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**UNDERSTANDING THE RESILIENCE OF VIOLENT
JIHADI MOVEMENTS: THE SOURCES OF
MILITANT DURABILITY**

by

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MOVEMENTS: THE SOURCES OF MILITANT DURABILITY**

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ABSTRACT

What explains the resilience and expansion of Jihadism since 9/11? Two primary factors associated with its accelerated growth are poor governance in the Muslim world and U.S. foreign policy failures. The social and political conditions within Muslim-majority governments in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and the role of U.S. policy under such conditions may have accelerated the growth of Jihadism despite the concerted military, intelligence, and allied efforts to defeat this movement and its underlying ideology. The domestic determinants, as represented by the World Bank's governance indicators, were observed within five MENA countries, and their performance on those indicators was compared to the levels of violence associated with each of the countries both domestically and abroad. To better understand anti-American sentiment from U.S. foreign policy failures that have contributed to the growth and resilience of violent Jihadi movements, this thesis also observed U.S. foreign policy interactions within a MENA region landscape littered with non-representative and poor governance. The U.S. government may need to reassess its approach toward violent extremists and develop a nuanced and sustainable approach against Islamic fundamentalism.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

DOD	Department of Defense
FY	Fiscal Year
GTD	Global Terrorism Database
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
VEO	Violent Extremist Organization
VIG	Violent Islamist Group

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION

Why has violent Islamic extremism grown in scale since 9/11? What explains the resiliency of violent Islamism despite the concerted effort by the U.S. and its allies to contain and defeat Islamic militancy? A recent study estimated a 270% increase in violent Jihadism advocates between 2001 and 2018, currently “numbering between 100,000 and 230,000.”¹ In the years leading to 2018, there were at least 67 extremist Islamist “groups worldwide, a 180% increase from 2001.”² The civil war in Syria attracted as many as 40,000 foreign fighters from 86 countries.³

This thesis explores the resilience and expansion of Jihadism since 9/11 from two different angles. First, it will explore the domestic determinants within Muslim-majority governments that may have contributed to the growth and resiliency of Islamic fundamentalism. Second, it will investigate the role of U.S. policy in widening the support base that facilitates accelerating its growth. This thesis will help the U.S. government reassess its approach toward violent extremists and help consolidate the victory against Islamic fundamentalism.

B. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION

Since 9/11, the U.S. Government has committed “\$6.4 trillion on counterterrorism efforts through the end of 2020.”⁴ That money is split with approximately \$5.4 trillion operational funds and approximately \$1 trillion allocated for the care of war veterans “through the next several decades.”⁵ At the current rate total military spending is

¹ Seth G. Jones et al., *The Evolution of the Salafi-Jihadist Threat: Current and Future Challenges from the Islamic State, Al-Qaeda, and Other Groups* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2018), 7–11.

² Jones et al., 7–11.

³ Jones et al., 7–11.

⁴ Jill Kimball, *Brown University: The Cost of the Global War on Terror: \$6.4 Trillion and 801,000 Lives - ProQuest*, 2019, ProQuest.

⁵ Kimball.

approximately two thirds of Federal discretionary spending. By 2023 that figure is likely to exceed 75% of total discretionary spending.⁶

Besides the fiscal implications of the post 9/11 wars the larger cost is in human lives lost and in the human suffering endured. Based on a recent report released by the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) on the casualty status from five named operations, total U.S. service men and women deaths was approximately 7,048 with an additional 53,241 wounded.⁷ Another report on the cost of war by the Watson Institute published in November of 2018 provides a tally of over 1 million war-related deaths since 9/11.⁸ These numbers include both U.S. military, U.S. DOD civilians and contractors, allied troops, partner nation military and police force, humanitarian/Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) workers, Journalists, Civilians, and Opposition Fighters. Finally, the 1 million deaths “include the more than 500,000 deaths from the war” raging in Syria since 2011.⁹

By looking at these numbers, it becomes evident that U.S. efforts to curb violent Jihadi activity is simply not working. Continuing to expend the same resources, using the same methods does not make any sense, when all we see is an expansion rather than a contraction of the militancy problem we sought out to address. Historically, radical social movements go through three phases: emergence, growth, and decline through a combination of repression and political institutionalization. In the case of the violent Islamist movement, however, it continues to grow despite our concerted effort to contain it. By exploring the sources of militant resiliency, we can begin concentrating our resources where there is an impact and a higher probability of mission success.

⁶ “Trump Budget Request Takes Military Share of Spending to Historic Levels,” National Priorities Project, accessed June 2, 2020, <https://www.nationalpriorities.org/analysis/2018/trump-budget-request-takes-military-share-spending-historic-levels/>.

⁷ “Immediate Release: Casualty Status,” U.S. Department of Defense, June 1, 2020, <https://www.defense.gov/casualty.pdf>.

⁸ Neta C Crawford, “Human Cost of the Post-9/11 Wars: Lethality and the Need for Transparency,” Watson Institute, November 2018, 1, <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2018/Human%20Costs%2C%20Nov%208%202018%20CoW.pdf>.

⁹ Crawford, 1.

C. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

Islamist resilience can be attributed to a number of factors, including identity and religion, social and economic grievances, and the role of political enfranchisement. It can also be explained by the strategic opportunism of Islamist militants or the failure of the U.S. to undertake the right mix of counterterrorism strategies. This section will explore some of these approaches to better understand the institutional, structural, and strategic factors that contribute to the persistence of violent Islamic extremist movements.

1. Political Exclusion

In his book *Why Men Rebel*, Ted Gurr focuses on relative deprivation as one of the primary reasons for militancy.¹⁰ Relative deprivation refers to a group's perception of how it is treated compared to other groups. According to Gurr, "Government-imposed inequalities are a major source of grievances, repressive policies increase anger and resistance, denial of the right to use conventional politics and protest pushes activists underground and spawns terrorist and revolutionary resistance."¹¹ Gurr emphasizes that "legitimate governments are seldom targets of rebellion,"¹² and highlights the pivotal role played by governments in either exacerbating or pacifying unrest. Similarly, Anne Marie Baylouny asserts that "local political inclusion can stimulate moderation, stemming the progression of militant Islamism in its infancy."¹³

In his book *Why Muslim's Rebel*, Mohammed Hafez explains the shift from peaceful opposition to violent resistance that Islamist movements underwent in response to the repressive political measures instituted by dictatorships concerned about their diminishing power. Hafez asserts that it is the structural challenges Islamists faced in Algeria and Egypt that denied political inclusion and left Islamists with nothing to lose in

¹⁰ Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*, 40th anniversary ed. kindle edition (Boulder, Colo: Paradigm Publishers, 2010), loc 103.

¹¹ Gurr, loc 178.

¹² Gurr, loc 178.

¹³ Anne Marie Baylouny, "Emotions, Poverty, or Politics? Misconceptions about Islamist Movements," *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 03, no. 1 (2004): 41, <https://doi.org/10.11610/Connections.03.1.04>.

turning to violence.¹⁴ According to Hafez, Islamist movements that resort to violence perceive institutional channels for conflict resolution as inaccessible and therefore justify violent action as the only viable option to pursue political objectives.

- Hypothesis 1: The persistence of Islamist militancy is related to the lack of democratic governance in the Muslim world.

2. Failed U.S. Foreign Policy

There is a vast body of academic literature that ties U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East to the rise of the violent Islamist organizations. Those Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs) have plagued the region since 9/11, increasing in popularity and widening their support base with no sign of easing anytime soon. Perceptions of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East may contribute to the resiliency of violent Islamic extremism. Polling data presented from post-9/11 surveys carried out by Gallop and Pew shows that there was “a pervasive overall attitude of ‘anti-American sentiment’ throughout the Muslim world and in the Middle East in particular.”¹⁵ This is largely due to perceptions of how the U.S. government implemented its counterterrorism policies internationally. According to Gregg, there is an overwhelming consensus, among Arabs and Muslims, that the “U.S. reaction to 9/11 [went] beyond counterterrorism to a broad hostility to Islam and Arabs.”¹⁶ This consensus among Muslims, in the countries surveyed, is believed to have a major catalyzing effect on the anti-American sentiment which in turn contributed to fueling radical ideologues.

In his book *The Five Front War: The Better way to Fight Global Jihad*, Daniel Byman proposes a five-pronged model for policy makers to consider in the fight against violent extremists: 1) Military, 2) War of ideas, 3) Intelligence, 4) Homeland Defense, and

¹⁴ Mohammed M. Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel: Repression and Resistance in the Islamic World* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2004), 1.

¹⁵ Heather S. Gregg, “Crafting a Better U.S. Grand Strategy in the Post-September 11 World: Lessons from the Early Years of the Cold War,” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 6, no. 3 (July 1, 2010): 248, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1743-8594.2010.00110.x>.

¹⁶ Anthony H. Cordesman, “Winning the ‘War on Terrorism’: A Fundamentally Different Strategy,” *Middle East Policy* 13, no. 3 (2006): 102.

5) Democratic Reform.¹⁷ Byman acknowledges the resilience and persistence of the violent extremist ideology propagated by Islamists and proposes an urgent comprehensive effort to address it.

Like Byman, Abdelislam Maghraoui, in his article “American Foreign Policy and Islamic Renewal,” cautions on democratization initiatives undertaken by U.S. policy makers.¹⁸ They both provide examples and projections on how good policy intentions can fail to meet intended objectives if pursued under the wrong conditions. Instead, Maghraoui advocates for policies that encourage and support an “Islamic renewal” that empowers moderate Islamists and paves the road for much needed political reforms allowing for balanced and reasoned political discourse.¹⁹

Maghraoui makes a clear distinction between moderate and extreme Islamists and warns against policies that promote an “anti-terrorism strategy [that] conflates various Islamist groups into a monolithic threat, regardless of political, ideological, or strategic motivations.”²⁰ Additionally, Maghraoui is likely to be skeptical of the military policy approach proposed in Byman’s book *The Five Front War*. Where Byman proposes working with local security partners to accomplish military objectives,²¹ Maghraoui warns that such cooperation with “security services that form the backbone of authoritarian regimes in Muslim countries ... undermines both democratic ambitions and the effort to change negative attitudes about the United States in the Muslim world.”²²

Byman offers some constructive criticism of the U.S. policy approach spanning the five fronts he identified in his book on *The Five Front War*. On intelligence, Byman warns about unilateral approaches that over exerts our resources with minimal return on

¹⁷ Daniel Byman, *The Five Front War: The Better Way to Fight Global Jihad* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2008), 3–4.

¹⁸ Byman, 168–70; Abdeslam M. Maghraoui, “American Foreign Policy and Islamic Renewal,” *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 05, no. 4 (2006): 1, <https://doi.org/10.11610/Connections.05.4.02>.

¹⁹ Maghraoui, “American Foreign Policy and Islamic Renewal,” 1–2.

²⁰ Maghraoui, 4.

²¹ Byman, *The Five Front War*, 3.

²² Maghraoui, “American Foreign Policy and Islamic Renewal,” 4.

investment. He advocates for partnerships that share the burden and significantly improve our local intelligence collection capabilities.²³ He also criticizes military use of force asserting that “we cannot condemn terrorists for taking innocent lives, and then kill innocents with our counterterrorism operations.”²⁴ He further adds that “when innocents die, the United States looks both incompetent and brutal, a perception that increases support for terrorists.”²⁵

Byman warns about defending the home front without over-reacting with policies that promote a “false sense of insecurity.”²⁶ According to Byman, when “deluged by nightmarish possibilities, we may miss the real threats and the real dangers.”²⁷ Byman also highlights democratization policy shortfalls, where a premature push for democratization, without the institutional capacity to manage the transformational process, and the prevalence of anti-American sentiment could result in unwanted outcomes.²⁸ Finally, on the war of ideas, Byman emphasizes that the information war cannot be disjointed from policy, nor cannot it be a unilateral effort, if it is going to be effective.²⁹

- Hypothesis 2: Failed U.S. Foreign Policy strategies contributed to the resiliency of militant Islamism.

D. RESEARCH DESIGN

When trying to understand the rise of militant Islamist organizations there is no one factor that offers a convincing justification. This thesis will explore the rise and resiliency of Violent Islamist Groups by approaching the problem from three different dimensions. The first dimension will focus on the structural conditions within the governments in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The Second will explore potential U.S.

²³ Byman, *The Five Front War*, 111–12.

²⁴ Byman, 123.

²⁵ Byman, 123.

²⁶ Byman, 132.

²⁷ Byman, 132.

²⁸ Byman, 166–70.

²⁹ Byman, 180–81.

policy contributions, within the MENA region, to the rise and resilience of VIGs, and finally the conclusion will evaluate both factors and offer recommendations to curb the growth and resilience of VIGs.

This thesis set out to understand the underlying causes for the resilience and growth of Violent Islamism and Jihadi movements throughout the MENA region. Two factors were explored with great detail: One focused on understanding the role played by poor governance in facilitating the rise of Islamist militancy, and the other focused on the role played by U.S. foreign policy within the MENA region that may have contributed to the rise and resilience of Islamist militancy.

The research in Chapter II focused on how poor governance and the lack of political exclusion contributed to the rise and resilience of militant Islamism. The Global Terrorism Database (GTD) provided the levels of violence within a country whereas a report by the Soufan Group provided the number of exported terrorists. Those two data sets were then combined for an accurate assessment of the levels of militant behavior displayed. The level of militancy was then compared to the quality of government provided by six governance indicators, provided by the World Bank, to test the causal relationship between the two.

Though the initial sample size consisted of five MENA countries, the three with the largest data variances were selected. Those three included Tunisia, Egypt, and Morocco. Tunisia and Egypt both exuded high levels of militancy with the highest levels of exported terrorists and domestic terrorist incidents respectively. Unlike the other two, Morocco showed lower militancy levels while performing relatively poor on all but one governance indicatory. This was counterintuitive at first, and though Morocco was second to last overall, in its performance on the World Bank Governance Indicators, it outperformed all countries observed on the Voice and Accountability metric, re-enforcing that political exclusion could in fact play a major role in the rise and resilience of militant Islamism.

Once the causal relationship between political exclusion and violent militancy was established, Chapter III turned to U.S. foreign policy interactions in the MENA region and their potential contribution to the durability of violent Islamist movements. Chapter III starts with the history of Islamists and their transition from active social movements to

violent Jihadi movement. It provided the background and historical context for the rise of political Islam and the social and political conditions attributed to the ideological doctrine used by many Jihadi splinters today. The background section also provided a brief history of early interactions between political Islam and U.S. policy makers, going back to the Cold War and the Soviet-Afghan War, when it was U.S. policy to arm, train, and fund the first global Jihadi movement in an attempt to combat Soviet expansion and influence.

Once the relationship and ties between militant Islam and U.S. policy makers was made, Chapter III turned to understanding anti-American sentiment and the perceived U.S. foreign policy contribution to it. Anti-American sentiment was established by an overwhelming unfavorable attitude toward the United States from within the MENA region expressed in both the Pew and Zogby Research polls. Regional grievances, stemming from past U.S. foreign policy, believed to be exacerbating the anti-American sentiment today were introduced to define the operating space U.S. policy makers attempt to navigate today. This space defined by unpopular foreign policy and an overwhelming anti-American sentiment, is where U.S. foreign policy practitioners attempt to implement the National Security Strategy and the pursue both diplomatic and military objectives.

II. POLITICAL EXCLUSION

A. PURPOSE AND IMPORTANCE

According to the Global Terrorism Data Base (GTD) there was a steady increase in terrorism incidents throughout the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region after 2001. From 2004 -2012, terrorist incidents made a noticeable increase and from 2012–2014 terrorist incidents more than tripled from approximately 2000 incidents per year to over 7000 incidents.³⁰ Though the dramatic increase is likely associated with the rise of ISIS in Iraq and Syria, there is still significant activity within domestic settings that is worthy of analysis. Looking at both numbers of individuals per capita who either tried or succeeded in leaving their home countries to join ISIS, and at numbers of domestic terrorism incidents will allow for a more balanced analysis when cross referencing the levels of violence between countries with their performance on various governance indicators. The expectation is that the level of performance on certain governance indicators may directly impact a country’s vulnerability to extremist ideology and hence influence militant behavior motivated by that ideology.

B. SCOPE OF RESEARCH

This chapter will look at the role of poor governance in five majority Muslim MENA countries (Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco), while focusing primarily on three (Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco), to explain the rise in Islamist militancy and the violent extremism associated with it. Despite the economic, social, and cultural similarities between those three countries the outcome variance makes them prime candidates to understanding the role played by certain governance indicators that might have led to the varying levels of militancy observed. All five of the countries selected offer high levels of displayed militancy, but Tunisia is by far the largest per capita exporter of militant Islamists, whereas Egypt has the largest number of domestic terrorism incidents, and finally Morocco underperforms on both those

³⁰ “Global Terrorism Data Base,” GTD, accessed September 15, 2020, <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/Results.aspx?region=10>.

metrics, displaying lower levels of observed militancy, while outperforming all in the opportunities available for its people to participate in governance.

This chapter will look at domestic terrorism incidents and number of exported militants per capita from each country to identify causal factors driving variation between countries. The term exported militants includes both those who tried but were either stopped at the border from entering Iraq or Syria, and those who successfully crossed the border and joined the ISIS ranks. Though the exported militant numbers are the primary indicator in this research, the number of terrorist incidents within a specified country's borders also provided additional insight into the rising tide of militancy that is increasing the levels of violence. The variation in the observed countries' militant activity will be explored between the years 2012 to 2016, where there was a marked increase in terrorist activity and Islamist militancy across the MENA region. The variation in militancy levels will then be cross-referenced with each country's performance on selected governance indicators to uncover a causation between an individual country's performance on those indicators and the uptick in violence in the years that followed.

The research in this chapter will rely heavily on the University of Maryland's Global Terrorism Database (GTD) for terrorist incidents per country and on a report by the Soufan Group on the national origin and number of foreign fighters that trekked from their country of origin to fight in the ISIS ranks. Both the number of incidents and a country's human capital contribution to ISIS on a per capita basis will be observed and the degree of variation between countries will be identified. The variances over time observed in both these metrics will be assessed with a primary focus on the numbers of foreign fighters exported by each of the five countries studied. The GTD numbers will also be used, but only when there is a significant variance in the number of Islamist motivated terrorist incidents within the 2012 to 2016 timeframe, as in the case of Egypt.

Good or bad governance in this paper will be defined by a country's performance on six governance indicators provided by the World Bank: Control of Corruption, Government Effectiveness, Political Stability and the Absence of Violence,

Regulatory Quality, Rule of Law, and Voice and Accountability. The data collected from both sources will be compared to the six governance indicators to see if there is a correlation between a country's performance, as measured by those indicators, and their populations' propensity to participate in Jihadi Islamist militancy within and outside their borders. Those states' performance on governance indicators will then be scrutinized for a nuanced understanding of how each country's performance on certain indicators could in fact impact its vulnerability to violent extremist ideology fueling Islamist militancy.

The five MENA countries considered in this research were selected based on meeting one or more of the following three criteria. First is their contribution to the ISIS foreign fighter pool, second is the large number of terrorist incidents within their recognized borders, and third is their status as non-rentier states with one exception, Saudi Arabia. The term "rentier" states refers to governments that are heavily reliant on exporting natural resources with less dependence on tax collection and as a result are less accountable to their populations.³¹ The effort to avoid rentier states is mostly due to the large number of imported labor (both skilled and unskilled), the small local population size, the added dynamic of patronage networks unique to rentier states, or simply due to the very small sample size of reported militant Islamists.

Saudi Arabia has a large local population consisting of approximately two thirds of the county's residents. It also has a large pool of Islamist militancy both within and outside its borders. Egypt on the other hand was selected despite its minimal per capita contribution to the ISIS foreign fighter pool. Egypt's selection was based on its dramatic uptick in terrorist incidents at home within the same timeframe of ISIS's unprecedented growth. In contrast, other countries like Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia, had relatively little terrorist activity at home but provided some of the largest numbers of ISIS volunteers on a per capita basis.

Countries like Sudan, Libya, Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen, had high terrorist activity but were not selected, due to their status as failed or failing states.

³¹ Michael L. Ross, "Does Oil Hinder Democracy?" *World Politics* 53, no. 3 (2001): 327–28.

Failed and failing states are outside of the intended scope of this research. Countries like Algeria, the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Oman were not selected because of their status as rentier states. Some of those countries have local populations consisting of less than 25% of their residents and robust welfare systems that mitigate social challenges experienced elsewhere. Additionally, all mentioned states had relatively minimal terrorist activity within the timeframe in question.

The inclusion of Jordan and Saudi Arabia in the presented data and its analysis is to highlight the impact of certain governance indicators on a state's vulnerability to violent extremism. However, Jordan and Saudi Arabia are less central to the analysis due to the following factors. First of those, which has already been identified, is the large number of migrant workers that constitute approximately one third of the work force. This might add to domestic dynamics that are out of the scope of this project. Saudi's status as a rentier state and Jordan's proximity to both Iraq and Syria also add certain complexities that are best left out of this project.

Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco will be the main subjects of this research. They represent similar social, cultural, and economic conditions and provide the largest variances in both their governance indicator percentile rankings and in their violence outputs. While both Tunisia and Egypt present the largest numbers in militant activity, with one leading the pack in militant exports and the other in domestic terror incidents, they both perform radically different in most governance indicators. Morocco on the other side is not a star performer by any means on its governance indicators, outpacing only Egypt, but has demonstrated a significantly better ability to contain the resiliency and growth of militant Islamism.

C. DATA ON FOREIGN FIGHTERS AND DOMESTIC TERRORISM

Three main sources of data were used for the raw data analyzed in this research. Two of these sources, the Global Terrorism Data Base and the Soufan Group, offer metrics associated with the domestic affinity to the militant Islamist ideology that fuels violent extremism. That domestic affinity, is measured by the amount of terrorist incidents happening within a country's borders and in the number of foreign fighters

willing to join the ranks of the Islamic State, and is a direct outcome of a country's poor performance on the six worldwide governance indicators provided by the World Bank. The affinity for militant Islamist ideology will be measured by both the number of domestic terrorist incidents and the number of foreign fighters exported. The higher the number of militant activity, the more likely a larger segment of the population is susceptible to the ideology propagated by militant Islamists.

Reliable data on foreign fighters was not easy to find. There were multiple sources reporting on FFs but the lack of consistency in the numbers gave reason to doubt the actual number of fighters by national origin. Several news outlets and academic literature acknowledged that, in some cases, certain governments admitted to inflating their numbers to entice foreign assistance and funding on counter terrorism initiatives while in other cases governments had underreported.³²

The Soufan Group report provided some of the most consistent findings and was cited by multiple credible academic and media outlets. Those outlets include the BBC and the Congressional Research Service.³³ Based on the group's demonstrated credibility, this chapter relies heavily on the Soufan Group publication "Beyond the Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees" by Richard Barrett, when referencing the national origin of Foreign Fighters that joined the ISIS ranks.³⁴

D. DEFINING GOVERNANCE INDICATORS

The World Bank, which offers the third source of data, provides percentile rankings that will be used to measure the extent to which performance on those indicators is associated with a country's foreign fighter exports or the number of

³² Elena Pokalova, "Driving Factors behind Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 42, no. 9 (September 2, 2019): 804, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2018.1427842>; Max Friedman, "Why Cutting Foreign Aid Benefits Terrorists," Council on Foreign Relations, August 9, 2017, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/why-cutting-foreign-aid-benefits-terrorists>.

³³ Jim Muir, "'Islamic State': Raqqa's Loss Seals Rapid Rise and Fall," BBC News, October 17, 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35695648>; Christopher M Blanchard, *Saudi Arabia: Background and U.S. Relations*, CRS Report No. RL33533 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2020), 18, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33533.pdf>.

³⁴ Richard Barrett, "Beyond The Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees" (Soufan Group, October 1, 2017), <https://www-jstor-org.libproxy.nps.edu/stable/resrep10782>.

domestic terrorism incidents. A government's performance on the World-Wide Governance Indicators provides the marker for their overall quality of governance. The information presented in this research links poor governance, specifically on certain governance indicators within the five selected cases studies, to higher levels Islamist militancy.

Per the GTD the highest levels of militant violence within the MENA region are concentrated within the five years after the Arab Spring. This is likely due to both the political instability provoked by Arab Spring and by the rise of ISIS as it expanded in both numbers and territory within both Iraq and Syria. This section will focus on the governance indicators during the decade preceding the Arab Spring and highlight the trends that may have contributed to increased levels of militancy within the countries studied. It will start by defining the indicators followed by providing an assessment of how those indicators impacted the poor governance that

According to Kaufmann et al., the World Governance Indicators were developed by the World Bank in 1996 in an attempt to standardize evaluations on "six composite indicators of broad dimensions of governance covering over 200 countries." Those indicators include: "Voice and Accountability," "Political Stability and Absence of Violence/Terrorism," "Government Effectiveness," "Regulatory Quality," "Rule of Law," and "Control of Corruption." These indicators were collected from multiple reliable sources through surveys that captured governance perceptions in each of the countries presented. The data came from a multitude of international sources that encompass commercial, nonprofit, private-and public-sector organizations.³⁵

Kaufmann et al. start by defining governance as "the traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised."³⁶ This definition is broken up into three categories that include: "(a) the process by which governments are selected, monitored and replaced; (b) the capacity of the government to effectively formulate and implement

³⁵ Daniel Kaufmann, Aart Kraay, and Massimo Mastruzzi, "The Worldwide Governance Indicators: Methodology and Analytical Issues," SSRN Scholarly Paper (Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network, September 1, 2010), 4, <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=1682130>.

³⁶ Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi, 4.

sound policies; and (c) the respect of citizens and the state for the institutions that govern economic and social interactions among them.”³⁷ Each one of those three categories are assigned two governance indicators that help with evaluating each country’s level of performance within the accepted governance norms of the global context.³⁸

Following are all three categories and their assigned governance indicators along with their definitions as expressed by Kaufmann et al.

(a) The process by which governments are selected, monitored, and replaced:

Voice and Accountability (VA)—capturing perceptions of the extent to which a country’s citizens are able to participate in selecting their government, as well as freedom of expression, freedom of association, and a free media.

Political Stability and Absence of Violence/Terrorism (PV)—capturing perceptions of the likelihood that the government will be destabilized or overthrown by unconstitutional or violent means, including politically-motivated violence and terrorism

(b) The capacity of the government to effectively formulate and implement sound policies:

Government Effectiveness (GE)—capturing perceptions of the quality of public services, the quality of the civil service and the degree of its independence from political pressures, the quality of policy formulation and implementation, and the credibility of the government’s commitment to such policies.

Regulatory Quality (RQ)—capturing perceptions of the ability of the government to formulate and implement sound policies and regulations that permit and promote private sector development.

(c) The respect of citizens and the state for the institutions that govern economic and social interactions among them:

Rule of Law (RL)—capturing perceptions of the extent to which agents have confidence in and abide by the rules of society, and in particular the quality of contract enforcement, property rights, the police, and the courts, as well as the likelihood of crime and violence.

Control of Corruption (CC)—capturing perceptions of the extent to which public power is exercised for private gain, including both petty and grand forms of corruption, as well as “capture” of the state by elites and private interests.³⁹

³⁷ Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi, 4.

³⁸ Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi, 4.

³⁹ Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi, 4.

E. DOMESTIC TERRORISM INCIDENTS (GTD)

Figure 1 provides a better side by side comparison of the five countries observed within the timeframe in question, whereas the graphs in Figure 2 were taken directly from the GTD website and offer a more comprehensive timeline of violent incident spikes. Notice the Y axis in Figures 1 and 2 varies from country to country.

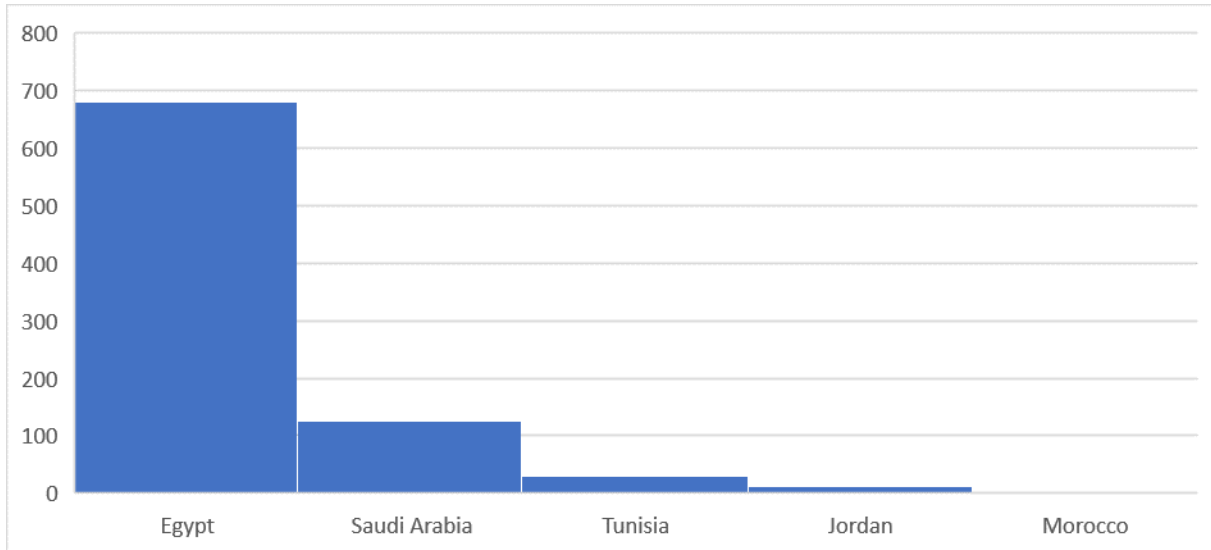
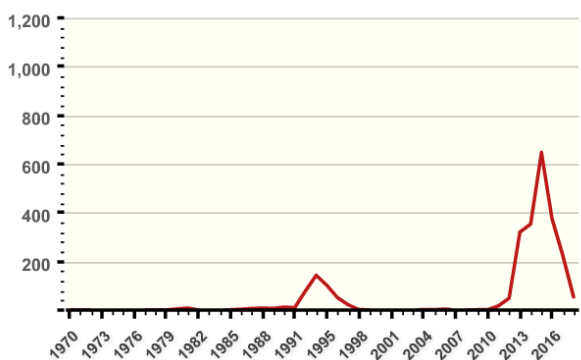


Figure 1. GTD— Maximum Number of Terrorist Incidents per Year 2012–2016⁴⁰

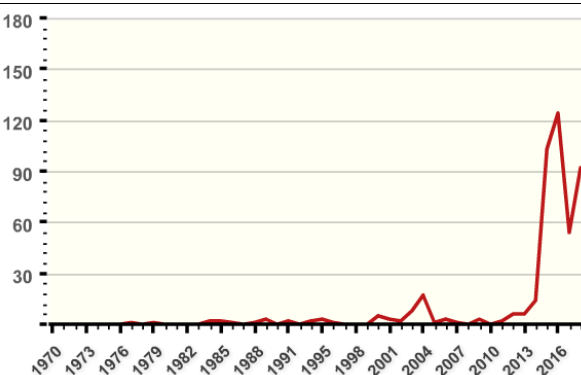
⁴⁰ Adapted from “Global Terrorism Database,” GTD, 2018, https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/Results.aspx?chart=regions&casualties_type=b&casualties_max=&start_yearonly=1998&end_yearonly=2018&ctp2=all.

Egypt



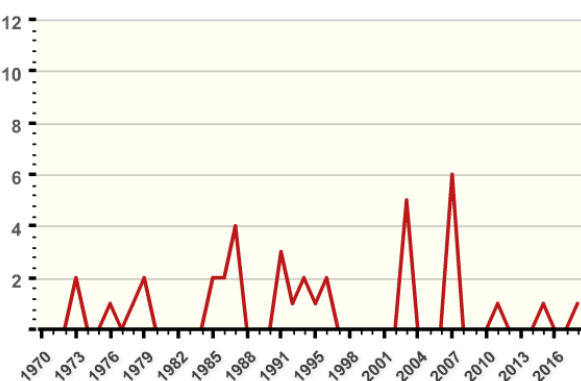
Egypt had a relatively small amount of terrorist activity in the years leading to the Arab Spring. Terrorist incidents started to rise in 2010 but then made a drastic climb in the three years after the Arab Spring peaking with almost 700 incidents in 2015.

Saudi Arabia



Saudi Arabia had kept its terrorist activity in check until 2004, when it went through a relative spike of approximately 20 incidents. Saudi would then see re-ignited activity around 2011, but would then see a drastic spike to over 100 incidents by 2015 before it tapered off at just over 120 incidents in 2016. Saudi would then see a decline of activity to less than a half in 2017, but would then see another upsurge with over 90 incidents in 2018.

Morocco



Terrorist incidents in Morocco are minuscule when compared to other MENA countries. It peaks at approximately 6 incidents in 2007 and stays in the range of zero to 1 annual incidents for the whole time after 2007.

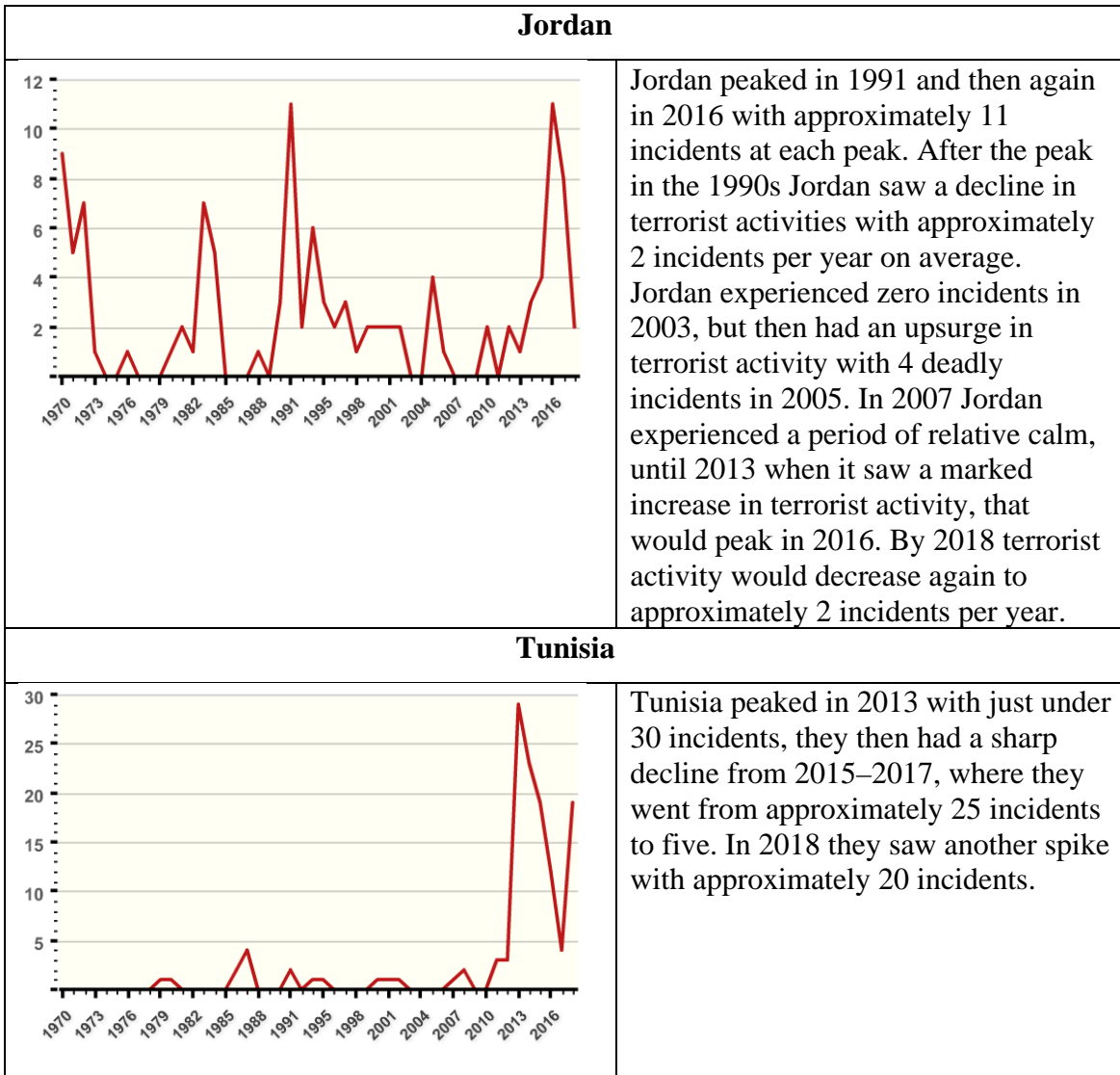


Figure 2. GTD by Country Analysis⁴¹

Table 1 one provides a comprehensive breakdown of all the data collected from the sources used for this thesis chapter. The table offers data in adapted form for added nuance and comprehensive analysis.

⁴¹ Source: GTD.

Table 1. Country Rankings per Governance Indicator Superimposed over Foreign Fighters per Capita and a One Year Peak in Domestic Terrorism Incidents⁴²

2000-2010	Voice & Account	Rule of Law	Regulatory Quality	Stability and Absence of Violence	Government Effectiveness	Control of Corruption	2012-16 FFs per Capita	2012-16 Peak 1 yr. Domestic Terrorism Incidents
Jordan	2	1	1	3	2	1	487	11
Tunisia	4	3	3	1	1	3	674	29
KSA	5	2	2	2	4	2	126	126
Morocco	1	5	4	4	3	4	135	1
Egypt	3	4	5	5	5	5	8	680

The values 1 through 5 represent how those countries ranked in relation to each other per each of the six governance indicators observed. The countries are lined up with the top performer, based on average scores from 2000–2010, on top to worst performer at the bottom.

F. BY COUNTRY GOVERNANCE INDICATOR ANALYSIS

Figures 3 through 7 offer a visual reference for the analysis that follows. Each line on the graph depicts one of the six World Bank governance indicators observed. Every one of the five countries is represented by its individual graph for an in-depth look at each country’s performance.

⁴² World Bank, “Worldwide Governance Indicators,” World Bank, 2019, <https://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/Home/Reports>; Barrett, “Beyond The Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees”; GTD, “Global Terrorism Database.”

1. Egypt

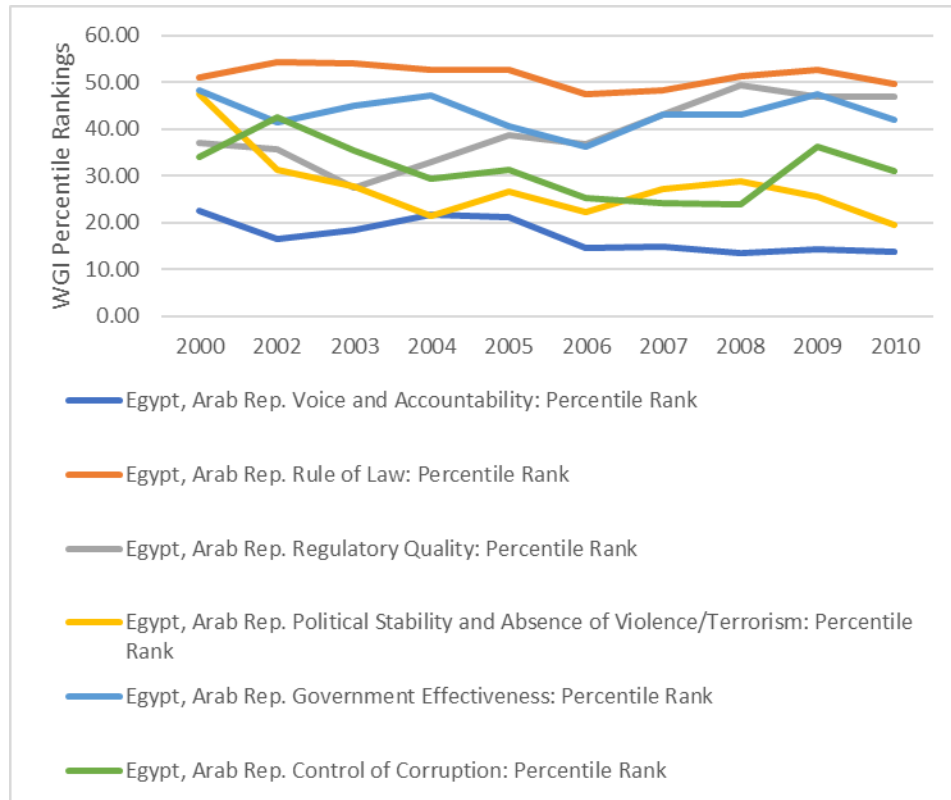


Figure 3. Egypt, Arab Republic⁴³

In the decade leading to the Arab Spring Egypt's lowest score was in the Voice and Accountability governance metric. In the five years leading to the Arab Spring, Egypt was consistently under the 15th percentile rank on Voice and Accountability and continued trending downwards in the years that followed.⁴⁴ Egypt did not do well on the Political Stability and the Absence of Violence indicator. It trended downward reaching its lowest pre-Arab Spring ranking of 19.43 in 2010.⁴⁵ Its ranking took a nose dive after the Arab Spring which coincided with the uptick in domestic terrorist incidents within the same timeframe. The government effectiveness indicator maintained an average percentile rank of

⁴³ Adapted from World Bank, "Worldwide Governance Indicators."

⁴⁴ Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi, "The Worldwide Governance Indicators," Egypt.

⁴⁵ World Bank, "Worldwide Governance Indicators."

approximately 43 in the decade preceding the Arab Spring. It fluctuated within an eleven-percentile range, ranking as low as 36.10 in 2006 and as high as 47.37 in 2009. The government effectiveness percentile rank would also see a sharp 20-point downward trend in the years after the Arab Spring, which were also the years where Egypt recorded the highest levels of domestic terror incidents.⁴⁶

On the Regulatory Quality indicator, Egypt trended upwards, starting at the percentile rank of 35.71 in 2002 and making slow but steady annual progress which capped off just short of a 50-percentile rank in 2008. Egypt would maintain a percentile ranking of approximately 47 for the remaining of the decade observed. The Rule of Law indicator was Egypt's highest performing percentile rank, and the only one to barely exceed an average of 50 in the decade that preceded the Arab Spring.⁴⁷

On the control of corruption indicator, Egypt attained a 42-percentile ranking in 2002, but then trended sharply downward to a 23.79 percentile ranking in 2008. Though the government appeared to make an effort the following year to address the problem, which is demonstrated by the approximately 13-point improvement in 2009, but then fell approximately 6 points to 30.95 in 2010.⁴⁸

Egypt consistently under performed in all governance indicators with the lowest percentile ranking in all except two, the Rule of Law and Voice and Accountability. Egypt barely outperformed Morocco, with a negligible 3-point difference, on the Rule of Law (Egypt's best pre-Arab Spring performance in relation to the other governance indicators). Egypt also outperformed both Saudi Arabia and Tunisia in the Voice and accountability metric, but was still relatively low with an average percentile ranking of 16.48 in the decade preceding the Arab Spring.⁴⁹

Egypt consistently performed worse than any other country in this study. Though Egypt might not have provided large numbers of foreign fighters to fill the ISIS pool, it had

⁴⁶ World Bank.

⁴⁷ World Bank.

⁴⁸ World Bank.

⁴⁹ World Bank.

the highest number of terrorist incidents, negatively outperforming all other countries in this study. This may have been attributed to the steady decline in the control of corruption score combined with the consistently low scores in Voice and accountability percentage ranking.

2. Morocco

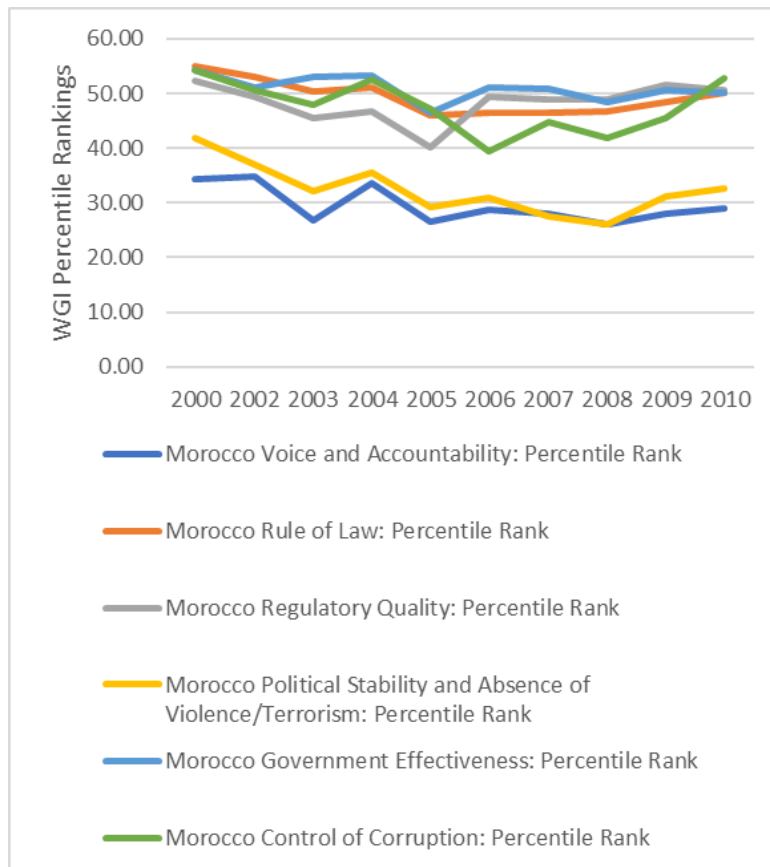


Figure 4. Morocco⁵⁰

On almost all its governance indicators, Morocco maintained a steady and relatively low percentile rank, with some minor fluctuation that was mostly insignificant. Morocco comes in at fourth out of the five countries included in this report on three of the six governance indicators with Egypt being at the bottom of the group in all three. Those three indicators include Political Stability and the Absence of Violence, Control of Corruption,

⁵⁰ Adapted from World Bank.

and Government Effectiveness. Morocco is at the bottom of the group in the Rule of Law percentile ranking but surprisingly outperforms the rest on Voice and Accountability. Granted, at a 29.04 percentile ranking in Voice and Accountability, there is not much to rave about, but apparently Morocco provides valuable threshold scores that provide valuable insight. Finally, Morocco comes in at third place in the Government Effectiveness percentile rank, barely outperforming Saudi Arabia and outdoing Egypt by approximately 8 points.⁵¹

3. Saudi Arabia

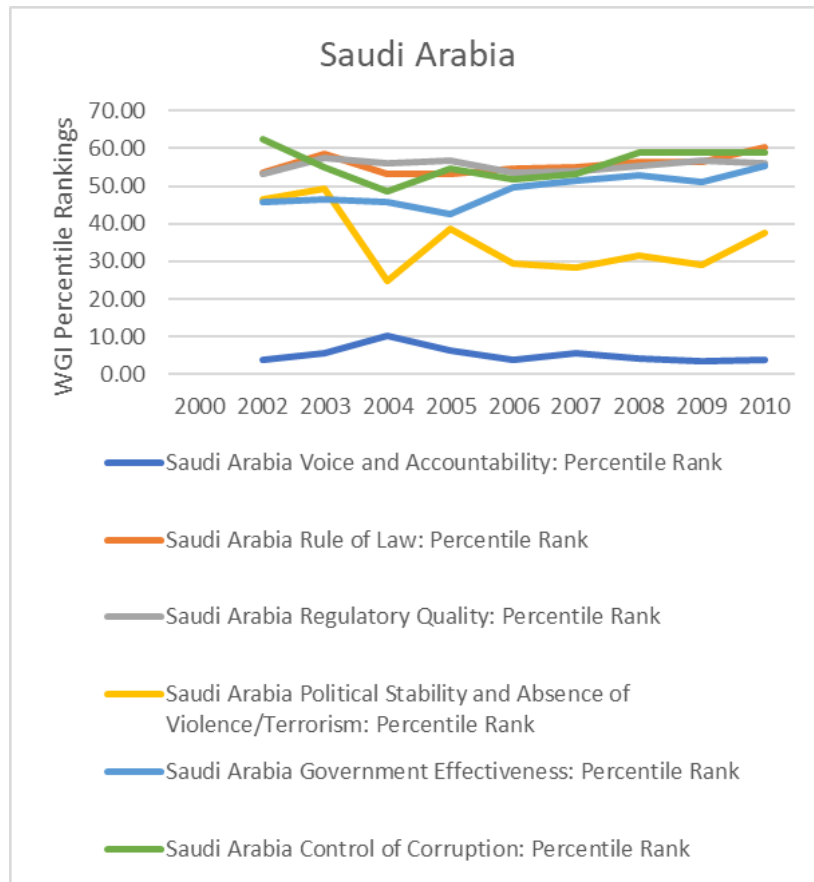


Figure 5. Saudi Arabia⁵²

⁵¹ World Bank.

⁵² World Bank.

In the decade leading to the Arab Spring Saudi Arabia averaged an approximate percentile rank of 55 on the Rule of Law, Regulatory Quality, and the Control of Corruption governance indicators. On those three indicators Saudi Arabia was second only to Jordan within the country grouping selected for this research. It is worth highlighting that Saudi Arabia's performance on the Rule of Law indicator trended upwards in the 7 years preceding the Arab Spring, reaching its highest percentile ranking of over 60 in 2010.⁵³

On the Political Stability and Absence of violence indicator, Saudi Arabia comes in second after Tunisia by a large margin of approximately 15 points. Jordan and Morocco both follow suite with percentile ranking trailing Saudi Arabia by less than 4 points, while Egypt lags approximately 10 points behind. Though the average 10-year percentile rank for Saudi Arabia on Government Effectiveness is approximately 49, the average in this case does not capture the upward trend that showed a marked improvement that increased Saudi's percentile ranking by approximately 13 points in the years preceding the uptick in violence. The score took a small dip after the Arab Spring but quickly recovered and continued on an upward trend outperforming all other countries in the group and closing at a ranking of over 60 percentile in 2015.⁵⁴

Where the Saudis are mostly challenged is with their Voice and Accountability score. Their score is so terrible that even Egypt outperformed them in all 15 years observed. They maintained a score in the single digits in all but one year, averaging a score below five between 2005 and 2015. This information in conjunction with Saudi Arabia's high performance on the Rule of Law metric helps with uncovering a trend that will be explored further in this research.

⁵³ World Bank.

⁵⁴ World Bank.

4. Tunisia

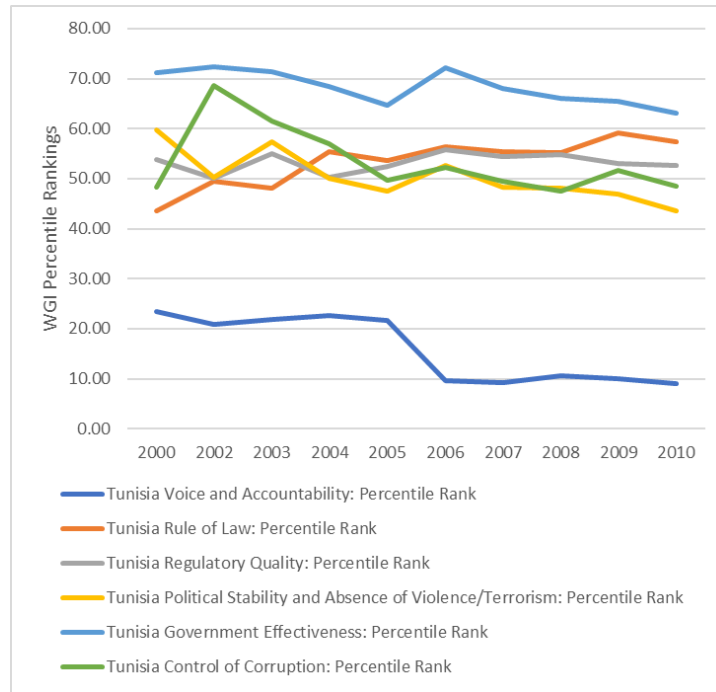


Figure 6. Tunisia⁵⁵

Tunisia performed relatively well on most governance indicators in the 10 years preceding the Arab Spring. Using the ten-year average percentile ranking (see Table 2) to compare how each one of the five countries performed, Tunisia ranked at the top in two governance indicators with a percentile ranking of almost 50 in Political Stability and the Absence of Violence and just a few points short of 70 in Government Effectiveness. Tunisia performed well, coming in at a close third trailing both Jordan and Saudi Arabia in the Rule of Law, Regulatory Quality, and Control of Corruption percentile rankings scoring just short of 55 percentile points in each. Despite its better than average performance on 5 of the 6 governance indicators, Tunisia would significantly underperform in Voice and Accountability placing it at second to last with a ten-year average percentile ranking of 15.03. Tunisia would only outperform Saudi Arabia with Egypt outpacing it by approximately 1 point.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ World Bank.

⁵⁶ World Bank.

On Voice and Accountability, Tunisia lagged behind for at least the decade leading to the Arab Spring. Its percentile ranking made a dramatic turn to the worse, going down to single digits, in 2006. Its lacking performance, on the Voice and Accountability metric, would continue until the Arab Spring, but would then make a notable improvement with a percentile ranking of over 55 in 2015.⁵⁷

5. Jordan

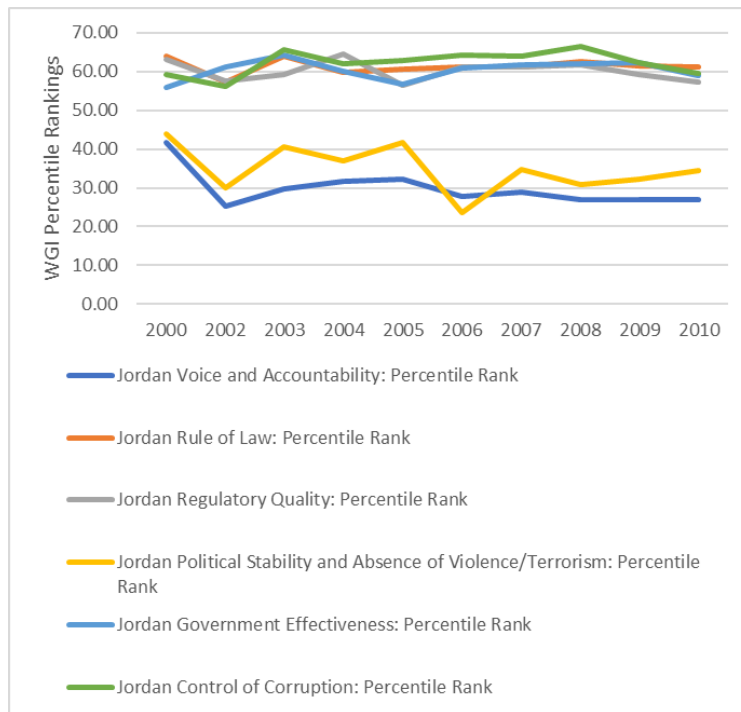


Figure 7. Jordan⁵⁸

Jordan did relatively very well in all six metrics leading the pack in three of the six. It was a close second in the Voice and Accountability and Government Effectiveness rankings, outperformed by slim margins on both. Jordan came in third in Political

⁵⁷ World Bank.

⁵⁸ World Bank.

Stability and the Absence of Violence with Saudi Arabia outperforming it by less than 2 points.⁵⁹

Overall, Jordan led the pack with an average 10-year percentile ranking, on all six governance indicators, of approximately 51 while Tunisia trailed closely behind with a 49-percentile ranking. Saudi Arabia and Morocco came in third and fourth with less than .5 point difference (42.7/42.5), and Egypt came in last trailing Morocco by approximately 8 points.⁶⁰

Table 2 provides yet another angle for viewing the data. The single digit scores used for the governance metrics are a shortened version of the percentile scores that are simplified for the readers convenience. The four columns on the right provide added insight to how acute the problem is by country in relative terms.

Table 2. Data Analysis⁶¹

2000-2010	Voice & Accountability	Rule of Law	Regulatory Quality	Stability and Absence of Violence	Government Effectiveness	Control of Corruption	AVG Score	2012-16 FFs per Million	2012-16 lyr peak in Domestic Terrorism Incidents	Total Fighters	Total Population
Jordan	3	6	6	3	6	6	5.00	487	11	3,000	6,154,949
Tunisia	2	5	5	5	7	5	4.83	674	29	7,531	11,179,149
KSA	0	6	6	4	5	6	4.50	507	126	10,908	21,531,722
Morocco	3	5	5	3	5	5	4.33	135	1	4,674	34,663,603
Egypt	2	5	4	3	4	3	3.50	8	680	750	92,442,547

*Red font represents an observed downward trend in performance that is not fully captured by the average score

The 0–9 scale is based on rounding average percentile rankings up or down and then assigning a value from 0–9 based on the following: percentile ranks from 0–9.99 are all assigned a zero value; 10–14.99 are assigned a 1 value; 15.0–24.99 are assigned a 2 value; 25–35.49 are assigned a 3 value; 35–44.49 are assigned a 4 value; and so on until we reach 95–100 with a value of 10. The higher the number the better that country scored in that category.

⁵⁹ World Bank.

⁶⁰ World Bank.

⁶¹ GTD, “Global Terrorism Database”; Barrett, “Beyond The Caliphate”; “International Migrant Stock, Total - Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, Arab Rep., Jordan, Tunisia|Data,” World Bank, 2019, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SM.POP.TOTL?locations=SA-MA-DZ-EG-JO-TN>; “Population, Total - Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, Arab Rep., Jordan, Tunisia | Data,” World Bank, 2019, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=SA-MA-DZ-EG-JO-TN>; World Bank, “Worldwide Governance Indicators.”

Table 2 is provided for a simpler presentation of each country's percentile ranking as obtained by the World Bank and to facilitate an easier visualization of the data collected. There are several data points in this diagram that tell a story based on how each country performed and how that performance translates to an increase in Islamist militancy. The focus in this research is primarily on the variation in the number of foreign fighters per million and in the incidents of domestic terror incidents. Though averages provide some insight, it is important to note both upward and downward trends detected over the years that are likely to have contributed to the frustration that was eventually expressed in the two different forms of violence observed.

The Soufan Group report provides a comprehensive breakdown of ISIS affiliated foreign fighters by national origin.⁶² The report provides several data points to include the number of fighters, per state of origin, broken down into fighters that made it to Iraq or Syria, those stopped or turned back at the border, and those watch listed by Turkey.⁶³ The sum of those three categories is what appears in the total fighters column in Table 2. Next, the total local population (minus migrant workers) is used to calculate the foreign fighters per million inhabitants for a fair country to country comparison. Jordan and Saudi Arabia had the largest ratio of a migrant workers population, with over three and ten million respectively, and therefore the number was deducted from their total population, whereas the migrant worker numbers in the other three countries were negligible and therefore not deducted.⁶⁴

Though Tunisia had been performing well on most indicators, in the first few years of the decade observed, and placed at a close second to Jordan, Tunisia unlike Jordan was on a downward trajectory on all indicators except for the Rule of Law. On Voice and Accountability, it went from just short of a 22-percentile ranking in 2005 to single digits and a steady downward trend from 2006 to 2010. With downward trends in Regulatory Quality, Political Stability, Government Effectiveness, and Control of Corruption, Tunisia's governance performance was sure to have residual impacts that accentuate a society's militant

⁶² Barrett, "Beyond The Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees."

⁶³ Barrett, 12.

⁶⁴ World Bank, "International Migrant Stock, Total - Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, Arab Rep., Jordan, Tunisia | Data."

tendencies. Government Effectiveness declined approximately 10 points from a 72-percentile ranking, whereas Control of Corruption would trend downwards going from a reasonable 69 approximate percentile ranking in 2002, to an approximate 49 percentile ranking in 2010, outperforming only Egypt in the year before the Arab Spring. When observed from that vantage point the discontent becomes evident, especially when the only improving, or upward trending, metric was the Rule of Law. Tunisia's numbers tell a story of a gradual decline in government performance, while coercive measures, represented by the Rule of Law metric, were on the rise in an environment where self-expression, represented by the Voice and Accountability metric, was abysmal.

Saudi Arabia also presents an interesting data set that is consistent with Tunisia's findings. Though it performs relatively well on all metric, outperforming Tunisia on three of the six governance indicators, its terrible performance in Voice and Accountability is an outlier that is very hard to miss. With an average ranking in barely the five percentile, it is approximately 10 points lower than the next low performer. Granted Voice and Accountability is a weak metric in all observed MENA countries, Saudi Arabia takes the prize for being at the bottom of the barrel. Meanwhile like Tunisia, Saudi Arabia also saw an upward trend in the Rule of Law metric, which inevitably tells a similar story of bolstering the nations coercive mechanisms while silencing the right to self-expression.

Jordan led the pack in most metrics, but still closely trailed Saudi, placing it in third place for foreign fighters per million. Jordan came no were close to Saudi's numbers in domestic terrorist incidents. Egypt significantly underperformed in their foreign fighter contribution, but clearly compensated for that lack in performance with its exceptionally large number of domestic terror incidents. Saudi Arabia comes in second with a more than 550 incident gap between the two with Egypt at approximately 680 incidents and Saudi Arabia at approximately 126.

Though it is tough to rank the countries individually by their degree of militancy, it is evident that Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt are all high risk, whereas Jordan and Morocco are in a lower risk category, with Morocco being the least risky of the five countries. The common theme contributing to a relatively large number of foreign fighters appears to be the consistently low scores in the Voice and Accountability metric. The impacts from the lack of

a country’s performance on that specific metric are highly pronounced in KSA, Egypt, and Tunisia, all offering concerning militancy rates that far exceed both Jordan and Morocco. Additionally, though Morocco did not do well across the governance indicators coming in 2nd from the bottom, and outperforming only Egypt, it did score the highest, comparatively, on the Voice and Accountability metric.

G. THE ROLE OF VOICE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Figure 8 offers only two governance metrics from the six governance indicators observed. It highlights the contrast between the performances of each by country.

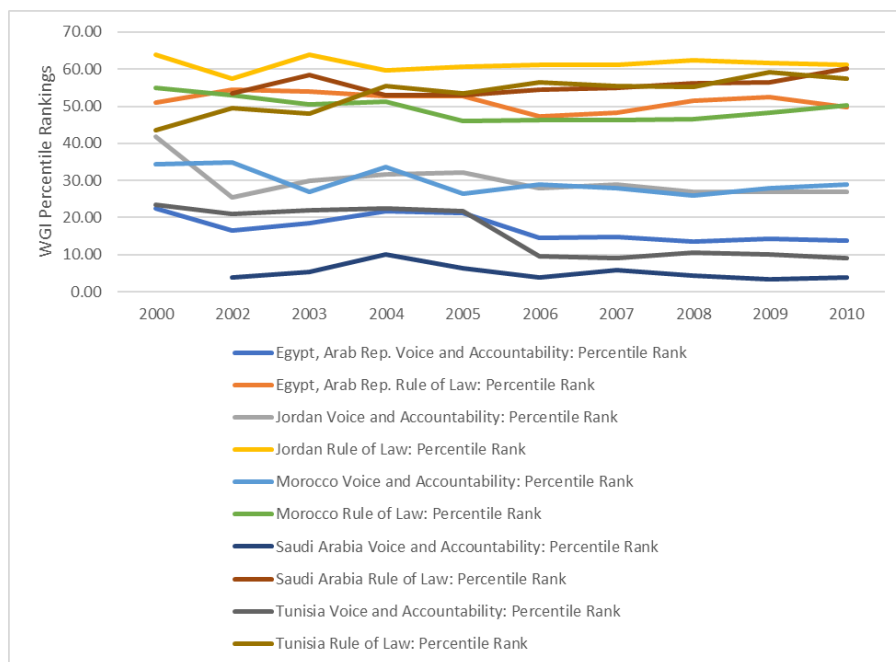


Figure 8. Voice and Accountability vs. The Rule of Law⁶⁵

Having observed each of the countries in the sample it is evident that one of the most consistent drivers of violent action are the low scores in Voice and Accountability. There is a consistent negative correlation between the Voice and Accountability percentile ranking and the levels of violence in each of the countries presented. The three countries with the highest

⁶⁵ World Bank, “Worldwide Governance Indicators.”

rates of militancy, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, and Egypt, all have five-year averages that were under a 15-percentile ranking, with Tunisia and KSA showing a consistent downward trend averaging in the single digits in the last five years (2005-2010) observed. Morocco on the other hand, though it still needs significant improvement across the board, did relatively well scoring significantly better on the Voice and Accountability metric and as a result was better able to manage the wave of Islamist militancy that swept through the region.

The following sections will focus on the interplay between the Voice and Accountability governance indicator and the Rule of Law governance indicator. The negative correlation between both indicators and the increased levels of violence observed as a result will be explained through social theory. The countries with the largest variances in their observed militancy, Tunisia, Morocco, and Egypt, will be the main subjects for this section. The internal dynamics within Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt, expressed through the governance indicators observed, will be explored through social theory for a better understanding of what drove high levels of militancy within those specific populations. Additionally, Morocco's relatively low levels of militancy will be analyzed to shed light on why a country with relatively low scores on almost all the World Bank's governance indicators can do better with containing militancy than others with more resources and habitually better percentile rankings on most indicators studied.

1. Voice and Accountability as Foundational Elements for a Functional Democracy

Multiple sources attest to the challenge of defining what constitutes democratic governance,⁶⁶ but one core principle of democratic governance according to Skaaning is that “democracy means rule by the people.”⁶⁷ Skaaning's emphasis on the “popular control over public decision-making and decision-makers, and equality of respect and voice

⁶⁶ Svend-Erik Skaaning, “The Global State of Democracy Indices Methodology,” *International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance*, Conceptualization and Measurement Framework, Version 3, 2019, 10; David F. J. Campbell et al., “Measuring Democracy and the Quality of Democracy in a World-Wide Approach: Models and Indices of Democracy and the New Findings of the ‘Democracy Ranking,’” *International Journal of Social Ecology and Sustainable Development (IJSESD)* 4, no. 1 (2013): 2, <https://doi.org/10.4018/jsesd.2013010101>.

⁶⁷ Skaaning, “The Global State of Democracy Indices Methodology,” 10.

between citizens in the exercise of that control,”⁶⁸ strongly corroborates the definition of the Voice and Accountability governance indicator put forth by the World Bank. Skaaning asserts that the “Rule by the people”⁶⁹ is foundational for a democracy, which is another way of saying “citizens are able to participate in selecting their government.”⁷⁰ Additionally, “popular control over public decision-making and decision-makers, and equality of respect and voice between citizens in the exercise of that control,”⁷¹ is in line with the “freedom of expression, freedom of association, and a free media.”⁷²

Out of the six World Bank governance indicators, Voice and Accountability is the one indicator that is most clearly associated with democratic governance. Though good performance in all six indicators is critical for a well-functioning democracy, the virtues that go along with the Voice and Accountability indicator are basically synonymous with the virtues that lay the foundation for democratic governance. A country’s perceived performance on the Voice and Accountability metric, which is defined by the “extent to which a country’s citizens are able to participate in selecting their government, as well as freedom of expression, freedom of association, and a free media,”⁷³ provides insight into the degree of democratic governance in a given state. Voice and Accountability is in essence the bedrock that good democracies are built on. You might be able to have some Voice and Accountability without a fully developed democracy, but there is no well-developed functioning democracy that is not a high performer on the Voice and Accountability metric.

Building the positive correlation between the Voice and Accountability governance score and a country’s democratic performance is an important baseline to establish since most social theory literature references democratic governance. Low Voice and Accountability scores in the countries selected is directly correlated with those countries

⁶⁸ Skaaning, 11.

⁶⁹ Skaaning, 10.

⁷⁰ Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi, “The Worldwide Governance Indicators,” 4.

⁷¹ Skaaning, “The Global State of Democracy Indices Methodology,” 11.

⁷² Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi, “The Worldwide Governance Indicators,” 4.

⁷³ Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi, 4.

lack of democratic institutions limiting citizen participation in all facets of governance. Figures 9 and 10 presenting the Checks on Government and Representative Government metrics, pulled from the Global State of Democracy indices, show almost identical trends in performance on the Voice and Accountability metrics collected by the World Bank in the decade between 2000–2010. This further supports associating performance on Voice and Accountability with democracy levels within any given country.

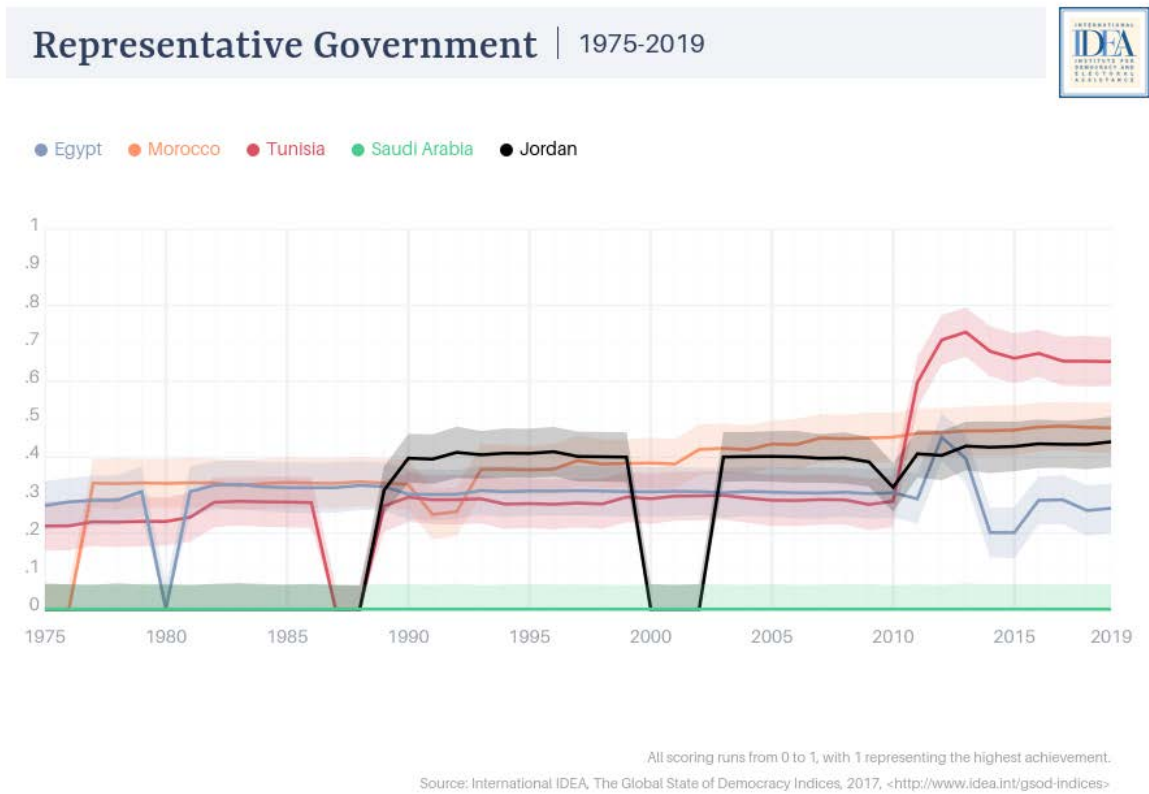


Figure 9. Democratic Governance—Voice Factor⁷⁴

⁷⁴ “The Global State of Democracy Indices,” International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2019, <https://www.idea.int/gsod-indices/#/indices/compare-countries-regions>.



Figure 10. Democratic Governance—Accountability Factor⁷⁵

H. APPLYING THEORY TO UNDERSTAND THE ROLE PLAYED BY POOR GOVERNANCE IN PROMOTING MILITANCY

Before applying theory to the cases observed, this section will introduce two major themes that apply across the region. One emphasizes social and economic causes, while the other stresses the importance of political enfranchisement. This section will focus on the impact of governance on the social and political drivers that contributed to the social unrest in the three North African countries selected. The rise in Islamist militancy will then be explored from within the context of each country’s performance on the Worldwide Governance indicators and the civil unrest associated with the lack of democratic institutions associated with poor governance. The causal chain linking the lack of democratic institutions and poor governance with militant Islamism will be uncovered to better understand the institutional and structural conditions contributing to the rise and persistence of violent Islamic extremist organizations/movements.

⁷⁵ Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.

Gurr's book *Why Men Rebel* sought to understand the factors and conditions that contribute to violent rebellion.⁷⁶ Gurr focuses on relative deprivation as one of the primary reasons for rebellion. Relative deprivation refers to a group's perception of how they are treated compared to how they feel they should be treated.⁷⁷ He examines the role of government in people's lives and how that impacts their perceptions and expectations.

Gurr's relative deprivation theory helps with explaining the significant variance in militant activity between Morocco, Egypt and Tunisia. Unlike Tunisia and Egypt, Morocco performed consistently mediocre on all governance indicators in the decade observed. It trended mildly upward on some indicators while trending mildly downward on others. Morocco's average score in all governance indicators in the decade before the Arab Spring was almost identical to its average score in the five years following the Arab Spring.

Tunisia and Egypt on the other hand, showed downward trends in most of the governance indicators observed between 2000–2010. Egypt maintained a steady score in the Rule of Law metric whereas Tunisia made significant strides on that same metric. When the Rule of Law metric is the best performing metric (or one of the best), as in Egypt and Tunisia, it is safe to deduce that an improvement in that metric alone while leaving other metrics behind, is evidence of coup-proofing where a state focuses on bolstering its coercive capabilities to secure regime survivability.⁷⁸

Per Gurr's relative deprivation theory, it was the decline in the quality of governance which violated the social contract between the government and the governed and the lack of democratic institutions, represented by the low Voice and Accountability score, that left those populations with no other choice stemming the militancy observed within the Tunisian and Egyptian populations.⁷⁹ Tunisia's performance on, Voice and Accountability, Political Stability, Government Effectiveness, and Control of Corruption,

⁷⁶ Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*, loc 103.

⁷⁷ Gurr, loc 124.

⁷⁸ James T. Quinlivan, "Coup-Proofing: Its Practice and Consequences in the Middle East," *International Security* 24, no. 2 (October 1, 1999): 131, <https://doi.org/10.1162/016228899560202>; Hicham Bou Nassif, "Generals and Autocrats: How Coup-Proofing Predetermined the Military Elite's Behavior in the Arab Spring," *Political Science Quarterly* 130, no. 2 (2015): 251, <https://doi.org/10.1002/polq.12324>.

⁷⁹ Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*, loc 178.

all showed significant downward trends just before the observed years of increased violence. Tunisia's past performance on Government Effectiveness and Control of Corruption metrics, with achieved percentile rankings in the seventies, and sixties respectively, followed by the significant decline in those same metrics and others, was not left unnoticed by the Tunisian population. Unlike Tunisia, which had scores in some governance indicators exceeding the seventy percentile, Egypt consistently performed poorly across the broad spectrum of governance indicators and still managed to trend further downwards. Egypt recorded a drop in performance, in the critical decade preceding the observed violence, in its Control of Corruption, Voice and Accountability, Government Effectiveness, and Political Stability metrics.

Tunisia is a great example of how relative deprivation from government-imposed inequalities may have crossed a threshold and led to the violence that followed. Tunisia, by far, made the largest per capita foreign fighter contribution to ISIS. Though Saudi Arabia out-performed it in the actual numbers of foreign fighter contributions, Tunisia had a significant lead in its number of foreign fighters per million. This may come as a surprise based on Tunisia's overall decent performance on its governance indicators, but after a closer look at the downward trends measured, the link between poor governance and discontent leading to increased militancy became evident.

I. SOCIAL JUSTICE, REBELLION, AND THE APPEAL TO MILITANT ISLAMISM

Egypt and Tunisia both showed a similar lack of performance on the Voice and Accountability metric while both also showed comparatively better performance on their Rule of Law metric. Both those metrics supported the assertion that oppressive non-democratic institutions existed in both these countries. According to Social Theory, the absence of democratic institutions and safe outlets for dissent and self-expression, tendencies for violence and militancy are a natural outcome.

This is evident in the cases of both Egypt and Tunisia, where the rise in Islamist militancy became the unintended outcome of social and political oppression. According to Baylouny, the non-democratic institutions of the Middle-East, that used coercive measures

to persecute those that pursued or simply advocated for political plurality, gave Islamists the upper hand when organizing. When no other options for political expression or dissent were available religious institutions became the rallying point for activist's intent on mobilizing against oppressive governments in majority Muslim nations.

According to Baylouny, "Religious movements have distinct advantages in authoritarian context."⁸⁰ Unlike other political movements, religious movements can expand their base of support through charities and other social welfare activities that cloak their political aspirations and provide a deprived public with much needed services. Baylouny asserted that religious institutions have the upper hand within authoritarian regimes because "the resources and networks requisite to mobilizing support, integral to social movement success, are also found in religion's institutional legacy and its charitable activities."⁸¹ Islamists, within politically repressive societies, can easily monopolize the political scene due to their unassuming and non-threatening disposition while pursuing economic and social justice. According to Baylouny, inclinations for violent jihad starts in native lands mired by governments with structural inadequacies. It is their disenfranchisement, alienation and oppression at home that drives radicalization and pushes them in the direction of violence. Those disenfranchised masses, as Baylouny convincingly asserts, provide global jihadis with the social base to draw from as they attempt to globalize a domestic spat.⁸²

Baylouny also offers an explanation for the lower levels of militancy observed in Morocco. Morocco was outperformed by Tunisia on all metrics except for Voice and Accountability. Morocco's performance was by no means great, but relatively speaking it scored three time higher on Voice and Accountability in 2010, which was one year before the observed increase in violence. It is safe to assume that Moroccan's perceived their government as more inclusive with some tolerance for self-expression and dissent.

⁸⁰ Baylouny, "Emotions, Poverty, or Politics?," 46.

⁸¹ Baylouny, 46.

⁸² Baylouny, 47.

It is those perceptions of political inclusion and tolerance that were likely to have curbed militant tendencies. Baylouny asserts that “Social Movement theory in particular demonstrates that local political inclusion can stimulate moderation, stemming the progression of militant Islamism in its infancy.”⁸³ Baylouny’s approach applies the social theory lens introduced by Gurr to better understand militant Islamist movements equating them to the non-violent social movements seen in democratic societies.⁸⁴ So when offered the political space to decent, they are likely to do it peacefully.

Baylouny makes the optimistic assertion that given the right conditions and under the right circumstances, Islamist’s may also organize into social movements and participate in civil society.⁸⁵ She adds that democratic theory, could play an active role in pacifying radical movements and ridding them of their violent tendencies. Structural reforms within government that offer an Islamist movement, a less risky alternative peaceful option, to expressing and acquiring political aspirations, would encourage a behavioral shift, away from violence. Instead Islamist movements are likely to adopt new norms and integrate within the greater government structure and participate in the political process. As a result, they would become fully vested in the system and would likely reduce affiliated violent groups to the fringes.

Conversely, Baylouny warns that if a group is denied political inclusion or deemed illegal by government political and security institutions, they would lose the “incentive to moderate.”⁸⁶ Findings from observing governance indicators from 2000–2010 strongly support Baylouny’s assertions. There was a direct positive correlation between each country’s performance on the Voice and Accountability governance indicator and their levels of observed militancy in the few years that followed. Those findings confirm the relationship between a countries level of democratic governance and the impact that has on their levels of observed militancy.

⁸³ Baylouny, 41.

⁸⁴ Baylouny, 44.

⁸⁵ Baylouny, 45.

⁸⁶ Baylouny, 45.

J. VOICE AND ACCOUNTABILITY VS. RULE OF LAW

Based on observed findings, the Rule of Law governance indicator performed consistently across the ten years from 2000–2010 in all five countries observed. Rule of Law levels remained constant in Egypt and Morocco, while in Tunisia there were significant improvements. This is an indicator of either maintaining or increasing national resource allocation to the institutions contributing to the consistent or improved performance in that metric. In an environment of limited or diminishing financial resources, this means potentially redirecting resources that would potentially improve performances in others. The problem observed in both Tunisia and Egypt is that the Rule of Law is the only metric making improvements, while other metrics like Control of Corruption and Voice and Accountability see major setbacks. Such trends are indicative of institutional failures driving a growing frustration within a given population.

When government institutions fail to provide basic services, and implement coercive measures to silence freedoms under the guise of law and order, it diminishes their legitimacy and is likely to increase a population's level of dissatisfaction. Gurr associates that frustration and discontent with the "relative deprivation that ensues when there is a perceived deficit between a society's expectations and the reality that they experience."⁸⁷ The declining scores overtime in both Egypt and Tunisia revealed a diminishing quality of life that was likely attributed to underperforming institutions that struggled to deliver on the governance indicators measured, eventually crossing a threshold. Crossing this critical threshold without a viable outlet for self-expression or dissent, evident by the low Voice and Accountability scores, gives a population no other choice but violence to achieve desired political outcomes. Hafez explains the shift from peaceful opposition to violent resistance that Islamist movements underwent in response to the repressive political measures instituted by dictatorships concerned about their diminishing power. According to Hafez, it is the structural challenges Islamists faced in Egypt that denied political inclusion and left Islamists with nothing to lose by turning to violence.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*, loc 124.

⁸⁸ Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel: Repression and Resistance in the Islamic World*, 1.

Hafez also makes a strong case that advocates for the power of Voice and Accountability, enabled through democratic institutions. He argues that disenfranchised groups are likely to resort to violence only when militant action seems like the only available option to them. According to Hafez, Islamist movements that resort to violence perceive institutional channels for self-expression and dissent inaccessible, complicating the path for peaceful conflict resolution, and therefore justify violent action as the only viable option to pursue political, “not economic or psychological,” objectives.⁸⁹ Hafez asserts that contrary to conventional belief, attributing their militancy to “economic stagnation or excessive secularization,”⁹⁰ it is their political environment defined by the governments structural restraints that led to their “lack of meaningful access to state institutions,”⁹¹ and ultimately drove them to extreme and violent measures.

Exclusive mobilization structures, observed by low scores on the Voice and Accountability metric, provide the means according to Hafez for underground network expansion and “the diffusion of antisystem ideological frames to justify radical change and motivate collective violence.”⁹² The shift to the underground increases the movements propensity for violence. This shift institutionalizes covert practices relied on to evade a state’s security apparatus and as a result those movements become less likely to forgo open rebellious activity by design.⁹³ Instead of addressing dissent through improved Voice and Accountability mechanisms that drive healthy institutional practices, Egypt and Tunisia implemented repressive, politically exclusive institutional structures that pushed activism underground, through Rule of Law mechanisms, that ultimately lead to rebellious and underground politically exclusive movements.

⁸⁹ Hafez, 18.

⁹⁰ Hafez, 18.

⁹¹ Hafez, 18.

⁹² Hafez, 22.

⁹³ Hafez, 23.

K. CONCLUSION

The primary focus of this chapter was to link militant tendencies observed within certain populations in the MENA region with their countries' performance on governance indicators. The causal link between increased militancy and governance indicators was then explained through social theory for a better understanding of how poor governance contributes to the frustration that increases the appeal for violent ideology that fuels the observed militancy. The five MENA countries selected for this research, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, all had significant increases in observed militancy between 2011 and 2016. They offered sufficient observable data that facilitated this research.

The data collected confirmed that poor governance does in fact contribute to militancy, but the variance in the numbers of militants per each country as it relates to how they performed on various governance indicators also provided additional valuable insight. The data overwhelmingly illustrated that the country with the highest score on the Voice and Accountability indicator, Morocco, did better than all countries observed in terms of its observed militancy. Morocco had significantly less Islamist inspired violent incidents at home, and was also the smallest exporter of foreign fighters, whereas both Egypt and Tunisia, recorded the highest numbers in domestic terrorism and foreign fighter exports respectively. The most obvious explanation in this analysis was the significant difference observed in Voice and Accountability scores, where Morocco, though underperformed globally, led the five MENA countries regionally.

After establishing the causal chain that linked low performance in Voice and Accountability to increased militancy, this chapter focused on social theory for an in-depth understanding of the interplay between governance indicators and how that translates into the social friction credited for the violence. Gurr offers the relative deprivation theory that best explains how performance on certain governance indicators can lead to the frustration within a country's population that fuels militancy. The declining performances on key governance indicators observed for Egypt and Tunisia, which likely translated to a diminishing quality of life, felt in real time by citizens of both countries, was a point of contention and frustration for most.

The lack of democratic governance, demonstrated by their performance on the Voice and Accountability indicator, in conjunction with a well performing coercive apparatus, derived from the consistent score on the Law and Order indicator, turns out to be a recipe for increased militancy. According to Baylouny, when analyzing Islamist movements to determine their likelihood for violence the following political indicators are necessary before jumping to conclusions: The prevailing power relations (i.e., do the people have a voice in selecting their leaders), how the group interacts within the power paradigm imposed by structural conditions within government (do the institutions hold government officials accountable) , the nature of the political system (i.e., is it open or closed by the state for the group's participation?) and the group's level of inclusion in the political system (i.e., is it a free and fair system that safely allows for self-expression and dissent).⁹⁴ Baylouny equates the prospect of a group's radicalization to their level of inclusion or exclusion in a state's political system.⁹⁵

Finally, Hafez explains the dangers potentially faced by governments that lack Voice and Accountability and depend largely on a coercive apparatus to enforce the rule of Law. According to Hafez, it is the absence of a conflict resolution system within a state's political structure that "encourages rebellion by delegitimizing the ruling regime and disempowering moderate voices within the movement."⁹⁶ Hafez concludes that "Muslims rebel because they are denied access to conventional means of political participation and because their organizations and members feel threatened by indiscriminate repressive policies."⁹⁷

The social theory examples provided show the impacts of repressive and coercive governance, represented by the negative correlation between performances in the Rule of Law metric and the Voice and Accountability metric. When there is no room for dissent and self-expression, frustrated populations are likely to adopt militancy because of the

⁹⁴ Baylouny, "Emotions, Poverty, or Politics?" 45.

⁹⁵ Baylouny, 45.

⁹⁶ Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel: Repression and Resistance in the Islamic World*, 27.

⁹⁷ Hafez, 203.

limited options available, not because it is their preferred method. The value of having institutionalized outlets for dissent is critical for curbing militancy within a society. This is evident with Morocco's noticeably better performance in the Voice and Accountability metric, though still lacking, likely mitigated crossing a threshold and reduced the appeal for violent action.

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III. U.S. FOREIGN POLICY FAILURES

A. PURPOSE AND IMPORTANCE

The previous chapter highlights the institutional deficits within the countries of the MENA region that contributed to the rise of Islamist militancy. Findings in Chapter II further reinforce past scholarly work on the rise of rebellious and militant behavior where domestic environments that lack representative institutions and governance contribute to that rise. Understanding those dynamics and then adding the U.S. foreign policy factor to the equation allows for better, more strategic decisions by U.S. policy makers. Gaddis adds to the discourse with his assertion that the root of the September 11th 2001 attacks on the U.S. were the nonrepresentative institutions within MENA societies that left people with no choice but militancy, sparked by religious fanaticism, as the only channel for dissent.⁹⁸ Understanding how U.S. foreign policy interacts in that space where allied leaders are not representative of the will of their people is critical to understanding the U.S. policy contribution to the resilience of militant Islamists in the MENA region. Only then can we begin to change the unwelcomed outcomes we see from heightened levels of anti-American sentiment, and the increased militancy that is in direct opposition to U.S. regional interests.

B. SCOPE OF RESEARCH

Unpacking the impact of both past and present U.S. foreign policies on the attitudes shared by most in the MENA region will assist with understanding how those policies are perceived, how they generated grievances, and how those grievances fuel the anti-American sentiment festering in the collective consciousness of many today. Ultimately the anti-American sentiment is what Jihadi organizations hoped to capitalize on for their legitimacy and recruitment initiatives. This causal chain provides a logical template for understanding the repercussions from U.S. foreign policy within the MENA region. It emphasizes the effect of grievances associated with perceived U.S. policy transgressions

⁹⁸ John Lewis Gaddis, *Surprise, Security, and the American Experience*, Joanna Jackson Goldman Memorial Lecture on American Civilization and Government (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 89.

on facilitating the evolution of a domestic Islamist social movement from peaceful opposition to local government into a persistent and violent global Jihadi phenomenon.

C. BACKGROUND

1. From Islamist Social Movement to Violent Jihad

It is critical to make the distinction separating political Islam from its Jihadi cousin before explaining the causal chain that links them together. Islamic political activism (political Islam) typically takes the form of a nonviolent social movements or a political platform advocating for reform or procedural change. Jihadism, on the other hand, is a call to violent action that had historically followed failed popular attempts by activists and social movements for peaceful reform, change or transition of power. It is also important to note that the terms “Islamist” and “Jihadi” are not synonymous. Though early Jihadis had splintered from Islamist social movements, like the Muslim Brotherhood, that path of origin is not always the case. It is important to acknowledge Islamism as a political philosophy inspired by religious doctrine and Islamists as members of a social movement engaged in identity politics rather than suggesting that such groups always hold a space for jihadis. Additionally, like other political movements that had resorted to rebellion and violence when denied a legitimate political platform, transformations of Islamist groups into Jihadi groups, or shifting of individual sympathies from endorsing peaceful reform to supporting violent rebellion are typically associated with political suppression as observed through time in both Egypt and Algeria.

The earliest examples of organized violent Jihadi movements have an observable history and emerged out of the context of political Islam which first emerged in Egypt to counter European domination in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.⁹⁹ Modern day political Islam was inspired by Hassan al-Banna, an Egyptian activist and the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood. He grew up in the Egyptian delta at a time of observed foreign excess and Egyptian deprivation. Commins explains how the miserable living conditions Egyptians endured, when contrasted to the luxury accommodations provided to their

⁹⁹ David Commins, “Hasan Al-Banna (1906-1949),” in *Pioneers of Islamic Revival*, New updated ed. with major new introd., Studies in Islamic Society (New York: Zed Books, 2005), 127.

European counterparts working for the Suez Canal Company, would have a lasting impact on al-Banna. According to Commins, al-Banna's drive for action was inspired by such inequities and would shape his resolute activism. Al-Banna would go on to found the Muslim Brotherhood, an organization that would infuse politics with religious dogma, in a departure from the traditional Islamic notions promoted in Egyptian society at the time.¹⁰⁰

According to Commins, Hassan Al-Banna simply sought to reform Egyptian society rather than overthrow the existing political order.¹⁰¹ The Muslim Brotherhood under al-Banna would champion social justice and public health reform to rid the population of the deficiencies that plagued Egyptian society. Like many social movements, Commins asserts, they advocated for a state that “would provide jobs and the means of livelihood for anyone able to work.”¹⁰² The Muslim Brotherhood sought reform, founded on sound social and Islamic principles, that facilitated Islamic governance, provided access to government services, healthcare, education and an overall improved quality of life for all Egyptians.¹⁰³ Like many social movements, it was born out of necessity and an overarching sense of inadequacy that plagued Egyptian society. Hassan al-Banna created the Brotherhood as a counterweight to both foreign domination and secular activism, but did not foresee that his organization would become “a model that Muslim revivalists would replicate throughout the Arab world and beyond.”¹⁰⁴

Both Banna and Qutb played a critical role in pioneering political Islam in Egypt in both its peaceful activism and later inclusion of advocating for violent jihad. According to Robinson, they underwent a distinctive journey that went from peaceful political activism to promoting a hardened and more radical ideology that is credited for influencing Jihadism today. Islamists under the Brotherhood sought “to merge political modernity with Islam,”¹⁰⁵ which put them directly at odds with Egypt's secular nationalist fervor that was

¹⁰⁰ Commins, 134.

¹⁰¹ Commins, 137.

¹⁰² Commins, 138.

¹⁰³ Commins, 138–39.

¹⁰⁴ Commins, 149.

¹⁰⁵ Glenn E. Robinson, *Global Jihad: A Brief History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020), 5.

prevalent at the time. Violent clashes with the Egyptian government led to the imprisonment and persecution of large numbers of Muslim Brotherhood members giving rise to a more radicalized fringe that would emerge. Sayyid Qutb, who started off as a secular nationalist and mid-level bureaucrat, would join the brotherhood then radicalize in prison when the Egyptian government cracked down on the Brotherhood's activism. He would later emerge as the organization's leader.

Fast forward slightly over a decade Qutb's activism, according to Robinson, would provide a template for the Jihadi activism that followed and is prevalent today. Qutb basically lay the foundations that would later justify violence in the form of armed Jihad pursued by both Sunni and Shia ideologues alike. Qutb would borrow from Salafi doctrine, a school of Islamic jurisprudence inspired by a 9th century interpretation of the Quran that frowns upon any nonliteral transliteration of the text,¹⁰⁶ and author the publication known as the milestones, which according to Robinson "was for jihadis as Lenin's *What Is To Be Done?* was for Communist agitators: a justification and guidebook for revolutionary change."¹⁰⁷ Qutb would also introduce the concept of *Jahilliyya*, which described a barbaric state of existence that pre-dated Islam in Arab lands, and inspired Jihadis to adopt violent means to confront and defeat that state of existence as did the forefathers of Islam.

Jihadism in its current form derives its ideology from innovations in Salafi doctrine adopted by Qutb. It is basically an ideology inspired by Salafism, built while enduring cruelty, and perverted in a prison cell before launching to oppressed Muslim communities elsewhere promising them salvation, freedom and justice through violent action. Though the Brotherhood at its inception did not advocate for violence, the hardline Salafi -Jihadi movements today owe their ideological pedigree to key Brotherhood figures such as Hassan al Banna, and Sayyid Qutb.¹⁰⁸ Having both been imprisoned and sentenced to death in Egypt, they would leave behind a doctrinal legacy born of pain and hardship.

¹⁰⁶ Daniel Brown, *A New Introduction to Islam*, 3rd ed. (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2017), 319–21.

¹⁰⁷ Robinson, *Global Jihad: A Brief History*, 14.

¹⁰⁸ Brown, *A New Introduction to Islam*, 299–302.

Building on lessons of the past, global jihad today is an offshoot of what Robinson referred to as the *Jihadi International* which was first introduced by the Islamist ideologue Abdullah Yussuf Azzam. Azzam was an activist who joined the Muslim Brotherhood Branch in Jordan at a young age and a credentialed cleric that graduated from al Azhar in Egypt in the early 1970s.¹⁰⁹ Azzam played a pivotal role in the recruitment and logistical support of the Arab Mujahideen during the Afghan Jihad. He envisioned and attempted to develop a pool of mujahideen under what became the Al Qaeda organization, that would travel to troubled Muslim lands in an attempt to free the Muslim population from oppression by the nonbelievers.¹¹⁰ This was the beginning of a regional movement intent on internationalizing the Brotherhood's doctrine under one active polity.

After the end of the Soviet-Afghan War and the sudden death of Azzam, Bin Laden emerged as the leader of the al Qaeda organization founded by Azzam. Embittered by the Saudi government's decision to allow for U.S. intervention in the 1991 War to liberate Kuwait, along with the failure of Islamist activism to affect change in Egypt and Algeria, he redirects Jihad efforts toward the west and specifically the United States, who he called the *Far Enemy*. This was in contrast to the *Near Enemy*, which was seen as the apostate regimes within the Arab Muslim World (i.e. Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Saudi) previously targeted by Jihadists.¹¹¹

Al Qaeda's shift in strategy from targeting the *Near Enemy* to targeting the *Far Enemy* is best understood by observing how populations within the MENA region perceive U.S. foreign policy. It is the grievances, from perceived policy transgressions, that most likely fueled the anti-American sentiment and created the conditions necessary for the operational shift undertaken by Al Qaeda and the Jihadi movement it inspired. Though shortly after Bin Laden's death and the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the *Far Enemy* efforts among Jihadi movements was subordinated to the establishment of a territorial state, and the grievances fueling the anti-American sentiment were broadcasted

¹⁰⁹ Robinson, *Global Jihad: A Brief History*, 38–39.

¹¹⁰ Robinson, 58.

¹¹¹ Robinson, 70–71.

incessantly and effectively for recruitment efforts and for legitimizing the violence propagated by that proto-state. Today those grievances are continuously leveraged for recruitment and for widespread appeal by violent Islamists intent on attacking U.S. interests at home and abroad.

2. From Jihadi Ally to Menacing Nemesis

Understanding the historical journey of political Islam from a social movement lens provided much needed insight into why elements of that movement resorted to violence. Then following the progress of what became an organized violent movement, and the role U.S. policy makers played in that transformation helps with understanding how and why the United States went from the facilitator of Jihad to the target of its violence.

This section offers a background on how U.S. foreign policy makers first came into contact with Islamist and Jihadi movements and how that relationship morphed over time from what appeared to be a benevolent partnership to an ambivalent and spiteful existence. American national interests and political Islam have not always been so divisive and at odds. In the early 1950s, there was a nationalist secular wave that spread throughout the Arab States in North Africa, the Levant, and Yemen. At first U.S. policy makers under Eisenhower tried to normalize relationships with those newly formed popular states. However, by the early 1960s, young Arab republics, led by Nasser's Egypt, advocated for Arab unity under a socialist system of governance believed to have favored the Soviet Union.¹¹² To counterbalance a potential Soviet-Arab alliance, U.S. policy makers, according to Bhattacharya, pursued improved relations with Saudi Arabia and encouraged "a holy Islamic alliance to isolate Egypt in regional politics."¹¹³ Alliances with other Muslim countries, like Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and others were pursued as part of a U.S. containment strategy against Soviet regional encroachment. In those years of what seemed to be an escalating Cold War, Islamic affiliation was considered

¹¹² David W. Lesch and Mark L. Haas, *The Middle East and the United States: History, Politics, and Ideologies*, Sixth edition. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 104–5.

¹¹³ Sanjukta B. Bhattacharya, *U.S. Policy towards the Muslim World: Focus on Post 9/11 Period* (Maryland: University Press of America, 2010), 21.

Soviet-proof and therefore preferred over secular nationalist governments with socialist underpinnings.

The 1970s would see a recalibration of U.S. strategy in the Arab-Muslim Middle East. American-Egyptian relationship would inch toward an alliance, whereas the American-Iranian relationship would sever and Iran, once a staunch ally, would view the United States as its mortal enemy.¹¹⁴ It was not until the 1970s, approximately three decades into the Cold War, that Iran would be the first country where Islamic extremism surfaced as an expanding threat to U.S. national security interests. According to Bhattacharya, “for the first time, an Islamic country demonized the U.S. calling it the ‘Great Satan’, and by holding 52 Americans hostage for 444 days, inflicted humiliation and created a deep sense of powerlessness among policy-makers.”¹¹⁵ The only other significant act of defiance by a Muslim country was Saudi Arabia’s oil embargo shortly after the Yom Kippur War of 1973. Though intended to squeeze concessions from Israel’s supporters on the Palestinian cause, Western observers saw Saudi’s actions as an attempt for Islamic resurgence.

In the early 1980s the Iran-Iraq war took center stage in U.S. foreign policy circles, distracting policy makers from developments in political Islam within Iran and elsewhere in the shadows of Arab regimes. Consecutively, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan would mark a decade of cooperation between Jihadist elements inspired by political Islam and the United States. In an attempt to thwart Soviet overreach, American policy practitioners endorsed the recruitment of Mujahideen from throughout the Islamic world, to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan. These actions unwittingly laid the foundations for the organized militant Islamist movements that followed. U.S. foreign policy at the time called for collaboration with Saudi Arabia and Pakistan to facilitate the transfer of personnel, funds, weapons, and equipment to the front lines of its proxy fight against the Soviet Union, projecting a façade of a strong alliance built on cooperation between Jihadists and their American handlers.

¹¹⁴ Bhattacharya, 22.

¹¹⁵ Bhattacharya, 22.

This short-lived alliance of convenience between the U.S. and militant Islamists would quickly fade away once the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan and the organized band of Jihadists, emboldened by their victory against a world power, would scan the globe for their next adventure. The adventures chosen by those militant Islamists would ultimately clash with U.S. foreign policy interests and initially find a widescale of support in a landscape marred by anti-American sentiment and a litany of unaddressed grievances.

D. DATA ON ANTI-AMERICAN SENTIMENT

Widescale anti-American sentiment is what confines U.S. soft power projection in the MENA region. It is the anti-American sentiment from grievances left unaddressed that legitimized the Jihadi cause and brought it into the mainstream. The words “anti-American sentiment” are often thrown together when describing negative attitudes toward the United States, but it is not always apparent what those words actually mean. Anti-American sentiment could mean a wide range of attitudes on a spectrum from simply disagreeing with certain U.S. foreign policies, to resenting such policies, to complete hatred and wishing harm to the United States and the American people.

The Pew Research Center surveys on *International Opinion Towards the United States* and on *the Confidence in Bin Laden* represented in Figures 11 and 12, both offer unique perspectives on how the U.S. is perceived throughout the MENA region. While the perceptions based on favorability ratings may offer the breadth of the varying degrees of anti-American sentiment, the level of confidence in bin Laden offers the depth and intensity of that anti-American sentiment harbored within a certain segment of MENA society.

Both Figures 11 and 12 each offer a critical piece that can be used for analysis in determining the level of anti-American sentiment within a given MENA State. The Zogby research presented at the end of this section offers valuable insight on the negative impacts of anti-American sentiment on U.S. foreign policy aspirations within the MENA region.

It is evident from the data presented that most populations within the countries surveyed do not have a favorable opinion of the United States, but the added metric on the *Confidence in Osama bin Laden*, presented in Figure 12, is where we can safely assume a positive correlation between the results portraying a high confidence level in bin Laden

and the intensity of Anti-American sentiment in the countries surveyed. Widescale confidence in a leader of a terrorist organization intent on destroying the United States, within populations of countries that receive billions of dollars in U.S. aid should be a cause for concern.

Figure 11 offers opinions from within four MENA countries: Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, and the Palestinian territories. Information on Kuwait, Tunisia, and Morocco was limited and therefore was not included in the analysis, and Israel, though technically a MENA country does not share the regions common history and culture, hence does not fit within the scope of this research. Figure 12 offers an interesting variable that captures the level of *Confidence in Osama bin Laden* from 2002 to 2011. This dynamic when combined with the data from Figure 11 could provide much needed insight to the degree and intensity of anti-American sentiment observed. Countries with a high unfavorable rating toward the U.S. and high confidence in Bin Laden are likely to harbor a more intense anti- American sentiment, whereas countries with lower unfavorable percentage ratings and lower confidence in Bin Laden are likely to have less of an anti-American sentiment.

Information from all three surveys offers a valuable dichotomy to U.S. policy ambitions versus the actual outcomes. Though the surveys capture a generally noticeable anti-American trend, the MENA countries with the least favorable opinions of the United States were the ones receiving the largest sums of U.S. aid. The results further emphasize the centrality of perceived grievances to the U.S. image, that if left unaddressed could hamper sustainable policy objectives.

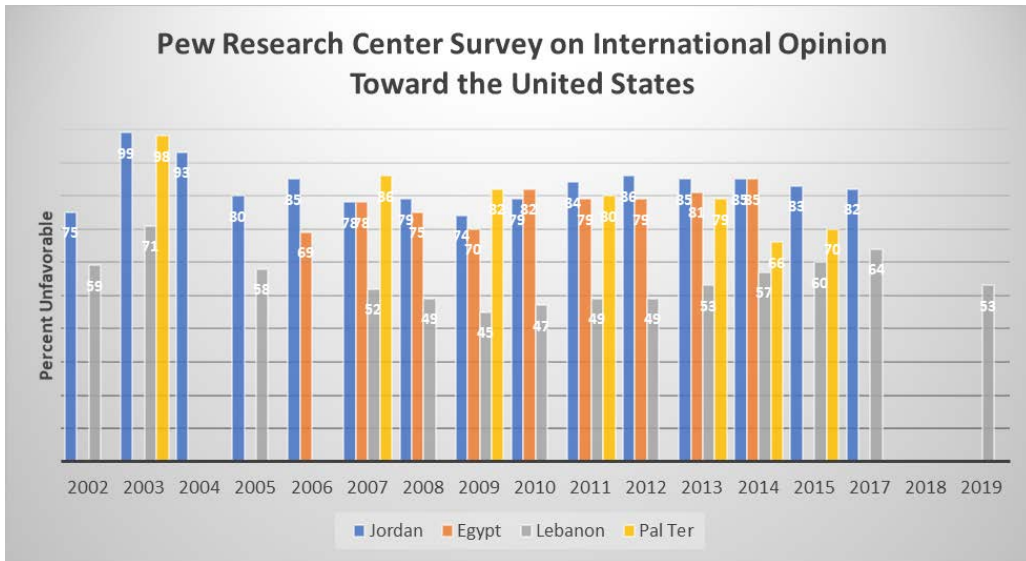


Figure 11. Pew Center Survey on International Opinion Toward the United States¹¹⁶

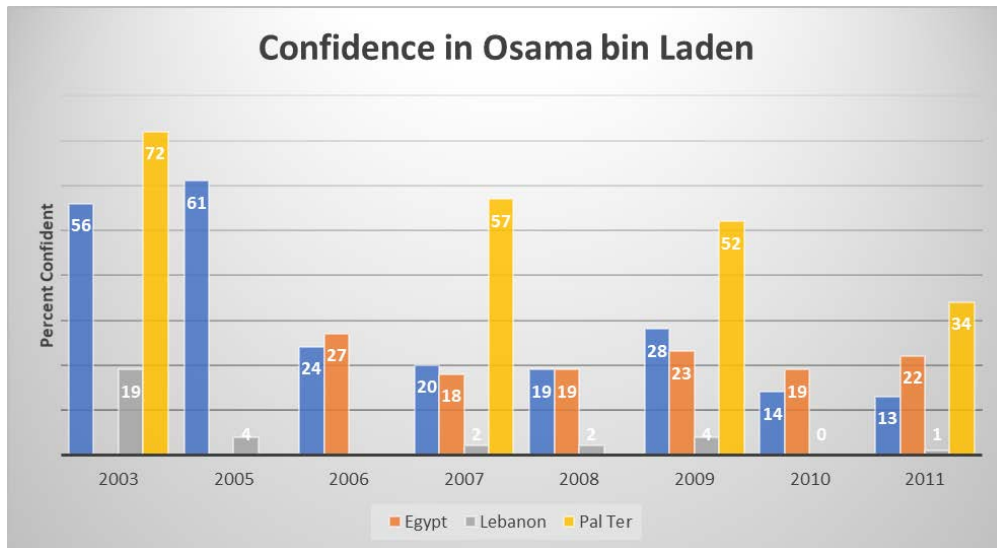


Figure 12. Pew Center Survey on Confidence in Osama bin Laden¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Pew Research Center, “Global Attitudes & Trends,” *Global Indicators Database* (blog), March 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/database/>.

¹¹⁷ Pew Research Center, “Osama Bin Laden Largely Discredited Among Muslim Publics in Recent Years,” *Pew Research Center’s Global Attitudes & Trends*, May 2, 2011, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2011/05/02/osama-bin-laden-largely-discredited-among-muslim-publics-in-recent-years/>.

1. Interpreting the Data

Both figures are placed on the same page for the sake of comparison. Three of the four countries plotted in Figure 11 show a high unfavourability rating of the United States averaging approximately 80%. Lebanon was the only country with favorability ratings averaging closer to 50%. Though the results from Figure 11 are telling of a widescale anti-American sentiment in the MENA region, it is the *Confidence in bin Laden* approval rating that is a cause for concern.

The *Confidence in Osama bin Laden* percentage ratings are likely a better indicator of anti-American sentiment in the countries surveyed. 2003 marks an extremely high level of confidence in bin Laden in both Jordan and the Palestinian territories with 61% and 72% expressing their support respectively. Lebanon was the only other country surveyed in 2003 with a 19% approval rating for bin Laden. Though significantly lower than the other two countries surveyed Lebanon registers its highest approval of bin Laden that year. Lebanon's approval percentage drops significantly to 4% the following year and continues to drop reaching 0% and 1% in 2010 and 2011. Lebanon registers the lowest confidence in bin Laden percentage rating out of all other MENA countries surveyed.

The survey's data on Egypt starts in 2006, where the only other country surveyed was Jordan. Egypt shows a slightly higher percentage than Jordan for that year with a 27% confidence in bin Laden rating vs. Jordan's 24%. Egypt and Jordan would both stay under 30% for the rest of the years surveyed whereas the Palestinian territories, though trending downwards, maintained a confidence rating of over 50% until 2009. In 2011, the majority in the Palestinian territories appeared to have lost confidence in bin Laden recording a 34% confidence rating, which is almost a 40% drop from when they were first surveyed in 2003.

Understanding the drivers of the incongruence between policy intent and policy outcomes will help shed light on why communities in the MENA region are skeptical and mistrusting of declared U.S. foreign policy affecting their region. Two countries with some of the most concerning trends observed, are among the highest global recipients of U.S. foreign aid, according to the Congressional Research Service report prepared by Sharp et. al. Per the report, both Jordan and Egypt were collectively second only to Israel in projected

aid allocations for FY21 and were among the top recipients of U.S. aid from 1946 to present day.¹¹⁸ The Pew Research Center surveys exposed a big disconnect between U.S. foreign policy aspirations in Egypt and Jordan, expressed by fiscal contributions, and foreign policy perceptions as interpreted by the opinions of the populations of these two countries of high interest.

Jordan is an interesting case to follow because of the intensity of the anti-American sentiment harbored within its borders. It shows both high levels of confidence in Osama bin Laden, and a significantly low opinion of the U.S. as shown in Figures 11 and 12 around the time of the Iraq War in 2003. In 2002, the Pew survey reports a U.S. favorability rating of 25%, which is significantly low for a country receiving such high amounts of U.S. foreign aid. Though that rating makes a sharp decline with almost a unanimous negative view of the U.S. in 2003, at the onset of the Iraq War, it never completely bounces back leaving Jordanians with a U.S. view that is visibly trending downwards over time.¹¹⁹ The confidence in Osama bin Laden percentage also increased in 2004 reaching approximately 61%,¹²⁰ signifying a high level of sympathy and concurrence with the Jihadi cause and the grievances espoused by its leaders. The Jordanian people's approval of al Qaeda, signified by the *Confidence in Osama bin Laden* poll takes a dip in 2005, shortly after Jordan fell victim to terrorist bombings claimed by Al Qaeda in Iraq.¹²¹ Though bin Laden's popularity wanes, the U.S. image in the region remains tarnished with many in Jordan attributing the regions misfortunes to U.S. foreign policy.¹²²

¹¹⁸ Jeremy M Sharp, Carla E Humud, and Sarah R Collins, "U.S. Foreign Assistance to the Middle East: Historical Background, Recent Trends, and the FY2021 Request" (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, May 5, 2020), 1–3, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R46344/3>.

¹¹⁹ Pew Research Center, "Global Attitudes & Trends."

¹²⁰ Pew Research Center, "Osama Bin Laden Largely Discredited Among Muslim Publics in Recent Years."

¹²¹ Hassan M. Fattah and Michael Slackman, "3 Hotels Bombed in Jordan; At Least 57 Die," *New York Times*, November 10, 2005, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/11/10/world/middleeast/3-hotels-bombed-in-jordan-at-least-57-die.html>.

¹²² Lionel Beehner, "The Effects of the Amman Bombings on U.S.-Jordanian Relations," Council on Foreign Relations, November 10, 2005, <https://www.cfr.org/background/effects-amman-bombings-us-jordanian-relations>.

U.S. foreign policy decisions like the Iraq War had a long-lasting impact on how the U.S. was perceived, and is still perceived in the MENA region. The Bush administration policy to democratize the region after 9–11, starting with Operation Iraqi Freedom, though noble and ambitious, was not welcomed by the people of the region. This is evident from the Pew public opinion polls covering that timeframe. It is safe to assume that the public opinion polls are more than simply portraying an unfavorable opinion of the United States. The consistent lack of a favorable opinion of the U.S. in Egypt and Jordan, with unfavourability ratings as good as 69% and as bad as 85% of the population in the fifteen years after the Iraq invasion, are indicative of the anti-American sentiment that continues to thrive in the region despite the U.S. foreign aid expenditures and the foreign policy initiatives intended to demonstrate good faith and serve U.S. regional interests.

2. Zogby Report

The first two surveys provided by the Pew Research Center helped with a better understanding of what is meant by anti-American sentiment and the degree it is shared by the greater population in the MENA region. The third data point is from Zogby Research Services and offers insight into how the U.S. stacks in popularity throughout the MENA region in relation to other key countries and Global powers. The Zogby report is critical in a world of great power competition where the battle for the hearts and minds around the globe is increasingly relevant.

In the 2018 Zogby Research Services report on Middle East public opinion, attitudes of various MENA countries toward other countries were measured. Findings from the report were intriguing and telling of the lack of effectiveness of U.S. foreign policy in the MENA region. Unfavourability ratings were no surprise and were consistent with the Pew polls referenced earlier in this section. The most telling statistics came from Iraq, Iran, Egypt, and Jordan. Both Iraq and Egypt recorded the lowest U.S. favorability ratings and both recording an 8% favorable rating of the U.S. Iraq, which is a country that was central to regional U.S. foreign policy in the better part of the 21st Century, had a population that regarded China (50%), Russia (48%), Iran (58%), and Turkey (60%) with significantly higher regard, than they did the United States. Egypt, the largest population

in the region, and largest Arab recipient of U.S. foreign aid, had a population that thought only of Iran (3%) as less favorable than the United States. Ironically, Iran saw the U.S. more favorably (32%) than did Iraq (8%), Egypt (8%), and Tunisia (30%). Finally, Jordan (37%), the second highest Arab recipient of U.S. aid, was second only to Lebanon (48%) among non-oil states in U.S. favorability ratings. Even then Jordanians viewed China, Russia, and Turkey with higher regard than they did the United States.¹²³ Those numbers are concerning and speak to an anti-American sentiment that had persisted and grown in the region over the decades of increased U.S. engagement.

Ultimately it is somewhere within this space where anti-American sentiment thrives that militant Islamists, like Al Qaeda, operate and are provided safe haven. Though confidence in bin Laden appears to have diminished over time along with the sympathy for the Jihadi cause, it is premature to claim a victory while the majority of people within the MENA region continue to view the United States in a negative light. Understanding and addressing the grievances, both old and new, fueling this negative sentiment is critical to devising sustainable policy that is likely to withstand the test of time. The next section in this chapter will provide a historical background of key U.S. policies that have generated grievances in parts of the region while simultaneously bolstering the popularity and confidence in the Jihadi cause.

E. GRIEVANCES PAST AND PRESENT

Starting with two Cold War policies that, though served immediate U.S. interests to counter Soviet encroachment at the time, failed to account for domestic undercurrents, that would ultimately shape the negative impressions associated with the anti-Americanism surrounding regional U.S. foreign policy. Those perceptions were shaped by the MENA population's collective experience as they aspired to achieve the Wilsonian ideal, captured by Mead, in the form of self-determination and democratic governance.¹²⁴ Those same

¹²³ James Zogby, Elizabeth Zogby, and Sarah Hope Zogby, "Middle East Public Opinion," Sir Bani Yas Forum (Zogby Research Services, LLC, 2018), 15, <https://foreignpolicy.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/8a1be-2018SBYFINALWEB.pdf>.

¹²⁴ Walter Russell Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World* (New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2002), 159–60, ProQuest.

populations then watched as their aspirations were shattered by perceived foreign intervention from the same powers that broadcasted the liberal values that inspired the self-determination and self-governance they sought to emulate.

Those perceived foreign policy encroachments start with the acquiescence to the colonial project in Greater Syria, represented by the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, and with U.S. and British intervention in Iran, characterized by unseating an elected prime minister. Those two pivotal policy decisions would generate life-long grievances and have lasting regional impacts that shaped regional perceptions in the decades that followed. Presenting those two historical examples, before introducing the implications of more recent U.S. foreign policy, offers a much-needed scene setter that establishes the conditions in the domestic social and political space that regional U.S. foreign policy aspired to influence. After establishing the historical context for the grievances shared by many in the MENA region, this section will look at more recent policies, like the support of oppressive regimes and the Iraq War, that actively added to the grievances of the past.

This section addresses regional grievances through the lens of what are perceived as some of the most contentious U.S. foreign policy decisions within the MENA region. It starts with the unwavering U.S. support to Israel, despite the humanitarian repercussions in Palestinian lives and suffering that endured from the inception of the Zionist State till modern day. Next will be the events that unfolded in Iran in the 1950s, with the ousting of an elected official in a collaborative effort between the United States and the British and re-instating the unpopular Shah of Iran. Those two historical policy references provided the basis for an anti-American sentiment that more recent U.S. policies failed to account for. The point here is that U.S. policy initiatives in the region were seen through the lens of past policies, and it is the anti-American sentiment as a result of those past policies that created the operating space within the MENA region that U.S. policy makers still attempted to navigate.

Additional policy themes that are extremely unpopular with the populations in the MENA region, and are attributed to a growing anti-American sentiment, include U.S. support for a number of corrupt autocratic and oppressive regimes, and U.S. policies after

9/11 which include the perceived as unprovoked invasion of Iraq.¹²⁵ All of the previously mentioned policies are perceived by many in the region as a demonstrated apathy or lack of interest in humanitarian transgressions directed toward Muslims and therefore seen as unbalanced and unjust. They perpetuate narratives that fuel anti-American sentiment and are therefore diminishing America's democratic appeal and re-enforcing perceptions of the U.S. as a neo-imperialistic crusader with aggressive and hostile intentions.¹²⁶

1. The Case of Palestine

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is probably the least popular regional U.S. policy, and a severe source of antagonism. The United States' staunch support for Israel, despite Israel's perceived disregard for humanitarian violations against the Palestinians, is by far the oldest and arguably one of the principal historical drivers of anti-American sentiment.¹²⁷ It is almost impossible to address anti-American sentiment and grievances as a result of U.S. foreign Policy in the MENA region without addressing the Palestinian Israeli conflict. This conflict was for decades the number one reason for regional unrest. Even recently, according to Zogby's 2018 poll, the majority of countries in the MENA region considered "ending the occupation of Palestinian lands" to be their number one issue, more important than "resolving the conflict in Syria" and the "danger of Iranian interference."¹²⁸ This finding alone offers a stark inconsistency between U.S. regional priorities and the priorities of the majority of those who live in the region.

The creation of the state of Israel in 1948 created a humanitarian problem that grew over the years in both scope and impact on the region's collective consciousness. Palestinian refugees still occupy camps in Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, West Bank, and Gaza. In places like Lebanon they are deprived of two basic right like work and land

¹²⁵ Byman, *The Five Front War*, 10–11.

¹²⁶ Cordesman, "Winning the 'War on Terrorism,'" 102.

¹²⁷ Muhammad Haniff Bin Hassan, "Key Considerations in Counterideological Work against Terrorist Ideology," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29, no. 6 (September 1, 2006): 531–58, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100600791058>.

¹²⁸ Zogby, Zogby, and Zogby, "Middle East Public Opinion," 7.

ownership.¹²⁹ There are generations of Arabs throughout the MENA region, many still alive today, that have witnessed the Palestinian struggle, sympathize with it, and are frustrated by the lack of action to addressing it, both by domestic and global leadership. The humanitarian matter of the Palestinian refugees remains a contentious issue today and continues to fuel anti-American sentiment in the region and throughout the Muslim community. It has provided a “righteous” cause for violent Jihadi movements and legitimized their heinous acts.

According to Byman, the “blinding bias towards Israel,” is among the central grievances capitalized upon by Jihadi movements.¹³⁰ Narratives of Israeli occupation of and perceived American complicity are often used in Jihadi recruitment communication campaigns to widen their support base and in efforts to radicalize their audiences. U.S. support to the Zionist state is perceived as a modern-day colonial venture intent on subverting the Muslims of the MENA region, thus contributing to the anti-American sentiment that complicates achieving U.S. foreign policy objectives in the region.¹³¹

2. The Case of Iran

The Islamic republic of Iran is seen by many as the first successful effort to create an Islamist government in the MENA region. The clash between the Islamic Republic and U.S. policy makers is what makes this shift in power in Iran so significant. Without looking at relevant historical context it is easy to see the Iran-U.S. impasse in the terms of incompatible values as often portrayed by political pundits, but this mostly antagonist relationship between U.S. policy makers and Islamists of different varieties can be traced to perceived policy overreach that goes back to the mid-twentieth century. One of the earliest policies contributing to the development of extremist Islamic movements includes covert action in Iran designed to overthrow “the moderate constitutional government of Mohammad Mussadiq, followed by years of close [U.S.] military and political support for

¹²⁹ BBC, *After 70 Years, Who Are the Palestinian Refugees?*, accessed October 18, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WuZrD5JjfXA>.

¹³⁰ Byman, *The Five Front War*, 11.

¹³¹ Byman, 11.

the undemocratic and often brutal regime of the Shah.”¹³² The decision to overthrow Mussadiq was born out of perceived necessity in a bi-polar competition for power between the Soviet Union and the United States. Some policy makers were concerned with Mussadiq’s socialist inclinations and therefore his propensity to embrace Soviet doctrine.¹³³ This is an example of a policy intended for Soviet containment, but with a completely different and unexpected outcome. Bhattacharya traces the anti-American sentiment and the “rise of Islamic revolutionary forces in Iran,”¹³⁴ to specifically this U.S. policy which arguably delivered today’s Islamic Republic of Iran. The Shah would be seen as an American puppet, by the majority of Iranians and his violent oppression of public dissent would increase popular resentment toward him and U.S. policy makers that were seen as his guarantors. It is under those conditions that the Islamic Revolution would sweep through Iran, ousting the Shah and creating a state sponsored anti-American sentiment, that justified Jihad through institutions committed to removing western and foreign influence from the region.

The domestic dynamics born out of the coup would ultimately shape the relationship between the U.S. and Iran. The prosperous relationship between the two countries in the years following the coup completely masked the undercurrent of resentment shared by a large swath of the Iranian population that held the U.S. responsible for meddling in Iranian domestic affairs. Though Iran would modernize and grow economically during this twenty-five-year period, the resentment to the Shah’s increasingly oppressive rule, according to Gasiorowski, “generated a new challenge...that differs from the one posed by Mossadiq: nondemocratic, violent, and deeply anti-American.”¹³⁵ U.S. policy makers indulged in the immediate political and economic gains, that appeared to have worked, and were completely blindsided by the Islamic Revolution that would change the course of regional history.

¹³² Bhattacharya, U.S. *Policy towards the Muslim World*, 25.

¹³³ Mark Gasiorowski, “US Foreign Policy Toward Iran During the Mussadiq Era,” in *The Middle East and the United States: History, Politics, and Ideologies*, Sixth (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 54–55.

¹³⁴ Bhattacharya, U.S. *Policy towards the Muslim World*, 25.

¹³⁵ Gasiorowski, “The Middle East and the United States,” 61.

Iran offered a great example of how Islamists that were radicalized under the Shah's oppressive rule equated the Shah's domestic policies to a U.S. foreign policy extension and then capitalize on the anti-American sentiment resulting from that association. Extreme ideologues would band together and plot his removal from power. They would exploit an anti-American sentiment already in place to grow their support base and increase their movements legitimacy and resilience.

3. Support of Oppressive Regimes

Other U.S. policies believed to have contributed to anti-American sentiment according to Bhattacharya, include support for the repressive Nimeri dictatorship in Sudan, and support for Mubarak's autocratic and often oppressive rule in Egypt.¹³⁶ Those policies, which implicated the United States with the non-democratic oppressive regimes within MENA, were among the early contributors to the affinity with the Islamist cause and the ideology it propagated. The 1990s would see an increase in Islamist terrorist activity, with attacks on U.S. diplomatic, economic, and military interests. The terrorist attacks would continue to increase in boldness and intensity culminating with the attacks on 9/11 which were the manifestation of anger and a reaction to a perceived American foreign policy duplicity in the Arab and Muslim World.

Understanding the root cause of such unintended negative perceptions begins with understanding the domestic political dynamics within the countries of the MENA region. On one hand U.S. policy makers promoted democracy and self-determination and on the other hand they were seen as staunch supporters to the regions oppressive regimes and therefore culpable to their atrocities in the eyes of many. According to Maghraoui, for a lot of people in the MENA region American anti-terrorism rhetoric appeared disjointed and lacked the necessary accurate historical references that sound policy should emerge from.¹³⁷ To them there was a clear gap between word and deed. Those complex dynamics are what policy makers find themselves entangled in as they manage perceptions and

¹³⁶ Bhattacharya, U.S. *Policy towards the Muslim World*, 12–13.

¹³⁷ Maghraoui, "American Foreign Policy and Islamic Renewal," 4.

pursue American foreign policy initiatives in the MENA region and elsewhere in the Muslim world.

4. Post 9/11 U.S. Policy

After 9/11 the Bush administration focused on three main efforts to combat Islamic extremism. Those included: “the global war on terrorism, the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) to promote democratic reform, and the public diplomacy campaign to improve America’s image in the Muslim world.”¹³⁸ At first glance and to Middle East policy advocates those efforts looked comprehensive and viable. Who would not rally behind fighting terrorism while simultaneously working on democratization initiatives and then tell the world about it to improve America’s image in the Muslim world? Instead of wide support for U.S. efforts in the Muslim world the Bush administration found itself immersed in a quagmire of Muslim resentment and a significant rise in anti-American sentiment.

Maghraoui points out that part of the challenge was that the three stated objectives were in direct opposition to one another: “For example, the global war on terrorism requires the cooperation of security services that form the backbone of authoritarian regimes in Muslim countries. Such cooperation undermines both democratic ambitions and the effort to change negative attitudes about the United States in the Muslim world.”¹³⁹ Though noble in intent, policy makers failed to address the complexity of such an undertaking and instead executed an incomprehensive strategy “that conflate [d] various Islamist groups into a monolithic threat, regardless of political, ideological, or strategic motivations.”¹⁴⁰ As a result, instead of achieving desired objectives the Bush administration found itself backpedaling from stated assertions, failing to meet regional objectives, and discrediting U.S. policy initiatives in the Muslim world.

¹³⁸ Maghraoui, 4.

¹³⁹ Maghraoui, 4.

¹⁴⁰ Maghraoui, 4.

F. CONCLUSION

U.S. policy makers find themselves today limited to a number of bad options in the Middle East. They find themselves mired in attempting to answer complex and difficult questions about policy options in the MENA region and the wider Muslim world. Policy decisions in places like Egypt, Iran, Syria, Libya and Iraq, to name just a few, are not as simple as U.S. policy makers and politicians would like them to be. Blanchard further explains how “working with partners in these countries carries risks of influencing underlying political disputes in unpredictable ways or inadvertently empowering parties to local conflicts that may be hostile to U.S. security or preferences.”¹⁴¹ Decision makers are often having to pick between a bad choice and the worst alternative when tackling the challenges presented in a multi-dimensional operating space speckled with anti-American sentiment. The Syrian example alone offers complexities presented by domestic and international players all seeking to manipulate strategic outcomes and promote their often-conflicting strategic interests.

Even under the conditions mentioned earlier, the United States had expended vast resources and spent billions of dollars on the fight against violent Salafi Jihadis. Both the Obama and Trump administrations had followed suit, enacting former Bush administration legislation authorizing the use of military force against “groups and individuals associated with the Islamic State (IS) and participating in hostilities against the United States or its coalition partners.”¹⁴² Blanchard and Humud depict the scope and magnitude of counter IS operations stating that “the executive branch has acknowledged military operations against Islamic State targets in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Libya, the Philippines, Niger, and Somalia.”¹⁴³ In Syria and Iraq alone “as of August 2017, U.S. and coalition forces had used combat aircraft, armed unmanned aerial vehicles, and sea-launched cruise missiles to conduct more than 24,500 strikes against Islamic State targets in Iraq and Syria since

¹⁴¹ Christopher M Blanchard and Carla E Humud, *The Islamic State and U.S. Policy*, CRS Report No. R43612 (Congressional Research Service, 2018), 7, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/R43612.pdf>.

¹⁴² Blanchard and Humud, 8.

¹⁴³ Blanchard and Humud, 8.

August 8, 2014, and September 22, 2014, respectively.”¹⁴⁴ All those operations, though effective in taking the fight to the enemy, fail to address anti-American sentiment that continues to grow despite U.S. military efforts. At best, current U.S. policy applies tactical Band-Aides in a strategic quagmire with no end in sight while on the current path.

Ultimately blanket grievances are convenient and easy tools used by jihadists to rouse public support and justify their cause. Groups like ISIS and Al Qaeda, often superficially appear to give a voice to the muted oppressed while completely focusing on widening their base and prioritizing their interests. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is a great example of how extremist groups appeal to a largely anti-American Arab audience. Though very real in its magnitude and effect on the Arab and Muslim psyche, the Palestinian plight is a good example of how Jihadists manipulate sentiment felt from real grievances to widen their support base. Palestinian suffering and Israel’s culpability, today, is only one among a litany of grievances facing societies in the MENA region. The Palestinian cause had become more of a slogan rather than a primary heart felt factor facilitating radicalization. Islamists bring the Palestinian plight into the picture when they are attempting to widen their platform beyond a local support base and to help project a global façade to their band of rejects.

All those grievances previously mentioned are typically associated with humanitarian violations and perceived international apathy to the pursuit of justice by an aggrieved social base within the MENA region. Where the U.S. is seen apathetic, Jihadis on the other hand acknowledge those grievances and address them when they communicate with the Global Muslim community. Their message resonates with a disheartened majority in a space where U.S. foreign policy is perceived as a central obstacle to their shared struggle for decency, equality, and social justice. This ultimately increases affinity to Jihadist movements that appear to listen to and address those grievances with their resonating self-righteous narratives.

¹⁴⁴ Blanchard and Humud, 8.

IV. CONCLUSION

A. HISTORICAL PRECEDENT

Understanding the operational space in which U.S. policy unfolds is critical for all U.S. foreign policy practitioners, both military and civilian alike. Understanding the complexities within the operating environment allows for nuanced reporting that drives informed decision making. The MENA region's modern history offers ample precedent, that should be examined for relevant and sustainable policy. What appears as great policy at first should not be simply taken at face value based on parochial success. Poor governance within the MENA region along with regional grievances, stemming from past U.S. foreign policy, believed to be exacerbating the anti-American sentiment today define the operating space U.S. policy makers attempt to navigate today. This space which is exacerbated by unpopular foreign policy and defined by an overwhelming anti-American sentiment, is where U.S. foreign policy practitioners attempt to implement the National Security Strategy and to pursue both diplomatic and military objectives.

Modern day policy initiatives like the Abraham Accords, signed between the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, and Israel, offer a great example of a contemporary case to which insights from this thesis are applicable. As with the findings in the policy case studies discussed in Chapter III (i.e. Iran, Palestine, Oppressive regimes, and policies after 9/11) the accords should be examined within the social and political context of the larger MENA region for increased awareness of the challenges that may arise as the policy begins to unfold. Though the Abraham Accords could be a step in the right direction, without addressing the regional governance deficits, explored in detail in Chapter II, and the grievances fueling anti-American sentiment covered in Chapter III, the chances of a sustainable peace plan quickly diminish.

The actual impact of the Abraham Accords is likely to remain unknown for now. The sentiment expressed by the popular undercurrent within the MENA region is probably a better indicator, offering a broader perspective, of likely policy success or failure. Historical

precedent offers valuable insight for policy makers to draw from as they engage within the MENA region in pursuit of U.S. national security objectives.

Accepting the Abraham Accords at face value offers a mirage of peace and could lead to strategic complacency. This is similar to what happened in Iran under the Shah where policy makers turned a blind eye to the popular undercurrent that was gaining momentum over the years. Plotting and executing the ouster of a democratically elected prime minister in Iran, though seemed like the better option at the time, would prove to be a strategic mistake that did more to threaten rather than bolster U.S. national security objectives in the MENA region. Iran went from ally to the United States' regional antagonist, a nemesis, consistently pursuing foreign policy initiatives that counter U.S. strategic interests. This includes its support to proxies that attack oil fields in Saudi Arabia and actively fight to prop up a dictator in Syria. Iran has actively trained and equipped proxies such as the Houthis in Yemen, Hezbollah in Lebanon and Syria, the Badr brigades and other Shia paramilitary militias in Iraq.

Iranians feel their actions and anti-American sentiment is justified based on U.S. actions in 1953 that still haunt their memories today. U.S. support for the Shah after toppling a democratically elected government is a narrative Iranian conservatives resort to every time moderate leaders engage in diplomacy initiatives with the United States. Instead of a strong and reliable regional friend with vast resources, Iran has become public enemy number one in the Middle East. They now have a government with a hardened anti-American sentiment, self-proclaimed divine right to rule, and coercive internal mechanisms to quell dissent as demonstrated in the late 90s and a decade ago with the Green Revolution.

The focal point of U.S. regional foreign policy should be addressing the increase in militant tendencies along with the overwhelming anti-American sentiment expressed by the MENA population. The larger problem in the Middle East today is not the risk of an Arab Israeli War that the Abraham Accords are designed to forestall. Rather it is the Islamist militancy observed in Chapter II in Egypt, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan that is the real threat to regional stability. Condoning the root cause of unrest in the region and then promoting unpopular policies, is likely to further embolden Islamist militants and increase their resilience within the disenfranchised populations of the MENA region.

Until U.S. policy accounts for the regional public sentiment that is typically masked and not represented by the autocratic and non-democratic governments, policies in the region are likely to be less sustainable and have unforeseen negative consequences. This lack of representation is largely the driving cause behind the unrest and violence we had seen throughout the Muslim world in the past several decades. U.S. foreign policy in support of those autocratic governments contributes to the suppression of vibrant and active forces found in professional organizations and other civil society elements that promote dialogue and debate on viable democratization initiatives. Unless there is a marked shift in policy to account for such dynamics, the Middle East is likely to remain in its current state with a good chance of getting worse.

The key is to empower those forces that battle corruption and advocate for stronger institutions that are capable of weathering shifts in governance, bringing about stable, representative, and prosperous governments. The goal is not that regional civil society, the will of the people, or representative institutions would align with U.S. interests on everything. Instead representative governments in a region that has shown a craving for self-determination are at a minimum likely to represent the will of their people and eventually lead to an improved standard of living, social justice and as a result curb the radicalization effort. Over time stable and transparent representative regimes could become contexts where partnership or good-faith negotiation become real possibilities at a fraction of the resources dedicated to stability in the region today.

B. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Before addressing the resilience of violent Islamist movement U.S. policy makers need to find legitimate partners in the region. According to Maghraoui, because U.S. credibility within the MENA region is based on the perceived fairness in upholding the liberal values it claims to defend, U.S. policy toward the Muslim world should seek alliances with those forces that share its liberal values. There are forces in the Muslim world that appreciate these values and actively pursue emulating them both regionally and domestically in their countries of origin.

Policy makers need to pay attention to forces of positive change and better understand their capabilities and capacity. Alliances with such legitimate forces that have a history of advocating for reform and social justice are likely to alter how U.S. foreign policy is perceived and reverse the anti-American sentiment plaguing the region. This is not a solution that is likely to bear fruit overnight, but an observed deliberate and consistent policy of empowering collective action and social movements, by those moderate forces referenced earlier, in the MENA region is likely to alter negative perceptions of U.S. policy intentions. If we had learned anything in the MENA region over the past decades, it is that radicalization occurs in the shadows where public sentiment is suppressed and political will finds no outlet.

According to Maghraoui, engaging with such moderate forces, comprised of civil society and social movements attempting to direct Islamic revival, is far more natural for the United states than it is for “secular Europe, communist China, nationalist Russia, or the region’s repressive governments.”¹⁴⁵ The United states with its long-standing civil rights record and protections for religious moderation is far more poised to align with and support burgeoning moderate Islamist movements and their reform focused agendas in the region. Those groups’ rejection of violence and their advocacy for equality, justice and accountable governance are in concert with the liberal values and rights protected by the U.S. constitution and promoted by American social and political institutions. Having a keen understanding of those complex dynamics in the Muslim world and formulating a nuanced policy approach that embraces “Islam’s ethical appeal” could be a game changer for long term regional policy outcomes.¹⁴⁶

Additionally, doubling down on policies that make aid programs contingent on transparent governance and vibrant civil society could change the way MENA region countries approach governance. Focusing regional U.S. foreign policy purely on security may lead to missed opportunities in mending the image of the United States within the region. Instead of the perception that U.S. policy makers are actively bolstering the domestic coercive apparatus adding to the anti-American sentiment in countries like Egypt and Jordan, they can

¹⁴⁵ Maghraoui, “American Foreign Policy and Islamic Renewal,” 4.

¹⁴⁶ Maghraoui, 4.

be seen as supporting plurality and representative democratic governance. Such a shift in regional public perceptions is likely to completely change the operating space from one that is hostile and suspicious to U.S. policy initiatives to one that is more welcoming.

C. FINAL THOUGHTS

Observing the growth and resilience of Jihadi Salafi movements leaves one curious how such a puritanical counter-intellectual movement with a high propensity for violence, could steal the limelight and dominate intellectual discourse on the challenges within the Islamic communities worldwide. Those extreme ideologues existed in the fringes of Arab and Muslim societies, lacking in authority and legitimacy and with minimal popular appeal (Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries being the exception). The extreme interpretations of Islamic doctrine perpetuated by violent Jihadi organizations and the newfound appeal for them have to be understood in the context of the extreme conditions that created them. A fringe movement without public support is likely to stay in the fringes whereas a fringe movement with public support can easily turn into a domestic, and even global, menace.

According to the research conducted for this thesis, the Political Islam promoted by Sunni extremists today gained popularity in response to the poor social, political, and economic performance of repressive governments within the MENA region.¹⁴⁷ There is a reoccurring pattern where Islamists violently pushed out of political participation resorted to violence and terrorism in retaliation. Wider conditions, such as poor quality of life and lack of social mobility, facilitated violent splinter groups that eventually migrated into the global Jihadi camp. These conditions favored Islamists and played right into their false claims of fighting for a better world as part of their “ends justify the means” narrative. They widened the acceptance for their extreme ideology because of the lack of a viable alternative from within the Muslim societies they live in. Under those conditions, moderate voices were typically drowned and Jihadi extremists found a more accepting support base.

Groups like ISIS and Al Qaeda did not simply come from nowhere and could not have sustained their operational capabilities without local and global support. Supporters and

¹⁴⁷ Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel: Repression and Resistance in the Islamic World*, 21–22.

sympathizers constituted the outer rings for those groups' survival and persistence. Understanding those groups' appeal and attempting to address the core grievances justifying that appeal should be part of the U.S. foreign policy goals to undermine their effectiveness. The core elements within those organizations are less likely to be swayed, but chipping at their support base by offering a better alternative could be a viable option. In an effort to improve its image in the Middle East the United States needs to look closely at resources available to help reverse the anti-American sentiment that is prevalent in the region. According to Telhami, those resources include "dedicated Muslim and Arab Americans," along with thoughtful, measured, and influential voices in the Arab and Muslim world "who have every interest in building bridges between the United States and the nations of the Middle East." 148

Not all supporters of violent Islamic Jihad are diehard Salafis with a strong affinity to the ideology they promote. Most harbor anti-American sentiment due to personal experiences and endured hardships from perceived U.S. policies affecting their lives locally. Understanding the U.S. policies that contribute to an increased anti-American sentiment is the precursor to eliminating the terrorist threat. Eradicating regionally supported terrorism entails acknowledging the suffering endured by millions within a targeted region, and directly addressing those claiming victimization by perceived U.S. policy overtures.

At this point a re-evaluation of regional foreign policy is what is needed to reverse past trends and address terrorism's root causes. Only by creating a new foreign policy operating space, where anti-American sentiment is diminished, will policy makers successfully promote American ideals and set the stage for collaboration with the communities of the MENA region. Only after the grievances fueling anti-American sentiment are addressed will the U.S. effectively mitigate the radicalization that targets U.S. interests.

148 Shibley Telhami, "U.S. Policy and the Arab and Muslim World," *The Brookings Review*; Washington 20, no. 3 (Summer 2002): 48.

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