islam, focused on promoting co-existence.

Saudi Arabia's willingness to promote religious modernisation inside its borders has often stemmed from efforts to assert its religious role at the international level. King Abdullah organised a dialogue between the world religions in Mecca in 2008, which required the participation of the *Ulama* Muslim senior clerics of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in order to discuss ways of improving dialogue between the followers of different religions and cultures.[57] The Mecca conference saw the discussion of papers focusing on dialogue with followers of other monotheistic religions. One of the primary recommendations that came out of the conference was the establishment of a permanent interfaith dialogue.[58] Accordingly, the Saudi government initiated a global dialogue in the Spanish capital, Madrid, following the conference. Bringing together Muslim, Jewish, Christian, Hindu and Buddhist leaders, the conference issued a declaration urging faith communities to collaborate in the fight against extremism.

A third step towards promoting interfaith dialogue as part of tackling extremism took place at the United Nation's General Assembly in New York in 2009 during a meeting about dialogue between religions, cultures and civilisations. At the time, King Abdullah reiterated that "terrorism and criminality are enemies of God, enemies of every religion and civilisation".[59] He announced that Spain and Austria would cooperate with Saudi Arabia to establish a centre based in Vienna to serve the objectives of the dialogue.

A number of political motivations underpin Saudi Arabia's interfaith activism. First, it is in the country's interest to present its position as countering religious extremism, especially in discussions with Western partners, who claim that the *Wahhabism* it promotes is a dangerous ideology that leads to violent terrorism. Second, the state perceives its efforts as necessary to educate international audiences about moderate Islamic principles, in keeping with its responsibilities as custodian of Islam's two most holy mosques. Irrespective of whether or not Saudi Arabian-led interfaith dialogue has been successful in convincing the West of the significance of such dialogue, it is important to note that a soft power policy that promotes religious diversity denotes a marked shift away from Saudi Arabia's previous practice, which was restricted to promoting Islam only, an approach likely to be ineffective among Western societies that are characterised by a plurality of religions.

However, the Saudi call for interfaith dialogue and religious promotion was met with global reservation.[60] The criticism was rooted in the fact that while Saudi Arabia may be assisting in countering terrorism and religious intolerance, the country still criminalises the public practice of non-Islamic religions domestically. To compound matters, leaving the Muslim faith for another religion – apostasy – is still punishable by death in the country. This calls into question the extent to which dialogue between religions can be effective. In this light, Saudi policy towards other faiths can still be viewed as undermining the country's efforts at promoting understanding, by establishing the country as an object of criticism.

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[57] 'Mecca Islamic Conference calls for a dialogue between religions and an intercultural center', *Al-Jazeera*, 7 June 2008, available at: http://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2008/6/7/مؤتمر-مكة-الإسلامي-يدعو-لحوار-الأديان-وينشئ-مركز-له, last visited: 27 January 2018.
[58] ibid.
[59] Nakhoul, S., 'Saudi king promotes tolerance at U.N. forum', *Reuters*, 12 November 2008, available at: http://www.reuters.com/article/us-un-interfaith-idUSTRE4AB84U20081112, last visited: 27 January 2018.
[60] 'King Abdullah's Interfaith dialogue and the Madrid Conference', *Wikileaks*, 30 July 2008, available at: https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08RIYADH1170_a.html, last visited: 26 January 2018.

Similarly, interfaith activism has not achieved its core goal of promoting tolerance because the government has failed to follow up these steps by promoting tolerance within its own society. The government is still reluctant to show leniency toward Raif Badawi, a Saudi writer sentenced to ten years in prison and 1,000 lashes for establishing an atheist website. Cases such as this continue to undermine Saudi Arabia's international efforts. Two years after the establishment of the KAICIID, the Austrian Chancellor, Werner Farman, criticised the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for cooperating with the country, asking whether the policy would afford Saudi Arabia the opportunity to build an international "propaganda centre" in Austria. He added to this statement with more direct criticism, stating that "an inter-religious dialogue centre that remains silent when it is time to speak out clearly for human rights is not worthy of being called a dialogue centre".[61]

Vision 2030

In April 2015, Saudi Arabia announced a blueprint of *Vision 2030*, which outlined the country's plans for a future that is likely to feature low oil prices, and for which the country will need to overcome massive dependence on government subsidies. However, *Vision 2030* also outlined Saudi Arabia's intention to ensure that it is "a tolerant country with Islam as its constitution and moderation as its method".[62] In an October 2017 statement, the Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman promised to return his country to "moderate Islam".[63] However, there has been no official discussion *per se* about how the government intends to achieve this objective, although Riyadh has taken high-profile action to combat the threat of Islamic extremism following the announcement of this vision. Owing to the relationship between Saudi Arabia's *Wahhabi* Islam and the country's political system, the government has pursued an indirect and subtle approach of its own to enact a series of measures which could lead to greater religious moderation. One of the notable regulations adopted following the outlining of *Vision 2030* was a set of new measures targeting Islamic preachers. Riyadh ruled that all Saudi-based clerics travelling abroad for charitable activities must receive clearance from the government before leaving the country, as directed by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs (MOIA).[64] These clerics now also have to obtain the government's permission before appearing on national television.[65] Such steps, taken by the government to help limit appearances by personalities of questionable affiliations and credentials, are designed to prevent the spread of extremist messages of hate and violence.

Saudi officials have reduced the authority of the religious police, known as the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, which carries responsibility for enforcing an extreme application of Islamic morality over public life.[66] The government has also begun purging extremism in mosques, laying off approximately 10,000 unofficial "substitute" imams.[67] In addition, a recent reshuffle of the Council of Islamic Scholars, or *Ulama*, has given moderate and reforming clerics a seat at the table.

[61] Kern, S., 'Austria Threatens to Close Saudi-Backed Interfaith Dialogue Centre', *Gatestone Institute International Policy Council*, 8 February 2015, available at: http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/5194/austria-saudi-kaiciid, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[62] 'Our Vision: Saudi Arabia... the heart of the Arab and Islamic worlds, the investment powerhouse, and the hub connecting three continents', *Vision 2030* Foreword, available at: http://vision2030.gov.sa/en/foreword, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[63] McLaughlin, E. C., 'Saudi crown prince promises "a more moderate Islam"', *CNN*, 25 October 2017.
[64] 'Activities of overseas preachers suspended', *Mecca Newspaper*, 4 September 2016, available at: https://tinyurl.com/y7mefxaj, last visited: 29 January 2018.
[65] ibid.
[66] 'Saudi Arabia clips the wings of feared religious police', *Financial Times*, 14 April 2016, available at: https://www.ft.com/content/5c45f0d4-0245-11e6-99cb-83242733f755, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[67] Al-Yousef, A. and Ali Al-Rubai, 'Saudi Arabia axes 10,000 substitute imams to save $96 million', *Al-Arabiya*, 31 August 2016, available at: https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2016/08/31/-Saudi-Arabia-axes-10-000-substitute-imams-to-save-96-mln.html, last visited: 26 January 2018.

The body now hosts Dr Suleiman Aba al-Kayle, a controversial critic of the religious clerics in Saudi Arabia, who has accused the religious establishment of failing to tackle extremism among Saudi youth.[68]

Taken together, these steps indicate that a process of counter-extremism is under way, which targets religious institutions, discourse and leadership, with the aim of addressing a root cause of terrorism. However, these steps have nonetheless been conducted in a scattered fashion.

The Global Centre for Combating Extremist Ideology (Etidal)

In May 2017, Saudi Arabia initiated and funded the Global Centre for Combating Extremist Ideology to strengthen international cooperation in the fight against online extremism. This is an international organisation based in Riyadh, committed to becoming a "global reference in combating extremist ideology and promoting moderation".[69] The centre — named *Etidal*, which means "moderation" in Arabic – was inaugurated at the US–Islamic Summit 2017 in Riyadh, during President Trump's first overseas visit. The centre was established with Saudi funding and support, with a view to combating extremist ideology and promoting moderation using digital media.

The centre is managed by 12 representatives who make up the Board of Directors.[70] Their presence is intended to represent the independence and neutrality of the organisation and its work. Beneath this Board sits a Committee for Ideology, which comprises scholars and intellectuals from different countries and whose responsibilities lie in reviewing the ideology-related goals of the Centre, and planning programmes and activities.[71] Aware of some of the negative publicity that the Saudi regime receives in the international press, the Saudi Foreign Minister attempted to alleviate concerns that the organisation might do little to combat extremism. At the launch of the Centre, he explained, "We want to convey a message to the West and the world that the Muslim world is not an enemy."[72]

Although it is still in its infancy as an organisation, it is possible to deduce the intentions of Etidal by further analysis of its mission statement. The Centre has placed a particular focus on the spread of extremism across the internet and social media platforms. Its mission statement describes extremism as an "epidemic" that crosses state borders.[73] Citing ISIS and the volume of attacks carried out by the group across the world, the statement describes how extremist groups have adapted the use of social media in order to further recruit and spread propaganda. Etidal employs technologies to detect, track and subsequently report on the presence of extremist content online. The Centre claims that it can detect and analyse extremist content within six seconds and neutralise it before it can be shared by other users.[74]

When describing the three fronts the Centre will target, the Etidal mission statement frequently speaks of "sabotage" with respect to the digital activities of extremist groups.[75] This would suggest a more assertive approach towards counter-extremism than has defined the country's previous efforts, which worked towards creating international forums to promote debate and the sharing of best practice working

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[68] Anzi, S., 'The Real Danger of the Extremists is Inside', *Al-Watan*, 16 September 2014, available at: http://www.alwatan.com.sa/Politics/News_Detail.aspx?ArticleID=200416&CategoryID=1, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[69] *Etidal, the International Centre for combatting extremist ideology*, available at: https://etidal.org/files/En_Etidal.pdf, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[70]'Governance', *Etidal, the International Centre for combatting extremist ideology*.
[71] ibid.
[72] 'Global Center for Combating Extremism in Riyadh adopts unprecedented techniques', *Al Arabiyah*, 22 May 2017, available at: https://english.alarabiya.net/en/features/2017/05/22/All-you-need-to-know-on-the-Global-Center-for-Combating-Extremism-in-Riyadh.html, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[73] *Etidal, the International Centre for combatting extremist ideology*.
[74] 'Global Center for Combating Extremism in Riyadh adopts unprecedented techniques', *Al Arabiyah*, 22 May 2017.
[75] *Etidal, the International Centre for combatting extremist ideology*.

methods. This has led some commentators to claim that the Centre will, with the tacit approval of the US, enable Saudi Arabia to clamp down on civil liberties, human rights and democratic reform, both domestically and regionally. For example, addressing the work in which Etidal will engage, Sarah Leah Whitson, the Middle East Director at Human Rights Watch, stated, "Saudi [Arabia]'s alleged efforts to tackle extremism are all for show if all the government does is jail people for their political views."[76]

Looking ahead, future cooperation with the USA looks likely, with plans for the establishment of another counter-extremist organisation, also to be based in Riyadh. In May 2017, the US and members of the GCC signed a memorandum to create a sub-centre to look specifically at combating the financing of terrorism and terrorist organisations.[77] The Terrorist Financing Targeting Center (TFTC) objectives will include identifying, tracking and sharing information about terrorist financing networks, and cutting off funding for specific recipients such as ISIS, Al-Qaeda and Hezbollah.[78] In a statement by the US Treasury Department, Secretary Steven Mnuchin stated that "this new Terrorist Financing Targeting Centre will enhance existing tools and cooperation with partners in the Gulf to forcefully address evolving threats", and added, "Treasury will offer the vast expertise of our Office of Terrorism and Financial Intelligence to this creative new effort."[79] So far, the main criticism of the Center is in relation to the funding and support it receives. While there is as yet no information regarding the exact finance that has been pledged, it is understood that Riyadh has set aside a sizeable sum. If the majority of financing comes from this source, it is conceivable that that Saudi foreign policy goals will be incorporated into the Center's strategic agenda.

[76] 'Saudi Arabia: Prominent Clerics Arrested', *Human Rights Watch*, 15 September 2017, available at: https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/09/15/saudi-arabia-prominent-clerics-arrested, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[77] 'U.S. and Saudi Arabia to Co-Chair New Terrorist Financing Targeting Centre', *US Department of The Treasury*, 21 May 2017, available at: https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/sm0092.aspx, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[78] ibid.
[79] 'Saudi Arabia and the Visit of President Trump', *Saudi Embassy in Washington*, June 2017, available at: https://www.saudiembassy.net/sites/default/files/WhitePaper_TrumpVisit_June2017.pdf, last visited: 26 January 2018.

4. The United Arab Emirates (UAE)

4.1 Background: Terrorism in the United Arab Emirates

The United Arab Emirates has not featured significantly on the radar of terrorist organisations, although ISIS declared a fully fledged war against the states participating in the coalition against ISIS, including the UAE.[80] Multiple political parties have also sought to destabilise the Emirates' security, such as the Muslim Brotherhood whose supporters are secretly active in the Gulf region.

The UAE is home to one of the world's highest percentage of Western expats and, in many of the terrorism cases, they have been the targets. In 2015, an American teacher was murdered by an ISIS Emirati-affiliated female in Abu Dhabi.[81] The terrorist was also planning a bomb attack just outside the apartment of an American man living in the capital. She was ultimately executed.[82]

Besides the radicalisation of UAE nationals, there have been cases of radicalised migrant workers residing in the country, such as Indians, who, at two million, comprise a significant portion of the total UAE population.[83] Afsha Jabeen was an Indian who was deported for promoting ISIS through Facebook.[84] In January 2016, three Indians were expelled from the country for their connections with the same terrorist group,[85] and another was arrested in India for gathering money to support ISIS from Dubai, using the *hawala* system – an unofficial banking system.[86]

Terrorist attacks are kept at bay by the strict monitoring and punishment regimes. In 2017 the Abu Dhabi Court of Appeal sentenced an Emirati man to ten years for joining the terrorist organisation ISIS in Yemen, and for participating in guarding the organisation's camp.[87]

4.2 Anti-Terrorism Laws and International Conventions

The United Arab Emirates works closely with the USA and other countries and international organisations to show its commitment to fighting extremism in all forms. The focus of Emirati counter-extremism has been to cut off funding opportunities for extremist activities, and to improve security at the borders to disrupt the recruitment of fighters from other countries. In addition, the UAE monitors social media to prevent the spread of hate messages and intervenes when it feels that religious centres are radicalising people and involving them in extremist activities.

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[80] 'ISIS threatens to kill citizens of the international coalition', *Asharq Alawsat*, 23 September 2014, available at: https://aawsat.com/home/article/186611, last visited: 26 January 2018.

[81] Alexander, H., 'Abu Dhabi police arrest "Reem Island Ghost" behind murder of American teacher', *The Telegraph*, 4 December 2014, available at: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/unitedarabemirates/11272886/Abu-Dhabi-police-arrest-Reem-Island-Ghost-behind-murder-of-American-teacher.html, last visited: 26 January 2018.

[82] Al Kuttab, J., 'Reem Island Ghost Alaa Executed by Firing Squad', *Khaleej Times*, 14 July 2015, available at: https://www.khaleejtimes.com/nation/crime/reem-island-ghost-alaa--executed-by-firing-squad, last visited: 26 January 2018.

[83] 'UAE has 2.2 m Indians: 40% from Kerala', *Emirates 24/7 News*, 13 May 2013, available at: http://www.emirates247.com/news/emirates/uae-has-2-2m-indians-40-from-kerala-2013-05-13-1.506273, last visited: 26 January 2018.

[84] Chauhan, N. and Manesh Buddil, 'First Indian Woman "operative of ISIS" deported from Dubai; she was "online recruiter" of terror group', *The Times of India*, 11 September 2015, available at: https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/First-Indian-woman-operative-of-ISIS-deported-from-Dubai-she-was-online-recruiter-of-terror-group/articleshow/48915346.cms, last visited: 26 January 2018.

[85] 'Three Indian sympathisers of ISIS deported from UAE', *DNA*, 29 January 2016, available at: http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-three-indian-sympathisers-of-isis-deported-from-uae-2171730, last visited: 26 January 2018.

[86] 'Rajasthan: ISIS Operative Arrested in Sikar', *The Indian Express*, 16 November 2016, available at: http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/rajasthan-isis-operative-arrested-in-sikar-4379307/, last visited: 26 January 2018.

[87] Marzouki, M., '10 Years in Jail for a Citizen who Joined ISIS in Yemen', *Emirates Today*, 16 March 2017, available at: http://www.emaratalyoum.com/local-section/accidents/2017-03-16-1.978650, last visited: 26 January 2018.

Accordingly, the country has adopted a comprehensive approach which comprises a mixture of laws and anti-extremism initiatives launched by both the government and civil society. Its counter-extremism law, which was most recently reviewed in 2014,[88] is supported by other regulations, such as legislation relating to cyber-crime and anti-discrimination.[89]

A number of bilateral initiatives to counter extremist messaging, especially in cooperation with the USA, are also noteworthy. For example, the UAE and the US have established "a digital communications hub" to combat ISIS online propaganda.[90] This programme "includes engagement with civil society, and community and religious leaders in the region".[91]

Many UAE politicians and religious figures took the lead in condemning religious extremism and its destructive impact on Emirati society. In 2015, the ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid, urged his State's Mufti to issue moderate fatwas which promote tolerance.[92] The UAE follows different schools of Islamic jurisprudence, with some of the Emirates adhering to the *Hanbali* school, traditionally one of the most conservative. In practice this means some clerics in the country have been offering controversial Islamic opinions stemming from their extreme personal understanding of Islam. In response to this, the federal government has decided to counter hard-line fatwas by creating a Council for Fatwa to oversee and unify the fatwa sources across the seven Emirates.[93] The step was designed to control random religious opinions being issued by extreme clerics which could lead to radicalising people.[94]

The UAE supports the Global Coalition to fight against ISIS. It hosts counter-extremism conferences to raise public awareness and enhance experts' discussions and solution-finding to counter messaging strategies. It co-chairs the Coalition Communications Working Group with the US and the UK as well as the Global Counterterrorism Forum with the UK.[95] In addition, the UAE has a number of think tanks operating in different Emirates. These, together with other research institutions, have been active in organising conferences, seminars and round tables to raise awareness of extremism.[96]

4.3 Specific Initiatives and Institutions

The Dubai Economic Security Centre

The UAE has been identified by the International Centre for Asset Recovery as a key destination for money laundering,[97] owing to weaknesses and gaps in some surveillance regulations governing sectors such as real estate and the gold and diamond trades. These weaknesses in regulations have resulted in abuse of the financial system, as evidenced by the annual ranking which assesses country risk regarding money

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[88] Salama, S., 'UAE anti-terror law is "toughest in 40 years"', *Gulf News*, 20 August 2014, available at: http://gulfnews.com/news/uae/government/uae-anti-terror-law-is-toughest-in-40-years-1.1374314, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[89] 'UAE maintains robust counter-terrorism stance: US State Department Country Reports on Terrorism for 2016', *Emirates News Agency*, 20 July 2017, available at: http://wam.ae/en/details/1395302623987, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[90] 'UAE and US Collaborate to Counter Extremist Propaganda', 2015, *Embassy of the United Arab Emirates*, available at: https://www.uae-embassy.org/news-media/uae-and-us-collaborate-counter-extremist-propaganda, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[91] ibid.
[92] Dajani, H., 'UAE's new fatwa council "will help fight extreme religious teachings"', *The National*, 5 June 2017, available at: https://www.thenational.ae/uae/uae-s-new-fatwa-council-will-help-fight-extreme-religious-teachings-1.18475, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[93] ibid.
[94] ibid.
[95] 'Chapter 2: Country Reports: Middle East and North Africa', *US Department of State*, 2016, available at: https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2016/272232.htm, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[96] 'Report: Middle East is the "Primary Theatre" for Terrorism', *Wilson Centre*, 3 June 2016, available at: https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/report-middle-east-the-primary-theater-for-terrorism, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[97] 'Basel Anti-Money Laundering', *International Centre for Asset Recovery*, 2017, available at: https://index.baselgovernance.org/ranking, last visited: 26 January 2018.

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laundering and terrorism financing, which has given the United Emirates 6.0 out of 10 points.[98] Even before the ranking was published in 2017, at least as early as 2005,[99] the US Central Intelligence Agency stated, "The UAE's position as a major financial centre makes it vulnerable to money laundering; anti-money-laundering controls improving, but informal banking remains unregulated."[100] In response, the UAE government established the Dubai Economic Security Centre in 2016 to protect Dubai's economic and financial reputation from the stigma of financing terrorism and to oversee charities operating in the country.[101]

Hedayah: The International Centre of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism

Hedayah is an international organisation based in Abu Dhabi that is committed to countering violent extremism through a broad-based, inclusive community of various actors, ranging from certain United Nations special agencies, such as the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC), to partnerships with national governments spanning the Middle East, Europe and Asia. It seeks to provide a forum for shared expertise and experience in achieving its main objective: to assist with the implementation of pillars of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy by addressing conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism.[102] The UK government has supported Hedayah's programmes with $1.4 million.[103]

Hedayah, meaning "guidance" in Arabic, was created as part of the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) in 2012. Established in 2011, the GCTF aims to assist states and policymakers with anti-terrorism strategies to help them address threats, in accordance with the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. The Forum comprises a number of European, Asian, African and Middle Eastern states.[104] At the launch in 2011 of the GCTF, the UAE offered to host an offshoot in response to the growing desire from GCTF member states and the wider international community for the establishment of a centre to create programmes and establish dialogue and research to prevent extremism.[105]

As part of its early work, in 2014 Hedayah hosted the global Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) exhibition in Abu Dhabi.[106] Experts and officials representing government, academic and civil society sectors gathered to develop the CVE communications agenda. It was assessed that terrorist and extremist use of the internet, and of social media in particular, for recruitment and propaganda purposes was one of the largest threats to combating violent extremism, and the inclusion of a range of technology specialists at the exhibition was beneficial in implementing new strategies to deal with this threat.[107]

Hedayah also operates seminars and workshops abroad, especially with other Arab countries. In 2017 it organised a workshop in cooperation with the Tunisian National Counter Terrorism Commission.[108] The

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[98] ibid.

[99] USA International Business Publications, Dubai Business Law Handbook, (USA: International Business Publication, 2005), p. 18.

[100] 'The World Factbook', *Central Intelligence Agency*, available at: https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2086.html, last visited: 26 January 2018.

[101] 'New Dubai financial centre will combat fraud, bribery and terrorism financing', *The National*, 24 April 2016, available at: https://www.thenational.ae/business/new-dubai-financial-centre-will-combat-fraud-bribery-and-terrorism-financing-1.147601, last visited: 26 January 2018.

[102] 'About Us: Vision and Mission', *Hedayah*, available at: http://www.hedayahcenter.org/about-us/271/vision-mission-and-values, last visited: 26 January 2018.

[103] 'UK, UAE launch task force to prevent violent extremism', *Gulf News*, 22 September 2016, available at: http://gulfnews.com/news/uae/government/uk-uae-launch-task-force-to-prevent-violent-extremism-1.1900703, last visited: 26 January 2018.

[104] 'Members and Partners', *Global Counterterrorism Forum*, available at: https://www.thegctf.org/About-us/Members-and-partners, last visited: 26 January 2018.

[105] ibid.

[106] 'Global CVE Expo 2014: Undermining Violent Extremist Narratives in the Middle East & North Africa: A How-To Guide', *Hedayah*, available at: http://www.hedayahcenter.org/activites/80/activities/283/2014/284/global-cve-expo-2014, last visited: 26 January 2018.

[107] ibid.

[108] 'Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters Workshop in Tunisia', *Hedayah*, 2017, available at: http://www.hedayahcenter.org/activites/758/2017/760/returning-foreign-terrorist-fighters-workshop-in-tunisia, last visited: 26 January 2018.

workshop was part of a programme called "Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters", and has tackled the issue of re-engaging jihadists into normal life after they return home.[109]

<u>The Sawab Centre</u>

Created in 2015, the Sawab Centre was created to work in partnership with the Global Coalition against ISIS and serves as the main point of contact for the 73-member coalition's efforts in countering ISIS online propaganda.[110] Launched as a joint partnership between, and with funding from, the US and the UAE, the Sawab Centre was created as a result of former US President Barak Obama's intensification of the anti-ISIS campaign in 2015.[111] As part of this strategy, the international community pledged more resources for combating ISIS online propaganda. Correctly recognised as an arena in which ISIS could not be defeated militarily, its online profile was, and still is, vast. Its savvy use of social media in recruiting tens of thousands of foreign fighters is just one area which the Sawab Centre aims to combat.

The Sawab Centre (*sawab* means "right" in Arabic) can trace its roots back to an earlier organisation: The Centre for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications (CSCC). In 2011, the State Department established the CSCC to combat the ISIS online propaganda via social media.[112]

The Abu-Dhabi based leading newspaper *The National* described the body as follows:

> The Sawab Centre functions as a 24/7 operations room that is staffed by officials from the UAE, US and other coalition members. The Centre's staff have a number of primary tasks. The first is to monitor ISIS's online content and analyse what is resonating with the small demographic subsets targeted by the extremists. This is so that the coalition can produce more research-based messaging to undermine ISIS. Rather than highlighting the group's brutality — precisely what inspires potential recruits — the Centre's own content seeks to undermine the idea of the "caliphate", by highlighting their inept governance, crumbling infrastructure and poor health services.[113]

One particular project which has seen success in raising awareness of ISIS propaganda used the social media platform Twitter. Now boasting 613,000 Twitter followers,[114] as well as a large number of followers on its Facebook page (2,128,891 million)[115], the Centre has utilised these platforms frequently to spread awareness of ISIS and to counter its messages. The mistreatment of women and children features regularly on these social media forums, drawing large amounts of retweets and increasing awareness. In 2017, an important initiative by the Sawab Centre was launched through an online campaign emphasising the role

[109] ibid.
[110] 'UAE & US Launch Sawab Center – New Digital Communications Hub to Counter Extremist Propaganda', *Embassy of the United Arab Emirates in Washington*, available at: https://www.uae-embassy.org/news-media/uae-us-launch-sawab-center-%E2%80%93-new-digital-communications-hub-counter-extremist-propaganda, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[111] 'Anti-terror Sawab Centre to combat ISIL propaganda online', *The National*, 30 September 2015, available at: https://www.thenational.ae/uae/government/anti-terror-sawab-centre-to-combat-isil-propaganda-online-1.128574, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[112] Khan, T., 'Abu Dhabi counter-terrorism centre to battle ISIL's online lies', *The National*, 7 July 2015, available at: https://www.thenational.ae/world/abu-dhabi-counter-terrorism-centre-to-battle-isil-s-online-lies-1.45777, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[113] ibid.
[114] Sawab Centre, *Twitter*, available at: https://twitter.com/sawabcenter?lang=en, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[115] Sawab Centre, *Facebook*, available at: https://www.facebook.com/sawabcenter/, last visited: 26 January 2018.

of women in combating extremism in their communities.[116] Using the hashtag #InHerStory, the campaign was run on the Centre's social media platforms to provide an alternative narrative to the inferior view of women that is promoted by extremist groups, and highlighted stories of women who fought against ISIS's ideology.[117]

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[116] 'Sawab Centre launches women's campaign against ISIL', *The National*, 20 March 2017, available at: https://www.thenational.ae/uae/government/sawab-centre-launches-women-s-campaign-against-isil-1.14554, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[117] 'Sawab Centre highlights role of women in resisting Daesh and uplifting societies', *Emirates News Agency*, 20 March 2017, available at: http://wam.ae/en/details/1395302603991, last visited: 26 January 2018.

5. Qatar

5.1 Background: Terrorism in Qatar

The extremist situation in Qatar is controversial. It has frequently been alleged by many countries that Qatar sponsors terrorist groups, including by its Gulf neighbours (Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain[118]), and even by some officials in the USA,[119] its biggest ally. The country itself has laws and initiatives to counter extremism and seems to be in a favourable position when it comes to terrorist attacks.

The last major act of terrorism carried out in Qatar was in 2005, and involved a suicide bomber driving his car into a theatre frequented by Westerners.[120] The incident killed a British citizen and injured several others. Since then the country has not experienced a significant act of terrorism, although the American military base 'Al Udeid', which hosts US military forces, has come under threat of attack several times. Nevertheless, the threat of terrorist attacks in Qatar remains low compared to the rest of the region.

Following years of anti-Western propaganda, there is significant anti-Western sentiment in Qatar, as elsewhere in the Middle East. In 2015, a man attacked a security guard at the US embassy in Doha using a knife.[121] Qatar itself is home to large number of expats. There are around 25,000 British and 11,000 Americans in the country, who mostly reside in Doha.[122] Such a large number of expat residents means terrorists are likely to try to carry out attacks in Qatar, according to travel advice offered by the UK government.[123]

Whether domestic counter-extremism efforts or favourable attitudes towards terrorist groups are responsible for the low frequency of terrorism is debatable. On many occasions other nations have alleged that Qatar supports, finances and hosts radical figures. In June 2017, Egypt, the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain ended diplomatic ties with Doha for failing to stop terrorism and its financing.[124] Saudi Arabia, which led the embargo, also blamed the country for sheltering radical Islamists belonging to groups it regards as terrorist organisations, such as the Palestinian Sunni organisation Hamas, and the political Salafi movement the Muslim Brotherhood. Most of this organisation's prominent leaders live in the country – among them the Islamist cleric Yousef Al-Qaradawi, who has been banned from entering multiple countries, including the UK, for activity related to support of extremism.[125]

Al-Qaradawi, along with a number of other extremist figures, has been given a platform by the Qatari media network Al-Jazeerah.[126] Launched in 1996, the network has played a major role in the spread of

[118] Qiblawi, T., Mohammed Tawfeeq, Elizabeth Roberts and Hamdi Alkhshali, 'Qatar rift: Saudi, UAE, Bahrain, Egypt cut diplomatic ties', *CNN,* 27 July 2017, available at: https://edition.cnn.com/2017/06/05/middleeast/saudi-bahrain-egypt-uae-qatar-terror/index.html, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[119] Koran, L., 'Members of Congress push for US to take tougher line on Qatar', *CNN,* 21 November 2017, available at: http://edition.cnn.com/2017/11/21/politics/us-congress-qatar-hamas/index.html, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[120] 'Car bomb targets theatre in Qatar', *BBC News,* 20 March 2005, available at: lhttp://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/4365039.stm, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[121] 'Qatar 2016 Crime and Safety Report', *Department of State Bureau of Diplomatic Security,* 30 March 2016, available at: https://www.osac.gov/pages/ContentReportDetails.aspx?cid=19398, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[122] Snoj, J., 'Population of Qatar by nationality – 2017 report', *Priya Dsouza Communications,* 7 February 2017, available at: http://priyadsouza.com/population-of-qatar-by-nationality-in-2017/, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[123] 'Foreign travel advice: Qatar', *UK Government,* available at: https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/qatar/terrorism, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[124] 'Qatar crisis: What you need to know', *BBC News,* 19 July 2017, available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-40173757, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[125] 'Muslim cleric not allowed into UK', *BBC News,* 7 February 2008, available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/7232398.stm, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[126] Levitt, M., 'Assessing the U.S.–Qatar Relationship', *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy,* 26 July 2017, available at: http://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA13/20170726/106329/HHRG-115-FA13-Wstate-LevittM-20170726.pdf, last visited: 26 January 2018.

extremist ideas in the Middle East.[127] Owing to its intensive coverage of news related to extremists such Al-Qaeda's leader, Osama Bin Laden, and his organisation, the popularity of terrorism increased. The organisation began to find new recruitments and young Arab supporters much easily.[128]

5.2. Anti-Terrorism Laws, Initiatives and International Conventions

Inside the country's borders, the Qatari security forces and government are well equipped to detect and prevent acts of extremism. Qatar established the Combating Terrorism Law in March 2004 to define terrorism and its financing.[129] This gave power to the government to identify and prevent terrorist acts, to investigate them and to prosecute both terrorists and their supporters. Ten years later, the Qatar Authority for Charitable Activities was set up, to track the activities of both national and foreign charity organisations that may aid terrorism in any form.[130] Qatar also has its own National Anti-Terrorism Committee (NATC), which is represented by more than ten government institutions and government ministers.[131]

At the same time, the state has been accused of offering support to extremist groups. The US Treasury Department has said that Qatar has tolerated terrorism funding and supported groups deemed to be terrorist in nature, such as Hamas.[132] Many fundraising activities and individuals have been identified by the US as terrorist funders operating in the country. In 2014, the US Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence, David Cohen, said that terrorist-fundraisers in Qatar "aggressively solicit donations online from supporters in other countries, notably Saudi Arabia, which have banned unauthorised fundraising campaigns for Syria".[133]

Qatar enacted the Cybercrime Prevention Law in 2014 to criminalise cyber-activity related to terrorism.[134] This made it a crime to establish contact with terrorists, to finance or motivate terrorism or to associate with terrorist activities.[135] The law enables the authorities to track and monitor electronic data and internet traffic to determine any extremism threats.[136]

Qatar State Security also plays a role in combating domestic extremism. The country maintains its own list of terror suspects and performs strict screenings of international passengers. Qatari immigration laws are quite effective, and thorough background checks are performed before work visas are awarded. Qatar has also signed an agreement with Interpol, which helps it to verify travel documents based on the Interpol Stolen and Lost Travel Documents databases.[137] The strictness of the immigration policies helps to reduce the threats of extremism and the movement of foreign fighters inside its boundaries.[138]

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[127] Alotaibi, N., 'How to solve a problem like Al-jazeera', *Al Arabiya*, 11 July 2017, available at: https://english.alarabiya.net/en/views/news/middle-east/2017/07/11/How-do-you-solve-a-problem-like-Al-Jazeera-.html, last visited: 26 January 2018.

[128] ibid.

[129] 'Law No (3) of 2004 on combating terrorism', available at: http://www.qfcra.com/en-us/legislation/Laws/Law%20No%20(3)%20of%202004%20on%20Combating%20Terrorism.pdf, last visited: 26 January 2018.

[130] 'Charity Work', *Hukoomi, Qatar Government*, available at: http://portal.www.gov.qa/wps/portal/topics/Religion+and+Community/Charity+Work, last visited: 26 January 2018.

[131] 'Country Report on Terrorism 2016 – Chapter 2 – Qatar', *US Department of State*, 19 July 2017, available at: https://www.ecoi.net/local_link/344159/475167_en.html, last visited: 26 January 2018.

[132] 'Qatar: Extremism & Counter-Extremism', *Counter Extremism Project*, 2016.

[133] ibid.

[134] Kovessy, P., 'Qatar's Emir signs new cybercrime legislation into law', *Doha News*, 16 September 2014, available at: https://dohanews.co/qatars-emir-signs-law-new-cybercrime-legislation/, last visited: 26 January 2018.

[135] ibid.

[136] ibid.

[137] 'Country Reports on Terrorism 2014 – Qatar', *UNHCR*, 19 June 2015, available at: http://www.refworld.org/docid/5587c74234.html, last visited: 26 January 2018.

[138] ibid.

The country has adopted various means to stop money laundering and the financing of terrorist organisations. The 2010 Combating Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing Law enables public prosecutors to freeze the accounts of terrorist groups designated by the United Nation Security Council.[139] The Central Bank also obtains help from other financial institutions to track any UN-designated terrorists and their funds.[140] The counter-extremism efforts of Qatar have succeeded in keeping acts of extremism to a minimum inside the nation.

5.3 Specific Initiatives and Institutions

Qatar's initiatives to combat extremism have focused on establishing and funding foundations and social enterprises in various Middle Eastern countries, to address the causes of extremism. Some of these initiatives tackle unemployment and create entrepreneurship opportunities to engage Arab youth in economic and social development. The philosophy behind the approach is that inclusion can help prevent extremism.

During the thirteenth United Nations Crime Congress, held in Doha in 2015, Qatar proposed the "Doha Declaration", which outlined a framework to prevent crime, terrorism and corruption by providing education for children and young people in the Middle East. To support the Declaration, Qatar provided US$49 million to the United Nation's office on Drugs and Crime (UNOD) to create programmes for prisoners' rehabilitation and integration and youth education.[141]

The Research Center for Islamic Legislation and Ethics (CILE)

Launched in 2012, the Center for Islamic Legislation and Ethics (CILE) aims to create moderate understanding of Islamic thought to help tackle the sources of extremist interpretations of Islam in the fields of science, gender, education, politics and interfaith and intercultural dialogue.[142] It operates as a member of the Qatar Faculty of Islamic Studies, part of the University of Hamad bin Khalifa.[143]

According to the CILE's website, "The centre is maintained by the production, dissemination and application of Islamic ethical thought and behaviour."[144] This is achieved by engaging scholars of text and scholars of context to bring about a transformative ethical school of thought."[145] In 2017, the Center held a lecture titled "When Fiqh and Ethics are Disconnected: ISIS as an Example"[146] to examine the interrelation between text and context in the behaviour and practices of ISIS and Islam.[147]

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[139] 'Law No. (4) of Year 2010 on Combating Money Laundering and Terrorism Financing', 2010, available at: http://www.qfcra.com/en-us/legislation/Laws/Anti-Money%20Laundering%20Law%20No.%20(4)%20of%202010.pdf, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[140] Levitt, M., 'Assessing the U.S.–Qatar Relationship', *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, 26 July 2017.
[141] 'Unprecedented funding agreement between UNODC and Qatar leaves lasting legacy for Doha Declaration', *UNDOC*, 27 November 2015, available at: https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/press/releases/2015/November/unprecedented-funding-agreement-between-unodc-and-qatar-leaves-lasting-legacy-for-doha-declaration.html, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[142] 'Our Vision and Mission', *Research Center for Islamic Legislation and Ethics*, available at: https://www.cilecenter.org/en/vision-mission/, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[143] ibid.
[144] Research Center for Islamic legislation and ethics CILE, *Hamad Bin Khalifa University*, available at https://hbku.edu.qa/en/cis/center/research-center-islamic-legislation-and-ethics, last visited 29 January: 2018.
[145] 'About us', *Research Center for Islamic Research and Ethics*, available at: https://www.cilecenter.org/en/about-us/, last visited: 26 January 2018.
[146] 'When Fiqh and Ethics are Disconnected: ISIS as an example', *Research Center for Islamic Research and Ethics*, 9 February 2017, available at: https://www.cilecenter.org/en/news/invitation-public-lecture-fiqh-ethics-disconnected-isis-example-16022015/, last visited: 27 January 2018.
[147] ibid.

<u>*Qatar Foundation*</u>

The Qatar Foundation is a semi-private, not-for-profit organisation based in Qatar, which was founded in 1995 and is funded by the government of Qatar.[148] The Qatar Foundation undertakes both local and international initiatives in an effort to improve the scope of education, science and research.[149] This is a step forward in the direction of providing the younger generation with better opportunities.

The Qatar Foundation also has a science and research agenda which aims to expand Qatar's technological capacity.[150] The Foundation has created a number of sub-initiatives to counter extremism, such as 'Silatech' which focuses on promoting the economic empowerment of Arab youth as means of preventing radicalisation. *Silatech* means "your connections". It targets young Arabs in countries, mainly in North Africa and the Levant, where the majority of jihadists originate, and offers employment and enterprise opportunities. Silatech claims to have tackled youth employment in those countries and to have helped 300,000 young men and women in those states to find jobs by the end of 2016.[151]

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[148] 'Mission', *Qatar Foundation*, available at: https://www.qf.org.qa/about/about, last visited: 27 January 2018.
[149] ibid.
[150] 'Contributing to the Success of a Nation', *Qatar Foundation*, 2017, available at: https://www.qf.org.qa/content/20th/contributing-to-the-success-of-a-nation, last visited: 27 January 2018.
[151] 'Silatech creates 300,000 jobs in Arab world', *Gulf Times*, 4 February 2017, available at: http://www.gulf-times.com/story/531619/Silatech-creates-300-000-jobs-in-Arab-world, last visited: 27 January 2018.

6. The Kingdom of Bahrain

6.1 Background: Terrorism in Bahrain

The frequency of terrorist attacks in the Kingdom of Bahrain has been considerably higher than among its Gulf neighbours. This could be explained by the fact that the country experiences different security challenges in comparison to other Gulf States. In the last five years, 140 cases of terrorism have been recorded (see table 1), claiming 22 lives and injuring 139.[152] Most of the attacks were directed at the security forces,[153] a trend that gathered pace in 2015 when periodic bomb attacks began. Police forces were attacked in this manner no fewer than five times during that year.[154]

Bahrain has established a high level of control over extremism, despite strife between the Sunnis and Shiites. The country has adopted and implemented strict anti-terrorism laws and convicted suspected terrorists. It also has many alliances with neighbouring and international countries to fight and prevent terrorism. The US and the UK maintain close relationships with the country, and both have a significant presence.

Measures against extremism have been mostly successful in limiting the number of violent attacks. The number of terrorist attacks fell from 41 cases in 2014 to just three in 2016 (see table 1). [155] However, Bahrain still is plagued by terrorism. The majority of the violent acts are led by Shia militant groups, who represent two-thirds of the Bahraini population.[156]

Because of such sectarian division, the relationship between the regime and the Shia population has been tense in the past, and continues to be so. The Shia form the majority of the population, but the State is ruled by Al-Khalifa, the Sunni tribe, which has led to a clash of interests. This is also one of the main reasons why the Bahraini–Iranian relationship is so complicated. Bahrain was ruled by the Shia Persian Safavid Empire between 1602 and 1783.[157] The Iranian Empire refused to give up its hold on Bahrain, even when it finally became independent after Britain ended its colonisation in 1971. Iran introduced a large number of activities, claiming to support the Shia population in Bahrain, but Manama, the Bahraini capital, regarded it as an interference in its sovereignty. This was followed by Bahrain accusing Tehran of helping a secret Shiite Hezbollah cell to overthrow the regime in 1996 by providing funds and intensive military training in Iran.[158] This caused the rift between the countries to deepen further. Leading government officials have often said that the country has fallen prey to the expansionist policy of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards. And this regime has the power to stir sectarian hatred in Bahrain through its terrorist cells.[159]

[152] 'Terrorism in Bahrain', *World Data*, 2016, available at: https://www.worlddata.info/asia/bahrain/terrorism.php, last visited: 27 January 2018.
[153] ibid.
[154] ibid.
[155] 'Bahrain FM: Muslim Brotherhood is a terrorist group', *Al-Jazeera*, 6 July 2017, available at: http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/07/bahrain-fm-muslim-brotherhood-terrorist-group-170706140931861.html, last visited: 27 January 2018.
[156] Palk, S., 'Explainer: Tensions between Sunnis and Shiites', *CNN*, 23 February 2011, available at:
http://edition.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/meast/02/23/bahrain.sunni.shiite.explainer/index.html, last visited: 27 January 2018.
[157] Potter, L., *Sectarian Politics in the Persian Gulf* (Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 55.
[158] Stork, J., 'Routine Abuse, Routine Denial: Civil Rights and the Political Crisis in Bahrain', *Political Scenic* (1997), p. 91.
[159] 'Foreign Minister of Bahrain: Those who do not see the danger of Iran blind', *CNN*, 17 November 2017, available at: %20https:/arabic.cnn.com/middle-east/2017/11/17/bahrain-cairo-meeting-iran-tweet, last visited: 27 January 2018.

In 2015, Manama cracked down on a terrorist cell which was trying to smuggle weapons into the country from Iran.[160] Bahrain's Foreign Minister, Sheikh Khalid bin Ahmed Al-Khalifa, later said that the amount of explosives that had been recovered "was enough to wipe out Manama".[161] In a similar vein, Iran sheltered around 160 individuals accused of terrorism who had been sentenced in Bahrain.[162] Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of the Islamic revolution, made a statement shrouded in controversy, that Iran will not giving up its support for the oppressed Shia people, including the people of Bahrain.[163]

6.2 Anti-terrorism Laws and International Conventions

Iran is not the only security threat to Bahrain. The country has also suffered an alarming threat from ISIS. Bahrain joined the Saudi-led 41-country Islamic alliance against terrorism in 2016, and has provided significant support. In addition, Khalid bin Ahmed Al-Khalifa, Bahrain's Foreign Minister, designated the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organisation in 2016 and vowed to prosecute anyone linked to it on charges of terrorism-related crimes.[164] The government has also blacklisted the Shiite group Hezbollah, Al-Qaeda, ISIS and the Al-Nusra Front in Syria.[165] A total of 68 terrorist groups have been listed, including some lesser-known groups such as Al-Ashtar Brigades.[166]

Terrorism-related acts are treated as criminal cases and come under the Anti-Terrorism Law of 2006.[167] Articles 155 and 168 of the Penal Code guide the treatment of such cases.[168] In 2015, Bahrain made its counterterrorism laws and penalties much stricter. The upper legislative chamber, the Shura Council, increased the prison term for those promoting terrorist acts to ten years.[169] A law approved by the Council also enables such convictions to carry a fine of nearly US$1 million.[170] The 2006 Anti-Terrorism Law underwent some changes, giving power to the security forces to detain a suspect for a longer period of time without pressing charges.[171] Under the new legislation, 24 suspects were charged in 2015 in a case related to the formation of an ISIS cell.[172] The convicts were accused of conspiring to carry out suicide attacks in the country and of recruiting fighters.[173]

The legislation orders various types of punishment for those convicted in terrorism-related cases. Serious crimes result in the death penalty or the revocation of citizenship. In January 2015, the government revoked the citizenship of 72 residents under the 2006 anti-terrorism law.[174] In March, three Bahrainis

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[160] 'Bahrain: Iran explosives enough to destroy capital', *Al Arabiya*, 10 September 2015, available at: https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2015/09/10/Bahrain-Iran-explosives-enough-to-destroy-capital-.html, last visited: 27 January 2018.
[161] ibid.
[162] 'Iran hosts 160 wanted men from Bahrain', *Al Arabiya*, 28 October 2017, available at: https://tinyurl.com/y8sakrga, last visited: 29 January 2018.
[163] Erdbrink, T., 'Ayatollah Khamenei, Backing Iran Negotiators, Endorses Nuclear Deal', *The New York Times*, 18 July 2015, available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/19/world/middleeast/ayatollah-ali-khamenei-of-iran-backs-negotiators-and-doesnt-criticize-nuclear-deal.html, last visited: 27 January 2018.
[164] 'Bahrain blacklists Hezbollah, designates 68 groups as "terrorist"', *The Times of Israel*, 11 April 2016, available at: https://www.timesofisrael.com/bahrain-blacklists-hezbollah-designates-68-groups-as-terrorist/, last visited: 27 January 2018.
[165] ibid.
[166] ibid.
[167] 'Law No. (58) for the year 2006 on the protection of society from terrorist acts', *Legislation and Legal Opinion Commission*, available at: http://www.legalaffairs.gov.bh/LegislationSearchDetails.aspx?id=2125#.WmWJ0mViP-Y, last visited: 27 January 2018.
[168] ibid.
[169] 'Decree-Law No. (68) for the year 2014', *Legislation and Legal Opinion Commission*, 4 December 2014, available at: http://www.legalaffairs.gov.bh/LegislationSearchDetails.aspx?id=72085#.Wh1NJkpl_IU, last visited: 27 January 2018.
[170] Mal Allah., L., 'Life prison and a fine of half a million dinars penalty for financing terrorism', *Al-Bilad*, 2 December 2017, available at: http://www.albiladpress.com/news/2017/3336/bahrain/464828.html, last visited: 29 January 2018.
[171] ibid.
[172] 'Bahraini Court to Try 24 Accused of Forming ISIS Cell in Bahrain … 16 at Large', *Bahrain Mirror*, 27 October 2015, available at: http://bahrainmirror.com/en/news/27170.html, last visited: 27 January 2018.
[173] ibid.
[174] 'Bahrain revokes the nationality of 72 people', *BBC News*, 31 January 2015, available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-31075216, last visited: 27 January 2018.

were sentenced to death for killing three policemen.[175] However, the strong reaction from the government has been a cause of concern for many human rights organisations, as in some cases anti-terrorism laws have been used to charge peaceful activists fighting for democracy.[176]

The government of Bahrain has recently started putting pressure on opponents from the Shia community. The Bahraini authorities have arrested the prominent human rights activist Nabil Rajab several times.[177] The most recent occasion was in June 2016 because of comments he had made on social media that criticised the Saudi-led Arab alliance in Yemen. Many other activists have been punished for expressing their opinions.[178] In addition, the court of Bahrain has successfully dissolved the primary Shia opposition group, Al-Wefaq, for alleged links with terrorism.[179]

The Ministry of Interior is the main body responsible for the identification and prevention of terrorist activities. It has the power to make arrests on terrorism-related cases backed by intelligence from the Bahrain National Security Agency. The Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs and the Ministry of Labour and Social Development head Bahrain's efforts to combat radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorist financing.[180]

Bahrain forms part of a regional financial coalition called the Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force. Being a centre of commerce, as is its neighbour the UAE, a large amount of money passes through the economy, which makes it vulnerable to terrorist funding.[181] In 2014, four Asian bank employees were arrested for being part of a money-laundering racket that transferred funds abroad.[182]

Bahrain has also taken part in many meetings with regard to cutting the financial supply to terrorists, including hosting the eighth GCC-EU workshop on countering terrorist financing.[183]

6.3 Specific Initiatives and Institutions

Hamad Centre for Peaceful Coexistence and the Declaration of Tolerance

Bahrain's sectarian tension and excessively violent forces have led the country to adopt some new measures. The government is currently endeavouring to approach the subject of interfaith and cultural cooperation through civil societies and NGOs. In November 2017, the city of Los Angeles, USA, saw the inauguration of the King Hamad Global Centre for Inter-Faith Dialogue and Peaceful Co-Existence, which aims to uphold the Declaration of the Kingdom of Bahrain which talks about religious freedom for

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[175] 'Bahrain executes three Shia men over 2014 police killing', *BBC News*, 15 January 2017, available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-38627679, last visited: 27 January 2018.
[176] Alwadaei, S., 'We are human rights defenders, but Bahrain says we're terrorists', *The Guardian*, 9 February 2015, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/feb/09/human-rights-defenders-bahrain-says-terrorists, last visited: 27 January 2018.
[177] 'Updates: Arrest and Detention of BCHR's President Nabeel Rajab', *Bahrain Center for Human Rights*, 2016, available at: http://bahrainrights.org/en/updates-arrest-and-detention-bchrs-president-nabeel-rajab, last visited: 27 January 2018.
[178] 'Bahrain "arrests" activist who claimed she was tortured', *BBC News*, 4 July 2017, available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-40495044, last visited: 27 January 2018.
[179] 'Bahrain dissolves main Shia opposition Al-Wefaq party', *Al-Jazeera*, 17 July 2016, available at: http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/07/bahrain-dissolves-main-opposition-party-160717132556468.html, last visited: 27 January 2018.
[180] 'Chapter 2. Country Reports: Middle East and North Africa Overview', *US Department of State*, 2015, available at: https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2015/257517.htm, last visited: 27 January 2018.
[181] 'Chapter 2. Country Reports: Middle East and North Africa Overview', *US Department of State*, 2015.
[182] Al Arab, M., 'Bahrain is sweeping the biggest money laundering operation in the Gulf', *Al-Arabiya*, 5 February 2014, available at: https://tinyurl.com/y727rg6m, last visited: 29 January 2018.
[183] 'Foreign ministry hosts GCC–EU workshop', *Bahrain News Agency*, 21 April 2015, available at: https://bna.bh/portal/en/news/665000, last visited: 27 January 2018.

all.[184] It also plans to make a contribution to international discussions regarding interfaith dialogue and tolerance.[185]

This makes Bahrain unique among the Gulf countries. While the other countries carry out the majority of their counter-extremism initiatives directly through government agencies and political bodies, Bahrain implements government initiatives as well as others that are introduced by civil societies. These include 'This is Bahrain' and the 'Bahrain Tolerance Foundation', both of which are helping the government in its quest for peace. In order to avoid receiving harsh criticism, the government is going along with this arrangement. The Muslim population, in particular, might regard some of these initiatives, such as the recent warming of the stance towards Israel, as controversial.

Indeed, when the US President Donald Trump decided in December 2017 to recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital, 24 delegates were sent to Israel by the civil organisation This is Bahrain, with the objective of promoting intercultural coexistence, even though it was viewed as a controversial decision at the time.[186] This initiative has helped to establish Bahrain as a tolerant country which does not discriminate against religious faiths and has no objections to what they preach. Other countries, such as Saudi Arabia, have attempted to counter extremism by carrying out similar activities – promoting and encouraging tolerance, faith engagement and supporting inclusion – but have not made very much progress with their interfaith activism. Saudi Arabia's interfaith dialogue centre in Vienna, Austria, still has not influenced the country's policy sufficiently to allow its million[187] Christian workers to practise their religion openly. On the other hand, Bahrain has made way for a number of Roman and Orthodox churches. It has also tried to promote inclusivity by appointing female Jewish[188] and Christian[189] diplomats on global platforms, and by funding the King Hamad Global Centre for Interfaith Dialogue and Peaceful Coexistence at the University of Sapienza in Rome, Italy. This scientific centre aims to spread the culture of peace and tolerance and to reject extremism, hatred and intolerance.[190] By encouraging religious freedom, Bahrain hopes to eliminate extremism and violence and to mitigate the allegations of human rights abuse.

[184] 'Bahraini Global Centre for Interfaith Dialogue and Peaceful Coexistence Launched in Los Angeles' *Saudi Press Agency*, 14 September 2017, available at: http://www.spa.gov.sa/viewfullstory.php?lang=en&newsid=1666203, last visited: 27 January 2018.
[185] ibid.
[186] 'Anger as "This is Bahrain" delegation visits Israel', *Al-Jazeera*, 11 December 2017, available at: http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/12/anger-bahrain-delegation-visits-israel-171211065439149.html, last visited: 27 January 2018.
[187] 'Vatican-Saudi talks on churches', *BBC*, 18 March 2008, available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/7302378.stm, last visited: 27 January 2018.
[188] 'Jewish woman ends stint as Bahraini envoy in DC', *The Times of Israel*, 18 November 2013, available at: https://www.timesofisrael.com/jewish-woman-ends-stint-as-bahraini-envoy-in-dc/, last visited: 27 January 2018.
[189] Toumi, H., 'Bahrain to appoint first Christian woman ambassador', *Gulf News*, 30 December 2010, available at: http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/bahrain-to-appoint-first-christian-woman-ambassador-1.738525, last visited: 27 January 2018.
[190] 'King receives participants in "This Is Bahrain" events in Rome', *Bahrain News Agency*, 30 November 2016, available at: https://www.bna.bh/portal/en/news/758660, last visited: 27 January 2018.

7. Kuwait

7.1 Background: Terrorism in Kuwait

Terrorist attacks in the state of Kuwait have been relatively low. In the last five years, the most significant terrorist attack in the country was a suicide bombing that took place at one of the country's most prominent Shia mosques: Al-Sadiq, in June 2015.[191] Around 227 people were wounded and 27 were killed in this attack, for which ISIS claimed responsibility.[192] The investigations led to the trial of 29 suspects, of whom 15 were found to be guilty and seven were sentenced to death.[193] In another attack, in October 2016, a large flatbed construction vehicle was intentionally driven into a smaller vehicle that was carrying three US military service members.[194]

However, the low numbers of terrorist attacks in Kuwait do not reflect the level of the population's support for terrorist groups such as ISIS. According to *Al Ray*, a leading Kuwaiti newspaper, there are about 100 Kuwaiti fighters within this terrorist organisation.[195] The tight surveillance of public places, such as mosques, and of radicals has not ensured that those who are interested are cut off from the wider network of the jihadists. The younger Kuwaiti population retains the ability to communicate with larger terrorist groups such as ISIS through online activity.

7.2 Anti-terrorism Laws and International Conventions

Kuwait has pursued a selective procedure to eliminate the sources of terrorism and its funding. The measures it has adopted were introduced after a number of reports issued by international government departments demanded that the country do more.[196] In 1999, Kuwait approved the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism.[197] Along with this, the Anti-Money Laundering and Combating the Financing of Terrorism Law, which was passed in 2013, enables cases involving the funding of terrorist activity to be tried in court.[198] These issues are routinely discussed publicly. Columnist Ali-Al-Baghli wrote a piece for the *Al-Qabas* newspaper entitled "Kuwait became M.T.A for fanatic extremist", which criticised the regulation for failing to watch the movement of funds within and beyond Kuwait's borders.[199]

In 2014, the US sanctioned three Kuwaitis for facilitating cash and weapons for Jabhat Al-Nusra in Syria.[200] A US report on the country's anti-terror measures also noted that many individuals in Kuwait are making charitable donations and other payments to Islamist groups abroad.[201] Also in 2014, the US Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence, David Cohen, said:

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[191] 'Kuwait Shia mosque blast death toll "rises to 27"', *BBC News*, 26 June 2015, available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-33287136, last visited: 27 January 2018.

[192] Pearson, M., 'ISIS claims fatal mosque attack in Kuwait', *CNN*, 27 June 2015, available at: http://edition.cnn.com/2015/06/26/world/kuwait-mosque-attack/index.html, last visited: 27 January 2018.

[193] 'Kuwait mosque attack: Seven sentenced to death', *BBC News*, 15 September 2015, available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-34254695, last visited: 27 January 2018.

[194] 'US troops in Kuwait came under "terrorist" attack: embassy', *Arab News*, 9 October 2016, available at: http://www.arabnews.com/node/995786/middle-east, last visited: 27 January 2018.

[195] 'Increasing number of Kuwaiti fighters with ISIS', *Al-Arab*, 11 November 2014, available at: http://www.alarab.co.uk/?id=36885, last visited: 27 January 2018.

[196] Toumi, H., 'Syrians' jail terms for illegal fundraising in Kuwait upheld', *Gulf News*, 23 May 2017, available at: http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/kuwait/syrians-jail-terms-for-illegal-fundraising-in-kuwait-upheld-1.2031547, last visited: 27 January 2018.

[197] 'Kuwait', *North Africa Financial Action Task Force (MENAFATF)*, available at: http://www.fatf-gafi.org/countries/#Kuwait, last visited: 27 January 2018.

[198] 'Kuwait: Detailed Assessment Report on Anti-Money Laundering and Combating the Financing of Terrorism', *International Monetary Fund*, September 2011, available at: https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2011/cr11268.pdf, last visited: 27 January 2018.

[199] Al-Baghli, A., 'Kuwait has become M.T.A extremists', *Al-Qabas*, 4 July 2014, available at: http://alqabas.com/114128/, last visited: 13 December 2017.

[200] Solomon, J., 'U.S. Treasury Sanctions 3 Kuwait-Based Financiers for Alleged Terrorism Funding', *The Wall Street Journal*, 6 August 2014, available at: https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-treasury-sanctions-3-kuwait-based-financiers-for-alleged-terrorism-funding-1407337782, last visited: 27 January 2018.

[201] 'Kuwait vows to fight terror after US sanctions over funding', *The National*, 8 August 2014, available at: https://www.thenational.ae/world/kuwait-vows-to-fight-terror-after-us-sanctions-over-funding-1.351836, last visited: 27 January 2018.

Although much of the private fundraising in the Gulf related to Syria is motivated by a sincere and admirable desire to ease suffering … a number of fundraisers operating particularly in Kuwait and Qatar are soliciting donations to fund extremist insurgents, not to meet legitimate humanitarian needs.[202]

The Kuwaiti government has enforced tighter rules to manage and control charities and fundraising in recent months. To that effect, all types of cash fundraising inside mosques has been banned.[203] A ministerial counterterrorism committee has also been formed to prevent sources of extremism and is led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.[204]

However, despite all those steps, Kuwaiti politicians have admitted on a number of occasions that much remains to be done. The Kuwaiti Deputy Foreign Minister Khalid al-Jarallah said, in a speech at the sixth meeting of the working group to counter the financing of ISIS in 2015, that even though Kuwait has made progress in cutting off donations to extremists, "we still have a lot to do".[205]

7.3 Specific Initiatives and Institutions

Media and drama to tackle extremism

The government of Kuwait does not only rely on "hard power" efforts, but has also incorporated "soft power" tools such as press, media and drama to help tackle extremism. After the participation in the third GCC Media Forum in 2015, the Minister of Information and State Minister for Youth Affairs, Sheikh Salman Al-Sabah, requested that media organisations within the country develop their potential and give people correct information to help stop the spread of extreme ideology.[206]

Kuwait is known for being the main hub of drama and theatre in the Gulf region. Until recently it was the only country in the region with a theatrical tradition and soap opera production, which forms a major part of the country's cultural life. The Kuwaiti anti-terror approach incorporated such tools to help counter extremism. A Kuwaiti anti-terror advertisement by Kuwaiti telecom company Zain showed real victims of terrorism confronting a suicide bomber and urging society to bomb violence with love and mercy.[207] Soap opera was also used as a tool in countering extremism. A drama called *Tora Bora* was shown during the holy month of Ramadan in 2015, and told the story of a young Kuwaiti man and his journey to Afghanistan after he was brainwashed by a terrorist group. The drama aimed to show the dark side and the way people suffer once they have decided to join these groups.[208]

The government is collaborating with Kuwaiti universities to identify signs of radicalisation on social media, where connecting with young people has been a major challenge for Kuwaiti officials in fighting

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[202] Toumi, H., 'Syrians' jail terms for illegal fundraising in Kuwait upheld', *Gulf News*, 23 May 2017.

[203] 'A New Law to Regulate Charitable Work', *Alwatan*, 1 September 2014, available at: http://alwatan.kuwait.tt/articledetails.aspx?id=382272, last visited: 27 January 2018.

[204] 'Kuwait Counter-terrorism Contributions', *Embassy of Kuwait in Australia*, 2016, available at: http://www.smh.com.au/cqstatic/gplfjf/Kuwait.pdf, last visited: 27 January 2018.

[205] 'Kuwait recognizes the need to do more to curb extremist financing', *Russia today*, 24 October 2016, available at: https://tinyurl.com/y88h75cu, last visited: 29 January 2018.

[206] 'Kuwaiti minister: extremism exploits the "new media"', 12 May 2015, *Sky News*, available at: https://www.skynewsarabia.com/web/article/744857/-وزير-كويتي- التطرف-يستغل-الإعلام-الجديد, last visited: 27 January 2018.

[207] Shaheen, K., '"Bomb violence with mercy": anti-terror ad goes viral in Middle East', *The Guardian*, 29 May 2017, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/29/bomb-violence-mercy-anti-terror-ad-goes-viral-middle-east, last visited: 27 January 2018.

[208] 'ISIS Threatens Stars of the Series Tora Bora', *Sayidati*, 24 June 2015, available at: https://tinyurl.com/yazcq597, last visited: 27 January 2018.

extremism.[209] In order to reach out to the local public, several counter-messaging campaigns are talking about religion.

Through all the measures that the government of Kuwait has implemented and planned, it has been building and augmenting its capability to counter extremist activities on all fronts – financial, economic and legal. However, such efforts have their drawbacks. Like many of the Gulf States, counter-extremism policies can have negative implications on human rights, and the country is continuing to seek the appropriate balance. For example, the country's controversial law requiring compulsory DNA testing as part of the anti-terrorism law was abolished in October 2017 for privacy and ethical reasons after much criticism from human rights organisations.[210] The Kuwaiti National Assembly provided funding for this effort in 2015 in response to the suicide bombing of the Al-Sadiq Mosque.[211]

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[209] 'Country Report on Terrorism 2016 – Chapter 2 – Kuwait', *US Department of State*, 19 July 2017, available at: https://www.ecoi.net/local_link/344151/475159_en.html, last visited: 27 January 2018.
[210] Nebehay. S., 'U.N. rights panel urges Kuwait to amend broad DNA testing law', 15 July 2016, available at: https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kuwait-security-un/u-n-rights-panel-urges-kuwait-to-amend-broad-dna-testing-law-idUSKCN0ZV1VY, last visited: 27 January 2018.
[211] Lee, S., 'Kuwait becomes First Country to Collect DNA samples from All Citizens and Visitors', *Newsweek*, 19 April 2016, available at: http://www.newsweek.com/kuwait-becomes-first-country-world-collect-dna-samples-all-citizens-and-449830, last visited: 27 January 2018.

8. The Sultanate of Oman

8.1 Background: Terrorism in Oman

Oman has been a safe haven amid the troubled region that is the Middle East. The country has experienced a very low threat of terrorism and radicalisation.[212] The authorities and the monarchy have played a part in combating extremism. In general, the young population of the country does not support terrorism, and there are no reports of Omani fighters within ISIS.[213] It is not surprising, therefore, that there has not been a single terrorist attack in Oman in the last five years (see table 1), nor deaths as a result of terrorism.[214]

However, the neighbouring states of Yemen and Saudi Arabia and the overall conflict-prone nature of the region puts Oman in the target zone of terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda. In 2013, Oman closed 20 consulates and embassies in the Middle East and North Africa temporarily for fear of attack.[215] More recently, the country has agreed to join the coalition led by Saudi Arabia to fight terrorism, which might put Oman in the sights of the terrorist groups controlling areas in neighbouring countries, such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda.[216]

Even with the threat of terrorist attacks being rare, various factors contribute to maintaining the peaceful state in Oman. The most important reason for tolerance portrayed by the population and government is the *Ibadi* influence. Ibadism is a key school within Islam. The majority of Omanis follow *Ibadi* doctrine,[217] which advocates for no conflict between the different sects of Islam and permits other religions to be practised with some restrictions. The country hosts Christian churches, Hindu temples, Sikh organisations and even some Buddhists.[218] The government also encourages education and social development to prevent the population from engaging in radicalisation and extremism. It has brought modernisation to meet the economic and social needs of the citizens without hampering their culture, placing Oman as a mediator in both its internal and foreign policies.

The anti-terrorism laws and security forces are driving forces for the maintenance of peace and tolerance. Oman was one of the earliest allies of the US in the Middle East, and together they have sought to address extremism through various means. The Royal Decree in 2007 regulates the penalties offered for terrorism-related proceedings.[219] Various activities, such as creating, joining or leading a terrorist group, recruiting fighters, developing arms, and others, are punishable by life imprisonment or death.[220] In 2009, an Omani national, Ali Abdul Aziz al-Hooti, was sentenced to life in prison for helping Pakistani Lashkar-e-Taiba and conspiring to carry out attacks.[221]

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[212] Al Mukrashi, F., 'Oman keeps terrorism vulnerability to zero' *Gulf News*, 18 November 2016, available at: http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/oman/oman-keeps-terrorism-vulnerability-to-zero-1.1931737, last visited: 27 January 2018.
[213] Gidda, M., 'How Much Longer Can Oman Be an Oasis of Peace in the Middle East', *Newsweek*, 28 January 2017, available at: http://www.newsweek.com/2017/02/10/oman-sultan-qaboos-terrorism-isis-al-qaeda-548682.html, last visited: 27 January 2018.
[214] Global Terrorism Database, available at: https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/, *University of Maryland*, last visited: 27 January 2018.
[215] Starr, B., Chris Lawrence and Tom Cohen, 'Intercepted al Qaeda message led to shuttering embassies, consulates', *CNN*, 5 August 2013, available at: http://edition.cnn.com/2013/08/04/politics/us-embassies-close/index.html, last visited: 27 January 2018.
[216] 'Oman joins Saudi-led Islamic Alliance: Gulf sources', *Reuters*, 28 December 2016, available at: https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-oman-coalition/oman-joins-saudi-led-islamic-alliance-gulf-sources-idUSKBN14H1L4, last visited: 27 January 2018.
[217] 'International religious freedom report: Oman', *US Department of State*, 13 September 2011, available at: https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2010_5/168273.htm, last visited: 27 January 2018.
[218] Cafiero, G., 'What the Arab World Can Learn from Oman', available at: https://www.huffingtonpost.com/giorgio-cafiero/what-the-arab-world-can-learn-from-oman_b_8074584.html, last visited: 27 January 2018.
[219] Chapter 2. Country Reports: Middle East and North Africa', *US Department of State*, 2016.
[220] ibid.
[221] 'Country Reports on Terrorism – Oman', *UNHCR*, 19 July 2017, available at: http://www.refworld.org/docid/5981e423a.html, last visited: 27 January 2018.

However, in the last few years, the Omani authorities have invoked the fight against extremism to crush peaceful opposition. In 2016, the Omani authorities ordered the closure of the *Azzaman* newspaper and arrested two of its editors for publishing articles accusing senior judicial officials of corruption.[222] After a wave of criticism by international human rights organisations, the court decided to revoke the order. In the same year, the Omani security services arrested writer Suleiman al-Maamari for a post on his Facebook page in which he announced his solidarity with a film critic who had been held in an Omani prison.[223] Al-Maamari was sentenced to six months in prison.

These incidents have placed Oman among the countries with the lowest ratings in relation to freedom of the press. In 2017, it was ranked 126th among 180 countries when freedom of press was taken as the parameter.[224]

8.2 Anti-Terrorism Policies, Initiatives and International Conventions

Oman has many agencies with responsibility for tackling the problem of extremism and terrorism. In January 2007, the National Committee for Combating Terrorism was established.[225] The main counterterrorism response forces include the Royal Oman Police (ROP) Special Task Force and The Sultan's Special Forces.[226] The Omani Royal Office and Internal Security Service also contribute and coordinate daily with all counterterrorism agencies to prevent terrorist threats along the borders and inside the country. [227]

To strengthen the security measures and to be more effective, various anti-terrorist agencies in Oman participate in American-led training on counterterrorism and law enforcement. Bodies such as the Ministry of Defence, the ROP, the Ministry of Transportation and Communication and others took part in the US State Department's 2016 Export Control and Related Border Security (EXBS) programme, which aims to improve interception capabilities on land and water through the ports of entry.[228]

Oman plays a role in preventing and detecting financial support to terrorist organisations and is a part of the Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force.[229] The Combating the Financing of Terrorism Law was revamped in 2016, and now requires all private enterprises, financial institutions and non-profit organisations to track transactions for possible money laundering and terrorism financing.

Collectively, the anti-terrorism laws, government initiatives, temperament of the population and active participation and communication between the counterterrorism agencies have produced positive counter-extremism results in Oman.

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[222] 'Oman: Newspaper Shuttered, Editor Held', *Human Rights Watch*, 14 August 2016, available at: https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/08/13/oman-newspaper-shuttered-editor-held, last visited: 27 January 2018.
[223] 'Writer arrested in Oman for "Post" on "Facebook"', *Al-Qouds,* 7 May 2016, available at: http://www.alquds.co.uk/?p=530188, last visited: 29 January 2017.
[224] '2017 World Press Freedom Index', *Reporters Without Borders,* 2017, available at: https://rsf.org/en/ranking?#, last visited: 27 January 2018.
[225] IBP, Inc., *Oman Energy Policy, Laws and Regulations Handbook: Strategic Information and Basic Laws* (Lulu.com, 2015), p. 281.
[226] Country Reports on Terrorism – Oman', *UNHCR,* 19 July 2017.
[227] ibid.
[228] ibid.
[229] ibid.

8.3 Specific Initiatives and Institutions

The Message of Islam in Oman

Oman, unlike some of its Gulf neighbours, has faced a low rate of terrorism threats. As a result, it does not have a special centre that has been constructed specifically for counterterrorism activities. However, the country is involved in a number of domestic and international initiatives that seek to promote religious tolerance and establish peace between different religions and sects. The Message of Islam in Oman is one such initiative that preaches tolerance by encouraging positive interaction between people of different faiths and beliefs.[230] Initiated by the Omani Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs, the programme has toured 46 countries,[231] such as Japan, South Africa, Romania, Turkey and France, to present the similarities between Islam and other religions and to promote mutual respect and understanding.

Along with the rest of the world, the Sultanate celebrates the United Nations' International Day for Tolerance on 16 November.[232] This day is dedicated to promoting tolerance and coexistence in a global sphere. The Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs sends invitations to important international figures to visit Muscat and spread ideas of peaceful coexistence.

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[230] 'Oman's Message of Islam', *Oman's Message of Islam*, available at: http://www.islam-in-oman.com/en.html, last visited: 27 January 2018.
[231] Abuairif, M., 'Omanis receive 2015 with optimism', *Al-Diplomacy*, 31 December 2014, available at: http://www.aldiplomasy.com/?p=8023, last visited: 27 January 2018.
[232] 'The Sultanate celebrates World Day for Tolerance', 16 November 2016, available at: http://2016.omandaily.om/?p=407956, last visited: 27 January 2018.

9. Conclusion and Recommendations

Terrorism in the six member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is driven by ideological, religious and political perspectives, along with anti-Western sentiment. Other motivations involve external entities, such as countries or political parties, who want to destabilise the region for geopolitical reasons. These unprecedented threats have made the governments of the Gulf States obliged to incorporate more sophisticated anti-terrorism approaches, which rely on both hard and soft power strategies. Instead of focusing on targeting individual extremists and terrorists as a way of maintaining security, the targets tend to be deeper, with the emphasis placed on tackling the root causes that motivate terrorism.

The financial wealth and capabilities of the GCC States has made it easier for the governments to run sophisticated and comprehensive programmes and establish designated centres to deal with terrorism, terrorism financing and messaging. The centres range from special security institutions to financial bodies that are able to engage in the surveillance and prevention of terrorism, as well as its financing.

An increased number of specialised centres have been established, with the aim of fighting extreme ideology by promoting coexistence and tolerance, mainly in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates. The centres of the three countries have cooperated on many occasions and have undertaken shared initiatives. Conventions and alliances with Western countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom have also helped to curb terrorism in the region. Local police and security agencies receive funds, training and assistance from the Western countries and there is mutual sharing of information.

Other GCC countries have adopted a slightly different approach and intensified their role through establishing charitable foundations. Their aim has also been to focus on the causes of terrorism and to develop prevention-based efforts, such as employment generation and economic empowerment. Qatar is active in this field, and the Qatar Foundation focuses much of its energy on tackling extremism overseas.

Recently, the scope of the specialised centres has spread beyond regional borders. They aim to have an international influence and to contribute to combating extremism internationally. One recently established centre is the Saudi-based Etidal, which aims to promote interfaith and intercultural dialogue. Islamic scholars and experts are invited to speak in the media and spread a message of tolerance. Conferences and meetings are held with representatives from various religions, such as Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism and others, to talk about maintaining harmony.

A significant and worrying trend is the use of the internet by terrorist groups to recruit new fighters. The populations of the Gulf States are leading users of the internet. Terrorists are also using social media platforms and the internet to spread extremism. The internet has become an easy place to radicalise people and promote intolerance. Fortunately, governments have recognised the need and are formulating laws to prosecute those spreading hate or extremism on the internet. Accordingly, intense focus on online radicalisation now characterises the Gulf States' counter-extremism efforts.

At the same time, there is growing concern about incidents of human rights violations, which often accompany the introduction of anti-extremism policies. Tightening anti-extremism policies results in increased state censorship with regard to free speech and the press. Incidents in which free speech has been criminalised often come to light. Cases have emerged in the media where people who have been

critical of the government have been arrested under anti-terrorism laws in a bid to silence them. Mass executions have also been carried out by governments, and in some cases the charges levelled against the alleged terrorists were questionable. These developments are sharpening the debate about how to counter extremism while still protecting human rights. Ignoring these considerations while implementing sophisticated anti-terrorism and extremism procedures will make it difficult to achieve the desired goal of stopping terrorism.

9.1 Recommendations

The fight against terrorism is global. It does not affect just one country – a lesson the UK should recognise in a far more profound way. Britain could – and should – play a greater role beyond its borders to protect itself from violent terrorism. One solution would be through increasing its cooperation with its Gulf allies. As such, a number of recommendations follow from the conclusions drawn in this report:

- **The UK should support and encourage modernisation projects that are taking place throughout the GCC.** Saudi Arabia's *Vision 2030* and its subsequent development plan to modernise Islamic thought, which was suggested by Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, aims to address the causes of extremism and render them ineffective. The development of Islamic thought is a potential opportunity which, to some extent, could be used to address the ideological roots of extremism that fuel violent terrorism. However, the UK should seek to ensure that such development in the Islamic narrative should incorporate a moderate alternative narrative which does not ignore liberal values, and which involves the wider Islamic world in the process.

- **The UK should increase its anti-terrorism cooperation with the GCC, beyond intelligence and security information sharing, by creating more joint initiatives and collaborative programmes to prevent radicalisation.** Expanding engagement would achieve better outcomes against terrorism and would strengthen Britain's global influence. Britain should, therefore, work not just in collaboration with the government agencies in the Gulf but also with actors in the private sector and civil society. The UK government should continue to support existing regional and local counter-extremism initiatives in the Gulf countries, especially the newly established centres, and encourage support for civil society initiatives. A major element of the GCC counter-extremism approach should involve more support for anti-online radicalisation. The UK should share its expertise and encourage technology companies to engage with the efforts of the Gulf States in this area. The UK should also consider funding international centres – similar to those created in the GCC – to take the existing UK anti-terrorism programmes to a different level.

- **The UK should continue to monitor its Gulf partners' anti-terrorism policies to ensure they are not used to prosecute people for exercising freedom of speech.** The UK is already a powerful partner in the fight against terrorism. It is a vital vocal critic of repressive legislation in some Gulf States, where legislation has allowed governments to convict peaceful critics as terrorists and sentence them to death. The UK government should exercise more leverage where excessive suppression of GCC citizens is concerned. One way to do this would be to encourage the adoption of a narrower definition of terrorism than is currently applied in most Gulf States.

# "*TERROR OVERSEAS: UNDERSTANDING THE GCC COUNTER EXTREMISM AND COUNTER TERRORISM TRENDS*"

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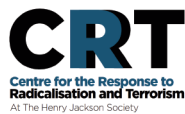
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