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Islam Keeping Violent Jihadism at Bay in Times of Daesh: State Religious Institutions in Lebanon, Morocco and Saudi Arabia since 2013

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Islam keeping violent jihadism at bay in times of *Daesh*: State religious institutions in Lebanon, Morocco and Saudi Arabia since 2013

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Executive summary

Can official Islamic institutions play a role in preventing violent extremism? Most Arab governments have granted a role to religious institutions in this regard in recent years. Yet, the cases of Lebanon, Morocco and Saudi Arabia exhibit considerable differences. In Lebanon, the role of Sunni religious institution *Dar al-Fatwa* is limited. Due to the weakness of state capacity and to the external interference in the country, *Dar al-Fatwa* is hardly able to coordinate Sunni religious activities there. The corresponding institutions in Morocco and in Saudi Arabia, however, are powerful, and also perform foreign policy roles through religious diplomacy.

The role assigned by governments to official Islamic institutions in the struggle against violent extremism varies. In the Arab world, the use of these institutions has been most prominent in monarchies with inherited religious legitimacy – in Saudi Arabia, Morocco and Jordan in particular. Morocco and Saudi Arabia have also been using their control of Islam to become regional hegemons. Morocco has been gaining more soft power religious influence in several countries, while in Saudi Arabia, recent reforms have curbed the influence of the Saudi *ulama* on domestic and foreign policy.

Arguably, Morocco's official religious institutions are among the more competent and have more legitimacy among the believers than their counterparts in other Arab countries. The *Habous* (Endowment) and Islamic Affairs Ministry is considered a strategic ministry, and its control is still a Crown prerogative. However, the effectiveness of the country's measures to prevent violent extremism can be questioned, since Moroccans constitute the third largest

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nationality group among foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq, after Tunisians and Saudis (if Moroccan bi-nationals living in Europe are included in the statistics). In Saudi Arabia, by contrast, a precondition for efficiently countering jihadism would be to give priority to this struggle, rather than to the regional contest with Iran.

Saudi Arabia is currently undergoing important transformations, which impact on the country's religious diplomacy and export of Salafism. The decision by the influential Crown Prince Mohamed bin Salman (MbS) to create new, *ad hoc* institutions to combat violent extremism outside of state religious institutions shows that he has taken steps to centralise ideological production. However, the recent arrests of religious clerics in the Kingdom have also targeted Islamic constitutionalists. This has undermined Saudi Arabia's ability to combat violent extremism at the ideological level, because the number of influential religious figures taking on this role has become more limited. Moreover, it is unclear whether the Saudi Kingdom has a Plan B for maintaining regime legitimacy should its religious legitimation wane. The two-tier system seems set to prevail, with the Kingdom simultaneously taking the lead in the struggle against extremist thought and in spreading anti-Shi'a propaganda.

In Jordan and Morocco, the religious establishment has an important role in the countries' respective programmes to prevent violent extremism. Conversely, Islamic institutions have not been assigned a similar role in Lebanon, where the response to jihadism so far has been concentrated in the security sector. However, many Lebanese Islamic actors want to be recognised as allies in the struggle against violent extremism; they have common interests with Western and Arab governments in combating violent extremism.

However, in today's climate of government control over official religious institutions, state-led religious institutions lack popular legitimacy, not least in Lebanon. In order to successfully implement measures to prevent violent extremism, Islamic institutions should be granted more autonomy by their governments. Recent reforms have enabled Morocco to combine pluralism in the religious field with a continued strong influence of the religious establishment over the believers. Used cautiously, Morocco could serve as a model for Lebanon and other Arab countries seeking to reform their religious institutions and increase the state's efficiency in preventing violent extremism. Pluralism in the religious field, decentralisation and professionalism of the official religious institutions seem to be effective antidotes against violent extremism across national contexts. The attempts of governments to completely subordinate the religious sphere to their wills often lead to a backlash, because citizens often lose confidence in the official religious figures.

Full report

Can Islamic institutions be seen as allies in the struggle against violent extremism rather than as part of the problem? If so, what role can religious leaders and official Islamic institutions play in countering extremist thought?

Former UN Security General Ban Ki-moon's report titled *Strengthening the Role of Mediation in the Peaceful Settlement of Disputes, Conflict Prevention and Resolution* considers the potential contribution of religious actors and faith-based organisations in the prevention of violent extremism to be underutilised.[3] Such actors are often well connected at the local level, can increase local ownership over Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) efforts, and provide psychosocial support to vulnerable groups.[4]

Initially taken by surprise, Islamic institutions in the Arab world were for a long time unprepared to face the challenge of violent extremism.[5] Yet today, most Arab states actively use their official religious institutions to prevent or counter violent extremism.[6] Most notably, monarchies with inherited religious legitimacy have used this strategy, but Egypt's ancient Al-Azhar institution has also played a role. In 2014, Al-Azhar organised a conference that condemned violence and suggested steps to fight jihadism and religious extremism. However, religious and civil society organisations are calling on religious institutions to go beyond pure condemnation and instead clarify religious concepts, one by one, in order to challenge extremists and their interpretations of religion.

This report analyses the measures taken by Saudi Arabia, Morocco and Lebanon to strengthen official religious institutions in the prevention of violent extremism. These three cases are chosen because they illustrate different types of challenges that religious authorities may face in their work to prevent violent extremism.[7] Saudi Arabia and Morocco are traditional monarchies based upon the upholding of religious legitimacy, with ancient or centuries-old religious institutions. However, suicide attacks in both kingdoms (in 2003–2004) showed that they were not immune from jihadi terrorism. Both regimes responded by initiating a process of modernisation of domestic religious institutions.

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[3] United Nations General Assembly, *Strengthening the Role of Mediation in the Peaceful Settlement of Disputes, Conflict Prevention and Resolution*, *Report of the Secretary-General*, A/66/811 (25 June 2012), p. 16. Available from http://undocs.org/A/66/811.

[4] Melissa Nozell and Susan Hayward, 'Religious Leaders Countering Extremist Violence: How Policy Changes Can Help', United States Institute for Peace, 31 October 2014.

[5] Radwan El Sayyed, 'Religious Institutions and the Challenges of Extremism and Terrorism', in Beatrix Austin and Hans J. Giessmann (eds.), Transformative Approaches to Violent Extremism, Berhof Foundation, Handbook Dialogue No 13, 2018.

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] Unlike counter-terrorism, PVE focuses on prevention, and includes programmes such as promoting community resilience, moderation and social cohesion. In many European countries, such programmes rely on the welfare state, a municipality-driven multi-agency approach and NGOs. The *Action Plan of the UN Secretary-General to Prevent Violent Extremism* (December 2015) acknowledges that no clear definition of violent extremism exists. A challenge is that while violent extremism is not associated in principle with any religion, most actual programmes to prevent or combat violent extremism focus to a great extent on violent jihadism.

In Morocco, where strong religious institutions exist, the institutions have supported and been involved in much of the effort devoted to PVE. This work has included reviewing textbooks and curricula of Islamic studies programmes in state primary and middle schools and Islamic schools, as well as providing vocational training and capacity building for mosque imams.[8] Saudi Arabia's programme employing Wahabi clerics[9] to re-educate and rehabilitate jihadis in jail is well-known. However, recently, the Kingdom and other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries have opted to centralise religious discourse and create new institutions to fight extremism. Morocco and Saudi Arabia are also regional hegemons. Religious actors from Morocco and Saudi Arabia are integrated into their countries' soft power strategies, but have enough autonomy to play independent foreign policy roles in Europe, North Africa, the Sahel and the Middle East.

In Lebanon, only a domestic role is expected of the official Islamic institutions. However, they often fall short of fulfilling this role. Lebanon's sovereignty has often been undermined by external interferences. The weakness and inability of Lebanon's official Islamic institutions to defend the Levantine Shafi'i or Hanafi interpretations of Islam against Hanbali Salafism, exported from the Gulf countries, is just one example of this. Moreover, Lebanon is a case where official Sunni Islamic institutions were created by colonial powers, and thus lack historical credibility. Moreover, Lebanon has thus far taken a securitised approach to jihadism, which does not entail involving religious actors in PVE efforts.

There is unexploited potential in the strategy to involve state religious institutions in the struggle against violent extremism. Religious clerics in countries as different as Lebanon and Iraq explicitly say that they would like to be granted a more important and more autonomous role.[10] Yet across cases, the fact that official religious institutions lack credibility in the eyes of regular believers is a challenge. Moreover, measures to prevent violent extremism are inherently political and can only be understood in light of the more general balance of political forces in a country.

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[8] Ilan Berman, 'Morocco's Islamic Exports: The Counterterrorism Strategy Behind the Mohammed VI Institute for the Training of Imams', *Foreign Affairs,* 12 May 2016, available at https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2016-05-12/moroccos-islamic-exports.

[9] Wahabism is a term used by non-Saudis to refer to the non-political version of Salafism followed specifically by the Saudi clergy. Total obedience to the ruler (*wali al-'amr*) is a central tenet of this doctrine. Although Saudi Arabia used the term 'Wahabi' until the 1920s, it is today seen as derogatory, and the more general term 'Salafism' is used. David Commins, 'From Wahhabi to Salafi', in Bernard Haykel, Thomas Hegghammer and Stéphane Lacroix (eds.), *Saudi Arabia in Transition. Insights on Social, Political, Economic and Religious Change*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 151–166, at pp. 158–159.

Salafis are distinguished by their common doctrine ('*aqida*) centred on strict adherence to the principle of *tawhid* (the oneness of Allah) and their rejection of human reasoning and logic. Politicised 'activist' Salafis and jihadi Salafis oppose Wahabis (apolitical Salafis). Quintan Wiktorowicz, 'Anatomy of the Salafi Movement', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 29, 2006, pp. 207–239, at p. 207.

[10] Author's interviews with religious officials in Lebanon, December 2017, December 2018, and with religious officials in Iraq, October–November 2018.

'Authoritarian upgrading' and government control of the religious field

'Authoritarian upgrading' is a term coined by Steven Heydemann in 2007 to designate the adaptation of authoritarian governance structures to contemporary domestic and external pressure. The aim is to ensure regime resilience. One aspect of this is selective liberalisation of the economy, which enables a diversification of external alliances, for instance by becoming more acceptable to Western donors.[11] The strengthening of government control over religious activities may be considered another key, under-researched feature of this strategy.

Increased government control of religious activities often takes place under the pretence of preventing violent extremism, but also often aims to put pressure on domestic opponents, often electoral opponents of the regimes. Yet many cases have shown that when governments strengthen state control over the religious field, government-supported religious leaders lose legitimacy. This can lead to a backlash, as youths seek out alternatives to the official religious institutions. This paves the way for the fragmentation of the religious field and a world of underground movements in which violent actors may thrive. Poor governance and/or the weakness of the rule of law are key drivers of violent extremism in many Arab countries.[12]

The most famous example is when, after the reform of the Egyptian Al-Azhar in the 1950s, Egyptian clerics and imams became state employees, dependent on the government for their salaries.[13] Friday sermons vigorously defending then President Gamal Abdul Nasser's policies were famously faxed from the government to the head of Al-Azhar.[14] The institution's popularity plummeted, paving the way for the fragmentation of religious authority and the rise of violent groups such as al-Gamaa al-Islamiyya and al-Gihad.[15]

This paper shows how such strategies seeking to impose government control over the religious field have risen in importance since the rise of *Daesh* in 2014.[16] However, promoting professors of liberal theology to counter extremist thought does not necessarily help. Militants often join *Daesh* because they are specifically looking for and attracted by the radicalism of its ideology.[17]

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[11] Steven Heydemann, 'Upgrading Authoritarianism in the Arab World', Analysis paper, No 13, The Saban Centre for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, 2007, at p. 5.

[12] For a comparative study, see Luigi Narbone et al. (eds.), *Inside Wars: Local Dynamics of Conflicts in Syria and Libya*, Firenze: European University Institute, 2016.

[13] Malika Zeghal, *Gardiens de l'Islam. Les oulémas d'al-Azhar dans l'Égypte contemporain*, Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 1996, at pp. 98–113.

[14] For Friday sermons under President al-Sisi, see Emily Crane Linn, Nicholas Linn, 'Sisi's Islam', *Foreign Policy*, 2 June 2015; Ahmad Hidhi, 'Egypt's new plan: 1 weekly sermon for over 80 million Muslims', *al-Monitor*, 20 June 2016.

[15] Gilles Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt: The prophet and pharaoh*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.

[16] Daesh is an Arabic acronym used to designate the jihadi group *Islamic State in Syria and Iraq* (*al-dawla al-islamiyya f'ish-Sham wa'l-'iraq*).

[17] Olivier Roy, *Jihad and Death. The Global Appeal of the Islamic State*, London: Hurst, 2017. Radicalisation can be defined as a process of interaction between a social movement and the state, where the former gradually changes perceptions, and/or actions (often, embracing the use of violence). Donatella della Porta and Gary LaFree, 'Guest Editorial: Processes of Radicalization and De-radicalization', *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, 6(1), 2012, pp. 4–10, at pp. 6–7.

Academic discourses on Islam are likely to fall on deaf ears. The question of how to build a non-Salafi version of Islam, with popular credibility, is therefore timely.

Saudi Arabia: the gradual erosion of the Wahabi–Saud pact under MbS?

Since the rise of *Daesh*, Saudi Arabia has made significant efforts to fight jihadism at the domestic and international levels. These efforts also promote simultaneously Saudi national interests and propel MbS to the centre of Saudi and regional politics.

The history of the Counselling Programme and the Intellectual Security Campaign

The origin of Saudi counter-terrorism and PVE measures goes back to the 9/11 attacks in the United States. After it became known that 15 of the 19 hijackers were of Saudi nationality, US pressure forced the Kingdom to introduce political reforms and clamp down on the finances of Wahabi networks abroad.[18] Reforms accelerated after al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) struck inside the Kingdom in 2003–2004. Alongside a strong police and security offensive,[19] Saudi Wahabi scholars were given an important role in a Counselling Programme (*al-Munasaha*) aimed at re-educating Saudi jihadis in jail.[20] This programme, also known as the Advisory Committees, began inside several Saudi prisons under the leadership of Assistant Interior Minister for Security Affairs Mohamed bin Nayef (Interior Minister from 2012) after the first jihadi attacks in Saudi Arabia in 2003.[21] It involved theological debates with distinguished Saudi religious clerics, in addition to psychological counselling by psychologists and social workers, as well as art therapy. A separate Counselling Programme for Saudis from Shi'a families was also created, but only with psychotherapy and without the religious component.[22]

 The Counselling Programme does not address jihadism *per se*, but 'religious deviation' (*inhiraf)* and exaggeration or fanaticism (*ghuluw*) in religious practice.[23] These Qur'anic terms constitute the base of the Saudi approach to PVE more generally. Jihadis are seen as unguided youths, who need patronage and guidance. In other words, Wahabism, Saudi Arabia's state religion, is in itself not questioned, but is used as an instrument in the struggle against jihadism. The programme stresses the importance of full obedience to the ruler (*wali' al-amr*). It re-affirms the power of the monarch as a 'benevolent patron', who protects and guides zealous

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[18] F. Gregory Gause III, 'Saudi Arabia and the War on Terrorism', in Adam Garfinkle (ed.), *A Practical Guide to Winning the War on Terrorism*, Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2004.

[19] Mohamed M. Hafez, 'Radicalization in the Persian Gulf: Assessing the Potential of Islamist Militancy in Saudi Arabia and Yemen', in *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict. Pathways towards Terrorism and Genocide*, London: Routledge, 2008, pp. 1–19, at p. 10.

[20] Christopher Boucek, 'Extremist re-education and rehabilitation in Saudi Arabia', in Tore Bjørgo and John Horgan (eds.), *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement*, London: Routledge, 2009, pp. 212–223, at pp. 214–215; Thomas Hegghammer, 'There is nothing soft about Saudi counterterrorism', *Foreign Policy*, 11 March 2010, https://foreignpolicy.com/2010/03/11/there-is-nothing-soft-about-saudi-counterterrorism/.

[21] Mohamed bin Nayef was appointed crown prince in 2015, but removed from all his positions in 2017 when the order of succession was changed in MbS's favour.

[22] Informal discussion, Saudi researcher, place not disclosed, October 2018.

[23] Meijer et al., *Counter-terrorism Strategies in Indonesia, Algeria and Saudi Arabia*, at p. 142, 129.

youths back to the 'right path'. The programme increases the social power of conservative clerics over youths, and diverts attention away from potential shortcomings in governance, or socio-economic or cultural challenges, which could fuel political violence.

The programme's goal is repentance and reconversion. In concrete terms, the convicts should recognise the authority of the monarch as *wali' al-amr*.[24] By 2009, around 4900 persons were reported to have participated in the programme, including 1500 who were released from Saudi jails in 2007 and put under surveillance.[25] The programme is only open to those arrested for supporting terrorism who 'do not have blood on their hands'. It is divided into three pillars: prevention (*wiqaya*), rehabilitation (*ta'hil*) and recovery (*naqaha*). The Mohammed bin Nayef Counselling and Care Centre, an aftercare centre in Riyadh, has allegedly been able to reconvert many former Guantánamo Bay prisoners from jihadism.

Overall, despite some high-profile cases of recidivism,[26] the programme is deemed relatively successful, since it is credited for having ended the AQAP campaign inside Saudi Arabia (although it continued in Yemen).[27] However, there are no statistics, except for those provided by the Saudi government, and it is difficult to know whether the massive economic incentives on youths to disengage mean they actually abandon their former beliefs (deradicalization).[28] Indeed, many of those who pass the exam and are released are given material compensations, such as scholarships and paid weddings.[29]

The programme is difficult to export, since the use of Salafism to counter and prevent violent extremism is more easily conceivable in a state where (Wahabi) Salafism is the state religion.[30] The programme helps in institutionalising the boundaries of Saudi Arabia's Wahabi orthodoxy vis-à-vis Salafi jihadism and Muslim Brotherhood thought. It further re-asserts the theoretical ('scientific') grounds for the apolitical Salafism tradition as an ethic of normalcy.

A preventive campaign for the general public, dubbed Intellectual Security (*al-aman al-fikri*), was launched in 2005-2007. It aimed to raise awareness, immunise Saudi culture and society

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[24] Meijer et al., *Counter-terrorism Strategies in Indonesia, Algeria and Saudi Arabia*, at p. 142.
[25] Zina D. Merrit, *Combating Terrorism: U.S. Agencies Report Progress Combating Terrorism and Its Financing in Saudi Arabia, but Continued Focus on Counter Terrorism Financing Efforts Needed*, United States Government Accountability Office, GAO-09-883, September 2009.
[26] 'Saudi Shura member spots 'need' to revise terrorist rehab program', *Saudi Gazette*, reprinted in *al-Arabiyya*, 16 December 2014.
[27] M. Hafez, 'Radicalization in the Persian Gulf', p. 4. The recidivism rate in the aftercare centre was at about 20% overall (some figures report 14%), and was concentrated among those who had been detained at Guantánamo Bay. UN Human Rights Council, 'Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms while Countering Terrorism on his Mission to Saudi Arabia', 6 June 2018.
[28] For this debate, see Tore Bjørgo and John Horgan (eds), *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement*. London Routledge, 2009.
[29] Casptack, Andreas, 'Deradicalization Programs in Saudi Arabia: A Case Study', Middle East Institute, June 10, 2015, http://www.mei.edu/content/deradicalization-programs-saudi-arabia-case-study; 'Terrorist Rehab: Rare Look inside Saudi De-radicalization Programme', *CBS This Morning*, 19 November 2014, https://youtu.be/JupSK4odKWQ.
[30] However, since 2014, many Arab and European countries, as well as the US, have become increasingly concerned with the spread of hate speech and radicalisation in jails and have engaged more Muslim chaplains.

from threats to Islam and deviant thought, and protect youths.[31] Like the Counselling Programme, it also involved religious clerics, like the religious police, religious personnel in charge of Friday sermons and of Qur'an memorisation, who were told that they had an important role to play in spreading moderate thought and detecting early signs of extremism. Moreover, 'successful' rehabilitees from the Counselling Programme were co-opted by the government and actively used in general prevention.

The Intellectual Security Campaign has an academic component: the Mohamed bin Nayef Chair in Intellectual Security Studies was opened at King Saud University in 2008, and many international academic conferences on intellectual security are held.[32] 'Intellectual security' has become a field of academic study. In this (mainly Saudi) discourse, 'deviant thought' is seen as the main cause of terrorism, and 'intellectual security' as the remedy.[33] Emphasis is put on the Islamic 'middle way' (*wasatiyya*) and the need to obey the ruler. The campaign targets youths because around 70% of the Saudi population is under the age of 30, and this category is also over-represented among perpetrators of political violence in the Kingdom.

However, the categories of 'threats to Islam', 'deviant thought' and 'intellectual terrorism' are not clearly defined. Although often used for jihadi terrorism, it also includes ideological opponents of the Kingdom, like the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood. The aim of the Intellectual Security Programme is to strengthen 'true' Salafi thought and promote the 'security of the nation' and national unity.

The Intellectual Awareness Programme continued under King Salman (2015-), and has been used to warn students at the Imam Muhammad Bin Saud Islamic University against extremist preachers and even so-called 'terrorist groups', such as the moderate Muslim Brotherhood organisation and the Lebanese Shi'a Hizbullah.[34] Moreover, the National Dialogue Forum, first launched in 2003 to promote national unity and address demands for constitutional reform, has continued.[35] Spearheaded by then Crown Prince Abdallah to improve the international reputation of Saudi Arabia after 9/11, the annual dialogue meetings brought together representatives of the Saudi *Sahwa* Movement, Sufis and Shi'a religious clerics.[36] They are considered to have played an important role in the growing acknowledgment of pluralism in Saudi society and culture. They were led by the King Abdul Aziz Centre for National Dialogue

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[31] Meijer et al., *Counter-terrorism Strategies in Indonesia, Algeria and Saudi Arabia*, at p. 138.

[32] 'Saudi Arabia's Religious Counter-Terrorist Discourse', Middle East Institute, 15 February 2015, http://www.mei.edu/publications/saudi-arabias-religious-counter-terrorist-discourse.

[33] Zina D. Merrit, *Combating Terrorism: U.S. Agencies Report Progress Combating Terrorism and Its Financing in Saudi Arabia, but Continued Focus on Counter Terrorism Financing Efforts Needed*, United States Government Accountability Office, GAO-09-883, September 2009.

[34] 'Imam University warns students, staff against extremist preachers', *Saudi Gazette*, 26 March 2018, http://saudigazette.com.sa/article/531337.

[35] Abdul Hanan Tago, 'National dialogue on extremism launched', *Arab News*, 1 January 2015.

[36] Stéphane Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011, p. 244. The *Sahwa* ('Awakening') movement was a Saudi social conservative Muslim Brotherhood-inspired political opposition movement, which criticised the House of Saud for its decision, during the 1990-1991 Gulf War, to accept a large contingent of US troops on its soil. Several high profile personalities, like Salman al-Awda and Safar al-Hawali, were arrested in 1994 and rehabilitated in 1999. (However, see below for more on their arrests in 2017 and 2018).

(KACND) and its head Sheikh Abdullah al-Mutlaq, a member of the Council of Senior Islamic Scholars. The topic in 2015 was 'Extremism and its Effects on National Unity'.

The Council of Senior Islamic Scholars frequently condemns terrorism, and has issued *fatwas* forbidding Saudis to travel to fight in Iraq and Syria.[37] Moreover, the government has taken measures to standardise (though not unify, like in Egypt) Friday sermons.[38] Mosque imams are monitored, and those who do not comply are sent for further training.[39] In addition, the religious curricula in Saudi primary and middle schools has been reformed. The US State Department pressured the government to remove the concept of *al-wala wa'l-bara* from Saudi textbooks. (This is the idea that Muslims should disavow themselves from any authority that is not in conformity with [the Wahabi interpretation of] Islam). Yet critics say there is room for a more extensive overhaul.[40] Western PVE experts have also called on the Kingdom to review copies of the Qur'an being distributed by Saudi NGOs.[41]

Preventing violent extremism in the Kingdom under King Salman

The Saudi Counselling Programme survived the 2017 demise of its founder, the once-powerful Prince Mohamed bin Nayef. Yet, after a royal decree in February 2014, *Daesh* members who have returned from Syria are not given the option of joining the rehabilitation programme. They are sent to a regular jail for a minimum of three years.[42]

In a bid for power centralisation, Saudi PVE efforts since the rise of MbS have side-lined most of the Saudi religious establishment. MbS's decision to create new, *ad hoc* institutions to combat violent extremism outside of the state religious institutions shows that he has taken steps to centralise ideological production. Notable here is the Global Centre for Combating Extremist Ideology, inaugurated in Riyadh during US President Donald Trump's visit in May 2017; in addition to the Saudi-led so-called 'Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition'. These new institutions for combatting violent extremism have been placed under the Ministry of Defence, linking them directly to MbS.[43]

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[37] Nabil Mouline, 'Enforcing and Reinforcing the State's Islam: The Functioning of the Committee of Senior Scholars', in Haykel, Hegghammer and Lacroix (eds.), *Saudi Arabia in Transition*, pp. 48–70, at p. 63.
[38] Afshin Shahi, *The Politics of Truth Management in Saudi Arabia*, London: Routledge, 2013, Chapter 3;
[39] Hafez, 'Radicalization in the Persian Gulf', at p. 11.
[40] Kelly McEvers, 'Angry teachers and empty libraries', *Slate*, 9 September 2009, https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2009/09/angry-teachers-and-empty-libraries.html; 'Statement of Ms. Leanne Erdberg, director, Countering Violent Extremism, U.S. Institute of Peace, Hearing Leanne Erdberg, 'Grading Counterterrorism Cooperation with the GCC States', Washington D. C.: United States Institute for Peace', Joint Hearing before the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade and the Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, 115 Congress, second session, 26 April 2018, accessible at: https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-115hhrg29967/pdf/CHRG-115hhrg29967.pdf.
[41] John Hanna, 'Elephants in the Room. Saudi Arabia can Win Islam's War of Ideas', *Foreign Policy*, 15 March 2018, https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/03/15/saudi-arabia-can-win-islams-war-of-ideas/#.
[42] Caryle Murphy, 'Saudi Arabia tries to keep the Islamic State from recruiting its youth', Agence France Press, 2 March 2015, https://www.pri.org/stories/2015-03-02/saudi-arabia-tries-keep-islamic-state-recruiting-its-youth.
[43] Between 2015 and 2017, MbS was deputy crown prince and defence minister of the Kingdom, while his rival, Mohamed bin Nayef, controlled the Ministry of Interior and was crown prince.

The Centre for Combating Extremist Ideology, also known as *Etidal* (Moderation), monitors jihadism online. It closes down websites and promotes counter-narratives built on universalistic values such as the idea of human dignity and a common humanity. The Islamic component appears relatively superficial. In the glossy publications of the centre, slogans of 'positive thinking' trump theological references. We may therefore ask: are such publications primarily addressed to Western public audiences, as public relations material for the 'new Saudi model', or do they (also) cater for Saudi citizens?

Although it is difficult to establish a clear answer here, Saudi clerics are not at the forefront of *Etidal*. The centre created a supreme ideological council of twelve Muslim scholars from different countries. From the Saudi scene, only the most loyal palace *ulama* are involved. In 2017, a committee was established by royal decree to monitor the use of *ahadith* (the sayings or actions of the Prophet) by Islamic preachers.[44] Instead of involving the Saudi religious clerics, like the Council of Senior Islamic Scholars, it also involved a council of Islamic scholars from around the world.[45]

The status of the Saudi clergy not only constitutes a salient domestic issue, it has foreign policy implications as well. Saudi religious scholars are key players in the propagation of Wahabi Islam worldwide. Historically, the House of Saud has given the clergy a right to organise a Saudi 'religious diplomacy', a source of Saudi Arabian soft power which complements and sometimes contradicts the Saudi foreign policies fronted by the various princes.[46]

The main Saudi cleric in *Etidal* is Mohamed al-Issa, head of the Muslim World League (MWL). This Saudi-led NGO controls mosques and Islamic institutions on five continents, including five large Islamic centres in Europe.[47] This is a source of Saudi Arabian soft power. While the heads of the MWL supported jihad in Afghanistan in the 1980s (as did the USA),[48] representatives today condemn violence in the name of Islam. Former Secretary-General Abdallah al-Turki stated in 2015, 'The terrorism that we face within the Muslim *Ummah* and our own homelands today … is religiously motivated. It has been founded on extremism, and the misconception of some distorted *shari'a* concept.'[49]

Al-Issa (b. 1965), a former justice minister, took over the MWL in 2016. He is a voice calling for moderation and tolerance inside and outside Saudi Arabia, and a trusted religious envoy of

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[44] Robert Spencer, 'Saudi Arabia to monitor use of Muhammad's sayings in order to counter jihad terrorism', *JihadWatch*, 22 October 2017, https://www.jihadwatch.org/2017/10/saudi-arabia-to-monitor-use-of-muhammads-sayings-in-order-to-counter-jihad-terrorism.

[45] This is not the first time that the House of Saud has turned to *ulama* in the Muslim world instead of Saudi clerics. King Abdallah requested international Islamic opinion in 2005 after the Council of Senior Islamic Scholars refused to authorise expanding a section of the Great Mosque in Mecca to welcome more pilgrims. Mouline, 'Enforcing and reinforcing the State's Islam', at p. 66.

[46] 'What do you mean by the paradoxes of Saudi 'Religious diplomacy'? Stéphane Lacroix', interview by MEDirections, 16 November 2017, https://youtu.be/GqXZH6jxjCA.

[47] Founded in 1962 to promote Islamic solidarity and oppose communism, the MWL is an example of early cooperation between Saudi Wahabi *ulama* and representatives of the Egyptian and Syrian Muslim Brotherhood.

[48] Thomas Hegghammer, 'The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters: Islam and the Globalization of Jihad', *International Security*, 35:3, Winter 2010/2011:53–94, at p. 80.

[49] Edward Delman, 'An anti-ISIS summit in Mecca', *The Atlantic*, 25 February 2015.

MbS to the West. He visited the Vatican in Rome and the Grand Synagogue in Paris in late 2017, and accompanied MbS to the US in March 2018, where he held a public speech at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.[50] Moreover, he issued an unprecedented letter condemning the denial of the Holocaust.[51] Al-Issa, like Saudi Arabia, upholds that terrorism does not hail from one particular school of thought.[52]

In Europe, the recent MWL promises of reforms have been followed up by concrete actions. Following a controversy that started after the 2016 Brussels attack, Saudi Arabia accepted that the MWL should cede control of the Great Mosque of Brussels to the Belgian authorities. In Geneva, Saudi Arabia recently (March 2018) accepted the replacement of a Saudi Salafi preacher with a former Saudi diplomat. These changes were also fuelled by the demands of European counter-terrorism agencies. The response from Riyadh highlights the eagerness of the Saudi crown prince for a good international reputation, and possibly, hopes of increased Western investment in the Kingdom.

Within the Middle East, however, the Saudi discourse of moderation has been less obvious, at least so far. In the Levant for instance (see below), many Saudi-sponsored religious schools are not funded by the Saudi monarchy itself, but by Saudi private individuals. Such institutions promote a more politicised form of Salafism.

Extremist thought has been spread in the Middle East as a side-effect of the Iranian–Saudi regional struggle. Saudi Arabia and Iran are both doing their best to mobilise their fellow Sunni and Shi'a believers. Wahabi preachers returned as important Saudi foreign policy actors after 2005, when they were used to oppose Iranian influence in the Middle East, Lebanon in particular.[53]

So far, Saudi Arabia, like Iran, has seen its competition with Iran as being more important to its interests than the struggle against *Daesh*. This has been viewed as a major challenge in the global fight against violent extremism. Saudi Arabia's Sheikh Rabi' al-Madkhali employs Islamic precepts, and anti-Shi'ism, to justify the war in Yemen, with all its horrific humanitarian consequences.[54] He also gives ideological support to Salafi fighting groups in Libya – just as the Saudi state used anti-Shi'ism to legitimise the GCC intervention in Bahrain in 2011. Sheikh al-Madkhali belongs to a current of thought that was supported by the Kingdom in the 1990s

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[50] 'Toward a More Moderate and Tolerant Islam: A Conversation with Dr. Mohammed Al-Issa', The Washington Institute, 15 May 2018. https://youtu.be/H69ylaO1JwY.

[51] John Hanna, 'Elephants in the Room. Saudi Arabia can Win Islam's War of Ideas', *Foreign Policy*, 15 March 2018, https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/03/15/saudi-arabia-can-win-islams-war-of-ideas/#.

[52] 'Mohamed al-Issa, head of a Saudi-based Islamic organisation on terrorist ideology', *Al Arabiya English*, 27 November 2017, https://youtu.be/nKuK4nFQAW8.

[53] Tine Gade, *Return to Tripoli: Battle over Minds and Meaning amongst Religious Leaders within the Islamist Field in Tripoli (Lebanon)*, FFI report, Kjeller, Norway, March 2009, 97–99.

[54] 'Conseil aux gens du Yémen. Sheikh Rab'i al-Madkhali', speech given on 26 March 2015, transcribed and translated by Salafislam.fr. http://salafislam.fr/conseil-aux-gens-du-yemen-sheikh-rabi-al-madkhali/; 'Advice to Ahl us-Sunnah in Yemen Regarding the Rafidah – Sheikh Muhammad al-Madkhali', 18 February 2017, https://youtu.be/g6E2vCEEAQM.

against the Muslim Brotherhood-inspired *Sahwa* Movement.[55] He distinguishes himself by his anti-political stance and his insistence on the need to support the ruler (*wali' al-amir*) to avoid chaos. Yet this 'apoliticism' is only really possible inside the Kingdom, if at all (depending on our definition of the 'political').[56] In countries as different as Lebanon, Iraq and the UK, religious clerics close to Sheikh al-Madkhali's line play a divisive role in their local societies.[57]

Saudi Arabia has made several attempts to organise an Islamic Military Coalition against *Daesh*. The most recent was in December 2015, when it spearheaded the Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition of 41 Muslim-majority countries against *Daesh*, with Iran notably absent. Closer scrutiny shows that this is as much a pact against Iran as one against jihadism, and the definition of terrorism used by the coalition extends to Iranian-sponsored groups such as Hizbullah.

Is the Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition another Saudi attempt to reconstitute a broad Sunni platform? It is difficult for Saudi Arabia to fight an internal Sunni war while it also opposes Iran. One option would be to open up to other (non-Wahabi) Islamic trends, and establish a common cause with the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist movements against the Islamic Republic of Iran. Yet, the 2017 Gulf crisis between Qatar and other GCC members showed that Saudi Arabia also deems it advantageous to exacerbate intra-Sunni divisions. The official line is that Saudi Arabia sees Qatar (and the Muslim Brotherhood organisations more broadly) as being allies of Iran, and plotting against Saudi interests inside and outside the Kingdom.[58]

A new role for the Saudi clergy?

The new Saudi counter-terrorism measures cannot be understood in isolation from the context of the on-going transformation of the Saudi social contract.[59] Since being appointed deputy crown prince in 2015, and then crown prince in 2017, MbS has held power at the centre. For instance, he kept a dozen cabinet ministers and influential princes under house arrest in an alleged anti-corruption drive in 2017. In 2016, he launched Saudi Vision 2030, a policy of ambitious economic and social reforms aimed at diversifying the Kingdom's dependence on oil and attracting more foreign investment. Importantly, MbS has vowed to modernise the Saudi religious field. He has launched a narrative according to which the 'original' Saudi 'moderate

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[55] Stéphane Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011, at p. 212.
[56] Laurent Bonnefoy, 'L'illusion apolitique: adaptations, évolutions et instrumentalisations du salafisme yéménite', in Bernard Rougier (ed.), *Qu'est-ce que le Salafisme ?*, Paris: PUF, 2008.
[57] Author's interview with social activists in Lebanon 2008-2017, Kurdish region of Iraq 2016-2018, Oslo 2018.
[58] Informal discussion, Saudi researcher, place not disclosed, October 2018.
[59] See Stig Stenslie, 'The End of Elite Unity and the Stability of Saudi Arabia', *The Washington Quarterly*, 41:1, 61–80, at pp. 73–75.

Islam' was distorted after the 1979 capture of the Great Mosque in Mecca by Saudi Islamist dissidents,[60] and now needs to be restored.[61]

However, the Saudi religious field is more diverse than often believed. The Saudi religious establishment never fully recovered from the death of former Grand Mufti Ibn Baz, a highly respected figure, in 1999, and of Ibn Uthaymin in 2001.[62] The current grand mufti, Abdul-Aziz ibn Abdallah Al ash-Sheikh, is considered a more servile ally to the House of Saud.[63] Moreover, King Abdallah initiated political and religious reforms in 2005, and protected reformist scholars and intellectuals against conservatives.[64] Greater space for free expression paved the way for new voices to be heard, even resulting in the religious establishment becoming divided on polarising issues such as gender segregation.

Some Saudi clerics have taken reformist positions on ending gender segregation, the ban on female driving (formally lifted on June 2018) and on allowing 'Western' types of entertainment such as concerts and cinema. Another example is Sheikh Suleiman al-Turaifi, a retired employee from the Saudi Ministry of Islamic Affairs, *Dawah* and Guidance, who has called for an overhaul of the Saudi school curriculum.[65]

However, in 2016, MbS moved to cut some of the clergy's traditional prerogatives, such as the ability of the religious police to apprehend people on the streets.[66] Arrests have targeted very prominent religious figures, including political reformists such as Salman al-Awda, who supported the 2011 Arab uprisings, and Islamic constitutionalists. [67] In July 2018, they also extended to religious critics of Saudi foreign policies, like Safar al-Hawali.[68] These figures played an important role in condemning jihadism in Saudi Arabia in the 2000s.[69]

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[60] See Thomas Hegghammer and Stéphane Lacroix, 'Rejectionist Islamism in Saudi Arabia, the Story of Juhayman al-'Utaybi Revisited', in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 2007-02, Vol. 39, No 1, pp. 103–122; Madawi al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State: Islamic Voices from a New Generation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, at p. 106.

[61] Martin Chulov, 'I will return Saudi Arabia to moderate Islam, says crown prince', *The Guardian*, 24 October 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/24/i-will-return-saudi-arabia-moderate-islam-crown-prince.

[62] Stéphane Lacroix, 'Between Islamists and Liberals: Saudi Arabia's New "Islamo-Liberal" Reformists', *Middle East Journal*, 58: 3, Summer 2004, pp. 345–365, at p. 346.

[63] Bernard Haykel, Thomas Hegghammer and Stéphane Lacroix, 'Introduction', in Haykel, Hegghammer and Lacroix (eds.), *Saudi Arabia in Transition*, 1–10, at p. 5.

[64] Eman Alhussein, 'Reforming the Religious Discourse in Saudi Arabia (2001-2010)', In Shahram Akbarzadeh (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Political Islam*, London: Routledge, 2012, pp. 179–190, at p. 187.

[65] Eman Alhussein, *The Enlightened Sheikhs of the New Saudi Arabia*, the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, 27 June 2018, https://agsiw.org/the-enlightened-sheikhs-of-the-new-saudi-arabia/.

[66] Lacroix, Stéphane, 'En Arabie Saoudite, modernisation de l'autoritarisme. Vague d'arrestations et révolutions de palais', *Orient XXI*, 25 September 2017.

[67] For the rise of the constitutionalist trend, see Stéphane Lacroix, 'L'Arabie Saoudite, entre violence et réforme', *Politique étrangère*, 2004, 69:4, pp. 743–754.

[68] Abdullah al-Aoudh, 'State-sponsored Fatwas in Saudi Arabia', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 3 April 2018, https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/75971. 'Saudi "seeks death penalty" for Muslim scholar Salman al-Awdah', *al-Jazeera*, 5 September 2018, http://aje.io/vkth5.

[69] Stéphane Lacroix, 'Understanding Stability and Dissent in the Kingdom. The Double-Edged Role of the *Jama'at* in Saudi Politics', in Haykel, Hegghammer and Lacroix (eds.), *Saudi Arabia in Transition: Insights on Social, Political, Economic and Religious* Change, pp. 167–180, at pp. 177–178.

Is this tendency towards state centralisation and control over the religious field, as seen in Egypt and elsewhere, reproducing itself in the Kingdom? Such political subjugation of Islam rarely occurs without a backlash. The recent arrests of reformist religious clerics and intellectuals and the clamp-down on the freedom of speech in Saudi Arabia have in fact stalled the discussion on reform of religious discourse. Moreover, the arrests undermine Saudi Arabia's ability to combat violent extremism at the ideological level, because the number of influential religious figures able to take on this role becomes more limited.[70]

The principle of full loyalty to the ruler in all circumstances (*wali al-'amr*) is a central tenet of Wahabism, on which Saudi state (and regime) legitimacy is built. This religious principle explains why Saudi society has remained relatively apolitical. 'Palace clerics' have actively provided religious justification for the Kingdom's policies, including unpopular measures.[71]

Does the Kingdom have a Plan B for maintaining political loyalty from its citizens, should its religious legitimation wane?

Expressions of Saudi nationalism (or 'hyper-nationalism'), like the celebrations of the National Day, have grown in the two recent years.[72] However, this discourse, a recent development, is relatively shallow and will probably be insufficient to bridge the gaps in Saudi society.[73] Thus, whether the Kingdom can find other sources of political legitimacy outside of Wahabism will ultimately depend on the health of the Saudi economy. In this respect, the abrupt delay, in August 2018, of Aramco's initial public offering (IPO) to 2021, blackened the hopes of success for the Vision 2030 reforms.[74]

Moreover, at the global level, Saudi Arabia may risk losing some of its religious strength among Muslims outside the Kingdom. Indeed, the apparent political centralisation and instrumentalisation of the religious field is unpopular among some Muslims, at least in Europe.[75] This may play to the advantage of more politicised strands of Salafism.

To summarise, the Kingdom has maintained a two-tier system in which the Saudi crown prince can officially claim to be promoting 'modernity' and tolerance, while at the same time using the conservative clergy to mollify certain constituencies and counter Iranian influence at the regional level. For example, the new school textbooks still condemn Shi'a and Sufi practices

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[70] For a study of influential female preachers in Saudi Arabia, see: Laila Makboul, 'Beyond Preaching Women: Saudi *Dāʿiyāt* and Their Engagement in the Public Sphere', *Die Welt des Islams*, 2017, 57 (3-4), pp. 303–328.

[71] Ibn Baz's *fatwa* sanctioning the US military presence in Saudi Arabia after 1991 is one example. Stéphane Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011, at p. 268.

[72] Eman Elhussein, 'Filling the Void (2): Saudi Nationalism', blog article posted on 22 September 2018, http://emanalhussein.com/2018/09/22/filling-the-void-2-nationalism/.

[73] Haykel, Hegghammer and Lacroix, 'Introduction', at p. 5.

[74] See, for instance, Madawi al-Rasheed, 'The slow, dangerous implosion of Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman', *Newsweek*, 14 September 2018, https://www.newsweek.com/slow-implosion-saudi-crown-prince-muhammad-bin-salman-opinion-1120224.

[75] 'Sheikh Sudais heckled in Geneva, for closeness to Trump', *Middle East Eye*, 2 July 2018, https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/saudi-imam-heckled-geneva-how-can-you-lecture-us-about-peace-957332750.

and rituals.[76] While new institutions that aim to combat extremist thought are being created, a profound theological liberalisation does not seem to be on the cards, at least not yet.

Morocco: a 'model' in the fight against *Daesh*?

There are at least four key characteristics of the relationship between the state and the religious field in Morocco: the legitimacy of state institutions; the effective role of state religious institutions in the prevention of violent extremism; the predominance of the Maliki tradition; and the inclusivity (or pluralism) of the Moroccan religious field .

The religious credentials of the Alaoui royal dynasty, which has ruled Morocco since 1666, comes from its recognition as Sharifian (descending from the Prophet Mohamed) through the prestigious lineage of Ali Ibn Abi Talib and the Prophet's daughter Fatima. Furthermore, the monarch carries the title Commander of the Faithful (*amir al-mu'minin*) (Article 41 of the Constitution) and is considered the sole authority of Islam in the country. Morocco remained independent during the Ottoman era, and, unlike in French Algeria (1830–1961) or in the French protectorate of Tunisia (1881–1956), Moroccan state structures were maintained during the French protectorate (1912–1956).

Although the 2011 constitutional reforms gave the largest party in parliament the right to form a government, control of the *Habous* (Endowment) and Islamic Affairs Ministry has remained a Crown prerogative. It is considered a sovereign ministry, alongside the ministries of defence and of the interior.[77] Although the government has been led by the Islamist PJD (Justice and Development Party) since 2012, the *Makhzen* remains in charge of the state religious institutions.[78] It relied on Salafi-leaning personnel in the past, but this changed after Mohamed VI ascended to the throne (1999). In 2002, he appointed Ahmed Toufiq, a Sufi-oriented university professor in history and former director of the Institute of African Studies at Mohammed V University of Rabat-Agdal, to head the Ministry of Islamic Affairs.[79] Toufiq is considered relatively secular – he has been called a 'secular extremist' by Abdelhamid Abounaim, a vocal Moroccan Salafi figure, who has been charged several times for inciting violence.[80]

In the wake of the 2003 Casablanca attacks, King Mohamed VI reformed and strengthened the official religious institutions. Two new units were created within the Ministry of Islamic

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[76] '"They Are Not Our Brothers". Hate Speech by Saudi Officials', Human Rights Watch, September 2017. See also: Toby Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf: Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the Arab Spring That Wasn't,* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013, at p. 127.

[77] Inmaculada Szmolka, 'Inter- and intra-party relations in the formation of the Benkirane coalition governments in Morocco', *The Journal of North African Studies*, 2015, 20:4, pp. 654–674, at p. 663.

[78] *Makhzen* (literally 'warehouse') is the name given to the power apparatus close to the Moroccan king and his circles, as well as the government entrusted with providing state services to ensure its administrative functioning. In practice, *Makhzen* therefore means the political establishment or the Moroccan 'deep state'. Mohamed Daadaoui, *Moroccan Monarchy and the Islamist Challenge. Maintaining Makhzen Power*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p. 46.

[79] Cédric Baylocq and Aziz Hlaoua, 'Spreading a "Moderate Islam'? Morocco's New African Religious Diplomacy', *Afrique contemporaine*, 257:1, pp. 108–121, at p. 113.

[80] 'Moroccan Court Charges Salafi Abdelhamid Abounaim for Inciting Violence', *Morocco World News*, 4 January 2019, https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2019/01/262454/moroccan-salafi-abdelhamid-abounaim-violence/.

Affairs: one for the supervision of mosques and religious personnel, and another charged with reforming religious education. These reforms aimed to institutionalise and better regulate religious activities in Morocco – sometimes at the expense of expediency to the *Makhzen*.[81] Moreover, the role of the Supreme *Ulama* Council (*ar-Rabita al-Mohamediyya*), the authority to issue *fatwas*, was strengthened. The same was true for local *Ulama* Councils in the Moroccan provinces. At least publicly, the ministry took an inclusive approach, including imams close to the PJD into some of the councils. In addition, some imams were provided with motorcycles so as to appear 'cool', and to travel to meet young people and deconstruct extremist discourse.[82] Current projects aim to better use the potential for economic profit in the *Habous*, and to build Islamic libraries and cultural centres open to the public in Moroccan cities to upgrade religious education.

Subjects such as history, philosophy, comparative religion and foreign languages were early on included in the curriculum of Islamic preachers.[83] A pilot project has been the 'Mohamed VI Institute for the Training of Imams, *Mourchidines and Mourchidates*', inaugurated in 2015. It trains nearly 1000 imams from Morocco, Europe, Africa and the Middle East at spacious and modern facilities, and students are fully funded. The guiding principles of the new institute are to show the intent, tolerance, moderation and balance provided in *shari'a* law.[84] An important novelty is that degrees have been made accessible to women, who can become female religious guides certified by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs. The *Mourchidates*, as they are called, are today active in Moroccan prisons, hospitals and youth centres.[85] Trained to promote tolerant Islam, the *Mourchidates* engage in dialogue with women on the topic of radicalisation.

The Mohamed V University in Rabat-Agdal is one of the first in the Arab world where *shari'a* is taught within a department of Sociology, physically integrating secular and religious scholars into the same environment.[86] Yet despite this 'best practice', meaningful scholarly interaction between professors of Religious Sciences and Social Sciences / Humanities is said to have remained limited.

Could the pragmatic Maliki tradition partly explain the relative successes of religious reforms in Morocco? The Moroccan and Tunisian approach to Qur'an teaching puts emphasis on 'Contemporary Fiqh' (*fiqh al-waqi'*) (contemporary Islamic jurisprudence). Students examine the intention of the text, not only its literary sense. Harmonious co-existence between all

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[81] Mohamed Masbah, 'The Limits of Morocco's Attempt to Comprehensively Counter Violent Extremism', Middle East Brief, No 118, Waltham: MA: Brandeis University, May 2018.
[82] *Ibid.*
[83] Assia Bensalah Alaoui, 'Moroccco's Security Strategy: Preventing Terrorism and Countering Extremism', *European View*, 16:103–120, at p. 109.
[84] Cédric Baylocq and Aziz Hlaoua, 'Spreading a "Moderate Islam"? Morocco's New African Religious Diplomacy', *Afrique contemporaine*, 257:1, pp. 108–121, at p. 113.
[85] Krista London Couture, 'A Gendered Approach to Countering Violent Extremism. Lessons Learned from Women in Peacebuilding and Conflict Prevention Applied Successfully in Bangladesh and Morocco', policy paper, Centre for 21st Century Security and Intelligence, Brookings, July 2014, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Women-CVE-Formatted-72914-Couture-FINAL2.pdf, at pp. 30-33.
[86] Prof. Sari Hanafi, statements during NUPI–IFI seminar in Beirut, 2 December 2017.

members of society, including non-Muslims, is considered to be an essential goal.[87] Although Contemporary Fiqh can also be found in other contexts, the North African model focuses more on rationalism and logic, preparing students for critical thinking. This is at least the idea that the *Makhzen* wants to sell abroad, to promote itself as a model in the prevention of violent extremism and to counter Salafi groups at home.[88]

Unlike academic forms of Islamic theological reformism ('reform-Islam'), Sufism (like Salafism) has a popular following outside elite levels. Yet Sufism does not equal apoliticism: the Sufi-inspired 'Justice and Spirituality' Movement (*al-Adl wa'l-Ihsan*, hereafter: *al-Adl*) is probably the largest Islamist movement in Morocco, outstripping the Muslim Brotherhood-inspired PJD and the Salafi trend. *Al-Adl* does not participate in elections, but it has been a vocal critic of the social and foreign policies in the Kingdom. Importantly, it never questions the religious basis of the royal dynasty.[89]

Moroccan Sufi networks, like the *Tidjania* are also very powerful, and extend far into the Sahel. Morocco has a foreign policy interest in controlling these solidarity networks. Currently, many of these Moroccan-born brotherhoods rival the Saudi-sponsored influence of the Salafis in the Sahel.

Morocco promotes itself, together with Spain, as a bridge for cultural understanding between Europe and the Islamic world, using the history of *Al-Andalus* (Islamic Iberia). Morocco's religious diplomacy is very active in the Sahel and West Africa. Rabat has been training French imams in an interim period; the idea is for France to develop its own training centres.

In 2014, the Islamic Affairs Ministry received requests from eight West African countries to train their imams in counter extremist thought. It has signed a religious cooperation agreement with Mali, to train 500 of its imams at the new institute in Rabat. The Moroccan investment in this can be explained by its regional ambitions and overall foreign policy, as well as economic interests.[90] However, religious training from Moroccan institutions does not always yield popularity in Mali, or help clerics secure jobs as mosque imams.[91]

In the years following the 2003 Casablanca attacks, many Salafi figures, including non-violent ones, were arrested or driven into exile.[92] However, Morocco has also taken an inclusive approach to Salafism: it has pardoned Salafi jihadis by royal decree on several occasions, most

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[87] See, for instance, Doris H. Gray, 'Between Islamism and Feminism, a Third Way', Chapter 11 in Bruce Maddy Weitzman and Daniel Zisenwine (eds.), *Contemporary Morocco: State, Politics and Society Under Mohammmed VI*, London: Routledge, 2012, at p. 143.

[88] Baylocq and Hlaoua, 'Spreading a "Moderate Islam"?', at p. 110.

[89] Avi Max Spiegel, 'Morocco', in Shadi Hamid and William McCant, *Rethinking Political Islam*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2017, 54–72, at p. 66.

[90] Salim Hmimnat, '"Spiritual Security" as a (Meta-)Political Strategy to Compete over Regional Leadership: Formation of Morocco's Transitional Religious Policy towards Africa', *The Journal of North African Studies*, 2018, pp. 1-39, at p. 7.

[91] I am grateful to Morten Bøås for this observation.

[92] Mohammed Masbah, 'Salafi Movements and the Political Process in Morocco', in Francesco Cavatorta and Fabio Merone (eds.), *Salafism after the Arab Awakening: Contending with People's Power*, London: Hurst, 2016, at p. 88.

recently in 2015.[93] Prominent Salafi jihadis have disengaged from violence, including Mohamed al-Fazazi, a Salafi sheikh who was sentenced to 30 years imprisonment in 2003 for having 'instigated' and 'praised' violence. He was pardoned in 2011 (two months after the 20 February protests began); becoming more pragmatic, in 2014 he led prayers before King Mohamed VI.[94] Moreover, Mohamed al-Maghraoui, in exile in Saudi Arabia since the Casablanca attacks, has been allowed to return. Al-Fazazi, al-Maghraoui and others have founded faith-based NGOs and Islamic schools, while some former Salafi jihadi prisoners now profess adherence to the Maliki school.[95] Moroccan Salafis would like to create a political party based on the model of the Egyptian al-Nour party, but it is uncertain how the Moroccan public would react to this. Moreover, such a development might provoke a split in the PJD, to the benefit of the *Makhzen*. Morocco promotes itself as a model in the fight against *Daesh*, but several shortcomings in its general approach to PVE have been noted, in particular the role granted to the security sector at the expense of addressing poverty.[96] The low degree of coordination with neighbouring Algeria is also seen as a weakness in the Moroccan approach, given the often transnational outlook of radical groups, and the need for multilateral initiatives.[97] Moreover, the necessity of the strict supervision of mosques is questioned by some researchers, on the grounds that radicalization in Morocco is believed to be more prominent online and in jails than in mosques.[98] Morocco today is also facing its own problems of the Salafisation of the Maliki doctrine.[99]

Morocco is among the top exporters of foreign fighters to Syria and Iraq. According to Moroccan intelligence agencies, by late 2014 approximately 1190 persons had left Morocco to join *Daesh*.[100] In 2018, the number was believed to be around 1500.[101] At least 220 of these are believed to be ex-jihadi convicts who have served time in Moroccan prisons.[102] This could indicate that rehabilitation and reintegration programs for jihadis have not been successful.[103] Moreover, the high number of Moroccan foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq could indicate that Morocco's security services did not sufficiently pursue potential foreign fighters at an early stage, and felt relieved when jihadis left the country.[104] Being seen as a country that avoids terrorist attacks within by exporting jihad is of course undesirable.

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[93] Salim Hmimnat, 'Recalibrating Morocco's Approach to Salafism', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 14 January 2016.

[94] Masbah, 'Salafi Movements and the Political Process in Morocco', at p. 88.

[95] *Ibid.*, at p. 89.

[96] Mohamed Masbah, 'The Limits of Morocco's Attempt to Comprehensively Counter Violent Extremism'.

[97] Vish Sakthivel, 'Morocco's Move in Mali', *Foreign Affairs*, 14 January 2014.

[98] Masbah, 'The Limits of Morocco's Attempt to Comprehensively Counter Violent Extremism'.

[99] Baylocq and Hlaoua, 'Spreading a "Moderate Islam"?', at p. 114.

[100] Tarik Ben Larbi, 'Le Maroc face à la "Daesh connection"', *Jeune Afrique*, 24 November 2014.

[101] Masbah, 'The Limits of Morocco's Attempt to Comprehensively Counter Violent Extremism', at p. 4.

[102] *Ibid.*

[103] Mohammed Masbah, 'Moroccan Foreign Fighters', *SWP comments*, Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, October 2015. If European jihadis of Moroccan descent are included, the total number is around 2,000–2,500. However, the factors pushing Moroccan bi-nationals in Europe to join *Daesh* in Syria and Iraq may differ from the those explaining why youths living in Morocco travel to Syria.

[104] Masbah, 'Moroccan Foreign Fighters', at p. 3.

Since 2014, Moroccan intelligence has attempted to hinder jihadi departures to Syria: the Ministry of Justice led by the PJD proposed a new amendment to the terrorism law which imposed heavier punishments for joining terrorist groups in Morocco or outside. Moreover, the country joined the Global Coalition against *Daesh* in Syria and Iraq in September 2014. Morocco's cooperation with Spain and other European countries to hinder the exfiltration of jihadis (and irregular migrants in general) to Europe is valued by the EU, although this has come at a price. Moroccan security services are valuable to European counterparts in fighting jihadi movements.[105] However, human rights groups often criticise Moroccan security services for the conditions in places of detention. Morocco is not particularly hard-hit by EU criticism of its extra-constitutional treatment of political prisoners, because it believes that the EU needs its support on issues relating to immigration control and counter-terrorism.[106] The Kingdom also serves as a gateway to the Sahel region, where it has massive economic investments and where France has been leading Operation Barkhane, a counter-terrorism operation constituted by the Sahel G5.

In short, Morocco has implemented measures that have enabled it to combine inclusivity in the religious field with institutionalisation. The Moroccan religious institutions play an effective role because of the Kingdom's religious legitimacy and due to a long history of inclusiveness in the religious field. The Moroccan model shows the unexploited potential inherent in making use of religious institutions in the prevention of violent extremism, and in focusing on early prevention rather than rehabilitation. This is not a 'set model' which can be readily exportable to other countries without due adaptations. However, the Moroccan efforts are admired in other Arab countries; Jordan, Egypt and the Kurdish Region of Iraq (KRG) have implemented some similar measures. In Lebanon, on the other hand, this has been more difficult to achieve. However, religious personnel in a country as different as Lebanon also look to Morocco as a model of inspiration for how religious institutions *could* potentially play a role in the prevention of violent extremism.

Lebanon: the need for religious autonomy and better recruitment

Lebanon's weak state, with a constant struggle among political-sectarian groups to control institutions, provides a counter example. The country's approach to jihadism is heavily securitised, involving the security and judicial sectors in particular. *Dar al-Fatwa*, the Sunni religious institution, and other religious clerics, have not thus far been given an official role to prevent violent extremism, although many religious officials may have liked such a role.[107] Moreover, finding a national PVE strategy is a delicate political issue in a confessional political system like Lebanon. When the government launched its PVE strategy in 2017, a key concern was to avoid stigmatising one particular religion or sect.[108]

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[105] Moha Ennaji, 'Recruitment of Foreign Male and Female Fighters to Jihad: Morocco's Multifaceted Counter-Terror Strategy, *International Review of Sociology*, 26:3, pp. 546–557.

[106] AFP, 'La France et le Maroc rétablissent leur coopération judiciaire après plusieurs mois de brouille', *Huffington Post*, 5 October 2016.

[107] Interview with religious officials, Tripoli and Beirut, 2016-2018.

[108] 'Strategizing prevention of violent extremism', *The Daily Star*, 27 June 2018.

The relationship between the state and Sunni religious institutions in Lebanon sits at the core of domestic Sunni politics in Lebanon.[109] The country's consociational democracy confers a particular status on political leaders as heads their respective religious groups. (Lebanon has 18 such groups, referred to as 'sects' – although Sunnis have always denied that they are a minority group.) The Lebanese *Dar al-Fatwa* is subordinate to the prime minister, a position reserved for Sunnis. Former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri is known for his statement: 'the reference of the mufti should be the prime minister', i.e. that the mufti should defer to the Sunni prime minister. The mufti of the Republic is elected by a majority of laymen (the prime minister and Sunni ministers and MPs in office, in addition to former prime ministers).[110] Religious clerics are in the minority among voters. This must be understood against the backdrop of the confessional democracy in which politicians are considered heads of sects.

In Lebanon, official Sunni Islamic institutions cannot claim to have the same historical legitimacy as Al-Azhar. Lebanese institutions were created by the French mandate, and have never had strong popular support. They are weak and unable to control Islamist movements, which receive abundant funding from abroad. Today, most funding comes from public and private donors in the Gulf,[111] but the pro-Syrian *al-Ahbash*[112] and pro-Iranian Sunni groups are also present.[113] *Dar al Fatwa*'s weakness should also be seen in the context of the weakening of Sunni power in the Lebanese political game, a trend since the assassination of Rafiq Hariri in 2005.

The example of Tripoli illustrates the weakness of *Dar al-Fatwa*. Out of a total of more than 110 mosques, only 44 are run by *Dar al-Fatwa*, the rest by private actors.[114] Moreover, dozens of private *shari'a* teaching institutes provide *shari'a* education to youths at the pre-university level. Most of these institutes are managed by Salafi sheikhs with Gulf networks and funding. However, these diplomas are not recognised by the Lebanese state, which recognises only the official *shari'a* school managed by *Dar al-Fatwa*. What drives students to attend Salafi *shari'a* schools when they know that their diplomas will not be recognised by the state?

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[109] Bernard Rougier, *Everyday Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islamism among Palestinians in Lebanon*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007, at pp. 127-133.

[110] Raphaël Lefèvre, 'Lebanon's *Dar al-Fatwa* and the Search for Moderation', Carnegie Middle East Center, 5 January 2015; Sahar Atrache, 'Lebanon's Politics: The Sunni Community and Hariri's Future Current', *International Crisis Group Middle East Report* 96, 26 May 2010.

[111] Saoud al-Mawla, *Al-Salafiyya wa'l-salafiyyun al-juddud. Min Afghanistan ila Lubnan*, Beirut: Dar Sa'ir al-Mashreq, 2016; Robert Rabil, *Salafism in Lebanon. From Apoliticism to Transnational Jihadism*, Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press; Zoltan Pall, *Salafism in Lebanon. Local and Transnational Movements*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

[112] *Al-Ahbash*, also known by its official name, *'Islamic Society for Charitable Work'*, is an Islamist group which took over many mosques in Beirut in the 1980s. It was led by Nizar al-Halabi, a Lebanese graduate of *Dar al-Fatwa*'s religious college. Rougier, *Everyday Jihad*, at pp. 113–123.

[113] Since the 1979 revolution, Iran has supported Sunni figures in Arab countries as a symbol that its 'model' is pan-Islamic and not confined to the Shi'a sphere. Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: Expansion et déclin de l'islamisme*, Paris: Gallimard, 2003, Chapter 5.

[114] See also: Sari Hanafi, '"We speak the Truth!": Knowledge and Politics in Friday Sermons in Lebanon', *Omran*, 2017, No 22, pp. 7–34; idem, 'al-tajdid al-islami min al-dakhil: takwinat jadida', *Idafat. Arabic Journal of Sociology*, No 38–39, Spring/Summer, 2017, pp. 26–49.

Motivations appear to be ideological as well as financial and practical. These students are often from very poor families, and join the *shari'a* schools after dropping out of state schools. Many are dedicated Salafis and care less about the formal recognition of their diplomas. Moreover, some schools primarily educate women, who might not have ambitions to embark upon a career but wish to study *shari'a* out of piety, or for personal development reasons.[115] In the case of *shari'a* schools catering for male students, school directors tend to be close to the Saudi religious establishment, and some (but not all) students are more radical. In a few cases in 2007 and 2008, some students of religious schools dropped out and joined jihadi movements.[116] This might be a special case, as the most extremist jihadis in Lebanon were not graduates of *shari'a* schools: the radicals are those who do not know their *shari'a*. Yet it still raises concerns.

Lebanon's *Dar al-Fatwa* has recognised that this fragmentation of the religious field is a challenge. During Fouad Siniora's premiership, leading figures in *Dar al-Fatwa* launched a project aimed at unifying Sunni *shari'a* curricula across Lebanon under its control, including a programme focused on tolerance and moderation. However, politicians appear to have shelved this issue. A major problem for Sunni institutions is that the state (and the Sunni prime minister in particular) do not seem to welcome any empowerment of state religious institutions, which would inevitably come at the expense of political expediency. Moreover, Sunni elites in Lebanon may feel reluctant to crush the autonomy of Islamist leaders who provide the support of some electoral constituencies and who back Sunni politicians at times of social tension with Hizbullah.

The weakness of Lebanese official religious institutions makes it almost impossible to control private Salafi institutions of learning. Hubs of religious extremism continue to exist in Lebanon, with full state knowledge and often inaction (or *laissez-faire*).[117] The key to reform could be to empower official religious institutions so that they can better coordinate and control extremist institutions. This will require granting greater political and financial autonomy to the local institutions.

Low recruitment prevails even at more moderate *shari'a* schools: those recruited to the PhD level in *shari'a* degrees, and subsequently to the country's top religious positions, are among the graduates of *shari'a* secondary schools. As mentioned, these often hold poor standards. To improve the quality of religious personnel in Lebanon, the income level of imams will need to be upgraded. Today, the salaries of state-appointed religious officials are so low that it is impossible to subsist, even modestly, without taking additional salaries from politicians.[118] Local *Dar al-Fatwa* institutions in regions outside Beirut have limited funding for their events, and are forced towards politicians, and therefore, in turn, to subordination.

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[115] Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety. The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005, at p. xiv.

[116] Author's interview with Fawaz Zakaria, lawyer defending youths on terrorism charges, Tripoli, April 2010.

[117] For the pre-2005 period, see: Tine Gade, 'Sunni Islamists in Tripoli and the Asad regime. 1966–2014', *Syria Studies* 7:2, April 2015, pp. 20–65.

[118] The monthly salaries for contractual and tenured imams are a mere USD 400 and 700 respectively; funding strains the limit of new tenures.

There is no room for a Western approach to religion. In recent years, European donors have helped the Lebanese *Dar al-Fatwa* enhance its capacities. [119] This has remained a locally-driven initiative, and limited in scope. *Dar al-Fatwa* has many skilled employees with a strong local reputation. If granted more autonomy and funding by the government, such skilled personnel within the local *Dar al-Fatwa* institutions have the potential to play a significant role in implementing measures to fight jihadism at the ideological level.

Conclusions

The degree to which religious actors are included in government strategies to prevent violent extremism in the Arab world differs. This paper has analysed three cases: Saudi Arabia, Morocco and Lebanon. While religious actors are granted an important role in Saudi Arabia and Morocco, this is not the case in Lebanon. Moreover, while Morocco places its official religious institutions at the centre of programmes to train imams, Saudi Arabia has recently taken steps to create new, *ad hoc* institutions to prevent violent extremism, sidelining its official religious institutions.

Morocco and Saudi Arabia both use religious diplomacy to address the challenge of violent extremism. Morocco attempts to portray itself as a privileged partner of the West in the Islamic world, educating imams from France and the Sahel. Moreover, through its deployment of religious soft power, it seeks to consolidate economic interests in the Sahel.

By contrast, Saudi Arabia has faced more criticism because of the Saud family's 274-year-old pact with Wahabism. However, it tries to counter this through the Saudi-led NGO Muslim World League, which has recently taken a more active role in promoting religious moderation in Europe. However, several of the crown prince's policies in recent years run counter to his declarations of wanting to strengthen moderate Islam inside the Kingdom. First, the recent clamp-downs on freedom of speech have brought the process of religious reform to a halt. Second, the recent arrests of Islamic figures and intellectuals have hampered the Kingdom's ability to effectively prevent violent extremism, as there are fewer credible figures available to take on this role. Third, Saudi Arabia continues to consider the regional contest with Iran as more important than the ideological struggle against extremist thought.

What the transformations in Saudi Arabia could mean for Islamic networks worldwide is still uncertain. Yet, countries like Morocco appear ready to take a more active global role in exporting Islam, should Saudi Arabia wish to withdraw from this role. However, such a scenario seems unlikely, given the regional conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Although pluralism of the religious field is considered essential to prevent violent extremism, measures taken under the umbrella term PVE in the Arab world often move in the opposite direction. While Morocco has concentrated efforts on the prevention side, Saudi Arabia's

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[119] For instance, the Berghof Foundation ran a two-year pilot project to strengthen the capacities of the Lebanese *Dar al-Fatwa*. See 'October 2015 – Project Launch Strengthening Religious Tolerance in Lebanon', http://www.berghof-foundation.org/programmes/middle-east-north-africa/intra-sunni-dialogue-and-strategy-development-in-lebanon/.

Counselling Programme is about the rehabilitation of jihadis. Since 2014, many Arab countries have strengthened government control over religious activities, standardising religious discourse under the pretence of fighting the ideology of *Daesh*. However, official religious institutions are not only used against jihadi groups, but also to counter domestic political (and electoral) competitors to the regimes. This prevents freedom of thought and re-asserts authoritarianism, under the pretence of being a measure against violent extremism. Saudi Arabia is a case in point, but it is far from the only Arab country to do so. In Morocco, the government has taken a more active role in monitoring religious activities. That said, Rabat distinguishes itself by its tradition of greater inclusivity in the religious field compared to other Arab countries.

Interestingly, governments' standardisation (or uniformisation) of religious discourse may prove negative for the prevention of violent extremism. Government-supported religious leaders often lack credibility, and are unable to play an effective role. Moreover, Western support for state religious institutions in the Arab world could further discredit them, hence potentially weakening their capacity to promote counter-narratives to jihadism. In order to fight violent extremism, religious institutions will need to be granted more autonomy, not less, moving towards general political liberalisation. However, in the current situation of turmoil in the Arab world, this is unlikely. Moreover, although inclusivity and pluralism in the religious field are needed, the Moroccan case has shown the potential gains when the state takes an active role in coordinating and supporting religious education and infrastructure.

Lebanon provides a counter example, not so much in the political expediency of its Sunni religious institutions, which we observe throughout the Sunni Islamic world, but in other aspects. (That said, in monarchies with inherited religious legitimacy, like Saudi Arabia and Morocco, cooperation with the regimes may seem more acceptable for clergymen than in multi-confessional Lebanon.) Lebanon's *Dar al-Fatwa* distinguishes itself by its blatant weakness, lack of funding and legitimacy, especially in the provinces. The country's Sunni religious field is therefore more easily penetrated by regional and transnational influences, as well as by private interests. Due to the notoriously low salaries granted to Islamic preachers, some chose to become the clients of local political notables. This reflects the recurrent weakness of the Lebanese state. Although Lebanon and Morocco are very different cases, the ancient 'country of Cedars' could take inspiration from its North African counterpart on the issue of investment into Islamic education and infrastructure. Prioritising upgrading religious education could make Lebanon more resilient in the face of regional turmoil.

However, solutions are not that easy to come by. It is not certain that religious reform should be the priority in preventing violent extremism. The religious reform literature is often written in an academic form and its reception limited to the intellectual, urban elites. Such discourse is not appealing to already committed extremists. Moreover, Salafism has a near-monopoly on popular mobilisation in the West and the Middle East. Some Salafi preachers play a divisive role in their local societies. Morocco tries to offer its Maliki-based religious institutions as an alternative, but rebuilding a non-Salafi Islam is not easy. Moroccan-educated preachers do not always find a job when returning to Mali, for example. However, as mentioned in the

introduction, credible religious actors have a role to play in clarifying religious concepts to believers to avoid the misuse of religion by extremist groups.

A final point is that if violent extremism is caused by social and political factors, and not by religious beliefs, counter-measures should target job creation, improve governance and the rule of law, and address the perceived sectarian-based discrimination of certain groups. PVE measures focusing mainly on education and tolerance in society, and not addressing governance and the rule of law, often miss the main point: that radicalization is more often than not a response to poor governance.

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