

COUNTER-TERRORISM IN SAUDI ARABIA: GOING AROUND IN CIRCLES AND HIDDEN AGENDAS

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ABSTRACT

International law has imposed the obligation to uphold human rights on states like the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. However, Saudi Arabia has always sought to find pretexts to limit its commitment to uphold human rights.

Saudi Arabia has adopted a number of measures in the context of what it refers to as “counter-terrorism,” but in reality, these measures have had a devastating impact on the human rights movement in the Kingdom, since Saudi Arabia now employs counter-terrorism measures to suffocate any voices calling for the respect of basic human rights. Unfortunately, it currently appears that Saudi Arabia intends to continue to use these counter-terrorism measures as an obstacle to basic human rights, and the Saudi government has already committed many human rights violations under the guise of counter-terrorism. To better understand this paradox, such violations must be explored in detail and contrasted with international laws governing counter-terrorism. This process will help shed light on the application of counter-terrorism in Saudi Arabia so as to arrive at appropriate future-oriented recommendations for the various parties involved, including the citizens,

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organizations, media outlets, international community, and the Kingdom's ally states, in order to urge the Kingdom to revise its current strategy that has proven destructive to the movement of human rights.

The ultimate goal behind this process is to end the misrepresentation of Saudi Arabia's counter-terrorism measures. Such misrepresentation has been fueled by the Kingdom's national media outlets, as well as public relations firms and international allies that benefit financially from arms deals with Saudi Arabia. This clarification and proper characterization of Saudi counter-terrorism measures will be an important step to improving human rights in Saudi Arabia.

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INTRODUCTION

The world today is more interconnected and interdependent than ever before. The impact of events and changes are no longer constrained by geography, and it has become common to see people in the global east interacting with those in the west. In sum, it is a world that is becoming increasingly, and inevitably, unified. It is therefore difficult for local systems—whether they be economic, cultural, intellectual, political, or scientific—to remain isolated from global affairs. It is difficult for local economies to be independent of the global economic order, and diverse cultures now contain a global language that can transcend borders and languages. Technological innovations, such as translation programs on the internet and on smart phone apps, have also contributed to increased connectivity, and the accessibility of knowledge.

Interconnected and interdependent systems, such as in health and the environment, have also become transnational issues unrestricted by geographical divisions. That is why specialized international

organizations have been formed, such as the World Health Organization that has offices and branches in over 156 different locations,¹ and the United Nations Environment Programme² that aims to implement environmental laws globally.³ These issues generate a worldwide feeling of a common threat, and that is why we see relative seriousness of countries and cooperation between them on these issues. For example, by 2007, 196 countries⁴ had agreed to work together to achieve global health safety standards and prevent the spread of diseases through the implementation of procedures at borders, airports and seaports. Also, 197 countries are participating in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), also known as the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit,⁵ which launched in 1992 for the purpose of protecting the international climate system.⁶ Global warming has become one of the best examples of a common threat that has incentivized the world population to think of its shared interest and feel its joint fate.⁷ Changes in the weather threaten food safety; increasing water levels can cause flooding or drowning of coastal cities; heat waves can cause desertification; everyone is affected by global warming, albeit in different ways, and to different extents.

On numerous occasions, the world has similarly faced the problem of terrorism and its common and expansive danger. The world community has therefore come together to resolve it through diverse initiatives, including the September 2006 United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy,⁸ considered to be the international framework for counter-terrorism. This is despite the fact that some

¹ *About WHO*, WORLD HEALTH ORG., <http://www.who.int/about/structure/en/> (last visited Apr. 20, 2018).

² *See UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME*, <https://www.unenvironment.org/> (last visited Apr. 20, 2018).

³ *See Climate Change*, UNITED NATIONS, <http://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/climate-change/index.html> (last visited Apr. 20, 2018).

⁴ WORLD HEALTH ORG., INTERNATIONAL HEALTH REGULATIONS (2nd ed., 2005), <http://www.who.int/ihr/publications/9789241596664/en/>.

⁵ *Other IP Treaties*, WORLD INTELLECTUAL PROP. ORG., http://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/other_treaties/parties.jsp?treaty_id=268&group_id=22 (last visited Apr. 20, 2018).

⁶ *Treaty Database: Framework Convention on Climate Change*, WORLD INTELLECTUAL PROP. ORG., http://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/other_treaties/parties.jsp?treaty_id=268&group_id=22 (showing that there are 197 contracting parties) (last visited Apr. 20, 2018).

⁷ Framework Convention on Climate Change, June 4, 1992, 1771 U.N.T.S. 165.

⁸ *United Nations Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force*, U.N. OFF. OF COUNTER-TERRORISM, <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/ctitf/en/un-global-counter-terrorism-strategy> (last visited Apr. 20, 2018).

countries believe that they are not equally in need of cooperation from other countries in their own fights against terrorism. These countries have dealt with terrorism as an internal issue and implemented unilateral counterterrorism procedures, such as limiting immigration or expanding airport checks and security, without delving too much into combatting terrorism in other parts of the world. Germany has taken such counterterrorism initiative. For example, Germany⁹ warned Saudi Arabia not to fund religious extremism domestically, at a time when Germany did not take any steps towards Saudi Arabia's continuous facilitation of extremism in numerous other countries.¹⁰ Examples of such facilitation includes Saudi authorities providing access to foreign students studying in Saudi universities known for their extremism and preaching of hatred. Such approaches would appear to suggest that the global concern for terrorism is far lower than the global concern for climate change. This lack of concern encourages internal and unilateral approaches, instead of comprehensive and global, despite the increasingly globalized, transnational threat of terrorism.

Another problem in addition to countries preferring internal and unilateral procedures, and ignoring the global aspects of terrorism in other parts of the world, is the problem of the gap between counterterrorism theory and practice.¹¹ While theories of counterterrorism have identified root causes of terrorism and comprehensive solutions to them, the practical implementation of counterterrorism procedures do not always reflect this. Perhaps vested geopolitical interests that rely on controlling sources of wealth and arms trade do not find such theories or strategies to be in their best interests. As such, they ignore those strategies and solutions one way or another.

In a sense that is similar to the lab results and research centers findings regarding the impact of some industries on the environment and general health. However, in reality there is no response to those findings. That is not because the findings are wrong but because responding to those findings would contradict with the profit size the investor would

⁹ السعودية تقول إنها "مهمته مثل ألمانيا" لمواجهة التنشيد [Saudi Arabia claims that it is like Germany interested in fighting terrorism], DEUTSCHE WELLE (June 12, 2015) (Arabic), <http://p.dw.com/p/1HIJZ>.

¹⁰ السعودية تموّل بناء مئات المساجد في بنغلاديش بقيمة مليار دولار [Saudi Arabia funds building hundreds of mosques in Bangladesh for 1 billion dollars], BBC (Apr. 26, 2017) (Arabic), <http://www.bbc.com/arabic/world-39718927>.

¹¹ See U.N. GAOR, 59th Sess., U.N. Doc. A/59/565 (Dec. 2, 2004), <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N04/602/31/PDF/N0460231.pdf?OpenElement>.

have expected. Whether the international community is aware of the shortcomings of current counter-terrorism strategies, there is a lack of will to seriously and effectively deal with terrorism. This could be partly because of two reasons:

First, the devastating impact of terrorism is mostly confined to a few countries. According to the 2017 World Terrorism and Political Violence Map,¹² risks of terrorism are high in only sixteen countries in the world. These are mostly African and Asian countries, something which decreases the level of concern of influential countries in the international community.

Second, the persisting ignorance concerning the real dangers and serious solutions to terrorism continue despite the increase in terrorist attacks on Western countries by 174% in 2016 (ninety-six attacks)¹³ compared to 2015 (thirty-five attacks). Moreover, and unfortunately, the far-right, populist rhetoric of some politicians and leaders, such as Donald Trump, has contributed to this ignorance and stoked further tension.

In the global effort to combat terrorism, the international community needs to constantly, factually, and accurately emphasize that counter-terrorism strategies cannot be partial, reactionary, emotive, or unnecessarily provocative, but rather well-researched and solution-oriented.

I. COUNTER-TERRORISM IN THE ARAB REGION

When the Arab Spring arrived, observers were not optimistic about the capacity of Arab governments in dealing positively with the demands of their people. Governments in the Arab world are characterized by patterns of tyrannical rule, where opposing viewpoints are suppressed and laws are fragile and controlled by the dominant political and economic forces. Nothing describes this better than international rankings of Arab countries in freedom, free press, democracy, and transparency.¹⁴ All of which are the result of oppressive governments.

¹² See *2017 Terrorism and Political Violence Map*, RISK ADVISORY, <https://www.riskadvisory.com/news/2017-terrorism-political-violence-map-1/> (last visited Apr. 20, 2018).

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ See *World Press Freedom Index*, REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS, <https://rsf.org/en/ranking> (last visited Apr. 1, 2018).

There were two possible outcomes of the protests around the Arab world. First, Arab governments would either suppress or contain the protests. Second, the people would achieve change through resilience, maintaining their collective momentum. Governments in the region were aware that the civil society formed under decades of oppression was not fully prepared to seize the opportunities for change generated by the Arab Spring. But this did not mean that they were not afraid of what was happening, especially after the fall of Tunisian President Zein al-Abedein Ali on January 14, 2011,¹⁵ Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak on February 11, 2011,¹⁶ Libyan President Mummar Gaddafi on August 20, 2011,¹⁷ and President of Yemen Ali Abdullah Saleh on February 27, 2012.¹⁸

The earlier downfall of Zein al-Abedein and Mubarak sent a worrying and serious message to Arab dictatorships. The collapse of Arab dictators had been a distant idea in Arab culture because of the rigor of the oppressive practices. During the initial months of the Arab Spring, governments in the region were concerned about the protests. This led them to not consider carrying out serious reforms, but instead to resort to increased surveillance and gradual increases in oppression. At least one Arab government, that of President Gaddafi, delivered statements that issued warnings and threats, aimed at terrorizing the people.¹⁹ Others delivered generic declarations that did not address the ambitions and hopes of the people, or cheating their people's aspirations through promises of economic prosperity.²⁰

Observing the chronology of speeches, decisions, and practices of Arab governments during the Arab Spring, one notices the gradual increase in oppression. Even in countries where protests brought no

¹⁵ Angelique Chrisafis & Ian Black, *Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali forced to flee Tunisia as protesters claim victory*, THE GUARDIAN (Jan. 14, 2011, 8:57 PM), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/jan/14/tunisian-president-flees-country-protests>.

¹⁶ *Hosni Mubarak resigns as president*, AL JAZEERA (Feb. 11, 2011), <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/02/201121125158705862.html>.

¹⁷ Neil MacFarquhar, *An Erratic Leader, Brutal and Defiant to the End*, N.Y. TIMES (Oct. 20, 2011), <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/21/world/africa/qaddafi-killed-as-hometown-falls-to-libyan-rebels.html>.

¹⁸ *Yemen's president Ali Abdullah Saleh cedes power*, BBC (Feb. 27, 2012), <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-17177720>.

¹⁹ Sarah Al Dandrawi, "أشهر خطب ثورات الربيع العربي في 2011.. من "فهمتكم" إلى "الزنقة", *The Most Famous Speeches of the Revolutions of the Arab Spring in 2011: From "Vhmtkm" to "Alzenqh"*, AL ARABIYA (Dec. 26, 2011) (Arabic), <http://www.marocpress.com/alarabiya/article-12387.html>.

²⁰ *Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Issued a Number of Royal Orders*, AL-RIYADH (Mar. 18, 2011) (Arabic), <http://www.alriyadh.com/614963>.

change, governments resorted to reprisals and targeting of opposition leaders and activists.²¹ The nature of this reaction can tell us two things. First, these governments were afraid of the consequences of targeting these opposition leaders in the early stages, in fear of creating martyrs and further galvanizing the opposition. Second, targeting these leaders was aimed at ending and drying up the sources of protests and mobilization so that these leaders do not lead future popular movements, especially since the causes for these protests and revolts remained and became even more pertinent.²²

In their attempt to avoid losing power in the Arab Spring, some governments rushed procedures and tactics to circumvent the protests with the aim of criminalizing and containing them.²³ To control freedoms and contain future mobilization, they issued new laws, in particular counter-terrorism laws, and signed new security pacts such as the Gulf Cooperation Council Security Pact in November 2012.²⁴ Human Rights Watch warned at the time that this new pact could be used to “suppress free expression and undermine privacy rights of citizens and residents.”²⁵ We can discern more than one new counter-terrorism law that is easily linked to renewed attempts at oppression. This is evident examining the content of these laws. Among these counter-terrorism laws are the ones in:

1. Saudi Arabia, February 2014;²⁶
2. Sudan, February 2014;²⁷
3. United Arab Emirates, August 2014;²⁸

²¹ For example, as happened in Bahrain.

²² *The Guardian view on the Arab Spring: It could happen again*, THE GUARDIAN (Jan. 2, 2017), <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jan/02/the-guardian-view-on-the-arab-spring-it-could-happen-again>.

²³ Such as the formation of the Bassiouni Council in Bahrain, or comments made in the speech by King Abdullah.

²⁴ نص الاتفاقية الامنية بين دول مجلس التعاون لدول الخليج العربية [Gulf Cooperation Council Security Pact], GULF CTR. FOR DEV. POLICIES (adopted on Dec. 25, 2012) (Arabic), https://www.gulfpolicies.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1658:2014-02-11-21-04-41&catid=166:2012-11-28-08-11-05&Itemid=388.

²⁵ *GCC: Joint Security Agreement Imperils Rights*, HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH (Apr. 26, 2014, 11:55PM), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/04/26/gcc-joint-security-agreement-imperils-rights>.

²⁶ Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Bureau of Experts at the Council of Ministers, [*The Regime of Terrorism Crimes and Its Financing*] (Dec. 27, 2013), <https://www.boe.gov.sa/ViewSystemDetails.aspx?lang=ar&SystemID=327&VersionID=305>.

²⁷ [Anti-Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism Act], Feb. 2018, <https://goo.gl/2CcoHN> (Sudan).

4. Bahrain, amendments November 2014;²⁹

5. Egypt, August 2015;³⁰ and

6. Oman, June 2016.³¹

As we can see, several Arab countries passed new counter-terrorism laws, or amended old ones, and have intensified efforts of coordination and cooperation in the region. These laws in different countries can be seen as the basis for creating a homogenous Arab sphere in combatting terrorism in the region. Among these attempts was the conference held in the Arab League for Arab Justice Ministers on May 17, 2017.³² This aimed to implement the Arab Counterterrorism Agreement, renew the attempt to create a common counter-terrorism law, which included a unification of national laws,³³ in addition to enhancing regional and international cooperation in combatting terrorism.³⁴

²⁸ Mohamed al-Amin, «مكافحة الجرائم الإرهابية» [Khalifa issues the "Law of Terrorist Crimes"], ALITIHAD (Sept. 24, 2014) (Arabic), <http://www.alitihad.ae/details.php?id=83545&y=2014>.

²⁹ 2014 لسنة 68 (مرسوم بقانون رقم 58 لسنة 2006) [Law Decree No. 68 for year 2014 amending some provisions Law No. 58 of 2006 on protection of society from terrorist acts], LEGAL AFFAIRS (Dec. 4, 2014) (Arabic), <http://www.legalaffairs.gov.bh/LegislationSearchDetails.aspx?id=72085#.WSQyqevyt1s>.

³⁰ Law No. 94 of 2015 (Anti-Terrorism Law), *al-Jarīdah al-Rasmīyah*, vol. 33, Aug. 15, 2015 (Egypt).

³¹ Baasdar AntiMoney Laundering Law and Terrorism Will], OMAN (Arabic), <http://data.qanoon.om/ar/rd/2016/2016-030.pdf>.

³² Nahla Mutwali, الجامعة تطالب بتنفيذ الاتفاقية العربية لمكافحة الإرهاب [The Arab League demands putting into action the Arab agreement on terrorism], AL-AHRAM (May 18, 2017) (Arabic), <http://massai.ahram.org.eg/News/80828/1979/231982/%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AC%D9%8A/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%B7%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8-%D8%A8%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%B9%D9%8A%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%85%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%AD%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5.aspx>.

³³ Azab: Activating Arab judicial conventions against terrorism], ANNAHAR (May 19, 2017) (Arabic), <http://www.annaharkw.com/annahar/Article.aspx?id=746321>.

³⁴ وزراء العدل العرب يناقشون مشروع قانون لتعويض ضحايا الأعمال الإرهابية [Arab Justice Ministers discuss draft law to compensate victims terrorist acts], AKHBARAK (May 17, 2017) (Arabic), [http://www.akhbarak.net/news/2017/05/17/11001804/articles/25306851/%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%AF%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8-%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%B4%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B9-%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86-](http://www.akhbarak.net/news/2017/05/17/11001804/articles/25306851/%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%AF%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8-%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%B4%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B9-%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86-%)

Numerous analyses and studies pointed out that the new counter-terrorism laws issued after the Arab Spring contained multiple provisions that violated basic and fundamental human rights principles, and were so broad as to criminalize all forms of peaceful dissent.³⁵ One useful study is that of Professor Michael Newton on Saudi Arabia's "Law of Terrorism Crimes and Its Financing," in which he explains how broadly defined wording contradicted the relatively specific and carefully worded counter-terrorism agreements which Saudi Arabia had ratified, and which protected freedoms.³⁶ This broadly worded law therefore allowed the Saudi authorities to prevent people from enjoying their fundamental freedoms and rights, such as freedom of expression and of religion. He also pointed to some of the key terminology in this law, such as "threatening national security and harming public order" or "preventing any attempt that targets harming the country's reputation," and he described them as inaccurate and impractical at the same time that they allowed the authorities to decide what type of activities fall under these terms.³⁷

We can see how governments invested in counter-terrorism laws as a means to preserve their rule and oppression. Fighting terrorism has become a common and a constant theme in the rhetoric of these governments, including Saudi Arabia whenever discussions touch on the subject of reforms, rights, and change. According to Saudi Arabia, terrorism is such a high priority that all other discussions should be postponed.

Oppressive governments in the Gulf and Arab region also realize that counter-terrorism laws alone are not enough to protect them from popular demands, protests, and revolutions. They have therefore resorted to additional procedures, tools, and tactics, such as:

1. Media: Media in these countries are either mostly or fully under the control of the State and have been intensively addressed against the people's demands.

%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B9%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%B6-
%D8%B6%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A7.

³⁵ See MICHAEL NEWTON, A LEGAL ASSESSMENT OF THE PENAL LAW FOR TERRORISM AND ITS FINANCING (June 14, 2015), <http://www.esohr.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/A-Legal-Assessment-of-the-Saudi-Penal-Law-for-Terrorism-and-its-Financing.pdf>.

³⁶ *Id.*

³⁷ Michael A. Newton, *A Legal Evaluation of 'The Saudi Penal Law For Crimes of Terrorism and Its Financing': Human Rights Violations Under the Pretext of Combating Terrorism*, EUR. SAUDI ORG. FOR HUMAN RIGHTS (Nov. 16, 2015), <http://www.esohr.org/en/?p=729>.

2. Religion: Religious *fatwas* were issued to ban protests. The religious establishment is used as a tool to serve the political ruler's agenda. Thus, during uprisings, the religious establishment calls for loyalty, obedience to the rulers, and to not revolt.
3. Violence: It would appear that violence and chaos provided the political authorities with an excuse to shut down any demand for change. One source of evidence for such tendencies is Saudi Interior Ministry's General Directorate of Investigations (also known as al-Mabahith), which encouraged people towards violence in numerous forms, such as in support, speech, and action.
4. Oppression: Oppression was previously used arbitrarily and according to the ruler's whim, but after the Arab Spring it became a legalized and institutionalized process.
5. Financing: Saudi Arabia's rulers spent a noticeable amount of aid in past years on Arab governments whose collapse was considered harmful to itself. Egypt stands out as the best example of this practice,³⁸ which according to some reports has received around 30 billion US dollars in Saudi grants, loans, and deposits in Egyptian banks between 2011 and 2016 alone. Another example is the ongoing Saudi generosity towards Bahrain.³⁹

Relying on these six factors—laws, media, religion, violence, oppression, and financing—governments in the region launched a counter-revolution to prolong their oppressive rule.

The Kingdom's foreign policy has demonstrated a counter-revolution stance to the Arab Spring that started in Tunisia, then Egypt, and extended to Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, Algeria, Morocco, Oman, Jordan, and Syria. The Saudi government welcomed the dictator of Tunisia, Bin Ali, and sent its forces to Bahrain to crush the uprising. It supported Hosni Mubarak, President of Egypt, against the Egyptian people, and then supported the military coup against an Egyptian elected government.⁴⁰

³⁸ See Anadolu Agency, *Egypt to get \$5 billion in fresh aid from Saudi Arabia*, HURRIYET DAILY NEWS (Dec. 1, 2013), <http://www.hurriyetaidailynews.com/egypt-to-get-5-billion-in-fresh-aid-from-saudi-arabia-58829>.

³⁹ See *المساعدات السعودية للبحرين تمثل 8.4 % من الناتج البحريني* [Saudi Aid to Bahrain Accounts for 8.4% of Bahrain's GDP], ALWASAT NEWS (May 15, 2015) (Arabic), <http://www.alwasatnews.com/news/991858.html>.

⁴⁰ See Ahmad Adnan, *الثورة المضادة في السعودية: مستقبل وزارة الداخلية* [Counter-Revolution in Saudi Arabia: The Future of the Interior Ministry], AL-AKHBAR (June 8, 2011) (Arabic), <https://www.al-akhbar.com/Opinion/89644>.

I. COUNTER-TERRORISM IN SAUDI ARABIA

To understand counter-terrorism in Saudi Arabia, it is necessary to study both how it emerged over time and its current status. It is also important to assess whether counter-terrorism in Saudi Arabia attempted to resolve the root causes of terrorism in the first place.

The Al-Sakeena website,⁴¹ run by the Saudi Ministry of Islamic Affairs, once reported that one of the core groups from which al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia emerged was “those who were previously trained in the training camps of Afghanistan and fought there.”⁴² Saudi Arabia is widely believed to have a role in sending jihadists and fighters to Afghanistan. Observers and researchers have also reported on how these jihadists later turned against Saudi Arabia after their fight in Afghanistan ended.

Researchers in Saudi Arabia hesitate to draw explicit links between the root causes of terrorism, and the formal religious and academic education systems. When such links between terrorism and formal education are found to exist, researchers prefer to remain vague. Writers, politicians, and religious figures loyal to the Saudi regime typically avoid explicit references to the educational system by referring to vague “systems of thought.” This is to divert attention from the close link between terrorism and the Saudi authorities. Education and curricula are the product of the official educational system of Saudi Arabia, and their publications controlled by the Saudi Ministry of the Media. Hence, to draw these explicit links amounts to accusing the Saudi government of promoting terrorist thought. “Systems of thought,” on the other hand, is a broader term that avoids specific references to a place and time. Sometimes those close to the Saudi authorities would also claim that it is the wrong interpretation of formal Saudi education and publications, and not these educational materials in themselves, that are behind terrorism. An example of this can be seen in a conference in Mecca in February 2015.⁴³

⁴¹ See نحن من [Who We Are], ASSAKINA (Arabic), <http://www.assakina.com/about-php> (last visited Mar. 25, 2018).

⁴² Yasin al-Jubouri, نشأته ونهايته.. تنظيم القاعدة في السعودية [Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia: Its Inception and End], ASSAKINA (Arabic), <http://www.assakina.com/center/parties/50607.html> (last visited Mar. 29, 2018).

⁴³ See Jumada Al-Awal, مؤتمر مكة: أسباب الإرهاب متعددة والجهل بالشريعة أحدها [The Mecca Conference: The causes of terrorism are multiple and the ignorance of Sharia is one of them], ASHARQ AL-AWSAT (Feb. 26, 2015) (Arabic), <https://goo.gl/DB2wMi>.

These pro-Saudi observers, however, are unable to explain how this “thought” is propagated, given the lack of a free media and independent press in Saudi Arabia. This absence of free and uncensored speech would suggest that the root of extremist religious thought in Saudi Arabia is to be found in the state-sanctioned Saudi education system, and not civil society or external actors. Even those private television channels in Saudi Arabia that have been created more recently are controlled by the government, and follow the official dictates of the government, with the threat of being shut down should they cross official lines. There is also no doubt that the formal educational system was and still is under the control of religious extremists sanctioned by the authorities.

All of these intellectual strands feeding extremist thoughts are formal. The authorities of course do not acknowledge this very obvious fact. On the contrary, they expend great effort in blaming others both within and outside of Saudi Arabia for being responsible for the extremist and terrorist thought inside the country. It would be too much of an exaggeration to claim that Saudi Arabia is solely responsible for the extremism and terrorism that we see in today’s world. But it would be equally unacceptable to claim that the Saudi authorities are innocent of these groups and currents.

Despite what the Saudi authorities claim about their role in fighting terrorism, a claim all too easy to make at a time when it has completely silenced independent voices in civil society, it is crucial that Saudi Arabia’s role and behavior in counter-terrorism is assessed according to objective criteria. The United Nations 2006 Global Strategy for Counter-Terrorism serves this purpose well, in the sense that it provides an objective framework through which we can assess Saudi Arabia’s efforts in combatting terrorism.⁴⁴ This helps us avoid the misinformation propagated by the Saudi authorities regarding their role in combatting terrorism. At the same time, we have to keep in mind that these United Nations benchmarks are not very useful if we do not have accurate knowledge of the systematic practices of the Saudi authorities.

The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy is based on four pillars⁴⁵ that were designed to work together as a whole. If

⁴⁴ See generally *About the Task Force*, UNITED NATIONS, <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/ctitf/en/about-task-force> (last visited Mar. 22, 2018) (“The mandate of the CTITF is to strengthen coordination and coherence of counter-terrorism efforts of the United Nations system.”).

⁴⁵ See *id.*

divided, these pillars might contribute to more terrorism or prolong its presence, instead of providing solutions to the problem of terrorism.

These pillars are:

Pillar I: Procedures that aim to deal with causes of terrorism and its spread;

Pillar II: Procedures that aim to prevent terrorism and counter it;

Pillar III: Procedures that aim to build state capacity to combat terrorism with international and UN support; and

Pillar IV: Procedures that aim to guarantee respect for human rights for all and the rule of law as central to fighting terrorism.

There is much that could be said about all four of these pillars. But for the purposes of this essay, it is particularly important to comment on the second and fourth pillars, and point out an important aspect of the third.

Starting with the fourth pillar, it is very easy to see that Saudi Arabia has failed in safeguarding human rights and the rule of law in its fight against terrorism. The law is under the complete control of an absolutist monarch who is the head of all the different branches of the government.⁴⁶ There is no independent legislature in Saudi Arabia.⁴⁷ At a time when parliaments around the world are elected by the people to legislate laws, Saudi Arabia's Shura Council is fully appointed by the king.⁴⁸ Its discussions and recommendations are governed by the government. The Saudi Arabian judiciary is also dependent on the king who, according to Article 5 of the Royal Decree M/78 of 1/10/2007, assigns the head of the Supreme Judicial Council, the highest judicial authority, in addition to 10 of its members, the head of the Supreme Court, the head of Bureau of Public Prosecution, and the Minister and Vice-Minister of Justice. It is also important to note the authorities' claim of a unique Saudi Arabian "open door" policy, by which they mean that

⁴⁶ When we review articles 7, 44, 50, 52, and 55 of the "Basic Law of Governance", we find the broad powers of the king. Royal Order No. (A/90) dated: 27/8/1412H (Basic Law of Governance), BUREAU OF EXPERTS AT THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS, <https://www.boe.gov.sa/ViewStaticPage.aspx?lang=en&PageID=25>. This, in theory, also practically proves the absolute king's control over everything in the country.

⁴⁷ The elected parliament is supposed to play the legislative role, but the one in Saudi Arabia is the Shura Council, which is fully appointed by the king. See الشورى [Shura Council System] art. 3, SAUDI ARABIA, <https://www.shura.gov.sa/wps/wcm/connect/shuraarabic/internet/laws+and+regulations/the+basic+law+of+government/shura+council+law> (last visited Apr. 28, 2018).

⁴⁸ *Id.*

the rulers hold public sessions directly accessible to their citizens, with the purpose of hearing their demands.⁴⁹ A closer examination of this “open door” policy demonstrates that it weakens the rule of law and its impartiality.

As to safeguarding human rights for all, which is the other part of the fourth pillar, the extent of the authorities’ failure and the violations could not be clearer. We can point out some of these violations here:

1. Torture: Independent reports detailing the extent of the authorities’ use of torture are numerous and can be found on the website of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.⁵⁰ Among these is the report submitted by the European Saudi Organization for Human Rights on 30 March 2016.⁵¹
2. Use of excessive force and extrajudicial executions: A sample of the authorities’ routine use of excessive force and extrajudicial executions can be found in the ongoing events in the Qatif region of Saudi Arabia since 2011. At least 6 cases of extrajudicial executions have been documented, in addition to 9 targeted killings of peaceful protesters.⁵²
3. Discrimination: Discrimination is widely practiced in Saudi Arabia, and targets women and all those groups who diverge from the religious ideology of the Saudi government. These include not only religious minorities but tribes and regions as well.⁵³
4. Lack of political freedoms: There are no political parties in Saudi Arabia, and people have no right to freely express their opinion. The

⁴⁹ See *Open Door Policy: The Emirate of Riyadh “Model”*, ALMANTIQ (May 3, 2017) (Arabic), <http://almnatiq.net/408311/>.

⁵⁰ *Reporting Status for Saudi Arabia*, UNITED NATIONS, http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/TreatyBodyExternal/Countries.aspx?CountryCode=SAU&Lang=EN (last visited Mar. 16, 2018).

⁵¹ See *Examination of Saudi Arabia’s Second Periodic Report*, EUR. SAUDI ORG. FOR HUMAN RIGHTS (Mar. 28, 2016), http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2fCAT%2fCSS%2fSAU%2f23603&Lang=en.

⁵² EUR. SAUDI ORG. FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, *A PROTESTER KILLED BY THE SAUDI GOVERNMENT, AND A RISING NUMBER OF EXTRAJUDICIAL EXECUTION VICTIMS* (Nov. 19, 2014), <http://www.esohr.org/en/?p=655>.

⁵³ See *Saudi Arabia: Official Hate Speech Targets Minorities*, HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH (Sept. 26, 2017, 12:00 AM), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/09/26/saudi-arabia-official-hate-speech-targets-minorities>; see also إحدى أكبر المشاكل الاجتماعية التي تواجه المجتمع السعودي هي مشكلة العنصرية، والتي [Saudi Arabia is the Most Racist Arab Country], SASA POST (Aug. 11, 2014) (Arabic), <https://www.sasapost.com/saudi-arabia-is-the-most-racist-arab-country>.

authorities prevent citizens from the most basic of political expressions. An example of this is the case of Khaled al-Omeir.⁵⁴

5. Economic deprivation: It is shameful that one of the richest countries in the world has such high levels of poverty as in Saudi Arabia. The authorities have made much effort to hide the real numbers from the world. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Poverty, Mr. Philip Alston, has pointed out how Saudi Arabia has hidden crucial facts and misled him despite his request from the authorities to provide him with the information for his visit to the country.⁵⁵

6. Absence of good governance: There is no doubt that Saudi Arabia is far from having good governance, including respect for human rights, rule of law, effective participation, political pluralism, transparency, and accountability. And there is also no doubt that the absence of these factors creates the ideal environment for creating terrorism.⁵⁶

All of these serious issues, including those related to human rights, create severe problems for people in Saudi Arabia every day. But perhaps more serious and concerning is the behavior of the authorities in dealing with these issues. The Saudi authorities routinely and continuously deny the existence of any problem. When faced with the facts, and with nowhere to run, they exhaust all attempts to mislead before partially acknowledging a problem. Even in such high forums as the Human Rights Council, where Saudi Arabia addresses the whole world, there is a complete denial of torture in Saudi Arabia, and the country's representative claimed that "my country fights against all material and moral aspects of torture through laws, legislation, and their strict execution that are equally applied to all."⁵⁷ In the same speech, and in reference to the very common practice in Saudi Arabia of using forced

⁵⁴ See السعودية تتجاهل قرار فريق الأمم المتحدة المعني بالإعتقال التعسفي في إطلاق سراح الناشط خالد العمير [Saudi Arabia Ignores the Decision of the United Nations Panel on Arbitrary Detention to Release Activist Khaled Al-Omeir], EUR. SAUDI ORG. FOR HUMAN RIGHTS (Mar. 30, 2017) (Arabic), <http://www.esohr.org/?p=479>.

⁵⁵ See Professor Philip Alston (Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights), *End of Mission Statement* (Jan. 19, 2017), <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=21094>.

⁵⁶ See *Good Governance and Human Rights*, OFF. OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMM'R FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, <http://www.ohchr.org/en/Issues/Development/GoodGovernance/Pages/GoodGovernanceIndex.aspx> (last visited Mar. 29, 2018).

⁵⁷ Bandar al-Ali, Address at the Human Rights Council Meeting on Torture and on the Sale of Children (Mar. 8, 2016); see عودية: نهج لا يستثني الأطفال التعذيب في السجن [Torture in Saudi Arabia: An Approach That Excludes Children], EUR. SAUDI ORG. FOR HUMAN RIGHTS (Nov. 20, 2017) (Arabic), <http://www.esohr.org/?p=2157>.

confessions, the country's representative also claimed that "all evidence collected by illegal means is considered inadmissible. Evidence from torture and ill-treatment, or those collected from searches without legal warrants are considered illegal and inadmissible."⁵⁸ Such speeches are all too common, and the persistent denial of the problem demonstrates a lack of will to finding a solution.

In its relationship with other countries and international organizations, Saudi Arabia also follows a similar pattern of denial and misleading statements to avoid criticism. A good example of Saudi Arabia's behavior towards states that criticize its human rights record is in the country's response to the Swedish Foreign Minister, Margot Walstrom, when she criticized Saudi Arabia for its human rights record.⁵⁹ Immediately after her statement, the Saudi authorities withdrew their ambassador from Sweden and froze granting business visas to Swedish businesses.⁶⁰ This sent a clear message to countries across the world that any attempt to publicly criticize Saudi Arabia would lead to retaliation and immediate political and economic harm.

This same pattern of behavior is witnessed inside countries where the authorities rely on oppression to assert their rule. They prevent critical discussion of human rights in Saudi Arabia, even if these discussions refer to undeniable facts. For example, on January 20, 2016, the Saudi authorities arrested a teacher named Mohamed al-Abeed,⁶¹ which many observers reported was prompted by al-Abeed's brief discussion with the Interior Minister, Muhammad bin Nayef, when the latter was visiting the site of a terrorist attack in al-Qadiah on May 22, 2015, which killed al-Abeed's brother.⁶² As documented by a video, al-Abeed told the Interior Minister that, "if the state does not perform its

⁵⁸ *Id.*

⁵⁹ David Crouch, *Clash Between Sweden and Saudi Arabia Escalates as Ambassador is Withdrawn*, THE GUARDIAN (Mar. 11, 2015), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/11/clash-sweden-saudi-arabia-escalates-ambassador-withdrawn-human-rights>.

⁶⁰ *Id.*; cf. اعتذار السويد يعيد السفير السعودي إلى ستوكهولم [Sweden's Apology Returns Saudi Ambassador to Stockholm], AL-RIYADH (Mar. 29, 2015) (Arabic), <http://www.alriyadh.com/1034210>.

⁶¹ *The Apprehension of a Citizen Who Criticised in Front of the Crown Prince the Performance of the Saudi Government in Dealing with Terrorism Continues Since 5 Months*, EUR. SAUDI ORG. FOR HUMAN RIGHTS (July 3, 2016), <http://www.esohr.org/en/?p=491>.

⁶² Alhurra, *قصةنا_قصةنا: ماذا حصل للمواطن السعودي الذي تجرأ وتحدث مع الأمير محمد بن نايف؟* [Dialogues between Prince and Al-Abeed], YOUTUBE (Aug. 5, 2016) (Arabic), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bWyNZfPRPP0> (originally broadcasted by Alhurra on May 26, 2015).

duties in protecting its citizens then it is a partner in the crime.”⁶³ In his criticism, al-Abeed was referring to the authorities’ role in supporting the al-Wesal channel⁶⁴ that promotes extremism and hatred towards the Shia. He was arrested seven months later and has remained in prison without an official investigation or trial as of the time of publication of this article.⁶⁵ The treatment of al-Abeed by the authorities sends a clear message to Saudis not to dare criticize the rulers, regardless of the nature of their criticism. Not only does the treatment of al-Abeed violate his basic rights, it also violates international law, and principles promoting the rights of victims of terrorism and urging their inclusion in counter-terrorism strategies.⁶⁶

A. ON PILLAR II: PROCEDURES TO PREVENT AND COMBAT TERRORISM

In contrast to the holistic view that argues for the use of numerous tools to combat terrorism, Saudi Arabia relies excessively on the use of security-related procedures at the expense of all others. The following security-related procedures and means are the most common:

1. Enforced disappearances: Many of those accused of terrorism are typically arbitrarily arrested or even kidnapped from the streets, checkpoints, work, or even home, without prior warning or an arrest warrant. This is followed by months or more than a year of incommunicado detention and no announcement about charges or reasons for arrest.⁶⁷
2. Unfair trials: All those accused of “terrorism-related” charges are put on trial at the Specialized Criminal Court (SCC), a security and counterterrorism court that was formed in 2008.⁶⁸ This is the same court where human rights defenders, prisoners of conscience, and peaceful demonstrators are tried. The SCC hasn’t written jurisdiction, and it

⁶³ EUR. SAUDI ORG. FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, *supra* note 61.

⁶⁴ WESAL TV, <http://www.tvwesal.com> (last visited Mar. 29, 2018).

⁶⁵ EUR. SAUDI ORG. FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, *supra* note 61.

⁶⁶ S.C. Res. 1963, at 3 (Dec. 20, 2010).

⁶⁷ See, e.g., *Judiciary of Saudi Sentenced to Death a Minor Who Participated in Demonstrations*, EUR. SAUDI ORG. FOR HUMAN RIGHTS (June 23, 2014), <http://www.esohr.org/en/?p=674>.

⁶⁸ Lori Plotkin Boghardt, *From ISIS to Activists: New Security Trials in Saudi Arabia*, 33 WASH. INST. NEAR EAST POL’Y 1 (May 2016), <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/ResearchNote33-Boghardt-6.pdf>; *Saudi Arabia: Abolish Terrorism Court*, HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH (Apr. 27, 2012), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/04/27/saudi-arabia-abolish-terrorism-court>.

lacks the minimum standards of providing justice to those charged with terrorism.⁶⁹

3. Lack of independent judiciary: As mentioned above, the Saudi judiciary is not independent of the executive branch of government. Many lawyers and human rights defenders who were tried in Saudi courts or defended others in these courts confirm the judiciary's lack of independence.⁷⁰ All courts are typically under the direct control of the Interior Ministry, not only in practice but also according to some of the laws, such as the counter-terrorism law that extends vast powers to the Minister of Interior Affairs at the expense of the judiciary. And about the lack of independence of the SCC in Saudi, in January 2016, the Committee against Torture said in its concluding observations on the second periodic report of Saudi Arabia:

In addition, the Committee is concerned that the Specialized Criminal Court, which was established in 2008 to try cases of terrorism, is insufficiently independent of the Ministry of the Interior. The Committee notes the reports received that judges of the Court have repeatedly refused to act on claims made by defendants facing terrorism charges that they were subjected to torture or ill-treatment during interrogations for the purpose of compelling a confession, including in the cases of Fadelal-Manasef, Ali al-Nimr, Dawoudal-Marhoun and Abdullah al-Zaher (arts. 2 and 15).⁷¹

4. The death penalty: International law emphasizes that the death penalty, even when used for "terrorism-related" offences, should only be used after ensuring numerous safeguards of fair trial are in place.⁷² But the reality of the death penalty and executions in Saudi Arabia is far from the minimum of fair trial standards.⁷³ This could be seen in the analysis provided by an expert in international criminal law, Mr. Oliver Windridge, on the execution of a young Saudi demonstrator

⁶⁹ HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, *supra* note 68.

⁷⁰ HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, *PRECARIOUS JUSTICE: ARBITRARY DETENTION AND UNFAIR TRIALS IN THE DEFICIENT CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM OF SAUDI ARABIA* 55, 100, 130 (Mar. 2008), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2008/03/24/precarius-justice/arbitrary-detention-and-unfair-trials-deficient-criminal>.

⁷¹ Comm. Against Torture, *Concluding Observations On the Second Periodic Report of Saudi Arabia*, ¶ 17, U.N. Doc. CAT/C/SAU/CO/2 (June 8, 2016), http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CAT/C/SAU/CO/2&Lang=En.

⁷² Human Rights Council, *Capital Punishment and the Implementation of the Safeguards Guaranteeing Protection of the Rights of Those Facing the Death Penalty*, ¶ 19 U.N. Doc. A/HRC/30/18 (July 16, 2015), <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session30/Pages/ListReports.aspx>.

⁷³ See generally Economic and Social Council Res. 1984/50 (May 25, 1984) (discussing the safeguards guaranteeing protection of the rights of those facing the death penalty).

by the name of Mohamed al-Shioukh⁷⁴ who was executed on January 2, 2016. This case is among many similar ones such as that of the Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr and the activist Ali al-Rubh who was accused of crimes he had allegedly committed when he was under 18, and yet was sentenced to death in violation of international law.

To the above, we can also add other patterns of behavior by the authorities that include unfair trials leading to excessive prison terms, such as thirty-year prison sentences, and other common practices like keeping a prisoner detained years after he finishes serving his sentence.⁷⁵

These procedures that the authorities typically rely on to counter terrorism are not in line with the requirements of the second pillar of the UN's counterterrorism strategy. The discrepancy between the common counterterrorism practices in Saudi Arabia and international standards is further emphasized when we keep in mind the impossibility of holding those in power accountable to such practices and for committing numerous and ongoing violations. Those who dare to raise a case against an official or an office are retaliated against. Furthermore, not only are victims unable to hold the authorities accountable, the authorities also rely on the common practice of labelling anyone they extra-judicially execute or whose rights they violate as "terrorist." This is exemplified in the cases of two children, Thamer Hasan al-Rabee⁷⁶ and Waleed Talal al-'Areed.⁷⁷ In the latter's case, the victim's family were even unable to retrieve his body for a proper burial.

Extrajudicial executions, torture, and executing children are absolutely prohibited, and together with the complete lack of redress and accountability, they create a deeply flawed counter-terrorism strategy. A crime, including a clearly defined terrorist crime, should be treated as such regardless if it is committed by an individual or a state actor. It is understandable that human rights violations can occur in any country, and this can be properly addressed by resorting to the law. But it is incomprehensible that in addition to committing numerous violations and

⁷⁴ See *New Evidence: Shocking Legal Analysis of Executed Saudi Protestor Mohammed Alshioukh Show "Grave Miscarriage of Justice,"* EUR. SAUDI ORG. FOR HUMAN RIGHTS (Jan. 18, 2018), <http://www.esohr.org/en/?p=1254>.

⁷⁵ Human Rights Council, *supra* note 72, ¶¶ 22–23.

⁷⁶ See *The Saudi Government Extrajudicial Executed 5 Citizens Based On Unproven Allegations,* EUR. SAUDI ORG. FOR HUMAN RIGHTS (Jan. 6, 2015), <http://www.esohr.org/en/?p=636>.

⁷⁷ See *Saudi Arabia Ends March 2017 With Grave Violations in Qatif and Awamiya Under the Pretext of Pursuing Wanted Persons,* EUR. SAUDI ORG. FOR HUMAN RIGHTS (Mar. 11, 2017), <http://www.esohr.org/en/?p=344>.

crimes, the Saudi authorities themselves control and define the laws and crimes, including what constitutes terrorism-related crimes, in ways that suit their own ends.

It is also important to point out that the authorities' counterterror practices have a disproportionately negative impact on women and children who are deprived of many of the economic and social rights that are extended to men. Out of desperation and frustration, women and children took to the streets to protest the violations faced by their husbands, fathers, and male relatives, and they were arrested, humiliated, mistreated, and some of them sentenced to prison on vague charges.⁷⁸ As such, thousands of families have suffered and continue to suffer from the authorities' counterterror strategies.⁷⁹ The authorities also do not shy away from using collective punishment on family members, villages, and neighborhoods of those wanted for terrorism-related crimes. The perfect example is the ongoing assault on the town of al-Awamiyah, which led the United Nations to issue a number of statements including one titled "Saudi Arabia's use of force and demolitions in the Al-Masora neighborhood violates human rights."⁸⁰

B. ON PILLAR III: PROCEDURES THAT AIM TO BUILD STATE CAPACITY TO COMBAT TERRORISM WITH INTERNATIONAL AND UN SUPPORT

It is understandable that different states have different capacities to combat terrorism. That is why numerous international programs attempt to increase those capacities and improve the country's ability to protect human rights while combatting terrorism. Saudi Arabia unfortunately uses these programs and international cooperation to

⁷⁸ See, e.g., *اعتقال 176 متظاهراً بينهم 15 امرأة*, CNN (Mar. 1, 2013), http://archive.arabic.cnn.com/2013/middle_east/3/1/saudi.protests/index.html.

⁷⁹ See generally *تصاعد مطالب الإعدام العام بإعدام سجناء، وأحكام مقلقة في الأسابيع القادمة* [The Demands of the Public Prosecutor to Execute Prisoners Escalated, and Disturbing Provisions in the Coming Weeks], EUR. SAUDI ORG. FOR HUMAN RIGHTS (Aug. 12, 2014) (Arabic), <http://www.esohr.org/?p=754>; *السعودية: السجن 30 عاماً لمتهم طلب خروج درع الجزيرة من البحرين* [Saudi Arabia: 30 Years Imprisonment for Accused of Seeking the Exit of the Island Shield from Bahrain], CNN (Dec. 23, 2013) (Arabic), http://archive.arabic.cnn.com/2013/middle_east/12/22/Saudi.arabia.jail.activist.Bahrain/index.html.

⁸⁰ *Saudi Arabia's use of force and demolitions in the Al-Masora neighborhood violates human rights*, OFF. OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMM'R FOR HUMAN RIGHTS (May 24, 2017), <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=21657&LangID=E>.

mislead the world about its attempts to combat terrorism and protect human rights. This includes the agreement signed between Saudi Arabia and OHCHR in June 2012 that instituted a number of training programs in Saudi Arabia.⁸¹ But in reality, there has been no effect or extension of this program onto the policies and practices of the government or the reality of the human rights situation on the ground. Civil society is completely blocked from participating in such programs.

Also noteworthy are the programs run by the authorities, especially the Mohammed Bin Naif Counseling Care Center for combatting the ideological aspects of terrorism and rehabilitating those accused of terrorism.⁸² According to an interview I conducted in May 2017, with one of the victim was in this center, whose name I cannot mention for security reasons, the whole purpose of the center is to create obedient subjects that are fully loyal to the state. The center does not do much to counter extremist thoughts and ideologies or hate speech. Moreover, some of the religious figures involved in this project and in rehabilitation programs are very likely to be from the same official religious school, which produced hatred and extremism.⁸³

II. CIVIL SOCIETY AND COUNTER-TERRORISM

International human rights theories emphasize the role of civil society in counter-terrorism. These theories encourage the participation of civil society in counterterror policies and practices, and encourage governments to consult with civil society and benefit from its expertise.⁸⁴ This emphasis and encouragement is clearly highlighted in the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.⁸⁵

The role of civil society should not be perceived as secondary, or as a mere formality, but as essential to effective policymaking. Excluding

⁸¹ *Technical cooperation in Saudi Arabia*, OFF. OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMM'R FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Countries/MENARegion/Pages/TechnicalCooperationSaudiaArabia.aspx> (last visited Mar. 24, 2018); المملكة توقع مذكرة تفاهم مع المفوضية السامية لحقوق الإنسان في جنيف [Kingdom signs Memorandum of Understanding with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva], AL-RIYADH (June 28, 2012) (Arabic), <http://www.alriyadh.com/747624>.

⁸² MOHAMMED BIN NAIF COUNSELING AND CARE CENTER, <https://goo.gl/MCcCHQ> (last visited Apr. 3, 2018).

⁸³ According to a source who spent months at the Mohammad Bin Naif Counseling and Care Center.

⁸⁴ G.A. Res. 60/228, at 2 (Sept. 8, 2006).

⁸⁵ *Id.* at 4–5.

civil society will likely render successful counter-terrorism policies difficult to achieve and sustain. One cannot maintain optimism towards any counterterror strategy that excludes the essential and meaningful role of civil society.

In Saudi Arabia, the current counter-terrorism strategy is seriously flawed not only because civil society is excluded, but also because participants in civil society are labelled terrorists. Rights activists, lawyers, journalists, and anyone who dares to call for basic rights are closely watched by the authorities, who go as far as accusing them of terrorist crimes under the counter-terrorism law and put them on trial at the Specialized Criminal Court.

We can refer to a number of such cases in recent years where the authorities terrorized civil society in the name of fighting terror. The following is a sample:

1. On March 10, 2014, Saudi media reported “10-year prison sentence for the blogger of incitement”⁸⁶ and “sentencing a participant in the Awamiyah terrorism to eight years in prison.”⁸⁷ The person in one of these news reports is Zaher al-Zaher, a peaceful activist who works as a medical supervisor in one of the public schools. He was accused of providing medical aid to those injured by government forces in anti-government demonstrations in al-Qatif in 2011 and 2012. His providing medical aid and treatment to injured civilians was considered a terrorist crime, whereas the government’s targeting of peaceful protestors and unarmed civilians was considered counter-terrorism.⁸⁸
2. The Specialized Criminal Court sentenced the human rights defender, Waleed Abu al-Khair,⁸⁹ under the “Law of Terrorism and its Financing,” the counter-terrorism law, and had him tried in the Specialized Criminal Court. He was sentenced to fifteen years in prison and a fifteen-year travel ban after his release.⁹⁰ According to the verdict, Waleed Abu al-Khair will be released from prison when

⁸⁶ 10 سنوات لمغزّد التحريض و 8 لإرهابي العوامية [Ten-year prison sentence for the blogger of incitement and eight-year for al-Awamiya terrorist], OKAZ (Mar. 10, 2014) (Arabic), <https://www.okaz.com.sa/article/907285>.

⁸⁷ الحكم على مشارك في إرهاب العوامية بالسجن 8 سنوات [A participant in al-Awamiya terrorism was sentenced to eight years’ imprisonment], AL-RIYADH (Mar. 11, 2014) (Arabic), <http://www.alriyadh.com/917023>.

⁸⁸ After torturing and 639 days of arbitrary arrest the health nurse presented Alzahrer to court, EUR. SAUDI SOC’Y FOR HUMAN RIGHTS (Oct. 13, 2014), <http://esshright.blogspot.de/2013/11/after-torturing-and-639-days-of.html>.

⁸⁹ Violating UN Pledges by Applying Vague Laws and Unspecialized Court, the Saudi Court Jailed a Human Rights Defender to 15-year, EUR. SAUDI ORG. FOR HUMAN RIGHTS (Sept. 21, 2014), <http://www.esohr.org/en/?p=668>.

⁹⁰ *Id.*

he is fifty years old, and allowed to travel abroad when he is sixty-five. All of this because he peacefully called for internationally and locally recognized basic rights.

3. Saudi Arabia also misrepresents peaceful demonstrations and labels them “terrorist movements” through state-controlled media outlets. The Saudi government has also come to increasingly rely on the armies of electronic warriors on social media platforms that it has recruited to propagate and justify its policies and practices. The best example of this is the authorities’ killing of Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr,⁹¹ the Shia religious leader and peaceful social justice activist, while persistently referring to him as “the leader of the Awamiyah terrorism.”⁹² The authorities even tried to conflate his case with al-Qaeda terrorists,⁹³ though he is known for his peaceful activism. Human Rights Watch referred to his execution as being “on a host of vague charges, apparently based largely on his peaceful criticism of Saudi officials.”⁹⁴ Amnesty International wrote that the authorities’ “killing of Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr in particular suggests they are also using the death penalty in the name of counter-terror to settle scores and crush dissidents.”⁹⁵

4. Legally, Saudi Arabia uses the counter-terrorism law in dealing with civil society organizations. The Specialized Criminal Court used the law to sentence Abdulaziz al-Shubaily, a member of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA), to eight years in prison followed by an eight-year travel ban.⁹⁶ Among his charges was his work for and participation in the civil society organization ACPRA.⁹⁷ The charge of participating or working in a civil society organization is based on the fact that, until March 2016, Saudi Arabia had intentionally rejected a law that would allow independent civil society organizations from registering and acquiring legal

⁹¹ *Fact Check: The Truth About Sheikh Nimr*, AM. FOR DEMOCRACY & HUMAN RIGHTS IN BAHR. (Feb. 29, 2016), <http://www.adhrb.org/2015/12/fact-check-the-truth-about-sheikh-nimr>.

⁹² الحكم بالقتل تعزيراً على قائد إرهاب العوامية [The death sentence is confirmed upon the leader of Awamiyah terrorism], AL-RIYADH (Oct. 15, 2014) (Arabic), <http://www.alriyadh.com/985153>.

⁹³ أمام ميزان واحد خيانة الوطن وتوظيف الدين لأغراض سياسية واستباحة . . . منظراً الإرهاب من مذهبين: النمر وآل شويل [Al-Nimr and Al-Shuweil: A view of terrorism from two doctrines . . . of one scale of treason and use religion for political and total allowance of bloodshed], AAWSAT (Nov. 30, 2015) (Arabic), <http://aawsat.com/node/508811>.

⁹⁴ *Saudi Arabia: Events of 2016*, HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/saudi-arabia> (last visited Apr. 3, 2018).

⁹⁵ *Shia Cleric Among 47 Executed by Saudi Arabia in a Single Day*, AMNESTY INT’L (Jan. 2, 2016), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/press-releases/2016/01/shia-cleric-among-47-executed-by-saudi-arabia-in-a-single-day>.

⁹⁶ *Saudi Arabia: Counter-terror court sentences activist for exposing systematic human rights violations*, AMNESTY INT’L (May 29, 2016), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/05/saudi-arabia-counter-terror-court-sentences-activist-for-exposing-systematic-human-rights-violations>.

⁹⁷ *Id.*

recognition.⁹⁸ This is despite the fact that a law is not needed for this purpose, since Saudi Arabia has ratified a number of international and regional treaties that guarantee this right.⁹⁹

The Saudi Arabian authorities have attempted to transform civil society and its role as an effective agent of counter-terrorism to a new role where they perceive and treat it as a component of terrorism. By doing so, they have prevented civil society efforts in combating terrorism. The authorities have also persecuted anyone who dares to defend the rights of suspected terrorists or those accused of terrorism. They have relied on their electronic armies to defame activists and have prosecuted those who have called for justice and fairness in dealing with prisoners of conscience. It is important to keep in mind that the authorities typically rely on social media to silence activists and prepare public opinion for the eventual arrests and imprisonment of these activists and other voices.

In rhetoric, the Saudi authorities sometimes acknowledge the existence of civil society. However, they do so either in the negative sense above, or in the positive sense only when they refer to their own official organizations and those controlled by different ministries. The term “civil society” is also used to refer to the elite that is loyal to the government but not to the independent civil society organizations and activists who are either in prison, in exile, or terrorized into silence.¹⁰⁰

November 2015 could be considered by some to be a turning point for Saudi civil society, since it was then that the authorities finally issued and began to implement a law of associations that would allow civil society organizations to receive legal recognition and therefore be able to operate.¹⁰¹ A closer look at the law of associations, however, forces its readers to lose all optimism because of a number of significant issues with this law, such as:

⁹⁸ [Royal Decree No. (M/8) dated: 19/2 / 1437H], BUREAU OF EXPERTS AT THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS (Arabic), <https://www.boe.gov.sa/m/viewsubsystemdetails.aspx?systemid=374>.

⁹⁹ See CRPD AND OPTIONAL PROTOCOL SIGNATURES AND RATIFICATIONS, U.N. DIVISION FOR SOCIAL POLICY & DEVELOPMENT DISABILITY, http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/2016/Map/DESA-Enable_4496R6_May16.pdf.

¹⁰⁰ See, e.g., U.N. Human Rights Council, National report submitted in accordance with paragraph 5 of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 16/21 – Saudi Arabia, ¶ 5, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/WG.6/17/SAU/1.

¹⁰¹ Hala Aldosari, *New Saudi Law Maintains State Control Over Civil Society Organizations*, THE ARAB GULF STATES INST. IN WASH. (Dec. 27, 2015), <http://www.agsiw.org/new-saudi-law-maintains-state-control-over-civil-society-organizations/>.

1. On October 30, 2016, six months after it came into effect, the trials began of two human rights defenders by the name of Mohamed al-Utaibi and Abdullah al-Atawi who were charged with, among other things, “founding an unlicensed organization.” The ongoing imprisonment of a number of human rights activists partly on the charge of “founding an unlicensed organization” also suggests that the law of associations has not changed the reality.¹⁰²

2. The law contains glaring omissions such as the absence of any mention of “human rights” or establishing human rights organizations, despite listing all the areas, organizations and activities that the law applies to, such as: religious, social, cultural, medical, environmental, educational, scientific, technical, artistic, youth-related, touristic, etc.

3. At a time when the Interior Ministry is accused of some of the worst human rights violations in Saudi Arabia,¹⁰³ the law of associations grants it the power to issue and refuse licenses to applicant organizations. In this regard, reveals a lot about the approach of the authorities in dealing with civil society organizations, an approach characterized by perceiving things from state intelligence and security standpoints.

4. The association law came at a time when most of the activists and reformers lacked safety, where the Saudi government did not extend for reassurance, and there was a homogeneous feeling among independent activists that their intention of establishing institutes would put them at risk and sight, thus, some avoided applying and others somehow submitted non-direct human rights identification activities. One of the anti-corruption and human rights activist was arrested once he was moving forward with others to apply for permission. It does not mean there is a link between his arrest and submission as there is not any information regarding the accusations available. However, this indicates the intimidating atmosphere experienced by activists, as they do not know when they will be targeted.¹⁰⁴

We can therefore conclude that not only have the Saudi authorities excluded civil society from the counter-terrorism strategy, but, by labelling and accusing it of terrorism, they have turned it into a target of

¹⁰² العطاوي والعتيبي يواجهان محاكمة بعد عامين على إغلاق التحقيق معهما: السعودية تلاحق المدافعين عن حقوق الإنسان [Saudi Arabia pursues human rights defenders: Al-Attawi and Al-Otaibi face trial after two years of close investigation], EUR. SAUDI ORG. FOR HUMAN RIGHTS (Nov. 21, 2016) (Arabic), <http://www.esohr.org/?p=539>.

¹⁰³ AMNESTY INT'L, *supra* note 96.

¹⁰⁴ Based on the author's monitoring and daily follow-up of the human rights situation in Saudi Arabia, and work in the European Organization for five years, as an exclusive researcher in the case of human rights in Saudi Arabia.

the counter-terrorism strategy. This unfortunately contributes to an environment of exclusion and dismissal of peaceful activism, and pushes many citizens towards violence as a sole option.

III. CONCLUSION

If we consider the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Strategy to be a viable prescription to counter-terrorism, then Saudi Arabia's approach falls far short of the identified steps. Saudi Arabia's counter-terrorism approach is mostly based on using force and security measures that entail numerous human rights violations, and lack any procedures capable of delivering justice. Such an approach is more likely to prolong the problem of terrorism than to resolve it. Security measures and use of force are not a solution, but at best temporary steps to contain the crisis before it explodes again. In other words, Saudi Arabia's approach to counter-terrorism is going round in a circle of generating, sustaining, and growing terrorism, while supposedly trying to treat it.

The steps that Saudi Arabia takes in the name of counter-terrorism—such as extrajudicial executions, house raids, humiliating women and civilians, using torture and executions, etc.—inevitably leads to acts of violent revenge and retribution. Implementing new laws, such as the counter-terrorism law, are insufficient to solve any aspect of the crisis. This partly because of the absence of a free legislature that is capable of legislating or operationalizing the meanings of the laws and amending them, and partly because of the absence of an efficient executive administration that operates under the law and is free of corruption and vested interests. This makes issuing new laws a meaningless exercise in fighting terrorism.

The path that the current Saudi law of terrorism took clearly elaborates the above-mentioned points. It is not difficult to see the law and its use as another mechanism of oppression. This is exactly what Amnesty International warned of early on when the law was still a draft in 2011.¹⁰⁵ During the Arab Spring, the Saudi authorities were drafting the “Law of Combatting Terrorism and Its Financing.” At the time, Amnesty International warned that the law “would strangle peaceful

¹⁰⁵ *Proposed Saudi Arabian anti-terror law would strangle peaceful protest*, AMNESTY INT'L (July 22, 2011), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2011/07/proposed-saudi-arabian-anti-terror-law-would-strangle-peaceful-protest/>.

protest.”¹⁰⁶ Saudi Arabia responded to Amnesty International’s concerns by claiming that these concerns were unfounded and baseless.¹⁰⁷ And similar to its general approach to dealing with the opposite viewpoint, the authorities blocked Amnesty’s website in Saudi Arabia a few days after the organization’s criticism. Amnesty commented saying that blocking its website came “following the organization’s criticism of a draft anti-terror law that would stifle peaceful protest in the kingdom.”¹⁰⁸

In addition to human rights violations, oppression, and abuse of law, Saudi Arabia also relies on a single and extremist interpretation of religion that causes widespread hatred and contributes to acts of terror. This extremist interpretation of religion is not only propagated by the formal religious authorities, it also represents the will of the ruling elite and their belief. One can read the statement of the former Interior Minister and Crown Prince Nayef bin Abdulaziz al-Saud (1934-2012) at a conference titled “Salafism is the Legitimate Method and a National Demand” (December 27, 2011), when he stated,

[T]his blessed state arose on the method of the *salaf* since its inception by Mohamed bin Saud and his pact with Mohamed bin Abdulwahab—may God bless them—and it remains so to this day by the will of God . . . and we are proud of it We reiterate that this state will remain—with God’s permission—following the true *salafi* method . . . and it will neither deviate from it.”¹⁰⁹

To reassert the above point, Security Council Resolution 1963 of 2010 made an important statement that terrorism cannot be defeated by military force, or imposition of laws, or through intelligence operations alone.¹¹⁰ This is next to many similar policies and standpoints such as that of Mr. Martin Scheinin, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the

¹⁰⁶ *Saudi proposed anti-terrorism law is a tool to stifle peaceful protest*, AMNESTY INT’L (July 22, 2011) (Arabic), <https://www.amnesty.org/ar/press-releases/2011/07/proposed-saudi-arabian-anti-terror-law-would-strangle-peaceful-protest-2011-1/>.

¹⁰⁷ *قلق منظمة العفو الدولية من قانون مكافحة الإرهاب في المملكة لا أساس له .سفارة المملكة في بريطانيا /سياسي [Political/Embassy of the Kingdom in Britain ... Amnesty International’s concern of the anti-terrorism law in the Kingdom is unfounded]*, SAUDI PRESS AGENCY (July 23, 2011) (Arabic), <http://www.spa.gov.sa/viewstory.php?lang=ar&newsid=912897>.

¹⁰⁸ *See [Amnesty International’s Website is Blocked in Saudi Arabia]*, DEUTSCHE WELLE (July 26, 2011) (Arabic), <http://p.dw.com/p/123Kd>.

¹⁰⁹ *كلمة سمو ولي العهد في افتتاح ندوة السلفية منهج شرعي ومطلب وطني [Speech of His Highness the Crown Prince at the opening of the Salafist Seminar, a legitimate approach and a national demand]*, SAUDI ARABIA MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS (Apr. 22, 2012) (Arabic), <http://www.mofa.gov.sa/ServicesAndInformation/LeadershipStatements/CrownPrinceSpeeches/Pages/ArticleID20111228111625336.aspx>.

¹¹⁰ G.A. Res. 60/228, at 1 (Sept. 8, 2006).

promotion and protection of human rights while countering terrorism, that, “the systematic violation of human rights undermines true national security and may jeopardize international peace and security.”¹¹¹

Despite all these clear policies and standpoints, it is important to highlight that much of the international opinion seems to praise Saudi Arabia’s counterterror strategies instead of assessing it impartially. This is to a large degree because of prioritizing economic relations and benefits at the expense of freedoms and counter-terrorism. Countries such as Great Britain, the United States, Canada, Germany, Belgium, and others continue to praise Saudi Arabia despite the fact that these countries have suffered from the terrorism that Saudi Arabia has failed to deal with adequately. It is also painful to see such examples as the French President awarding the Saudi Interior Minister, Mohamed bin Nayef, the highest honor for his “great efforts in the region and world for combating extremism and terrorism” in March 2016.¹¹² The CIA similarly awarded a medal to the Interior Minister for “the outstanding intelligence work in the field of counter-terrorism” on February 10, 2017.¹¹³ This same minister is responsible for oppression, and provides immunity to the apparatuses of the Saudi state that commit gross human rights violations such as beheading of children and extrajudicial executions.¹¹⁴

This also indicates the inclination of global counterterror strategies to promote security measures in combatting terrorism at the expense of all the other crucial aspects of counter-terrorism strategies. For example, many countries including Italy have signed contracts with the Saudi government to provide military and security training to Saudi police to combat terrorism.¹¹⁵ But we never see a program to train officials or provide support to protect and promote human rights as prescribed in the above-mentioned fourth pillar of the United Nations

¹¹¹ Siracusa Principles, ICCPR, 36 INT. COMM. J. REV. 47, 50, ¶32 (1986); see also S.C. Res. 1963 (Dec. 20, 2010).

¹¹² [The French president awards Prince Mohammed bin Nayef a high-ranking French award], RT (March 6, 2016) (Arabic), <https://arabic.rt.com/news/813853>.

¹¹³ [Crown Prince receives CIA medal for contribution to security], AL ARABIYA (Feb. 10, 2017) (Arabic), <http://www.alarabiya.net/ar/saudi-today/2017/02/10/محمد-بن-نايف-يتم-تسليم-ميدالية-الامن-تحت-مظلة-جورج-ميدالية-يتم-تسليم-نايف-بن-محمد-CIA.html>.

¹¹⁴ AMNESTY INT’L, *supra* note 96.

¹¹⁵ [For these reasons, Saudi Arabia chose Italy to train in the fight against terrorism], ALHURRA (Nov. 27, 2016) (Arabic), <https://www.alhurra.com/a/saudi-italy-police/336745.html>.

counterterror strategy. This imbalance is partly a reflection of a weak global civil society in comparison to the powers enjoyed by states. This also needs to be addressed.

The weakness of the position of civil society in global counterterror strategies also reflects another unfair imbalance. Whereas international decision-making is quick to label individuals and groups as terrorists based on a broad definition of terrorism, it is far more hesitant and unwilling to do the same towards states, or to hold accountable states such as Saudi Arabia for the violence, killing, and destruction in Yemen. This is a serious flaw that creates deep resentment among oppressed people throughout the world.

This serious problem is not simply of description, but of definition. There are some who believe that understandings of terrorism and terrorist are purely driven by power and the powerful. Those in positions of power, who control mass media, manufacture definitions and concepts that they apply inconsistently, depending on the particular subject of scrutiny. This is why we see an absence of a unified global definition of terrorism. Some would argue that terrorism should be applied to such state behavior as that of utilizing military, diplomatic, and economic power to impoverish other countries or force them to submit to its will.¹¹⁶ Yet, we do not see any serious discussion concerning state terrorism.

I believe that it is important to have clear benchmarks and standards of defining and describing terrorism, regardless of whether practiced by an individual, group, or state. These standards should be created in consultation with civil society and the academic community to minimize political manipulation. Holding states accountable should become a priority since it contributes to correcting and enhancing state counterterror practices. One can argue that we see such an example in the US JASTA legislation.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ *Manufacturing and investment of "terrorism" in the Arab world*, AL JAZEERA (Feb. 19, 2015) (Arabic), <http://www.aljazeera.net/programs/arab-present-situation/2015/2/19/صناعة-واستثمار-الإرهاب-بالوطن-العربي-بالوطن-الإرهاب-واستثمار-صناعة>; *السياق والخلفية: الإرهاب في العالم العربي*; *see also* *العربي-بالوطن-الإرهاب-واستثمار-صناعة*; *Terrorism in the Arab World: Context, Background and Prospects*, NEW ARAB (July 7, 2016) (Arabic), <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/supplementaryouth/2016/7/16/الإرهاب-في-العالم-العربي-الإرهاب-واستثمار-صناعة>; *والأفاق-والخلفية-السياق*.

¹¹⁷ *The most important contents of the American law "sponsors of terrorism" America*, AL JAZEERA (Arabic), <http://www.aljazeera.net/encyclopedia/events/2016/9/29/أهم-مضامين-قانون-مضامين-أهم> (last visited Apr. 4, 2018).

In conclusion, we need to ask the following: Has the global counterterror strategy that is currently in practice contributed to the weakening or the strengthening of terrorism in the past two decades?

One answer could be found in the following statement of the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Jeffrey Feltman, when he stated that terrorism had become “more transnational, more dynamic and more multi-dimensional, with terrorists increasingly operating across borders.”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ الأمين العام يشدد على ضرورة تطوير استراتيجية الأمم المتحدة لمكافحة الإرهاب ويقترح إنشاء مكتب جديد لذلك [The Secretary-General emphasizes the need to develop the United Nations counter-terrorism strategy and proposes the establishment of a new office], UNITED NATIONS NEWS (Apr. 12, 2017) (Arabic), <https://news.un.org/ar/story/2017/04/274732#.WTGF-uvyt1s>.