
VIOLENT NON STATE ACTORS: COMPARISON BETWEEN EGYPT AND SAUDI ARABIA

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ABSTRACT

Both the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, [KSA] and the Arab Republic of Egypt, [ARE] are known to have a portion of their societies, although minority, they are very vibrant in Islamic religious thinking and preach to spread their radical approach. This paper is set to highlight violent nonstate actors in both countries [KSA-ARE]. There is a number of Shia and Sunni Muslims who have endorsed “radical” political Islam ideology rather than liberal views which they consider a Western thinking style, and thus unwelcome in their societies. Islam as other religions, teaches peace and reconciliation among people(s); but there are a number of people(s) in Muslim societies who endorsed radical Islam among Wahhabi, Salafist, Sunni and Shia Muslims; and this started in early stages in some of the Quranic schools “Madrasah²” in which kids are taught about Islam with radical approach by interpreting Islamic studies with traditionalist views. Both Egypt and Saudi Arab work to counter this Islamic radical approach; but sometimes with a method that abuses human rights

Keywords: Egypt, Saudi Arabia, U.S. Foreign Policy, Violent Non-State actors

1. INTRODUCTION

Studying violent non-state actors in both the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Arab Republic of Egypt is of paramount importance because of how the two nations historically deal with any type or any kind of extremist organization. Middle East is a region where Arab and Muslim populations are majority and some Shia and Sunni Muslims have endorsed “radical” political Islam ideology rather than liberal views which they consider a Western thinking style, and thus unwelcome in their societies. Although Islam preaches toleration, moderation, peace and kindness, some Wahhabi and Salafist ulema tend to adopt radical Muslim views. In the Quranic schools “*Madrasah*” under radical theorists, kids are taught about Islam through radical approach by interpreting Islamic studies with traditionalist radical views such as Sayyid Qotb and others. Both Egypt and Saudi Arabia face this type of schools and both governments [Saudi Arabia and Egypt] have set up religious institutions at ministerial levels in order to counter those radical Islam ideologies, but in vain there are still ulema with traditionalist radical views who

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Madrasah means school even in our modern time. And Quranic madrasah was and is still a way to teach all ² Islamic related courses. If the Madrasah is under non-radical Muslims, it gives the real interpretation of the Quran and other Islamic studies; but once Madrasah is under radical right in Islam, students get indoctrinated and become radical.

seem to be influential in both societies like Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Wahhabis and Salafis in Saudi Arabia. In order to assess the violent non-state actors in both countries, I first outline the research design in the following section.

2. RESEARCH DESIGN

This paper highlights how and why violent non-state actors occur in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and in the Arab Republic of Egypt. As U.S. is considered a key ally of both Egypt and Saudi Arabia in the region, the study looks also into how the U.S. foreign policy shapes the political behavior of both countries. The focus has been put on the violent non-state actors such as "Egyptian" Muslim Brotherhood, *Tan'zim Al Jihad*/Egyptian Islamic Jihad, and *Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis* in the Sinai peninsula; and the Wahhabi and Salafist movements in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, this study has also analyzed some regional violent nonstate actors such as al-Qaeda that may have impacted or carried out violence acts and it is still playing negative impact in either country. And the study assesses also how Egypt and Saudi Arabia respond to these violent nonstate actors.

3. METHOD

The study employed case studies [Egypt and Saudi Arabia] and comparative approaches to understand the relationships between two nations' violent non-state actors and why it is important to understand the Islamic radical ideology in the scope of the Middle East and North Africa.

Egypt and Saudi Arabia are case studies. The study focuses on the violent non-state actors in both countries.

Research Questions

This research responds to the following questions:

What is violence? What is Islamism? 3) What are violent non-state actors?

Why violent non-state actors do spread in the Arab world? What are their objectives? Have they limited goals?

Conceptual perspective and Arab world [Muslim Community] vis-à-vis the rest of the world.

Defining key terms and understanding Islamic concepts

According to Rebecca, L. and Elizabeth, P. (2015, 80p) violence is defined as intentionally harming another person(s), causing bodily injury or death. The intentionality component is consistent with standard definitions of aggression and violence typically used in social psychology (Anderson & Bushman, 2002). However, this definition does not distinguish between more and less extreme forms of interpersonal harm, such as punching versus killing someone. This is in contrast to the general approach in social psychology, which categorizes less extreme harm as aggression and more extreme harm as violence which refers to the broader sense of violent non-state actors. As this study focus is on the violent nonstate actors in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, where violence are perpetrated by Muslim-extremists; this leads us to have the below definitions.

According to Mehdi Mozaffari, (2007, 18-19pp) Islamism (for Islam) term was equivalent to Christianity (for Christianity) in 19th century. And in 20th century "Islamism"

started to have a new meaning after Islamic revolution in Iran (1979) under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini, who preached a political Islam and established the first 'Islamist government' in the twentieth century. This religious revolution made it imperative to find a new vocabulary, there were some new vocabularies such as Islamic fundamentalism, radical Islam, Islamic revival, and political Islam. It was only until 9/11 when the "Islamism started being used as a new meaning of terrorist acts. Muzaffari (2007, 21p) defines 'Islamism' as a religious ideology with a holistic interpretation of Islam whose final aim is the conquest of the world by all means.

According to Khalil, A. (2015, 528 p.) Scholars tend to advance the root causes of Islamism within two following approaches: 1) culturalist approach, which Islamism as a rigid and immutable phenomenon. The advocates of this approach tend to view Islamism as nothing but a reactionary response to the crisis of modernity that has challenged Muslim societies since the early 20th century. 2) Second approach is the contextualist, which views Islamism from socioeconomic perspective and as a political platform without much spiritual thrust. This theory's proponents tend to treat Islamism as mere response socioeconomic and political crises that wracked Middle Eastern countries almost six decades. With regard to both approaches, I think each one can have its political inputs depending on the contextual crisis and how the actors [Islamists] view it as a threat to their political agenda.

I understand that Muslim community is based on the Islamic culture that embedded in Islam itself; more clearly it is rooted from Quran and Prophet's teachings (sayings and actions). I'll divide this theoretical understanding on Islam into three categories of Islamic behaviors and beliefs: 1) Muslim sub-community who embraces liberal views. 2) Muslim sub-community who tends to have radicalized themselves and their radical views are to be taught not beyond their respective nations borders; that is to say the radical views are for radical Muslim nationalists or "National Islamism". Muzaffari, M. (2007) gives examples of four countries/ or territories in which this type of category exists [Kashmir; Palestine (Hamas); Lebanon (Hezbollah), and Chechnya]. 3) Muslim sub-community who follows Islamic traditionalist views with a conservative Quranic interpretation that does not allow modern scholars to go in-depth thinking and analyzing the sacred texts [This category may be found in both Sunni and Shia communities].

Moreover, they have to follow only what traditionalists had said in the early times of the Islamic history. This category does follow the most influential leaders of the global Islamism doctrine(s), and the following Muslim scholars and political figures were contemporary lodestar for this doctrine: Egyptian Hassan al-Banna (1906-1949) the founder of Muslim Brotherhood; Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) the key member and ideologue of Muslim Brotherhood; the Pakistani theologian Abul A'ala Mawdudi (1903-1975), and Ayatollah Khomeini [1900-1989] Iranian theologian and former head of state.

The above mentioned Muslim scholars had in common the same global Islamism ideology. The focus in this study was put on the passage of Sayyid Qutb which gives the doctrinal 'religious' thinking using the Jihad, not as defensive "Islamic theological consensus meaning" recognized by most Muslim scholars but as offensive to reach the ultimate goal [governing the world] in that perspective. According to Muzaffari (2007, 29) Sayyid Qutb said:

“Those who say that ‘Islamic Jihad was merely for the defense of the ‘homeland of Islam’ diminish the greatness of the Islamic way of life and consider it less important than their ‘homeland’’. This is not the Islamic point of view, and their view is a creation of the modern age and is completely alien to Islamic consciousness. ... Of course, in that case the defense of the ‘homeland of Islam’ is the defense of the Islamic beliefs, the Islamic way of life, and the Islamic community. However, its defense is not the ultimate objective of the Islamic movement of Jihad, but is a means of establishing the Divine authority within it so that it becomes the headquarters for the movement of Islam, which is then to be carried throughout the earth to the whole of mankind, as the object of this religion is all humanity and its sphere of action is the whole earth”.

In the above passage, Sayyed Qutb by bringing this idea that considering Jihad as ‘defensive’ is not enough, according to him, the ‘offensive’ has to be used for the ultimate goal. The second and third Muslim sub-community categories are different only in understanding how Islam should expand its authority; the second category does spread its political Islam within national borders and it does care of its national Muslim community. Whereas the third sub-community tends to have in its plan the spread of Islam in the world, some scholars call it ‘Global Islamism’. On the other hand(s), the first category does believe in having Islam that tolerate other religious denominations and live side by side. While some scholars such as Daphne Josselin and William Wallace (2001, 237p) argued that the most recent re-emergence of political Islam in the Middle East occurred in large part as result of 1967 Israeli victory over Arab nations; the argument is not alone as the main factor [that led Islamists to wage violence in the Middle East and in the rest of the world]; the causal factors are expanded from the hate of Israel, their aim to fight against United States influence and its allies in the region, and their global Islamism leading tendency.

According to Josselin and Wallace (2001) non-state actors (NSA) are defined as organizations autonomous from the funding and control of a central government, emanating from civil society or individuals beyond State control. They can be domestic or transnational in both origin and activity. NSAs seek to affect political outcomes within one or more states, which can be violently or non-violently pursued.

From the above viewpoints especially second and third categories of Muslim community, I am going to analyze U.S foreign policy as strong ally for both Egypt and Saudi Arabia; and thereafter assess NSAs in both countries [Egypt and Saudi Arabia].

U.S Foreign Policy and the West Interests in the Middle East Region

Following Morsi's ouster, US policy in the region remained unchanged, highlighting the US interest in protecting Israel. By declining to call it a coup (and considering it instead as a response to the demands of the Egyptian people), the White House skirted a US law forbidding the provision aid to countries in which an elected official has been removed in a coup, Victoria E. and Dawn L. (2014, 18). The United States relations with Egypt and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are based on their respective national interests, especially the fight against international terrorism; and the control of the Iranian regional influence. We have seen how the U.S. foreign policy stood firmly in the successive Egyptian regimes from Sadat until the recent political change in Egypt under Abdel Fatah al-Sisi; and also with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Political Interests of the United States needs dependent allies in region such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia;

and US military aid to Egypt is a tool that ensures compliance; and its presence maintaining security in the Arab Gulf area specifically on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia territory is another tool to show the good relations. Friendly dictators are preferred over a democratically elected but unfriendly regime, regardless of the stated support for democracy and human rights found in formal and public discourse, Victoria and Dawn (2014, 16).

Relations of cooperation always depend upon a host of factors, and in Egypt's case, Western governments believed their interests in the region would be better served by authoritarian rulers' illusory promise of 'stability' than by the uncertainties of elected government. The West saw Arab autocrats as the best way to sustain the flow of oil (Human Rights Watch 2012, 5). Privileged over the popular demands for social justice, democracy, and human rights were dominant interests promoting access to oil, strategic military access to the airspace and the Suez Canal, a friendly voice among Arab nations toward Israel, and access to local economic market, Victoria, E. and Dawn, L. (2014, 10).

Violent Non-State Actors in Egypt

Muslim Brotherhood (MB)

MB founded by Islamic scholar, Hassan al-Banna in 1928.

Two prominent scholars who inspired MB are Hassan al-Banna and Sayyed Qutb.

After the downfall of Mubarak in February 2011, the Muslim Brotherhood was a key player in Egypt's incipient politics.

Figure 1: The figure shows how MB was born and how it involves in political Islam



Source: Spring Semester 2020, Wright State University

The fall of Morsi and his Muslim Brotherhood (MB)

The failures of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt have often been taken as emblematic of a wider pathology in Islamist politics. But the Brothers' dysfunction and dishonesty, and the incompetence of their President, turned public opinion against them. Despite the fact that the Muslim Brotherhood was the largest social movement in Egypt with the highest number of professionals (doctors, lawyers, engineers, teachers, etc.), it failed to govern Egypt effectively. While it is difficult to judge the Brotherhood's performance in power because of its short tenure,

it is safe to say that the movement's cadres and leaders lacked the basic governance skills and tactics that would have enabled them to deal with Egypt's daunting social and economic (Khalil al Anan, 2015 , 539).

Tan'zim al-Jihad/ Egyptian Islamic Jihad

Radical Qutb-inspired Islamist groups such as Tanzim Al-Jihad or Egyptian Islamic Jihad was created and got strong in 1970s and its member(s) killed Sadat in 1981.

Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis and other Islamist organizations in the Sinai Peninsula

Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis pledges allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) forming the Sinai Province. Following the January 2011 uprising that toppled Hosni Mubarak's regime, the country became increasingly destabilized, creating a security vacuum in the Sinai Peninsula. Radical Islamic elements in Sinai exploited the opportunity, using the unique environment, in launching several waves of attacks upon Egyptian military and commercial facilities. On 29 January 2015, militants from the Sinai Province militant group launched a series of attacks on army and police bases in al-Arish using car bombs and mortars. The attacks, which occurred in more than six different locations, resulted in 32 confirmed deaths including army personnel and civilians³. On 31 October 2015, a Russian passenger jet disintegrated above the northern Sinai, killing all 224 aboard. The Islamic State's Sinai Province claimed responsibility for the incident. Russian, Egyptian, and western investigators concluded that the plane was brought down by a bomb⁴. On 26 January 2014, militants shot down an army Mi-17 helicopter in North Sinai, killing all five of its crew members. The weapon the insurgents used was an infrared-homing, surface-to-air missile from the Russian-made Iгла family. This was the first time in Egyptian history that an armed non-state actor dropped a state's military helicopter by a missile. *Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis* claimed responsibility for this attack as well as series of escalating attacks on police and soldiers earlier that morning masked men in an SUV attacked a bus carrying soldiers in Sinai, killing at least three and injuring at least 11 persons⁵.

Mohamed Morsi's accession to power did not result in a radical reorientation of foreign policy as might have been expected of an Islamist president, but it did relatively change regional alliances, with Qatar and Turkey becoming Egypt's new preferred partners in the Middle East. The IMF loan was requested at the same time that the main financial and political support of the Muslim Brotherhood, Qatar, promised to provide the country with nearly billion dollars in loans and soft credits, although this entire amount was not disbursed eventually. Such a degree of economic and ideological dependence on Qatar was highly criticized by the public and even mocked in the Egyptian media. Gradually, Qatar's support for the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) was rejected as representing foreign interference in the country's domestic affairs and an undignified attempt to wrest the role of regional leader from Egypt.

³ *New York Times* 30 January 2015

Ibid. 23 September 2016⁴
New York Times 26 January 2014⁵

The big injection of funds from the Arab Gulf countries and Saudi Arabia came after Morsi's fall in July 2013 and the accession of military officer Abdul Fattah al-Sisi to power. The most conservative governments in the Middle East, led by Saudi Arabia, which were regaining influence in the region's foreign affairs, provided the Egyptian military regime with not only political but also financial support Barbara A. Piazza (2018, 4-5pp). In the following section, we will see how Saudi government deals with internal insurgencies but also with regional and international violent nonstate actors.

Violent Non-State Actors in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Wahhabism, Sufism and Shia Militias

The official 'Wahhabi' religion of Saudi Arabia has essentially merged with certain segments of Salafism. There is now intense competition between groups and individual scholars over the 'true' Salafism, with the scholars who support the Saudi regime attacking groups such as al-Qaeda as 'Qutbists' (following Sayyid Qutb) or takfiris (excommunicators).

The easy explanation for differences within the *Salafi* movement⁶ is that some aim to change society through *da'wa* (preaching/evangelizing) whereas others want to change it through violence. But as the Saudi example shows, all strains of *Salafism*, even the most revolutionary and violent, make a place for social services such as education in their strategies for the transformation of society. On the hand, Al-Qaeda is of the Islamic point of view that violence has to be used for the ultimate objective and it [Al-Qaeda] took it root of doctrinal ideology from *Salafism*.

When Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab began preaching his revivalist brand of Islam amongst the Bedouins of the Najd during the 18th century, his ideas were dismissed in the centers of Islamic learning such as al-Azhar [Egyptian Islamic Institution] as simplistic and erroneous to the point of heresy.

Crackdowns on Shi'a Protests & Salafist Terror groups.

According to the Wahhabi traditional teaching, Shi'a is considered as a *heretical sect* and as such it is not recognized as Muslim, Muzaffari, M. (2007, 26). The *Wahhabist* world does not accept Shia community as Muslims, this led to endless conflict between *Wahhabis* and Shiites and it became one of the leading foreign policies in their respective supporting countries [Iran vs. Saudi Arabia]. And Shia minority are arbitrarily arrested in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Figure 2. Victims of Terrorism in Saudi Arabia

⁶ <https://jamestown.org/program/understanding-the-origins-of-wahhabism-and-salafism/>



Source: Spring Semester, 2020, Wright State University⁷

Al-Qaeda

Al-Qaeda is an Islamist global organization [transnational extremist *Salafist* movement] founded in 1988 by Osama bin Laden. Even though Saudi Arabia has defeated extremist organizations at 95% on its territory, *Salafists* who preach to carry out terrorist acts [through Al-Qaeda leadership] are still within the Saudi community, and as such Saudi government is always at alert for the terrorist activities. Furthermore, Al-Qaeda may also target Egypt not only as U.S. ally in the region, but also as a country that fight national and international terrorism.

Reaction of Egypt and Saudi Arabia on the fight against violent non-state actors.

Egypt Freedom House Rating⁸

Name of the country: Egypt	Score(s)	Status
Political rights	7/40	
Civil Liberties	14/60	
Total	21%	Not Free

Source: Freedom House: Freedom in the World, 2020

Saudi Arabia Freedom House Rating⁹ (S.A)

Name of the country: S. A.	Score(s)	Status
Political rights	1/40	
Civil Liberties	6/60	
Total	7%	Not Free

Source: Freedom House: Freedom in the World, 2020

WSU, Wright State University⁷

<https://freedomhouse.org/country/egypt/freedom-world/2020>⁸

<https://freedomhouse.org/country/saudi-arabia/freedom-world/2020>⁹

Even though fight against violent nonstate actors is an obligation of a sovereign state [as Egypt and Saudi Arabia are], as we have seen both countries' freedoms rating [Freedom House: both are **NOT FREE**]; they react harshly without following human rights' principles. Moreover, both countries do violate national and international law, under the cover of fight against terrorism, by using military and other security forces to arbitrarily arrest political opponents. These two countries lack political rights and civil liberties such as freedom of expression, freedom of speech, freedom of association, freedom of press, freedom of religion, and freedom from torture; right to liberty and security; right to a fair trial and due process; right to assemble, right to vote and right to participate in politics such as running for office, etc. Both countries discriminate minority, Christian, (Coptic church's members, and Shia Muslims in Egypt); and women in both countries.

Furthermore, Egypt does constitutionally accept other religions [Christians, Copt and others..] with a certain limitation of practice. By contrast, Saudi Arabia does categorically not allow any other religious denominations to operate on its soil.

4. CONCLUSION

This study has shown that Egypt and Saudi Arabia have many enemies [Islamists] within its citizens and outside their borders. When MB 'as Islamist organization' took power in Egypt in 2012 as result many Gulf Cooperation Council's member states had changed their foreign policy toward Egypt except Qatar which seemed to want cooperation with MB. Although Al-Qaeda, ISIL, and other global Muslim extremist organizations have no formal headquarters in both countries [Egypt and Saudi Arabia] they [Islamist/extremist Organizations] do without doubts plan to carry out terrorist acts as they did from time to time in Saudi Arabia and in Egypt through ISIL affiliates in the Sinai Peninsula, and in other parts of Egypt. Under the disguise of the fight of violent nonstate actors both countries abuse human rights as this is found every year in the report of the U.S. Department of State; and national and international human rights organizations and on the research centers such Freedom House. Despite of their different Islamic school of thoughts, Sunni Muslim [of Shaffi jurisprudence] for Egypt, and Wahhabi/Salafi Muslim [of Hanbali jurisprudence] for Saudi Arabia, both countries have strong relations to curb the influence of Iran in the region as both have Shia minority communities on their respective soils and are supposed to have strong relations with, and financial support from Iran. Both countries are key U.S. allies in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia supports financially Egyptian government, and both are politically and diplomatically in good terms with each other and they are member-states of Arab League and OIC, Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

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