# Testing the Feasibility of a Human Security Approach to Combat Violent Extremism in Palestine, Egypt, and Iraq

Human Security to
Counter Violent Extremism

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**Authored by:**

*ACPSS*
Omar Sheira
Rabha Allam
Ziad Akl

*CPSS*
Krmanj Othman
Kamaran Mohammad
Sabah Hayder

*Human Security Collective*
Sangeeta Goswami
Fulco van Deventer

**Co-authored by:**

Bibi van Ginkel, The Glocal Connection – Platform for Shared Security
Dina Zbeidy, Leiden University of Applied Sciences

**Review, support and assistance by:**

*ACPSS*
Ahmed Kamel ElBeheiry
Ahmed Askar
Amal Hamada
Amr Elshobaki
Mohab Adel
Noura Fakhry

*Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael'*
Apolline Rolland
Louise van Schaik
Tobias von Lossow

**CONTENTS**

# List of Abbreviations

ABM – Ansar Beyt al-Maqdis

ACPSS – Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies

CDCD – Center for Democracy and Community Development

Clingendael – Netherlands Institute of International Relations, 'Clingendael'

CPSS – Centre of Political and Strategic Studies of the Salahadeen University

CT – Counter Terrorism

CVE – Countering Violent Extremism

FGD – Focus Group Discussion

GPoT  – Global Political Trends Center

HS – Human Security

HSC – Human Security Collective

INGO – International Non-Governmental Organization

IS – Islamic State

ISIS/ISIL – Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant

KII – Key Informant Interview

KRG – Kurdistan Regional Government

MB – Muslim Brotherhood

MENA – Middle East and North Africa

NGO – Non-Governmental Organization

NWO – Dutch Research Council

PVE – Preventing Violent Extremism

SDG – Sustainable Development Goals

UN – United Nations

UNDP – United Nations Prevention Programme

VE – Violent Extremism

WANA – West Asia North Africa Institute

WOTRO – Science for Global Development Programme

# Preface

The Dutch national research council, NWO, put out a call in 2015 on 'Comprehensive Approaches to Human Security' within the 'Security and Rule of Law in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Settings' research program – an activity of WOTRO in close collaboration with the Knowledge Platform Security & Rule of Law. The aim of the call was to contribute to new evidence-based knowledge and provide insights to policymakers on inclusive and comprehensive approaches to human security in fragile settings and in view of transnational security threats.

A full proposal was submitted by a consortium consisting of research and practitioner partner organizations:

- Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael', The Hague, The Netherlands, (project lead)
- Global Political Trends Center (GPoT Center), Istanbul Kültür University, Istanbul, Turkey
- Human Security Collective (HSC), The Hague, The Netherlands
- Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies (ACPSS), Cairo, Egypt
- Center for Democracy and Community Development (CDCD), Jerusalem
- Centre of Political and Strategic Studies of the Salahadeen University (CPSS), Erbil, Iraq

One of six awarded projects for a duration of 36 months in March 2016, the focus of this project was to demonstrate the impact of a human security (HS) approach in Palestine, Egypt and Iraq in addressing the root causes of violent extremism (VE) as a regional threat. The objectives of the research included:

- **Validating** the push and pull factors of radicalization;
- **Gaining context-specific insights** into how HS is defined;
- Providing insight into conditions for **engagement (communities and security stakeholders)**;
- **Producing evidence** on how this engagement leads to joint implementation of an HS approach on countering violent extremism (CVE);
- Producing **context-specific evidence** on how a HS-approach can prevent VE;
- **Demonstrating impact** of the HS approach to policymakers;
- Providing insight into the context-specific **roles of women in CVE**; and
- Developing effective CVE policies, based on a HS approach, that **diminish the support base**
- **for VE** in communities (multi-disciplinary and multi-stakeholder).

It was recognized that there are remarkable differences in the political settings of the three countries. In the context of Iraq, ISIS[1] counts on a community of disenfranchised and marginalized groups and youth who see an alternative to the current state order. In Palestine, VE should be seen in the context of a lack of national unity, inefficient government and Israeli occupation. Egypt is recently facing increasing challenges to democratization and an increasing focus on hard security in CVE, thus weakening the conditions necessary to apply a HS approach to CVE.

The three countries present a complementary picture as there are significant differences in the push and pull factors leading to VE, in civic space, in trust levels between government and citizens, and also in the positions of women. The role that context plays in a HS approach is thus amplified in this

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[1]Also known as IS, ISIL, Daesh.

study. The research sought to validate the push and pull factors and demonstrate the efficacy of a HS approach in preventing VE through engaging local communities. These varying contexts were to be taken into account when deciding on the pathways used to strengthen the HS approach. One of the aims was to involve learning exchange and development at the local level, and connect the community with (inter)national security stakeholders relevant to CVE.

It was important for all the consortium members that through the process of the research, the capacity of local actors would be built. So, the aim was always for this to be more than a straightforward research project producing knowledge and insights. It was also about the process to be practice-oriented – with the ambition being a project of facilitating a broad-based, bottom-up, locally owned, and HS-grounded security agenda. The overall goals of this research were threefold: producing new evidence-based knowledge; strengthening linkages between academia, policymakers and practitioners; and increasing the capacity of local actors.

Given the sensitive nature of the research topic and the fact that the situation in the countries associated with the research was and continues to be volatile and fluid, it is of no surprise that not all of our initially-outlined processes went to plan. Most importantly, the 2016 coup d'état attempt in Turkey saw the suspension of passports for members of our partner organization in Istanbul, the GPoT Center. Tasked as they were under the proposal with regional coordination and capacity building, not being able to travel and the associated scrutiny they were under meant that they felt they had no option but to withdraw from the project at a very early stage. Another partner, CDCD in Palestine, ceased being a member of the consortium after April 2019. For this reason, the Palestine chapter in this report is based on a desk study that primarily reflects on perceptions of VE in Palestine and does not follow the same systematic approach as the chapters on Egypt and Iraq. For the same reason the Palestine case does not feature in the concluding chapter in which the question is answered on whether a human security approach works.

The political situation and other circumstances on the ground in the three regions have changed dramatically over the course of the project with serious implications for the feasibility of the methods planned, but more importantly for the security and safety of the project implementers themselves. The "do no harm" principle applied as much to the consortium members as it did to the research subjects. Ways to mitigate risks and adverse circumstances have been discussed intensively and alternative approaches found that –although not originally planned – offer, to the best extent possible, a diversity of insights to be used for the evidence-based data collection in the research.

In spite of the occasional setback caused by externalities beyond the project's control, the research continued apace with minor modifications to the project methodology as well as to the project team and attendant roles and responsibilities. The overall goals as outlined above have been met to a large extent in Iraq, to a somewhat lesser extent in Egypt, and to a lesser degree in Palestine. The following chapter will outline the research design, the working methods and the target audience.

# I.    Introduction

The Middle East region has a long history of political instability, violence and conflict, and has always been an important card in the hands of the big geopolitical powers of the day. Political and security developments in the past decade have further caused turmoil and unrest at best, and full-fledged conflicts and civil wars at worst. The sparks of hope that erupted during the so-called Arab Spring, which started in 2010, and which marked the beginning of political transitions and democratization in some countries throughout the region, has not fully delivered on its promise as perceived by a majority of the population. Political reforms, for instance, have not succeeded fully at local levels, and economic growth, employment and future prospects for the population have not matched expectations. Particularly among youth, these disappointments have aggravated perceptions of marginalization.

It was against the backdrop of these disappointments that ISIS grew in strength, gained territory and control, and eventually established the Caliphate in 2014 in parts of Syria and Iraq. In addition to the attraction of ISIS' ideology for local populaces, ISIS also spurred the travel of between 40,000 and 50,000 foreign terrorist fighters from approximately 140 different countries who joined their ranks and those of other jihadist organizations. The war and the atrocities committed have had a devastating impact on the region, left thousands dead or wounded, and caused a flow of refugees that has placed an enormous burden on the region in terms of dealing with transit, ensuring security, and providing food, medicine and shelter.

Even though the so-called Caliphate has now been defeated, ISIS has not. Although many of its fighters are dead or have been captured, some have returned to the countries they came from, or have travelled on to new emerging jihadist hotspots. There are also still several small terrorist cells in hiding or within prison camps (in which they are detained, awaiting trial), who are regrouping and gathering strength, or who are considering changing their allegiance to, e.g., Al Qaeda instead. In other words, the threat is far from over, having just morphed into a different shape. This also has an impact on state organs that need to develop prosecutorial strategies for those captured and on local communities where recruitment can take place. As a consequence, state institutions might step up their (hard) security responses, at the expense of the operational space for community-based organizations, and/or the trust deficit between state and citizen might deepen, leaving less room for HS approaches. To what extent the international community is involved in supporting HS approaches is a crucial facilitating factor. Certainly, with respect to the Palestinian case, the recent reversal in US position on Israeli settlements in the West Bank has obviously had an impact on the chances for the success of a HS approach in the area.

Clearly, this short summary of recent security developments in the region does not do justice to the complexities of these developments, yet shows that the problems of VE are still very imminent in the region, and something that cannot be easily dealt with. To confront this security and societal problem, comprehensive strategies are needed. There is a role for hard security in addressing imminent and emerging threats. At the same time, underlying root causes and triggers, and the propaganda and recruitment mechanisms, require multi-stakeholder, whole-of-society soft or HS approaches. Hard security responses are, for the purpose of this project, understood to include police or even military interventions, safety and security checks at vulnerable sites, cutting off supporting mechanisms and networks, investigation and prosecution of criminal acts, and legislation to ensure that the proper legal frameworks are in place. Soft or HS approaches can include the developments of counter or alternative narratives, engagement strategies with local and non-state

actors, inter- and intra-religious dialogue, youth and gender empowerment programs, vocational training, awareness raising, and various prevention programs, to name just a few.

As mentioned, the overall goals of this research were threefold: (1) producing new evidence-based knowledge; (2) strengthening linkages between academia, policymakers and practitioners; (3) and increasing the capacity of local actors. As a consequence, the methodology used was hybrid, depending on what the key objective was.

On the one hand, the project aimed to use capacity-building and train-the-trainer methods to build trust between different actors and reinforce the capacities and skills of all involved, in order to strengthen multi-stakeholder engagement. These engagements would then lead to the addressing of the concerns of the local population regarding the deficits in the way they perceived HS (referred to as the HS approach), in order to contribute to the mentioned goals (2) and (3).On the other hand, the project's objective (1) aimed to gather research data on how the perceptions of the population vis-à-vis HS change over time as a result of the engagement efforts related to objective (2). In that sense, the project thus aimed to contribute to building resilience in society, and create the conditions for exchange between different actors that play a role in the soft approaches, something which should be part and parcel of a comprehensive, legitimate and effective strategy to face complex security threats. In addition, the project aimed at working with state institutions to develop their strategies on CVE.

*Research questions, phases, methods and activities*:

The overarching research question was: '**Can a human security approach effectively address the drivers of violent extremism?**' Clingendael, HSC and GPoT Center have been engaged in dialogue with both government and civil society in the MENA region, in West and East Africa, and in Asia to analyze the root causes of VE and map the push and pull factors that motivate people to turn to VE. They have also been involved in the development of strategies with government and civil society to address the root causes of VE. The current research project sought to analyze such processes in Palestine, Egypt and Iraq. The research addressed the following sub-questions:

> (1) How are the root causes of VE in the three contexts defined and understood at the local, national and international levels? How can trust and cooperation between government and civil society be described at the start of this project?(validation phase)

> (2) How and under what conditions can a HS approach address these root causes effectively? To what extent is the current political setting conducive to establishing these conditions? How will the differences in political setting influence the impact of a HS approach to CVE on the three specified levels?

> (3) How can a gender focus be applied to security-related issues in the specific settings? How can women be empowered to contribute to CVE?

The first phase of this research consisted of validating the push and pull factors in the communities selected. The outcome of the validation involved confirmation, refutation, and/or adaptation of these push and pull factors, as well as a thorough understanding of the impact of each factor in the specific community. A shared understanding was to be arrived at and analyses of the links between conflict, insecurity and VE made. In this first phase, stakeholders were also to determine the trust-levels between different stakeholders.

The next phase of research was to focus on how the application of a HS approach can effectively address the push and pull factors leading to VE. From the understanding that a HS approach is developed bottom-up by and within the context of communities, and is comprehensive by taking peace, justice, security and development (concepts that are also very much related to SDG16) into account, the research posited the development of a HS approach itself as a theory of change. This was to be done by applying a HS framework that acknowledged the primacy of the local and the national level, but also paid attention to developments at the regional/international level. At each level the HS approach was to help formulate a specific analysis of root causes and interventions, and measures that could address the particular push and pull factors. A long-term goal would then be agreed upon, to be shared by all participants, as well as intermediate goals and measures that would help make that long-term goal a success. The interventions would define the pathways to prevention and transformation of the respective threat.

There are two complementary aspects across the different levels– a substance aspect and a relational aspect. Substance refers to the content in terms of what the analysis is and what the required interventions are. The relational aspect refers to the power shift that is needed to make a HS-approach effective. People need to own their security agenda. This power shift is a complex and sensitive process in the selected countries due to the trust deficit mentioned. The activities of this project were to address the local and national level in particular, and look into the conditions necessary to facilitate this power shift.

| Aspect/level | Local | National | Regional/international |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Content** | What are the factors at the local level leading to VE and support for VE within communities? What are effective responses at the local level from a HS perspective that can prevent VE? | What are the causes and triggers at the national level for VE to play out within the national context? What are the effective responses at the national level from a HS perspective that can prevent VE? | What are international factors that enhance VE as a transnational threat? What are effective responses at the international level from a HS perspective that can prevent VE? |
| **Relational** | What conditions are needed for communities to develop their own security agenda based on a HS-approach? How can the necessary power shift be facilitated? | What conditions are required to make communities partner in the development of a national CVE strategy based on a HS-approach? How can this process be effectively facilitated? | What conditions are required to make communities partner in the development of a transnational CVE strategy based on a HS-approach? How can this process be effectively facilitated? |

The impact of the HS approach on radicalization processes was to be measured in the second phase. The impact vis-à-vis the relational element of the HS approach would provide insight into the manner in which the political context at the outset in the three different countries influences this process. This was to deepen the understanding of the conditions needed for a HS approach to address the root causes of VE.

The processes of developing shared analyses of push and pull factors, identifying intervention activities and mechanisms, and empowering actors to implement activities and mechanisms included:

- Workshops: several workshops in the three countries served as a participative multi-stakeholder tool to explore, identify, analyze and validate outcomes and develop pathways. The content and relational aspects of the HS approach were implemented in each context

(the in-country workshops, as well as during the transnational ones: the kick-off workshop, the mid-term meeting and the final meeting)

- Questionnaires: Questionnaires were sent to participants prior to the workshops. The analysis of outcomes was shared with participants, helping to identify capacity-building and engagement needs, as well as potentially adjusting strategies. Participatory research based on these questionnaires were then conducted at the national level with the leadership and stakeholders (youth, women, religious, security sector, parents, teachers, etc.) in the communities selected.[2]

In addition, three transnational workshops have taken place over the course of the research cycle. The kick-off meeting was organized in 2016 and served to elaborate on the methodology and share experiences relevant to the research. It brought together consortium-members, stakeholders from national/international policymaking and academia. In 2018, the mid-term meeting allowed for the assessment of the methodology and preliminary outcomes, the adaptation of the research where necessary, and included consortium-members and a select group of stakeholders. A concluding workshop in November 2019 served to present the final outcomes/findings, and included participants of the mid-term workshop as well as stakeholders in the CVE arena.

The data used for the project has been gathered in two ways: in a participatory manner via workshops, and directly through semi-structured interviews via written questionnaires and one-on-one interviews with relevant stakeholders in the various communities. The latter guarantees the anonymity of responses and allows people to freely and openly share their views in a closed setting (to prevent ethical issues). The workshops were milestone moments throughout the project, allowing the core team to discuss, determine and, if needed, adjust their approach, for example on the following issues: geographic/demographic composition of participants, criteria for selection, format of the regional workshops, how to remain independent when interviewing both state and non-state actors, how to mitigate possible future conflict dynamics and how to avoid ethical issues.

Stakeholders at local and international level participated actively in developing HS approaches, which is about both content as well as social construction (trust and inclusion). The stakeholders were facilitated and trained during the workshops by the practitioners, who passed on the skills and knowledge developed during other levels and contexts of this research. The continuous interaction between the contexts and the levels has strengthened the understanding and skills of each stakeholder in the process. The research has led to a knowledge hub, a networking tool and training material for leaders at the community level as well as for policymakers.

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[2] In Egypt, for example: Two rounds of in-depth interviews with a 30 stakeholders; 6 focus groups with 62 participants.

## II.    Human Security: A Conceptual Framework

Security challenges today are as much faced by individuals and communities as by the state. And while governments continue to bear the primary responsibility for their nations' security, the threats from radicalization to VE and terrorism are more localized than ever. In certain contexts, municipal authorities, local practitioners and community-based groups are better placed to address these threats in a more context-specific and balanced manner by tackling the underlying factors conducive to radicalization, for instance, through dialogue and capacity building. This also makes it easier to prevent (unintended) negative consequences resulting from overly-broad counterterrorism policies, that risk limiting the political space of civil society actors, and even result in violations of human rights.

The concept of HS adds a security perspective complementary to state-centered security, acknowledging that security has to be provided and ensured by the whole of government and the whole of society, and cannot be in the hands of traditional state-security institutions only. The mainstreaming of the UN PVE plan of action approach underlines the fact that VE, and more specifically the ideology behind VE, cannot be defeated only by military means. The role of government institutions and civil society that facilitate and enable inclusion, dialogue, oversight and accountability, are becoming increasingly relevant in effective PVE and CVE measures. At national levels however, governments are struggling to allow appropriate roles and space for "multi actors" within their overarching counter terrorism strategies.

HS perceives the broad concept of security through an individual-centered and context-specific lens, and thus goes beyond the concept of violence, whether that is instigated by the state, has a criminal or terrorist background, or even domestic violence. It includes, rather, a positive understanding of security, which is related to respect for human rights, economic and social development, future prospects, rule of law, and a trustful relationship between the state and its citizens. The absence of HS, as perceived by communities, is something that can be mitigated by a variety of institutions and actors, especially by facilitating better multi-stakeholder engagement and dialogue, nurturing trust between various actors and institutions. This approach posits that fostering HS is and should be at the core of the CVE agenda.

In our research, we use a HS lens to analyze the threats and root causes behind the perceptions of insecurity and apply a HS approach as a dynamic and practical framework to address the threats and root causes of insecurity that communities and their governments face. Although UNDP outlines the concept of HS in its Development Report of 1994[3] along seven dimensions, we focus on the personal, community, political and economic security dimensions, as these are the ones most related to the push and pull factors of VE. The selection of three countries that vary significantly in terms of their socio-political and socio-economic backgrounds, and therefore also in terms of the drivers of violence and insecurity at the local, national and international levels adds, in our understanding, to the validity for the research. We recognize the limitations of comparability that comes along with our choice of diversity. However, it also provides us with very relevant input regarding the impact of facilitating circumstances, or the absence of them, on the success of a HS approach on VE. During the

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[3] United Nations (1994). 'Redefining Security: The Human Dimension'. *Human Development Report*. New York: Oxford University Press.

transnational workshops, results that are highly contextual and those that allow for upscaling and generalization are discussed and distinguished. It helps to focus on the emerging threats of VE to the security and well-being of individuals and communities and to identifying the concrete needs of communities threatened in their survival, livelihood and dignity. Sensitivity to the local context also helps identify and solve ethical problems at an early stage.

The research aims to provide evidence on how a HS approach in the context of VE could create immediate and tangible results that comprehensively address the root causes behind the threats; identify priorities based on the actual needs, vulnerabilities and capacities of communities and their governments; and reveal possible mismatches between domestic, regional and international policies and responses.

Of the six programs funded under the NWO WOTRO Security and Rule of Law Program, one project, coordinated by the WANA Institute in Jordan, shows some similarities with this project in terms of the region chosen as well as the actors and institutions identified that play a role in studying the impact of a HS approach to VE. In their project, the theory of change on the way HS approaches work is defined as the most effective way to preserve security and promote resilience when addressing underlying causes of conflict, such as gaps in development, opportunities and rights.[4] Key in the approach is finding common ground between the security and the development–humanitarian sectors, even while they have different objectives, reference points and success criteria. Their project focused on empowering community stakeholders to facilitate more effective interaction with the security sector in facing VE threats.[5]

As this research and report, WANA also argues that the security and policy environment, particularly the emerging threat of VE in the region, has an impact on the effectiveness of HS approaches. This has resulted in a greater emphasis on hard security responses to prevent security incidents which, as a consequence, has narrowed the space for people-centric HS approaches.[6] One of the findings of their project points in particular to the mistrust of communities in state institutions as providers of HS for citizens. This seems mainly due to the fact that state institutions are primarily focused on providing services linked to HS programming for the capital region, thereby marginalizing other governorates.[7]

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[4] Project website visited September 2029, http://wanainstitute.org/en/project/towards-more-effective-human-security-approaches-context-emerging-threat-violent-extremism
[5] *Ibid.*
[6] *Ibid.*
[7] Mid-term workshop report for the project "Towards more effective human security approaches in the context of the emerging threat of violent radicalisation in Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia", August 2018, author: Dr Neven Bondokji, p. 4, http://wanainstitute.org/sites/default/files/files/MidtermWorkshopReportNWO(4).pdf

A. Case Study: Egypt

1. The Egyptian Context

The Arab World after the so-called Arab spring of 2011 has witnessed a new pattern of radicalization and terrorism, where new radical forces have emerged, new methods of terrorist operations have materialized, and new strategies by the state to counter such phenomena were adopted. In this context, it was the role of the Al-Ahram Center for Strategic and Political Studies (ACPSS) in the project to highlight and study the specific case of Egypt. The questions this research set out to explore, as stated earlier, were, first, how the root causes of VE were defined in Egypt at the local, national, and international levels; second, how and under what conditions a HS-approach could address these root causes effectively; and third, to what extent a gender focus could be applied to these settings.

This chapter on Egypt is divided into five sections. The first one discusses the overall political and security context of Egypt to set the stage for how VE has once again emerged and is being countered. The second outlines the analytical approach taken throughout the duration of the project. The third section approaches the case of Egypt to assess the changing trends of terrorism and the state's hard security efforts in countering it. The fourth section explores how this VE has evolved after 2011. It discusses the most active terrorist organizations, how their tactics and ideologies were formulated, and which governorates and cities of Egypt were targeted. The fifth, then, shifts to the state's soft policies on countering VE and highlights the efforts to rehabilitate violent extremists, renew the religious discourse and hold conferences as platforms for inclusion of youth.

The political rupture that occurred in Egypt from 2011 to 2013 sparked political tensions and created a range of factors that affected the country's state of security. Part of these factors comprised long-standing issues that indirectly affected security, such as conventional corruption, lack of access to justice, and failure to implement effective economic and social policies. Others comprised relatively recent issues such as the ouster of the Muslim Brotherhood government in June 2013 and the dispersal of Rabaa al-Adaweya Square, which led to new waves and platforms for radicalization.

A new wave of terrorism emerged as a result; haphazard and mostly unorganized, targeting the state's security forces, courts, critical infrastructure, energy, water, telecommunications, and transportation sectors on the one hand; and on the other, churches, mosques, businesses, banks and other public areas. The attacks, which intensified throughout 2014, were carried out by Ajnad Misr (Soldiers of Egypt) and al-Muqawama al-Shaa'biyya (Popular Resistance)[8] in the greater Cairo[9] and Nile Delta region, and by Ansar Beyt al-Maqdis (Supporters of the Holy House)[10] in the North Sinai towns of Arish and Sheikh Zuwayyed. Some of the groups were motivated by the idea of taking revenge against the government for ousting former-President Mohamed Morsi. While others mainly aimed to cast doubt on the presidency of now-President Abdelfattah el-Sisi by weakening the state's ability to govern and by attempting to show that his term would only bring an era of instability.[11]

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[8] Seven attacks in 2015, targeting security forces, gas stations, and prisons.
[9] The Greater Cairo region is comprised of Cairo and its neighbouring governorates Giza, Helwan and Qalioubia.
[10] Ansar Beyt al-Maqdis currently call themselves Wilayet Sinai and claim an affiliation to ISIS. However, they remain the same terrorist organization and only function under a different name.
11 Interview with Security Researcher at Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, Ahmed Kamel el-Beheiry (henceforth el-Beheiry), October 31, 2019.

The year 2015, then, became a turning point with the release of the Declaration for Revolutionary Movements which declared an end to the peaceful means of opposing the state and called for organized, armed resistance.[12] The declaration made way for the emergence of more terrorist groups such as al-'Iqab al-Thawry (Revolutionary Punishment)[13], and later, in 2016, Hasm: Haraket Sawa'ed Masr (Egyptian Arms Movement)[14] and Liwaa al-Thawra (Revolutionary Brigade). This wave of "new terrorism" became known for its evolved tactics, advanced attacks and varied targets. In the meantime, Ansar Beyt al-Maqdis, too, widened its scope, including more targets, from army and police officers to informants, civilians, and even churches and mosques; and conducting attacks in more governorates than just North Sinai, such as Alexandria, Cairo, Gharbia, Giza and Minya.[15]

The state responded to this state-of-affairs by adopting a hard security approach, broadening the definition of terrorism and executing an elaborate range of hard security policies – in the form of legal reforms, policing, and other activities – to counter it. Parallel to this approach, the state also launched soft security initiatives of renewing the religious discourse in order to counter VE and holding conferences as platforms of inclusion and discussion for the youth.

As of 2019, terrorist attacks continue to decline and are currently at a markedly lower rate in comparison to the past years. Still, most of the terrorist groups operating in the greater Cairo and Nile Delta region have all but disappeared. However, while the policies have been effective in curbing the surge of terrorism, an interplay between them and the remaining terrorist groups has created a range of push and pull factors that continue to impact the state of security in Egypt.

The specific context of Egypt had implications for the methodology of the research, given the escalation of the security situation. First, it led to the passing of security policies that did not allow for access when it came to conducting surveys in certain governorates, cities, or towns that were afflicted by terrorism; and second, it necessitated that the researchers themselves take extra precaution when approaching their field research. The methodology for the Egyptian case combines quantitative and qualitative approaches. The former served to provide an overview of the security situation and terrorism in Egypt. A detailed database of terrorist attacks and counter-terrorist operations was compiled based on the official discourse and statistics by the government as well as by the media and social media. All information was thoroughly categorized and insights obtained on terrorism (terrorist groups, targets, types, frequency, casualties and geography) as well as the state's counter-terrorism operations (targets, types, scope and results of security raids).The data collection was refined throughout the course of the project to further specify and broaden the insights derived from the data. For example, the weapons used in attacks were specified and information was gathered on those killed. The database was updated on a daily basis over four years, and include the security-related incidents from 2015 to 2019, matching these to the statements from the Egyptian state.[16]Moreover, it outlines the interplay between terrorism and counter-terrorism and assesses the effectiveness of hard security policies.

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[12] Ibid.

[13] 16 attacks throughout 2015 and 2016, targeting security forces and government officials.

[14] 17 attacks from 2016 to 2018, targeting security forces and government officials.

[15] Omar Sheira, *Security Report: January 2015–June 2017*, Combatting Violent Extremism with a Human Security Approach in Palestine, Egypt, and Iraq, Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies (2017).

[16] The data was collected from a wide range of official, media and social accounts.

On the qualitative side, the research addressed the main causes of VE. Key questions[17] were addressed indifferent papers exploring either hard or soft security approaches. This corresponded with the diversity of various domestic and regional phenomena related to terrorism. The papers analyzed the geopolitics of terrorism focusing on some cities that witnessed an increase in terrorist attacks; focused on new terrorist groups in the post-revolutionary era; dealt with regional phenomena affecting Egypt, such as the returnees from ISIS; and discussed the state's attempts to renew the religious discourse and hold inclusive youth conferences. The research was based on 30 in-depth interviews with current and former security officials, government officials, human rights lawyers, journalists, civil society representatives, political scientists, regional delegates, political activists, and former jihadists. Six focus groups were setup, bringing together 67 current and former security experts, government officials, academics, lawmakers and religious scholars. Two rounds of trainings were conducted with 70 students[18] from 11 universities on the push and pull factors of radicalization. Three workshops on the research findings focused on how to render CVE policies in Egypt more gender sensitive.

## 2. Security Trends in Egypt

### *General Trends of Terrorism in Egypt*

In 2015 there was a spike in both terrorist attacks and emergence of terrorist groups targeting the state. Among these were Ansar Beyt al-Maqdis (Supporters of the Holy House), Ajnad Misr (Soldiers of Egypt), al-'Iqab al-Thawry (Revolutionary Punishment), al-Muqawama al-Shaa'biyya (Popular Resistance), Hasm: Haraket Sawa'ed Masr, and Liwaa al-Thawra (Revolutionary Brigade). In the second half of 2015, there were 306 terrorist attacks that fell gradually to 27 in 2017 and to 10 in 2019 which marks a total drop of 96.7 percent within four years. The number of casualties among the security forces fluctuated, although exhibited an overall decline from 23 in 2015 to a four-year high of 39 in 2017 before finally declining to 6 in 2019. The same trend was witnessed in the number of casualties among civilians, which rose from 46 in 2015 to 75 in 2017, and fell to none at all in 2019.

| Year/Statistic | Terrorist Attacks[19] | IEDs[20] | Security Forces Deaths | Civilian Deaths |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2015** | | | | |
| Jul. – Dec. | 306 | 286 | 23 | 46 |
| **2016** | | | | |
| Jan. – Jun. | 119 | 137 | 32 | 8 |
| Jul. – Dec. | 58 | 55 | 18 | 30 |
| **2017** | | | | |
| Jan. – Jun. | 53 | 44 | 28 | 75 |
| Jul. – Dec. | 27 | 13 | 39 | 11 |

[17] "New terrorist groups in Egypt post 2013", "Motives and Ideology of Terrorist Groups in Egypt post 2013" and "Fayoum case study" by Rabha Allam, ACPSS team member . "Terrorism in Egypt: July 2017–June 2019", "Terrorism in Egypt: July 2015–June 2017", Omar Sheira, ACPSS team member. "Mapping Jihadi Terrorist Groups", "Analyzing the competition of ISIS and Al-Qaida" and "the Returnees from ISIS" by Ahmed Kamel Elbeheiry, ACPSS team member.
[18] 40 out of the 70 students were females
[19] This number includes the number of instances of planted, detonated and defused IEDs as well as armed attacks.
[20] This number includes the number of planted, detonated and defused IEDs.

| 2018 | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Jan. – Jun. | 7 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Jul. – Dec. | 6 | 4 | 6 | 0 |
| 2019 | | | | |
| Jan. – Jun. | 10 | 7 | 6 | 0 |

This was similarly reflected in the domains under attack. Whereas in 2015–2017, there were 536 attacks on security forces, critical infrastructure, religious buildings, public places, business, energy, water, telecommunications and transportation sectors, this figure dropped to a total of 50 attacks on only a limited number of domains during 2017–2019.

The general trajectory, therefore, appears to be a decrease in the number of terrorist incidents. Yet there is an important observation to make here. The official spokesman of the Armed Forces, Tamer el-Refai, mentioned during a workshop held in September 2017, that a single terrorist attack on a religious building (mosque or church), or on civilians or security forces could take place, claiming the lives of a notable number of people. This phenomenon tends to impact the number of victims targeted by terrorism and hence, the public perception of security. But a single attack, despite the media coverage and impact on public perception, is usually not an accurate indicator of the overall security situation in the country because it is a single event and not usually a pattern or series of attacks.

*General Trends of Counter-Terrorism in Egypt*

Counter-terrorism operations mainly take the form of police raids, disposal of IEDs, or arrests of suspects in the greater Cairo and Nile Delta region. In the border regions, they take on a more military form of wide-scope operations.[21] While there were hundreds of counter-terrorism operations in 2015 in several governorates, such as Cairo, Qalioubia, Giza, Minya, Beheira, Sharqia and Dakahlia, these were mainly been restricted to Cairo, Alexandria, Giza and Qalioubia in 2019. There has been a significant decrease in the number of reported counter-terrorism operations in Egypt, which dropped from 788 in 2015 to 240 in 2017, and finally, 19, in 2019, marking a 97.5 percent decrease. The number of arrested suspects between July 2017 and June 2019 similarly was much lower than figures from the July 2015–June 2017 period, where the former amounted to 154 arrested suspects and the latter, 8,828 arrested suspects.

| Year/Statistic | Counter-Terrorist Operations | Arrests |
|---|---|---|
| **2015** | | |
| Jul. – Dec. | 788 | 4,516 |
| **2016** | | |
| Jan. – Jun. | 480 | 1,981 |
| Jul. – Dec. | 314 | 1,504 |
| **2017** | | |
| Jan. – Jun. | 240 | 827 |
| Jul. – Dec. | 119 | 64 |

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[21] These counter-terrorism operations may include airstrikes; destruction of tunnels; raids; disposal of IEDs; destruction of outposts, vehicles, and explosive storages; anti-smuggling operations; killing of terrorists; or arrest of suspects.

| 2018 | | |
|---|---|---|
| Jan. – Jun. | 49 | 14 |
| Jul. – Dec. | 32 | 21 |
| **2019** | | |
| Jan. – Jun. | 19 | 55 |

*The Sinai 2018 Operation*

The Sinai Peninsula continues to be an area of intensive security operations to rid it of Ansar Beyt al-Maqdis and to counter the arms, drug and goods-smuggling, as well as the entry of illegal migrants. A wide-scale operation dubbed 'Sinai 2018' was launched in that year to cripple Ansar Beyt al-Maqdis, and the results are listed below. The extremely high numbers of tunnels destroyed; IEDs disposed of; communication equipment and stations destroyed[22]; outposts, explosive storage units, ammunition warehouses and vehicles destroyed; and terrorists killed, show that the operation indeed has been much-needed and very intensive. Nevertheless, it also highlights very clearly that the threat faced in the Sinai is still highly organized, resourced and well-manned.

| ‘Sinai 2018’ Operation | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **North Sinai** | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | **Feb** | **Mar** | **Apr** | **May** | **Jun** | **Jul** | **Aug** | **Sep** | **Oct** | **Nov** | **Dec** | **Total** |
| Airstrikes | 7 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 1 | **19** |
| Tunnels | 5 | 1 | 8 | 18 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 11 | 0 | **49** |
| Raids | 58 | 27 | 23 | 19 | 8 | 6 | 12 | 0 | 5 | 7 | 5 | **170** |
| IEDs Disposed | 439 | 378 | 150 | 39 | 15 | 10 | 105 | 0 | 10 | 141 | 344 | **1,631** |
| Outposts Destroyed | 2,151 | 1,839 | 1,013 | 471 | 292 | 285 | 44 | 0 | 17 | 130 | 342 | **6,584** |
| Vehicles Destroyed | 397 | 251 | 165 | 176 | 3 | 17 | 35 | 0 | 80 | 71 | 171 | **1,366** |
| Terrorists Killed | 88 | 67 | 69 | 30 | 32 | 3 | 65 | 0 | 52 | 18 | 44 | **468** |
| Explosive Storage | 126 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 0 | **149** |
| Suspects Arrested | 2,524 | 1,106 | 516 | 317 | 96 | 59 | 67 | 0 | 0 | 129 | 403 | **5,217** |
| **Western Desert**[23] | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | **Feb** | **Mar** | **Apr** | **May** | **Jun** | **Jul** | **Aug** | **Sept** | **Oct** | **Nov** | **Dec** | **Total** |
| Airstrikes | 0 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 1 | **13** |
| Raids | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | **6** |

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[22] This figure is not listed in the table due to the seizure and destruction of an unspecified numberof laptops, walkie talkies, communication towers and other communication equipment.
[23] Operations in the Western Desert and other border regions were carried out as a part of the 'Sinai 2018'operation to target arms and drugs smuggling as well as terrorist outposts.

3. An Era of New Terrorism

With the above analysis in mind, one must take into consideration the extent to which the Egyptian state relies on hard security as a stability-restoring tool. The emergence of new terrorism trends and new platforms for VE were, therefore, met with the "strong hand" of the state. In this context, the project surveyed several phenomena that are related to these political developments, at both the national and regional levels. Research[24] dealt with new terrorist groups in the Egyptian context, their formation, areas of geographical activity and their reasons for resorting to violence; as also with the topic of returnees from ISIS, and how they represent a national security threat to the Egyptian state.

*New Patterns of Terrorism*

The ouster of former President Mohamed Morsi in July 2013, followed by the dispersal of the sit-in at Rab'aa Square is believed by some to have led to the formation of the new Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated terrorist groups that operated in the greater Cairo and Nile Delta region. Filled with rage and resentment after losing friends and relatives in the clashes, the youth internalized the desire to use force against the security apparatus.[25] The ideology first appeared to take a secular form and then gradually adopted a more religious tone to justify violence against the state and its officials or against security forces.

Four main groups were the most important in this new trend, and there is enough evidence[26] to support both their link to the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood and their close affiliation with one another. The first group was al-Muqawama al-Shaa'biyya (Popular Resistance), which was created in August 2014 with a main aim to "avenge the martyrs of the 2011 revolution".[27] The group did not have any specific ideology and targeted security forces, police vehicles, security buildings, businesses and roads with guns, rifles, Molotov cocktails and IEDs. The second group was al-'Iqab al-Thawry (Revolutionary Punishment), which emerged in January 2015. It was very similar to the Popular Resistance, ideologically supporting the January 2011 Revolution, but more organized, less chaotic and better-armed; more public, announcing all their attacks; and aimed to kill members of security forces as opposed to merely injuring them.[28]The third and fourth groups were Hasm: Haraket Sawa'ed Masr and Liwaa al-Thawra (Revolutionary Brigade), respectively. Both emerged around the same time, in July and August of 2016, and formed an evolved version of all the new groups, in terms

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[24] "New terrorist groups in Egypt post 2013", "Motives and Ideology of Terrorist Groups in Egypt post 2013" and "Fayoum case study" by Rabha Allam, ACPSS team member. "Terrorism in Egypt: July 2017–June 2019", "Terrorism in Egypt: July 2015–June 2017", Omar Sheira, ACPSS team member. "Mapping Jihadi Terrorist Groups", "Analyzing the competition of ISIS and al-Qaeda" and "the Returnees from ISIS" by Ahmed Kamel Elbeheiry, ACPSS team member.

[25] Margarita Bizina, 'Radicalization of Youth as a Growing Concern for Counter-Terrorism Policy', *Global Security Studies* 5(1) (2014).

[26] This link might be confirmed by the similarity of the communication methods used to produce the clips circulated by these groups to list their attacks on the security forces, as they perfectly coincide with the methods usually used by the Muslim Brotherhood in their political statements. Besides, the evolution of the targets of these groups from merely damaging public facilities and injuring security forces to assassinating officers and setting explosives to kill security forces perfectly coincided with the internal debate within the Muslim Brotherhood that discussed the "religious license" to kill security forces rather than just injuring them.

[27] Public Founding Statement, (14 August, 2014), [website no longer operational].

[28] Archives of the Revolutionary Punishment movement, (2015), <https://goo.gl/nDkVWS>

of training, use of weapons, operative techniques and also ideological discourse.[29] The groups had a very obvious Islamist affiliation and opposed the Egyptian State on religious extremist grounds to protest Morsi's removal from power. They executed attacks on high-ranking officials in the police force, judiciary system, religious establishment and security forces in Fayoum, Giza, Cairo, Damietta, Qalioubia, Beni Suef and Beheira.

Apart from the Muslim Brotherhood's offshoot terrorist groups, there were other groups that were ideologically aligned with al-Qaeda and ISIS. *Ansar Beyt Al-Maqdis,* ABM, was active in North Sinai post-2011, but when ISIS declared a Caliphate in Syria and Iraq, this local group sought to gain more attention, resources and recruits by pledging allegiance to ISIS in November 2014[30].

On the other hand, when ABM announced their allegiance to ISIS, a group of its prominent figures left to create two new groups solely affiliated to al-Qaeda: *Al-Motabetun* and *Ansar Al-Islam*. *Al-Morabetun* operated in the Western Desert and was closely related to other al-Qaeda affiliated organizations across the border in Libya. It conducted several attacks on security forces and checkpoints in the west of Egypt, until its founder, Hisham Ashmawy, a discharged military officer, was arrested in Libya and delivered to the Egyptian authorities in May 2019.[31] Another group affiliated to al-Qaeda was Ansar al-Islam, which operated in the west of Egypt as well. This group, tightly related to al-*Morabetun,* conducted a major attack against a security convoy on al-Wahat road in October 2017, killing almost a dozen security officers. Such an attack initiated a wide security campaign in the Western Desert, which helped to clear the area of terrorist elements and pushed them to withdraw to the Libyan territories where Ashmawy and others were later captured by the Libyan authorities.[32]

Despite their limited success in executing attacks, the state's security policies have succeeded in quelling all the above terrorist groups over the past years. The arrested members of these groups however, now serving their sentences in prisons, remain a threat that could reverse this marked success as they have access to a notable number of other prisoners. This issue should be addressed through extensive de-radicalization programs in prisons that could help reorient their mindset and redirect their activities towards peaceful undertakings.

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[29] Mohamed Khayal, 'Sources inform al-Shorouq Newspaper of the inner working of Hasm and Liwaa al-Thawra', *al-Shorouq Newspaper*, (18 July, 2017), <http://www.shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=18072017&id=c4d9282e-a210-4cf6-b32a-f0e5bae5b9ce>

[30] Zeinab AlGundy, "What we know about Ansar Beit Al-Maqdis", *Ahram Online* (4 Sept,2015), <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/0/126736/Egypt/0/What-we-know-about-Ansar-Beit-AlMaqdis.aspx>

[31] Mohamed Nasar, 'From Beyt al-Maqdis and al-Qaeda: Ashmawy's journey with terrorist organizations', *Masrawy,* (October 8, 2018), <https://www.masrawy.com/news/news_egypt/details/2018/10/8/1440817/%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%82%D8%AF%D8%B3-%D9%84%D9%80-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%B7%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D8%B1%D8%AD%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%B9%D8%B4%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%8A-%D9%85%D8%B9-%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B1%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%A8>

[32] Mahmoud al-Tabbakh, 'Who is Ansar al-Islam: the organization that claimed the terrorist attack at al-Wahat', *Masrawy,* (3 November, 2017), <https://www.masrawy.com/news/news_egypt/details/2017/11/3/1184491/%D9%85%D9%86-%D9%87%D9%8A-%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%A9-%D8%A3%D9%86%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%8A-%D8%AA%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%AA-%D9%87%D8%AC%D9%88%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B1%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%8A->

Nevertheless, ABM still operates in the Sinai Peninsula. Their activities reached a peak in July 2015, when, imitating ISIS, hundreds of members of the group attempted to occupy parts of the town of Sheikh Zuwayyed in North Sinai. The State's forces bore down on them heavily, leading to them weakening considerably since then.[33] The group has executed attacks in Cairo, Minya, Gharbia, Alexandria and Sinai, and targeted security forces and civilians alike, especially churches and mosques. The government has launched several operations to target the group, the most recent being 'Sinai 2018', and succeeded in significantly suppressing its outposts, as well as its weapons and explosive stocks. However, though weakened, it still remains active in the peninsula.

*The Returnees of ISIS*

On the more regional front, the Egyptian state finds itself confronted by the return of foreign fighters fleeing ISIS' defeats in Syria, Iraq and Libya. An estimated 27,000–31,000 foreign fighters from 86 countries were believed to have flocked to join the organization in the past years, where they have been active in combat operations.[34] Therefore, their potential return is considered by the Egyptian state to be a national security threat.[35]

There is no accurate figure of the number of Egyptian fighters in ISIS but the estimated numbers range from 600–1,000, making Egyptians among the top ten nationalities making up ISIS.[36] The threat posed by ISIS returnees is particularly highlighted by three factors. The first is the combat experience acquired. Many ISIS fighters have now advanced their combat skill, tactics and ideology, and can employ them upon their potential return to Egypt. Their threat is especially salient due to experience gained in city-based terrorist operations. Second is the network. Egyptians in ISIS and other terrorist organizations have formed broad networks both within and outside of Egypt. As a result, they now have the improved ability of recruiting more members to join their cause. This is a phenomenon similar to that which occurred some decades ago when jihadists returning from Afghanistan formed al-Qaeda. And finally, the third factor is support and knowledge exchange. Returning ISIS fighters are expected to lend support to the Egyptian North Sinai-based *Ansar Beit Al-Maqdis* and strengthen their presence there. They may also support other terrorist organizations that operate within the greater Cairo and Nile Delta region in their pursuit of opposing the Egyptian state.

Until the current moment, however, the state lacks a comprehensive strategy towards addressing this issue. A hard security approach is adopted in dealing with the returnees, where they are put on trial and eventually imprisoned, especially those who have supported, planned or perpetrated terrorist attacks in Egypt. While there are significant efforts of intelligence-sharing with other regional and international governments on this issue, it is also worth noting that terrorist organizations are careful to hide the roster of their members. And that even Interpol, for example, has approximately only 7,000 names of foreign fighters out of a total of approximately 30,000. In this context, the researchers recommend that a cohesive working group studies how each country in the

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[33] Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, 'Wilayet Sinai', (2019), <

[34] Hardin Lang and Muath al-Wari, 'The Flow of Foreign Fighters to the ISIS: Assessing the Challenge and the Response', *Center for American Progress,* (March 2016),

[35] Kim Cragin, 'The Challenge of Foreign Fighter Returnees', *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice,* 33(3), (2017), 292–312, http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1043986217697872

[36] *See* Lang and al-Wari.

region plans to deal with the issue, and how these initiatives can be combined within a collective policy that targets dealing with the political threat of returnees.

## 4.Soft Security Policies: Youth Conferences and the Renewal of Religious Discourse

State institutions have also engaged in several initiatives to counter VE through soft policies in an attempt to complement the hard security mechanisms. Basically, soft security policies implemented by the State are targeting their work at two levels: youth and religious discourse. Youth correspond to the wider pool from which terrorist groups are recruiting. Hence, the state has sought to engage with youth through different programs that help create a counter narrative to the grievances narrative widely used by the terrorist groups in their recruitment. As for religious discourse, the state has worked closely with the main Muslim religious authorities to produce an alternative religious discourse that deprives the terrorist groups of their most important weapon, ideology. Implanted, such soft security policies by the state have been a way to overcome some of the basic push and pull factors of radicalization in the Egyptian context, especially when it comes to ideology.

On youth, a new platform was created to include youth in public debates on pressing issues. It consists of consecutive rounds of youth conferences that bring together government officials, different segments of youth and experts in public policy, reflecting a wide range of expertise.[37] The rationale behind conducting these conferences was to raise awareness among youth about public policy formulation and, at the same time, build new ground of trust and loyalty for the government among the younger generation. Through nine rounds of youth conferences[38] between 2016 and 2019 in Sharm el-Sheikh, Cairo, Alexandria, Ismailia and Aswan, almost 14,000 young Egyptians have engaged in discussions, focus groups, simulation models of international and national institutions, and public sessions of dialogue with the President, members of the cabinet, businessmen, academics and other experts in different fields. The young participants are recruited through public calls, and selected from among young professionals, university students, young religious scholars, politicians and volunteers in charity organizations, and especially from among those who have graduated from the Presidential Leadership Program. Young women have been well represented in these conferences as participants, facilitators and lead discussants.

Despite critics questioning the inclusiveness of these conferences, given that none of the young opposition figures have ever been invited, these conferences have served as a platform of public debate to discuss a wide range of topics, including countering terrorism, irregular migration, economic reform, educational reform, national integration and state-building. The young participants are then usually invited to submit recommendations that are later presented to the different ministries and the parliament. By engaging youth in these conferences, the state has fulfilled several goals: first, it has created a new corps of young elite loyal to the state's policies and willing to serve as agents of change in their circles; secondly, it has initiated a relatively public debate about controversial problems facing society in order to foster the public support needed when implementing the state's policies in addressing these problems; thirdly, these conferences have served as a substitute for the political participation of youth in the decision-making process and

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[37] Sahar Ibrahim, '2017: el-Sisi and the youth. Limitless support.', *al-Bawaba News,* (30 December 2017), <https://www.albawabhnews.com/2871628>

[38] "Youth Conferences and Countering Violent Extremism", by Ahmed Askar, ACPSS team member

helped engage them in setting the national political agenda; and fourthly, the conferences have been a direct method of raising awareness among young participants, especially on technical questions such as regional challenges related to the surge of terrorist groups, migration, state failure and the spillover of violence.[39]

The national youth conferences were complemented by the Presidential Leadership Program (PLP). This program aims at recruiting recent university graduates from diverse fields and educating them about the main political challenges faced by the government prior to appointing them in ministries, media outlets and public institutions as young advisors, vice directors or vice ministers. This program was perceived as an opportunity to integrate youth as public servants within the state's bureaucracy.[40] The limited opportunities in this regard, however, created a wave of frustrations among those who were not appointed. Nevertheless, this tool was further institutionalized into the National Training Academy, with an aim, on the one hand, of educating university graduates to broaden their experience through serving as public servants in different national and local public institutions. And on the other hand, these training programs were widened to also target current young and mid-career professionals working for the state's institutions, especially from the executive branch of the government. Engaging youth through these activities has served the state's purpose in disengaging some segments of this group from the protesting discourse with regards to public policies and has helped build support for the state within the young generation.[41] In other words, the government has tried, through this mechanism, to achieve two purposes: to create a channel for political participation needed to curb the grievance discourse used by terrorist groups to recruit youth, and to maintain a constant platform for political indoctrination and training for young professionals prior to their potential recruitment as public servants. Overall, the experience is still in its preliminary stages and cannot be fully evaluated unless it is oriented towards more inclusiveness, diversity and decentralization in order to boost youth participation at the local level, and not merely at the central and national levels.

On religious discourse, the political will to include religious institutions in countering VE was demonstrated in President El-Sisi's consecutive calls for the renewal of religious discourse as a way to tackle the ideological base for terrorist groups.[42][43]Three main official institutions are now in charge of developing the Muslim religious discourse in Egypt: Al-Azhar[44], the main educational institution for religious scholars, the Ministry of Endowments, which is in charge of managing all the country's mosques, and Dar al-Iftaa (Institution for Religious Edicts), which is in charge of issuing official

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[39]Siyassa, 'The national youth conferences', (27 October 2017), <http://www.siyassa.org.eg/News/15385.aspx>

[40] Interview with a youth who participated in the PLP, 27 February, 2019.

[41] Interview with a Member of Parliament that attended the youth conferences, (25 February, 2019).

[42] Huda Abdel Razzaq, 'El-Sisi: Confronting terrorism requires moving with determination', *el-Fagr,* (31 March, 2019), <https://www.elfagr.com/3532925>

[43]Salwa al-Zughbi, 'El-Sisi speech on the Prophet's Birthday', *el-Watan News*, (8 December, 2016), <https://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/1662600>

[44] According to the 7th article of the 2014 Egyptian constitution "Al-Azhar is an independent Islamic scientific institution, with exclusive competence over its own affairs. It is the main reference for religious sciences and Islamic affairs. It is responsible for calling to Islam, as well as, disseminating religious sciences and the Arabic language in Egypt and all over the world. The State shall provide sufficient financial allocations thereto so that it can achieve its purposes. Al-Azhar's Grand Sheikh is independent and may not be dismissed. The Law shall regulate the method of appointing the Grand Sheikh from amongst the members of Council of Senior Scholar", retrieved from:<http://www.sis.gov.eg/Newvr/Dustor-en001.pdf>

*fatwas*[45] in the country. These three institutions were invited by the President to launch a coordinated campaign to renew and review the religious discourse as a way of depriving terrorist groups of their misleading ideology, their main tool of recruitment. A renewed religious discourse would eventually make it difficult for terrorist groups to misuse religious interpretation in order to legitimize their activity.

An extensive assessment of all initiatives introduced by these three main institutions between 2015 and 2019 led to a few main findings.[46] First, that the religious sphere is highly contested in a way that has hampered the adoption of a well-coordinated campaign. Though these institutions could have emphasized their presence and influence on what was a prioritized political theme, the competition among them led to a plethora of duplicated initiatives rather than a more homogeneous plan that is equally divided among them. Second, while some institutions saw opportunity, others were mired in bureaucracy. The Institution for Religious Edicts and Ministry of Endowments were responsive to the official calls for a renewal of the religious discourse.[47] However, they mostly worked at the creation of new roles and aspired to be more influential in the political sphere. Concerns were voiced about both institutions making politicized initiatives rather than authentic efforts at genuine reform. Al-Azhar, on the other hand, acted more independently from the state's institutions and approached the renewal of discourse at its own pace, in a larger context of reforms within its ranks and bodies. This tendency of independence, too, was frequently seen as slowing down the process of renewing the religious discourse. Therefore, the result was a huge number of CVE conferences, seminars, procedures and bodies, lacking harmony and sustainability in the long term. Third, the appointment of a presidential advisor on religious affairs has helped coordinate the initiatives by reconciling the short-term goal of fighting VE which claims to be based on religious grounds and the long-term objective of reforming religious institutions. The presidential advisor has wider authority to propose direct measures to address VE. Among these were the organization of educational lectures and the circulation of booklets in prisons with the aim of refuting the religious grounds on which terrorist groups have based their violent activities.

Going forward, more effort should be invested in coordinating the development and delivery of alternative religious discourses promoting peace, coexistence and respect of diversity.[48] Both al-Azhar and the Institution for Religious Edicts have put forth several mechanisms to observe, depict and refute extremist discourses, but few of these efforts have actually been directed to the groups that need them the most. Therefore, these discourses should be largely disseminated through official and non-official channels, to youth in schools and universities, and also among prisoners implicated in terrorist attacks to help de-radicalize them in the long-term. And mostly, independent religious

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[45] Fatwa in Islam is a formal ruling or interpretation on a point of Islamic law given by a qualified legal scholar (known as a mufti). Fatwas are usually issued in response to questions from individuals or Islamic courts, retrieved from: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/fatwa>

[46] "Softly countering violent extremism in Egypt through renewing the religious discourse", by Mohab Adel, ACPSS team member

[47] Egyptian Government, 29th International Conference for the High Council of Islamic Affairs, (20 January, 2019), <http://www.sis.gov.eg/Story/181873/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A4%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%B9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%84%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%A6%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%A9?lang=ar>

[48] Shaymaa Abdel Hady, 'High Council for Islamic Affairs issues Cairo Declaration for Renewal of Religious Discourse', (20 January, 2019), <http://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/2099802.aspx>

figures should be engaged in the dissemination process in order to widen the credibility and the impact of these discourses.

Today, one cannot but help recall that nearly two decades ago the Egyptian state had been dissatisfied with the deadlock of its hard security policies to counter the terrorist group al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya (The Islamic Group, henceforth the Group). In a climate marred by regular clashes, attacks and raids, the state turned to a range of softer security initiatives in the hope of achieving a breakthrough. Among these efforts was The Revisions Process proposed by Police General Ahmed Raa'fat. It was a multi-dimensional, dialogue-based initiative between the state and the Group that started in 1997 with a declaration renouncing the Group's violent ideology and concluded in February 2002 with the state releasing most of their imprisoned members.[49]

The first dimension[50] of the Process comprised trust-building measures. General Raa'fat consolidated trust by opening a channel with the Group's leadership and maintaining close contact with them; improving conditions of imprisonment; releasing prisoners and promising them no harm or further prosecutions; and, finally, assisting them in finding jobs following their release. The former leader of the Group, Nageh Ibrahim, attributed this dimension to the ultimate success of the initiative.[51] The second dimension was based on persuading the state to support the idea of continuing the dialogue with the Group. Ibrahim noted that this was a turning point, when the state finally changed its approach from one of vengeance to one of dialogue and mutual understanding. The third dimension of the process was the mode of negotiation, which effectively tackled the Group's violent ideology and views of Islamic jurisprudence. Upon the Group leaders' acceptance of non-violence, General Raa'fat devised a plan to relocate them to other prisons where they could influence other members of the Group to renounce their extremist ideology. This process took place over the course of five years. The fourth and final dimension of The Revisions was the documentation and publication of the process in a series of books[52], and its propagation by means of the members that were rehabilitated and released from imprisonment. In addition, those released were financially assisted by the government to be reintegrated into society[53].

The Revisions process could possibly be utilized to counter the current trend of terrorism, yet with distinctive tools customized for each terrorist group depending on their motives and ideology. Therefore, the tools employed to de-radicalize the returnees from Syria and Iraq might not be fit for purpose for groups belonging to the "new terrorism" wave in Egypt due to one main reason; namely, that violent offshoots stemming from the Muslim Brotherhood are primarily linked through community and mutual interests rather than only ideological and religious views. Therefore, any initiative with the imprisoned members of these groups will first require that they are categorized

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[49] A ceasefire was announced in the wake of The Islamic Group's terrorist attack in Luxor on July 5, 1997. Despite a preliminary period of doubt on both ends of the state and the Group, Police General Ahmed Raa'fat used this time of relative calm to initiate the dialogue between both parties.

[50] "the Egyptian experience in CT in the 1990s: the ideological revisions of the Islamic Group", by Ahmed Kamel Elbeheiry, ACPSS team member

[51] Interview with former Islamic Group Leader Nageh Ibrahim, July 2018.

[52] The authors of these books were the top leaders of the IG such as Osama Hafez, Aly Alsherif, Nageh Ibrahim, Hamdy Abdelrahman, AssemAbdelmaged and EssamDerbala. The books titles included "The Renouncing Violence Initiative: a legal and a practical vision", "Advice and clarification to correct concepts for active Muslims", and "Refuting religious extremism and banning apostasy accusations against Muslims".

[53] Nageh Ibrahim,"The Islamic Group between the initiative and the revision", in DiaaRashwan (ed), the Revisions of the Islamic Group and Jihad Group, Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies (ACPSS), 2008, pp. 34–39

according to their ideological stance and then reviewed by religious or state delegates to determine whether or not they could be engaged by de-radicalization programs.

5. Push and Pull Factors

The validation of the push and pull factors was at the very heart of this project since its inception. And to that effect, the papers sought to explore as many dimensions of the Egyptian security situation as possible, from hard security policies to the softer security policies, in order to identify the most salient push and pull factors. One must approach these factors with an understanding of the close connection between them, which results in the domestic affecting the regional, and vice versa.

This section will first analyze domestic push and pull factors and present the Fayoum context before diving into regional push and pull factors. On domestic push factors[54], the popular protests that resulted in the ouster of former President Mohamed Morsi in 2013 made a segment of the population, mainly the Muslim Brotherhood supporters, feel excluded from the political process. And when the state ordered the dispersal of the pro-Morsi sit-ins at Rab'aa and al-Nahda Squares, many turned to violence as a coping mechanism to either avenge their lost ones;[55] weaken the political and economic security and stability of the state; or target security forces or officials who support the state. This response coincided with an internal debate within a faction of the Brotherhood that concluded with the approval given to kill supporters of the state for removing Morsi.[56] As a result of these domestic push factors – political exclusion, state policies, chaotic conditions of 2013 and vengeance – several terrorist groups emerged in Egypt, most originating in the greater Cairo area and others in either the eastern borders, the Sinai Peninsula, or the western ones, the Western Desert.

With regards to the domestic pull factors,[57] the Muslim Brotherhood is an organization that has, over the years, relied on, and succeeded, in forming a community of followers loyal to the organization and to one another. Therefore, when violent extremist off-shoots began emerging after the events of 2013, each one managed to capitalize on the following factors: first, the rage and resentment of those who had lost their friends and relatives in the dispersal of Rab'aa and al-Nahda Squares – this validated the pull factors of emotional fulfilment or taking action to remedy social injustice. Second, the groups used the networks existent within their community – this validated the factors of social belonging, identity and peer pressure. And third, the groups relied on the online or published circulation of extremist views justifying violence – this validated the abuse of religious doctrines.

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[54] 1) Political exclusion; 2) state policies; 3) chaotic conditions of 2013; 4) polarization; and 5) vengeance.

[55] Some would argue that young members who have lost friends or relatives in the clashes were the fuel for this wave of radicalization.

[56] Liwaa al-Thawra spokesman claimed in an interview with Qaaf Page on Facebook to have a list of potential targets for assassination that was reviewed and approved by a religious council affiliated with their group. Also see CNN, 'Call of Egypt: Who supports it and how was it received by the Muslim Brotherhood and the government in Egypt?', *CNN*, (29 May, 2015), <https://arabic.cnn.com/middleeast/2015/05/29/egypt-kenana-ikhwan>; Also see AbolEzzDiyaa al-DeenAsad, Jurisprudence of the Popular Resistance to the Coup, (2016), 19.

[57] 1) Social belonging; 2) emotional fulfilment; 3) peer pressure; 4) identity; 5) abuse of religious doctrines; and 6) remedy social injustice

> **Fayoum Context: Push and Pull Factors**
>
> Fayoum became home to multiple violent extremist groups and tens of attacks in the years after 2013, which drove our research team to take the governorate as a case study and understand why it especially witnessed this rise in terrorism.
>
> Among the pull factors is the governorate population's strong support for the Brotherhood, evident in the elections of June 2012.[1] Another factor is the governorate's geography. Fayoum is land-locked and surrounded by desert in nearly all directions, yet well-connected to at least six other governorates with an excellent network of highways, and accessible to war-stricken Libya through the Western Desert. It was, therefore, the optimum location for violent extremist groups to make base, execute their attacks and flee before being tracked by security forces.[1] The groups were able to execute several attacks on ill-prepared security forces and checkpoints until the state took the sufficient hard security measures to stabilize the governorate.
>
> The push factors, on the other hand, relate to Fayoum's poor standing as a governorate that occupies a near-bottom ranking on the scale of human development;[1] has a 36 percent poverty rate; an average of 6.1 years of schooling; a  state-controlled economy; high disparity between rich and poor; and poor state services.

Finally, regional push[58] and pull[59] factors must also be considered. There is a new axis of regional cooperation between Egypt, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. And the main aim of this axis is countering VE, restoring political stability in the region and confronting terrorist attacks as well as political Islam. These policies create a range of factors that can push people and groups towards radicalization.

On the other hand, organizations like Ansar Beyt al-Maqdis, Morabetun and Ansar al-Islam have fed on push factors such as state absence and chaos to recruit, grow and expand their influence. This is evident in Egypt's border regions, where a desert area to the west has porous borders with Libya that act as means for terrorist groups to smuggle drugs, weapons and fighters in order to fund their organizations or conduct terrorist attacks in Egypt. In Sinai's mountainous borders to the east, the Ansar Beyt al-Maqdis relies on similar activities to fund its organization.

IS has also utilized sectarianism on regional and domestic scales in an attempt to push societies into open conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims.[60] The organization has attacked churches and Christians in Gharbia, Alexandria and Minya, killing tens and injuring hundreds; kidnapped and executed 20 Egyptian Copts who were working in Libya; and attacked Muslims too with their assault on a Sufi mosque in North Sinai which killed 305 people.

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[58] 1) Regional state policies; 2) state absence/chaos; 3) porous borders; and 4) sectarianism
[59] 1) Arms available; 2) belonging to winning group; and 3) abuse of religious doctrines
[60] This was noted by Egyptian extremist ideologue Abu Bakr Naji in his book *The Management of Savagery* as a tactic to transform societies into two opposing groups. Naji's book is among the main texts which defined the ideology of ISIS.

The propaganda of different organizations boasts of: the cause of justice, a lifestyle of community and solidarity, war against infidels, the opposing of corrupt governments and the fulfilment of religious duty. These sentiments and ideologies are all communicated through recruiting networks that operate on the ground or through social media; and were especially effective when combined with showing that the group was successful in its aims and was empowering disenchanted communities.

## 6. Challenges to the Human Security Approach

The Egyptian state has confronted the most recent wave of VE – which was most intense from 2013 to 2015 – with a broad range of hard security policies. As a result, most terrorist groups operating in the greater Cairo and Delta region have disappeared or disassembled. The current period of relative calm, however, requires a more dynamic approach that includes soft security initiatives to address the push and pull factors of VE.

Here, there are multiple challenges. First, terrorist groups today evolve at a remarkably faster pace than they did in the past. To make matters more difficult, their ideology no longer plays the dominant role that it did over the last decades, making the affiliation and mobility of their members more fluid.[61] Therefore, if the state was to target the ideology of a single group, for example, as it did in the past, the effort could prove to be futile. This is one of the reasons why there is now a comprehensive attempt to renew the religious discourse, namely so that it reaches the broader population. Nevertheless, renewing the religious discourse is a complicated task that is expected to yield benefits in the long term. Therefore, a much harmonized and coordinated plan should be put forward in order to sustain and disseminate a new religious discourse.

Second, the security situation in the region is fast evolving. Developments in Libya, Sudan, Yemen, Gaza and Syria all impact security in Egypt. Each minor development in these areas requires that the state allocate the appropriate amount of resources to ensure the national security of Egypt. This undoubtedly leaves fewer resources available for soft security measures. In other words, it is still difficult to convince policymakers that withdrawing resources allocated for the hard methods to invest them in soft approaches would eventually result in long term stabilization and prosperity.

Third, both state and society in Egypt have relied on hard security policies to address terrorism in the past years. Thus, soft security initiatives are still in need of development and will require the appropriate institutional framework – in addition to capacity-building, resources and public trust – in order to succeed. In this sense, exchange of experience between the state and other organizations and members of the international community could assist. Learning about international experiences where soft policies have managed to sustain stabilization in the long term would definitely make it easier to convince local authorities about their potential benefit. Training security personnel on alternative methods to build and maintain trust with local communities would help deepen their conviction about the positive results of applying soft methods.

Therefore, in order to create more space for soft security measures to be applied, there is a need for convincing both the state and the society of the relative affordability of soft measures as compared to hard security measures. There is also a need for a comprehensive plan to work simultaneously at

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[61] One member could leave his organization for another with relative ease and no strings attached.

different levels: religious discourse, media, education and democratization in general. As well as the need for working with women as agents of change, especially in fragile and vulnerable areas to develop local initiatives addressing terrorism and VE in general. There is also a deep need to learn about the best practices applied worldwide in countering terrorism and VE through societal initiatives and HS approaches in similar contexts. Boosting the role of local civil society will be crucial in this regard, first to widen community-based initiatives and second, to attract new segments of the community that are reluctant to be directly involved with the state's institutions.

B. Case study Iraq (Iraqi Kurdistan)

1. The Iraqi context

The issue of VE in Iraq should be studied through a combination of multiple causes and circumstances, which constitute the conditions of extremism. The study's main finding argues that the absence of the population's trust in the government (central, regional and local), political institutions, and security forces to address violent conflicts and safeguard Iraq's citizens, has developed into conflictual inter- and intra-community relationships, and caused a proliferation of opportunistic armed actors, challenging the sovereignty of the Iraqi state. With the resulting growth of conflicting sentiments and the diffusion of long-term insecurity and uncertainty, this distrust is a fundamental factor contributing to VE and violent conflicts in Iraq. It has contributed to the de-legitimization of state institutions, negative perceptions towards state authorities, divisions between communities, and citizens' disengagement with the entire political process. Moreover, both the Iraqi government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) have failed to provide a comprehensive policy to address VE. For example, there is no dedicated position for countering VE in the current cabinet of Iraqi Kurdistan. The two governments have, instead, reacted to the threat of VE, as their scattered countermeasures to the rise of the ISIS in 2014 show. Additionally, the study's data shows that despite the gravity of the threat posed by various forms of violent extremists in Iraq since 2003, the threat has been mainly treated with a top-down approach and viewed from the perspective of hard security. As a result, CVE has been reduced to and remained within the scope of countering terrorism policies.

This lack of resistance to the rise of the ISIS in Sunni-majority provinces can be partly explained through the incapacity of the state and its security forces to protect its Iraqi citizens, but it also requires an understanding of the popular support the group received during its rise. Explaining the issue of popular support is critical to understanding both the capacity of violent extremists to recruit people and also that of HS and CVE policies. Similarly, the question of how to gain and lose legitimacy is key to mobilizing and achieving the support of the people to fight violent extremists. Questions of trust and legitimacy have a significant impact on the effectiveness of CVE policies. This highlights that the dynamics of conflicts in Iraq are occurring in a social and political context, and cannot be understood in isolation. Instead of seeing VE and violent conflicts as individual issues demanding individual solutions, they should be considered as part of a much more complex structure of the crisis of governance in Iraq, requiring in-depth understanding and contextual analysis, in order to develop effective and long-term policy and programming. In the case of Iraq, understanding extremism is complicated by a long history and atrocious waves of violence, including war, exclusion, marginalization and state discrimination.

However, in the third phase of the research, we witnessed some improvement. The Iraqi government and the KRG have also introduced some regulations broadening their scope of CVE. For example, a KRG official stated that "the education curricula will be reformed. Students will study different religions in schools, such as Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Yezidi and Zoroastrianism. In the next stage, they will be studying other religions in the world. In all these programs, strengthening the idea of coexistence will be an essential element. In collaboration with UNICEF, nine textbooks will be written and taught in schools, which will include the various areas of coexistence, tolerance, peace, and civic

education".[62] Similarly, there is more engagement now between the Iraqi government and international NGOs to develop a national CVE policy. Importantly, there is now recognition from the government on the role of civil society. Cooperation and coordination, especially in the field of addressing the crisis of displacement and instability in many areas, particularly in Nineveh, is increasing. International NGOs have played a key role in this shift, by engaging local NGOs in the implementation of the projects, many of which require the involvement of government institutions. Many within the government, especially in Iraqi Kurdistan, now believe that local civil society actors should be given greater flexibility to design and adapt programs, rather than becoming implementers for projects designed in other contexts that have little ability to adjust course when the dynamics and context shift. As international actors are engaging the Iraqi government, the Kurdistan government and their security and political institutions, such as the EU's Security Sector Reform program in Iraq, they need to advocate for greater civil society participation to drive security sector assistance and reform. A refocusing of security imperatives, integrated with a community-led mentality, could yield a security paradigm that more fully respects rights and protects civilians – key to enhancing legitimacy and building trust.

In order to grasp the multifaceted nature of VE in Iraq, the study adopted a mixed methods approach. This included a quantitative method along with a preliminary desk review of the existing literature on VE in Iraq. The quantitative data was drawn from131 surveys conducted between April 2017 and July 2019. Each year, around 60 surveys were conducted with various respondents in different regions. The figures presented in the following sections, are the outcomes of all interviews carried out over the 3 years. During both the survey and workshops, we tried to measure the level of change in people's perceptions around the main questions of the study. Though the political and security situation changed during this time, and by the end of the study ISIS was militarily defeated militarily and all its territories retaken, there was not much difference in people's views and perceptions of trust in political and security institutions. The lack of trust, which is significantly highlighted in this paper, is a key challenge to the HS approach. This shows that people's perceptions and views towards security and political institutions are outcomes of a long history of poor people–state relations and lack or limited engagement of citizens in political process and decision-making in Iraq. For this reason, the study of VE in Iraq should be situated in the country's history, governance, context and perceptions of representation, belonging and legitimacy. However, we have seen differences between regions and different time periods. For example, perceptions of people towards security forces in Kurdistan are more positive than perceptions of people from the provinces of Nineveh and al-Anbar. Different parts of Iraq are in different political, social, economic and security transitions, highlighting the limited and fragile nature of Iraqi statehood, but also highlighting the need to develop more nuanced approaches to deal with the issue of VE and violent conflict in Iraq. A weak Iraqi state has created both barriers and opportunities to promote the HS approach. For example, the lack of a strong and centralized state has created space for local civil society to engage with wider international actors to collectively advocate for the addressing of human insecurities. At the same time, in the context of a fragile statehood, formulating and implementing a comprehensive and sustainable HS policy is extremely difficult. Moreover, we have witnessed a clear change of perception towards three key issues: the role of civil society and its engagement with government officials, more positive perception of the role of INGOs working in the field, and the increasing role of women in both society and politics. These three areas, in which we have seen progress, reflect the

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[62] A KRI official, FGD, 2018

factual changes on the ground. For example, in the new government in the Kurdistan Region, women representation has increased, with three women holding three key positions, such as the Speaker of the Parliament. Similarly, international NGOs have contributed significantly to the return of internally displaced populations, service delivery and working towards social cohesion in areas previously controlled by the ISIS. In addition, there is generally now more civil society engagement with the government in many sectors compared to the previous years of 2016, 2017 and 2018.In addition, qualitative analysis allowed us to obtain in-depth insights by conducting 24 semi-structured interviews with stakeholders, conducted face-to-face as well as by Skype and email between 2017 and 2019.[63]Examples include members of the Iraqi and Kurdistan Parliament, Iraq and the KRG's Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Youth and Culture and the Ministry of Education; and local and international civil society organizations based in Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan Region. These interviews are referenced as Key Informant Interview (KII). All reasonable precautions were taken to mitigate the potential risks of participation for respondents and interviewees engaged under the auspices of this research project. Participants will not be associated with the report in any concrete way, as their participation was protected under conditions of anonymity. Preliminary results of the study were discussed with key informants (local and national actors, international organizations and NGOs) during three workshops held in2017, 2018 and 2019 in Erbil. The researchers engaged key stakeholders to provide policy recommendations related to VE and HS. Throughout this document, the interviews are referenced as Focus Group Discussion (FGD).

In addition, the Centre of Political and Strategic Studies (CPSS) sent a letter to 32 government institutions in Baghdad and Erbil, which included asking them, first, whether they feel they have been instructed or informed on any approach for countering VE; secondly, on the role of HS in their approach to preventing VE; and thirdly, how they perceive VE and its root causes, and how that should be countered. We only received responses from the KRG's Ministry of Education and Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs. As we started this in the first year of the research project, we observed low engagement from government institutions, indicating both the limited willingness of the government to engage with civil society, but also the lack of a clear policy from the government.


## 2. Defining VE in Iraq

### *Conflict and power dynamics in Iraq*

Interviews with local informants further confirm what has already been argued in the vast majority of the literature, that the current conflicts in Iraqi society are diverse and overlapping, with sectarian, religious and political aspects, as well as being affected by regional interference. It is worth highlighting that most of these conflicts predate the 2014 ISIS occupation of large swathes of Iraqi territory. Previous studies on the perception of conflict held by minority communities in northern Iraq, including the Christian, Yezidi, Sabea-Mandaean, Shabak and Turkmen communities, show that even before the ISIS occupation, these communities felt themselves excluded from government decision-making at both local and federal levels.[64] Studies also show that the state's marginalization
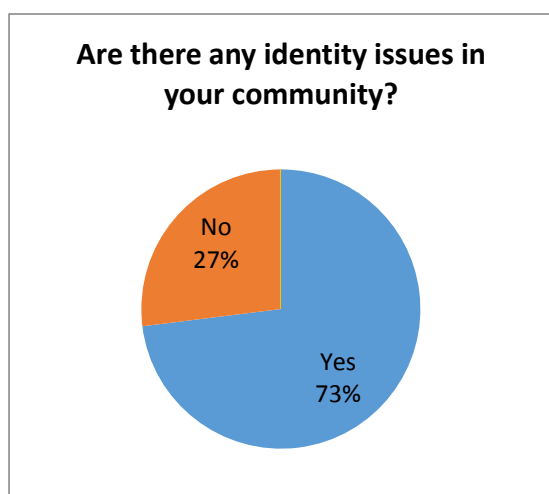
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[63]Affiliations of the interviews are included in the Annex 1.
[64]Van Zoonen, Dave and Khogir Wirya, (2017a). The Yazidis: perceptions of reconciliation and conflict. MERI Report, Middle East Research Institute, Erbil. 11 October 2017.
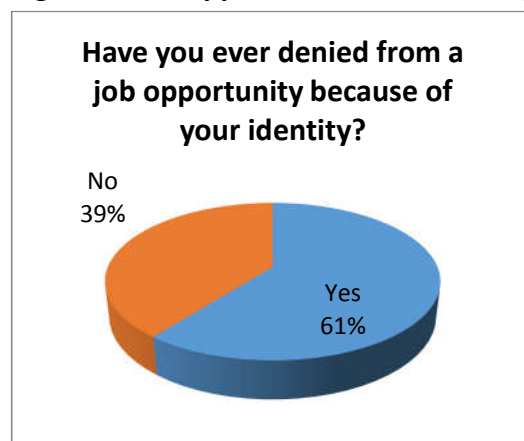
of predominantly minority areas contributed significantly to the state's later failure to protect these areas, and ultimately eased the way for the ISIS invasion of Nineveh, which uprooted these communities.[65] Today, these communities continue to experience physical insecurity, political exclusion, a lack of proper public services and a feeling of uncertainty towards the future.[66]Different communities in Iraq have not been able to find a common identity, with the majority of the people interviewed for this study expressing their belief that they have been marginalized and excluded because of their identity (see Figures1 and 2), and believing that the state's inclusion of their people is very low (see Figure 3).

**Figure 1: Identity issues in the community**



Are there any identity issues in your community?

No 27%

Yes 73%

**Figure 2: Job opportunities and identity**



Have you ever denied from a job opportunity because of your identity?

No 39%

Yes 61%

Van Zoonen, Dave and Khogir Wirya, (2017b). The Shabaks: perceptions of reconciliation and conflict. MERI Report, Middle East Research Institute, Erbil. 9 August 2017.

Van Zoonen, Dave and Khogir Wirya, (2017c). The Sabean-Mandaeans: perceptions of reconciliation and conflict. MERI Report, 24 July 2017.
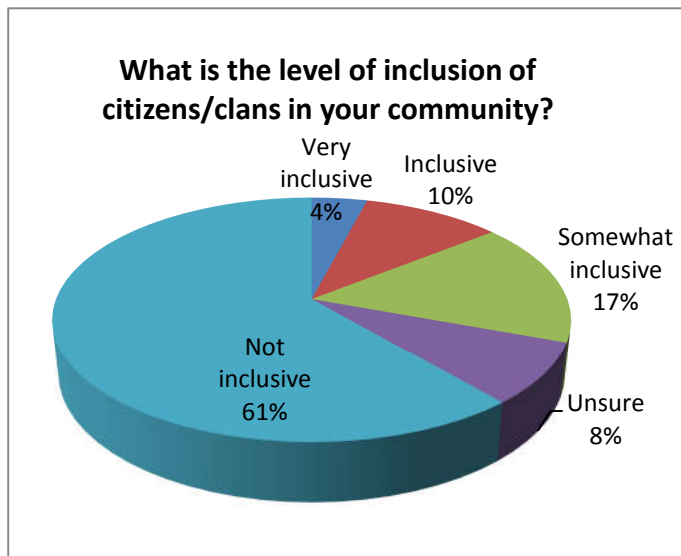
Van Zoonen, Dave and Khogir Wirya, (2017d). The Turkmen in Tal Afar: perceptions of reconciliation and conflict. MERI Report, Middle East Research Institute, Erbil. 12 July 2017.

[65]USIP: 2019
[66]Costantini&Palani: 2018

**Figure 3: Level of citizen inclusion in society**



What is the level of inclusion of citizens/clans in your community?

- Very inclusive 4%
- Inclusive 10%
- Somewhat inclusive 17%
- Unsure 8%
- Not inclusive 61%

This was especially obvious in the Nineveh, Kirkuk and Diyala provinces. However, many people do not see their identity as the source of conflicts in Iraq; as a local community leader in Shingal stated, 'the whole issue is a political issue between the political parties'.[67] Sanad and Social Inquiry (2018) is a strong study which finds that, across locations and identity groups, people recognize that radicalization and extremist views are not specific to one group or community. Even among minority communities, including Yezidi and Christian populations, people indicated that there are extreme views within their own groups as well as others, and recognized this has the potential to further divide communities.[68]

*Conflict-prone areas*

Areas which have experienced sectarian collision are predicted to face the most violent conflicts, such as the border between the city of Mosul and the multi-cultural and multi-sectarian regions such as the districts of Tal Afar and the Nineveh Plain, and the provinces of Diyala, Salahaddin and Al-Anbar, which are located in central and western Iraq. These regions face violence, primarily driven by legacies of past and ongoing sectarian-driven conflicts, the weakness of the state, underdevelopment and poverty, and the continuation of a widespread sense of injustice and marginalization.[69] In addition, compared to the participants from the south of Iraq and the Kurdistan Region, the participants from these regions have the most negative expectations regarding their security, and economic and political future. As a government official in Mosul pessimistically predicted, 'As for the central and northern regions, except the Kurdistan Region, it is possible to say that they will witness more conflicts among Shiite factions, as well as the tribal conflicts driven by the struggle for power and control of the regions'.[70] In addition to these areas, many who we interviewed expressed concerns over the areas disputed by the federal government of Iraq and the KRG which have been

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[67]KII, Shingal, 2018
[68]Sanad & Social Inquiry, 2018
[69]FGD, 2018
[70]KII, Mosul, 2019

and will remain places of conflict, and that the conflict between the two governments has constrained the reconstruction efforts in most of the territories retaken from the ISIS from 2014 to 2017.[71]

In the south of Iraq, although the population is predominantly Shia, there are conflicts between and within the Shia factions and tribes due to the lack of central control and the ensuing struggle for power. The respondents in southern Iraq expressed their concerns over the future of these tribal conflicts, worrying that they might generate new political conflicts. This shows that, for this part of Iraq, identity and sectarianism are not the main sources of conflict; it is the weakness of the Iraqi state institutions and their failure to deliver basic services which have created a vacuum and allowed various groups to compete for power and control. These conflicts have not so far created extremist groups, though there is a concern among the people that the continuation of these power vacuums in the south will only further delegitimize the image of the Iraqi state.

*Drivers of violent conflicts*

> Where does extremism come from? It comes from unemployment, instability and external conflicts and interventions.
> [Barham Salih, Iraqi President, 2019]

The weakness of state institutions is a significant cause of violence in Iraq.[72]That is, marginalization and exclusion, and national differences and sectarianism have contributed to an environment conducive to VE, which is, according to a majority of the participants, the main internal driver of VE. The interplay between internal and external drivers in creating and perpetuating violent conflict in Iraq has also been crucial. In addition to the internal drivers mentioned above, external factors play a major role in Iraq's internal affairs, and these external interventions have a negative role in creating violent conflict and an environment conducive to extremism. The motives for external intervention are multifaceted, partly being driven by regional geopolitical rivalry, leading for example to the formation and sponsoring of armed groups and militias by foreign states. The widespread perception also exists that external actors seek to control the natural resources of Iraq, and that VE paves the way for the weakening of the Iraqi state, thus creating space for external interventions. In the recent past, and continuing today to some extent, Iraq has faced foreign intervention from global powers, such as the USA. Yet today there is more concern over the interventions of countries in the region, such as Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries, which may empower extremist groups to weaken Iraqi society and state. For instance, some of the participants stated that Iran is supporting sections of the Shia community at the expense of Iraq's other communities, particularly marginalizing the Sunni community. This has allowed radical Sunni groups to fill the power vacuum, especially in Sunni-majority areas, handing them control of the political trends amongst Sunnis and also Sunnis' relationships with the Shia and other communities in Iraq.
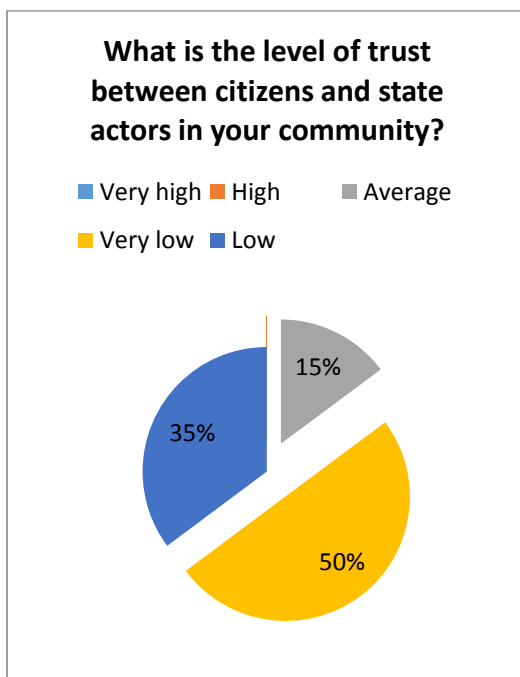
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[71]FGD, 2019
[72]KII, 2018 and 2019

Figure 4 shows that 85 per cent of participants responded that the level of trust in the state actors (i.e., officials and decision makers) is low. Only 15 per cent believed that there was a medium level of trust, with no one claiming there was high or very high trust. This indicates a fundamental problem of public trust between citizens on the one hand and officials and decision makers on the other. There is a chasm separating the people and the authorities, mainly caused by the inability of state actors as a whole to provide basic needs and services. This high level of distrust should drive officials and power holders to work to reduce this gap, by creating popular satisfaction and public confidence, and ultimately constructing legitimacy.

Societal trust usually varies over time and according to geographical area, and the administrative and political position of state actors and decision makers themselves. The perception of the lack of citizens' trust in the state was reflected in the responses to questions focusing on perceptions of the state's institutions and security apparatuses in addressing violent conflicts.

**Figure 4: Level of trust between citizens and state**



What is the level of trust between citizens and state actors in your community?

■ Very high ■ High ■ Average
■ Very low ■ Low

15%
35%
50%

**Figure 5: Trust in political institutions in addressing violent conflicts**



Do you trust the political institutions in your community in addressing violent conflicts?
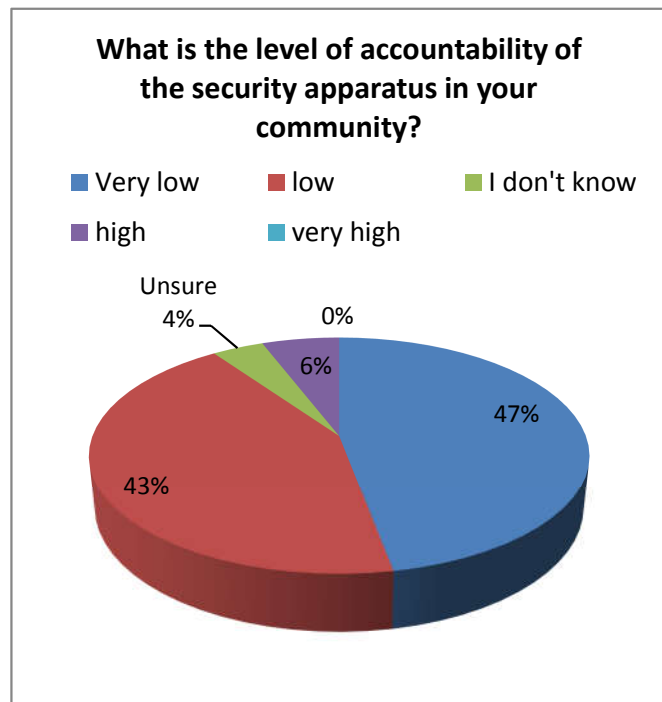
Yes 21%
No 68%
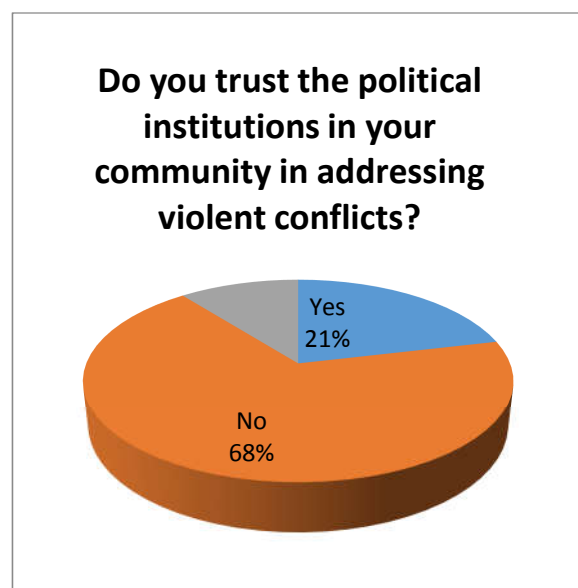
As shown in figure 5, 68 per cent of participants were of the opinion that the political institutions have not been able to provide effective solutions or had 'the capability of seeking real solutions to violent conflicts in Iraqi society',[73] a central reason for the loss of public confidence in these institutions, including political parties. Negative perceptions towards political and government institutions are shaped by negative perceptions towards political parties.

Regarding trust in security and political institutions, it was found that there are also negative perceptions of and low trust in the security forces, with 64 per cent of participants responding that they did not have trust in the security institutions to handle violent conflicts (see figure 6). In addition, respondents stated that there is very low accountability in the security apparatus (figure 7). The low level of trust derives from the fact that Iraq's security forces are largely sectarian and exclusive, dominated by Shia political actors.

**Figure 6: Trust in security institutions in handling violent conflicts**



Do you trust the security institutions in your community in handling violent conflicts?

Unsure 7%
Yes 29%
No 64%
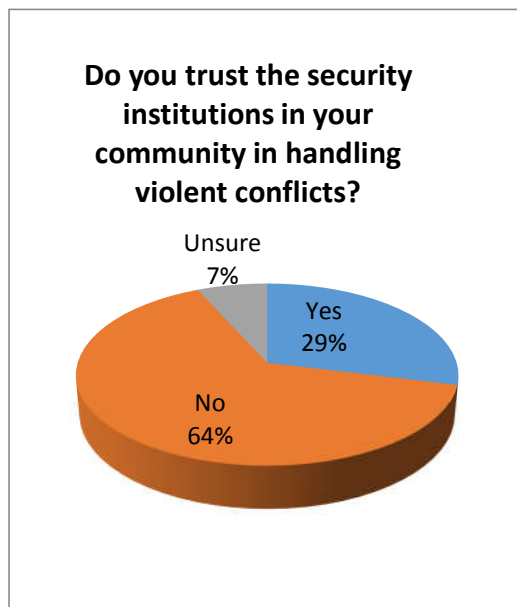
**Figure 7: Level of accountability in the security apparatus**



What is the level of accountability of the security apparatus in your community?

■ Very low  ■ low  ■ I don't know
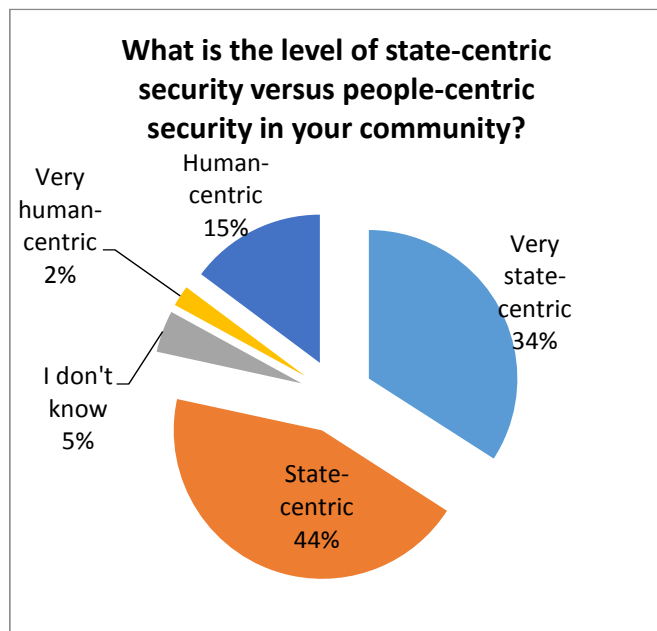■ high  ■ very high

Unsure 4%
0%
6%
47%
43%

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[73]FGD, Erbil, 2018

In addition to the issues of low trust in the security apparatus to handle violent conflict and the perception of their lack of accountability, there are also complaints of the military and security forces' interference in civilian affairs (figure 8) and the focus on state security rather than the security of civilians and communities (figure 9). As figure 8 shows, 61 per cent of the participants believe that the military continuously interferes in people's lives. This belief was particularly prominent among participants from the Sunni-majority territories, including Mosul, Anbar and Diyala. The respondents from Sunni Arab-majority areas feel that there is a widespread and extensive interference by the army, security forces and non-state armed groups. In these provinces, the army itself, and other armed groups affiliated with the army, prevented the organization of public protests and demonstrations, or severely repressed protesters using medium and heavy weaponry. Armed forces are divided along the lines of political parties and religious and ethnic components and entities, and thus they interfere in various issues related to the affairs of citizens.

**Figure 8: Military's interference in citizens' affairs**



Does the military interfere in civilian affairs in your community frequently?

- Yes 29%
- No 64%
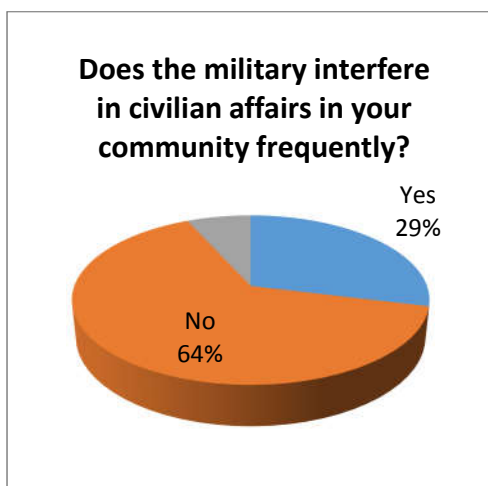
**Figure 9: Perception of state-centric security vs. people-centric security**



What is the level of state-centric security versus people-centric security in your community?

- Very human-centric 2%
- Human-centric 15%
- I don't know 5%
- Very state-centric 34%
- State-centric 44%

Moreover, prison conditions, which have a significant impact on transitional justice, especially in areas retaken from the ISIS, are poor throughout the country. In our 2018 workshop, a participant from Mosul described the situation: 'Prisons in Iraq are big graveyards, without any orders from the

courts and no considerations of human rights, and the authorities in the prisons are dragged into corruption, bribery and illegal treatment with the prisoners'.

*Demographic and social dimensions*

In addition to the security and military dimensions, addressed above, the interviews highlighted the key issues with regards to the demographic and social dimensions as follows:

- Due to conflict and war, the size of the middle class has diminished, and the gap between the poor and rich is increasing.
- The education system is in bad condition, and the curricula and its programs have failed to address the root causes of extremist attitudes.
- Women's participation in society, especially in the reconstruction projects in areas retaken from IS, has increased, though there are concerns that women's participation has been symbolic and used by political parties for their own interests, such as the exploitation of the quota system.
- There is a high rate of unemployment, with 90 per cent of the participants believing that in Iraq there is a direct correlation between VE and unemployment.
- Though people feel that the state's respect for human rights is very low, there is also a belief that the freedom of the press and the media is largely respected.
- Though the media enjoys relative freedom, it is politicized and is not trusted to provide objective coverage of violent conflicts.

3. Countering VE through a Human Security approach in Iraq

> *We should not reduce drivers of VE only to the religious drivers. We [also] have ethnically motivated violence and extremism. Political drivers are also fundamental. The government will fail if it cannot address the various sources of violence and extremism in our society. Targeting only one sector might increase tensions between segments of society.*
> *[A university professor, Kirkuk, 2018]*

The analysis has shown that amongst the Iraqi population, and across various sections of it and in different regions, the level of HS is low, the level of trust in the state is low, the capacity of security and political institutions in handling violent conflicts is limited, and social cohesion between communities is also low. Therefore, producing context-specific evidence on how a HS approach can prevent VE is important to designing an effective strategy for countering and ultimately preventing VE in Iraq. Both our interviews and the focus group discussions highlighted the priority of the development of a policy countering VE before any other action can be taken. This policy needs to combine bottom-up and top-down approaches. Cultural awareness must be disseminated with a view to ensuring the rehabilitation of people perceived to have previously been affiliated to ISIS, improving the status of municipal services and the economic situation of citizens, and creating functioning and legitimate government institutions.

*The role of the Iraqi state/government in tackling VE*

The Iraqi state must establish a monopoly over the use of violence, demobilize and reintegrate all armed groups that operate in the decentralized security landscape in Iraq, and protect its borders from the movements of terrorist groups. A participant from Basra stated 'when weapons are in the hands of unorganized and tribal forces, no one can ever be sure of their safety'. Political divisions and sectarian conflicts are central factors in this weakness of confidence in the security institutions as a whole. The security forces should be institutionalized, meaning that party and sectarian control over internal security forces should be terminated. Furthermore, security forces must be rebuilt and their members provided with advanced training, in order for the public to have confidence that they will perform their work professionally and effectively. Security cadres also urgently need to be provided with developed equipment and modern techniques to combat terrorists and terrorism. Moreover, the widespread corruption inside security institutions should be eradicated, and security cadres who violate laws or regulations should be punished in light of the state's laws.

At the heart of the Iraqi crisis is poor governance, as explained above. This means that hard security measures must be accompanied by countering administrative and financial corruption, providing more employment opportunities, and improving the living standards of individuals. Furthermore, a robust restructuring of the governmental system, and a redefinition of the relationship between the provinces and the central government based on provincial and local characteristics are essential.[74] In this context, local and international civil society organizations can assist the Iraqi government in eliminating the root causes of violence. The role of the judiciary must be utilized in order to reduce administrative and political corruption. The quote below, from a local community leader in Mosul in May 2017, highlights the dissatisfaction of the people towards the judiciary and provincial councils in the country.

> *All corrupt members of provincial councils, and administrators in other institutions, must be changed, and replaced with technocrats [non-political figures] and impartial administrators. The role of the judiciary should be activated so that it can root out corrupt members inside Mosul city in particular, by taking over these functional positions and key institutions, thus representing the city and province as a whole. (KII, Mosul, 2018)*

*The role of political institutions in tackling VE*

With regards to the role of political institutions in countering VE, political institutions are seen as being part of the conflicts, both in terms of creating and of inflaming them, and all for the sake of partisan interest. In this context, if political parties and their impact on political institutions are observed closely, their role is seen as having been instrumental in increasing conflict at various social and governmental levels, as 'political parties have introduced some old grudges and social polarization onto the political scene itself, and added a new dimension to the old conflicts'.[75] Most of the political parties are not seen as capable of eradicating VE, not only because the formal institutions are weak, but also because Iraq's political institutions are effectively run by powerful political parties seeking to gain partisan benefits. As the following quotes show, political institutions

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[74]Palani, 2018
[75] KII, 2018

do not have the trust and support of the people, and are accused of lacking the vision to address existing conflicts.

*Political institutions are responsible for the absence of social justice, which thus causes the expansion of public dissatisfaction and weakening of societal components' relations with each other. (FGD, 2017)*

*Some political groups are changing demography and identity texture and organized criminal activity based on sectarian identity against other societal components, for the benefit of a particular community, especially in areas retaken areas from IS and areas that their population have been internally displaced Since all political institutions are under the domination of these political groups, it is possible to see how political institutions play a central role in fueling existing conflicts, and how they are merely tools in the hands of the dominant groups. (FGD, 2019)*

*Even if political institutions have plans on paper, they are not effective and in practice they do not implement them. The increasing scale of violence is evidence of this. (FGD, 2019)*

In Kurdistan, the regional government is working on combating extremism and violence, yet lacks a comprehensive policy. Security institutions monitor the movements of extremist and terrorist groups, and citizens are accustomed to providing security institutions with information and serious cooperation. There is also effective control over the entry of foreigners, and residence permits are granted to those coming from outside the region, whether they are non-Kurdish Iraqis, Iranians, Turks or Syrian refugees, and even foreign workers. At the same time, the KRG has imposed monitoring and control over mosques and other places of worship. For example, after end of the Isha daily Islamic prayer, the Ministry of Endowments and security institutions have prevented the holding of meetings or the staying on of worshippers in the mosque, as these are sites where radicalization could occur.

*The role of citizens in addressing VE*

*Citizens' participation in security provision is not only important for providing security, but also critical for the Iraqi state's legitimacy. [A KRI official, FGD, 2018]*

People should have trust in the security institutions and departments, and should feel a sense of collective ownership and responsibility to them, as a key means of improving security in society. One participant from Baghdad in our 2019 workshop stated, 'Assistance between the people and these institutions, as well as improving social equality, will increase the people's trust and belonging to the country'. Iraqis have mobilized social movements, rejecting the ethno-sectarian system of governance in the country since 2003; however, these movements have not had a direct impact in terms of achieving their demands. The main challenge to citizens' participation in Iraq is the translation of citizens' demands and participation into institutional change in the country. In order to enhance the role of citizens in addressing violent conflicts, Iraqi citizens must be discouraged from taking the avenue of VE, through the depoliticization of sectarian and ethnic identities; this will ensure they are removed from the pull of embarking upon violent political conflict. Violence will
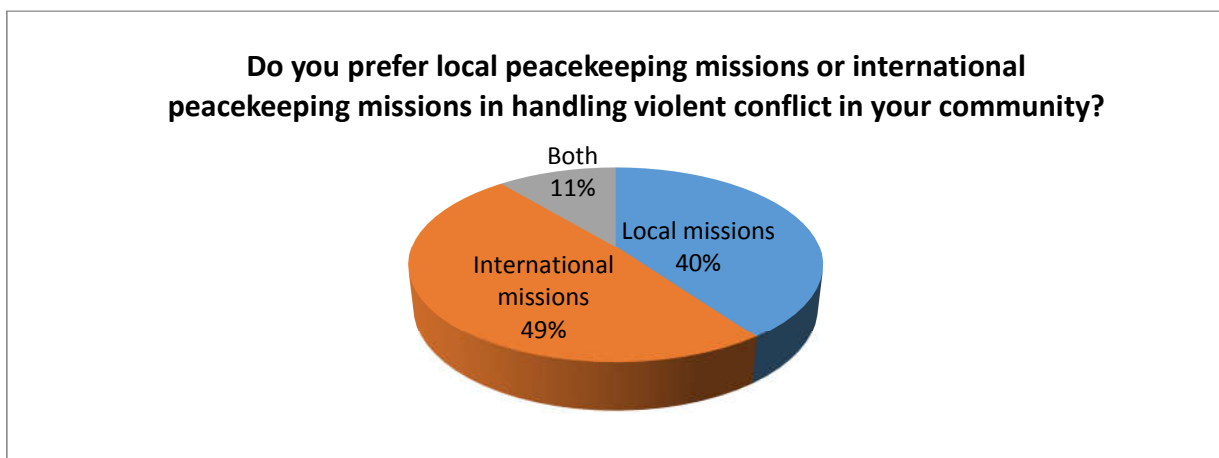
become less common as citizens are urged to choose civil and peaceful paths to achieve their legitimate political and non-political objectives. In this way, citizens can play their real civic role.

In Iraq, citizens are willing to participate in society, but have not been able to participate effectively in their communities. They are tired of the behavior of various independent security actors; they feel that the state, accountable and democratic, should be at the core of personal and societal security. They believe that their security cannot effectively be guaranteed without a legitimate and strong state. In order to maintain the existence and security of society, it is essential that the state's security institutions take control of the entire security file. This means that the armaments of irregular forces (i.e., militias and armed groups) and the personal possession of weapons should be addressed.

### *The role of international and internal peace-making missions in countering VE*

In the post-ISIS invasion period since 2014, international NGOs supporting Iraq in the field of countering VE have focused on a diverse range of issues related to civic education, social cohesion, security protection, countering hate speech, enhancing youth and women's participation, and transitional justice.[76] INGOs have created a wider space for citizens' engagement in the implementation of many stabilization and reconstruction projects in Iraq. The lack of trust in the local and national security and political institutions has led some to prefer international peacekeeping missions to local ones in handling violent conflicts, as the graph below shows. Moreover, post-2017 initiatives to stabilize and reconstruct areas retaken from ISIS have been characterized by a lack of a coherent policy, a recurrent theme in all KIIs and FGDs. For example, stabilization initiatives in Nineveh to pave the road for community cohesion and counter VE are mostly led by INGOs in the absence of clear Iraqi government policy and a clear implementation structure. NGO-led projects have created a new opportunity for citizens' participation, in particular for underrepresented demographics including women, youth and minorities. However, key informant interviews reveal that the current stabilization and reconciliation programs have limited impact on addressing radicalism and extremist views, as they have not been able to translate the complexities of the dynamics on the ground into the successful implementation of projects.

**Figure 10: Views on peace-making missions**



**Do you prefer local peacekeeping missions or international peacekeeping missions in handling violent conflict in your community?**

Both 11%
Local missions 40%
International missions 49%

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[76] INGO KIIs, 2019

There is a belief that the involvement of international peacekeeping missions in countering extremism and violent conflict is futile for two main reasons. First, international missions are perceived as working to sustain their own interests and for foreign agendas. Secondly, if the parties of internal conflicts do not have the will or desire to tackle extremism, the attempts of international missions will be futile. On the other hand, there is also a belief that the role of international peacekeeping missions is essential in protecting all societal components in a neutral manner. These missions can also play an essential function in ascertaining the root causes of existing problems, as well as analyzing the situation of Iraqi society, and then conveying that to decision makers in the international community. Peacekeeping missions can leverage the experience they have of societies suffering from internal conflicts and wars, providing efficient and effective solutions to existing problems. They may also be able to influence the opinion of the international community, specifically the United Nations, regarding events on the ground. In the case of Iraq, it is therefore necessary to have international missions, rather than internal missions which cannot maintain their independence and neutrality, being as they are under the influence or dominance of political parties.

Another view supports cooperation and coordination between international peacekeeping missions and internal missions. This is because international missions cannot function effectively in the absence of local will to address existing problems, particularly if the central government and its institutions are not sincere in their intention to stabilize the political situation and improve the standard of living of citizens. At the same time, if such mutual cooperation exists, international missions can provide serious assistance to the internal security institutions in order to achieve peace and internal security. This perspective was highlighted by participants from the Kurdistan Region in particular, who expressed great confidence in the necessity of international missions and organizations.
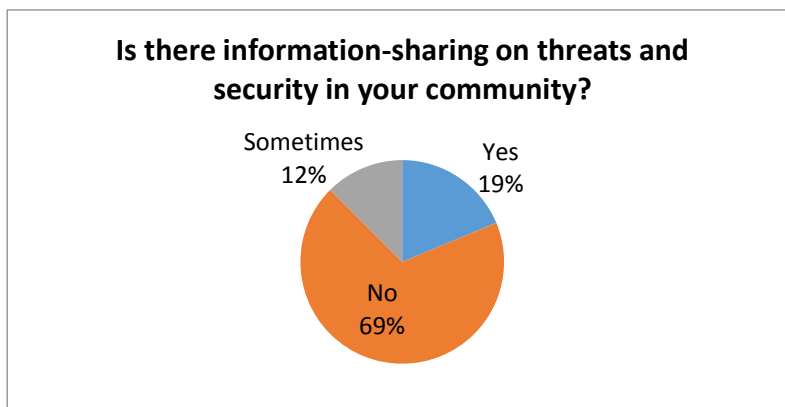
*Engagement with civil society*

> *We need more policy debates and open round-table discussions mainly with the government institutions. Right now, we have a serious problem. We, as a civil society, are not trusted and engaged by the government. Security institutions need to trust local civil society and engage them in the development of their policies of countering VE. [A local civil society activist, Erbil, 2019]*

Improving the state and society relationship, and the engagement of civil society, both of which are currently lacking, are essential to effective prevention of VE in the post-ISIS phase, and fill several important roles that (1) counter what justifies and legitimizes violence in society; (2) develop alternative channels for dialogue and peaceful transitional justice; (3) reintegrate both the population who remained under ISIS for more than three years, and also the families of IS fighters; and (4) build societal resilience and provide avenues for strengthening community cohesion, which are fundamental to addressing the root causes of violent conflict in Iraq.

From interviews with civil society activists about their participation in and engagement with internal security institutions, the majority confirmed that this was very limited (see Figure 11). Even when we asked both members of civil society organizations and representatives of the authorities, the majority of the participants, especially in the cities of Mosul and Baghdad, did not sense that there was any cooperation. Some of them expressed the feeling that those who truly attempt to keep society safe, cannot then be a part of the corrupt security and political establishment. One participant from Anbar stated, 'There is a great gap between the civilians and the security departments, and the trust has been completely lost'.[77]

**Figure 11: Civil society engagement in security provision**



Is there information-sharing on threats and security in your community?

Sometimes 12%
Yes 19%
No 69%

The main challenge remains the weakness of the government institutions on one hand, and civil society's mistrust of the state's security institutions on the other, with civil society unwilling to work with them in Iraq. Trust between civil society and institutions has broken down, and there is a lack of access or mechanisms to help citizens get to know their governments, let alone hold them accountable. Too often, civil society is seen by many government institutions as an enemy of the state.

4. Push and Pull factors

During the interviews and the survey, as outlined in the methodology, one of the questions we posed was how internal changes and regional powers, and the attendant events and dynamics, have contributed to the rise of violent extremist groups in Iraq. This question is very relevant, as the Iraqi issue has also been seen as a regional issue, and part of larger regional geopolitical rivalries and the crisis of the regional security order in the Middle East. Both domestic and regional push and pull factors can be identified in Iraq.

Domestic push factors occurred after the regime change in Iraq. The marginalization of the Sunnis and the perceived sectarian, exclusive authoritarian rule of the former Iraqi Prime Minister, Nouri al-Maliki (2005–2014), created conditions conducive to VE and terrorism. These factors helped build the structural context from which groups like al Qaeda and ISIS emerged, managing to attract young

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[77]KII, Anbar, 2019

people and presenting themselves as the voice of "Iraqi resistance" against the Shia-dominated government in Baghdad. In addition, widespread human rights violations and poor governance contributed to this structural context.

Regarding domestic pull factors, Salafist and jihadist movements had managed to establish networks and bases in Iraq even prior to the regime change. Jihadist organization Ansar al-Islam, for example, was established in 2001 and had control over a large territory on the Iraq–Iran border. In addition, after the regime change, former Ba'athist members and networks were active in creating an environment where they helped share the belief that the political process in Iraq was born and matured under ''Western'' occupation. Thus, they called for the boycotting of the political process.

Similarly, regional push factors can also be identified. The structural context in which the Sunnis felt marginalized and excluded by the Iraqi government was not the main reason for the rise of VE in Iraq. The rise of violent extremist movements in Iraq after 2003 has been significantly accelerated by regional power politics, such as the regional Sunni–Shia rivalry, and popular movements against authoritarian rule in the Middle East after the Arab Spring. And the Syrian War provided a space for extremists to travel and cross borders easily, thus mobilizing a population.

To conclude, regional push factors should also be underlined. The wider regional rejection and "resistance" against the intervention of the West in general and the US in particular, and the expansion of Iran in the region, which led by the Gulf countries and Turkey, played out as pull factors rendering Iraqis more susceptible to joining extremist groups. Thus, the Sunnis' perception of injustice and exclusion together with the regional resistance against US intervention and Iran's role created an environment conducive for VE.

## 5. Conclusion

In the fight against ISIS, Iraq has developed and strengthened its counterterrorism institutions, and is now capable of fighting terrorism on its own. However, while the CVE and CT definitions and policies have much in common, they require different approaches and understandings. CVE should be conditioned by the recognition that the narrow definition of terrorism adopted in Iraq pre-2014 and during the fight against the ISIS needs to be reviewed. It should take the wider issues of poor governance, weakness of state institutions, limited control over the monopoly of the use of violence, and low state–authority trust into consideration. In other words, CVE strategies should be part of a long-term institution and state building process. Iraq needs to develop more long-term capacities to address the threat of VE which is beyond the capacity of its counterterrorism apparatus. It is in this context that the Iraqi government needs to engage with civil society and all the other government institutions such as the Ministry of Education within a broader national strategy for combating and preventing VE. In other words, a strong engagement and cooperation between the state and hard security institutions and civil society is called for.

It is not only the lack of interest or will, but also the lack of capacity of state institutions that constrain attempts to address the root causes of VE through soft- and HS-based policies. In this context, international actors, who want to support Iraq in developing a comprehensive national CVE policy, that is also concrete and realistic, need to have deeper knowledge and insights into the complex dynamics and context that constitute the internal root causes of VE. Any policy developed

should be designed to weaken the factors leading to VE, and example of these include the deep mistrust in the government and the lack of monopoly over the use of violence.

As Iraq needs to move from a counterterrorism phase into adopting a broader and longer-term CV program and policy, the balance between hard security and HS will remain crucial to formulate a policy that can be implemented on the ground.

Different parts of Iraq have experienced different HS transitions, and this reality has to be reflected in any policy designed to counter VE. The findings of the study show that any successful national CVE policy based on a HS approach requires the Iraqi state to establish a monopoly over the use of violence, and demobilize and reintegrate all armed groups that operate in the decentralized security landscape in Iraq. Without the unification and institutionalization of security forces, the state will continue to face terrorist threats.

## C. Perceptions on Violent Extremism in Palestine

## 1. Introduction

Many Palestinians living in the West Bank consider themselves to be living under a double-barreled occupation: on the one hand there are the Israeli military forces, who remain omnipresent throughout the West Bank, and on the other hand there is the Palestinian Authority (PA), actively suppressing political opposition as well as cooperating with the Israeli authorities.[78] The lack of HS and the impact of VE in Palestine needs to be set in the context of violence, occupation, displacement and uncertainty, where local leadership is similarly complicit in oppressive practices against its constituency. It is necessary to analyze and understand the various factors and actors that shape the security situation and the perception of VE in Palestine, to identify spaces and areas in which a HS approach can contribute to enhancing security and combat the development of VE. This chapter is based on desk research and a literature review, as the last decade has seen numerous publications and studies on HS in Palestine.

## 2. Context: Palestinian security

In order to address the role of a HS approach in Palestine, it is imperative to understand the current security situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs). There are various factors that influence the sense of security – and the lack thereof – in Palestine, and the violence committed against citizens. Since the 1993 Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), the Palestinian Territories have been geographically fragmented. The West Bank is divided into three areas, referred to as areas A, B, and C. Area C which forms about 60 per cent of the West Bank is under the civil and security control of the Israeli authorities. While the PA is supposedly in charge of internal security and civil affairs in Area A, and civil matters in Area B, Israel maintains 'full external security control'[79] in these areas, too, and military raids are not uncommon.[80] The Gaza Strip has been under an Israeli-imposed blockade (air, sea and land) since 2006, after Hamas formed a government and took control over Gaza. Since then, Gaza has undergone recurrent wars and escalations between Palestinian factions and citizens, and Israeli forces, costing thousands of lives.[81]

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[78] Dekker, M. 2013. *Occupational Hazards: Providing Human Security in the Palestinian West Bank in the context of Israeli Occupation,* VU Amsterdam, 17.

[79]*What are areas A, B, and C of the occupied West Bank?* Al Jazeera, 2019,https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/09/areas-occupied-west-bank-190911093801859.html(accessed December 2019).

[80] See for example Amnesty's recent news on raids in Ramallah: *Israel ramps up assault on civil society with chilling raid on Palestinian NGO Addameer,* Amnesty International, 2019,https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/09/israel-ramps-up-assault-on-civil-society-with-chilling-raid-on-palestinian-ngo-addameer/(accessed December 2019).

[81]For number of fatalities during the various escalations among Palestinians and Israelis, see: https://www.btselem.org/statistics/fatalities/after-cast-lead/by-date-of-event.
The 2008–2009 and 2014 Gaza wars have together cost about five-thousand lives. There have also been a number of Israeli operations, and escalations at the borders with Gazan protestors. This in addition to the destruction of houses, public buildings and infrastructure. For exact details see OCHA: *Occupied Palestinian Territory: Gaza Crisis Facts and Figures,* UN OCHA*,*

The PA has been unable to de facto exert control over the security situation in the Palestinian Territories. The challenges they face are a result of Israel's occupation and its use of force against Palestinian civilians, the geographical split between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, and the political split between Hamas and Fatah. This has resulted in a 'fragmented sovereignty' in which 'the control over specific spaces and groups of people is divided between different actors, connected uneasily through various unstable networks of collaboration and conflict.'[82] Due to the security gap caused by the PA's incapacity, informal security communities have been formed as well. These are armed groups that act in the name of political factions, families or clans, and aim to protect their members and interests thus also shaping to the overall security situation.[83]

Israeli occupation and the PA's fragmented sovereignty increase the sense of insecurity among Palestinians. Furthermore, the lack of economic sovereignty and the harsh economic conditions compound this feeling. While Palestinians, with the help of international donors and local initiatives, seem to do well in the education and health sectors, the national economy is still under strict Israeli control. The situation in the Gaza Strip is even worse: unemployment rates are almost at 50 per cent,[84] and the UN has announced that due to the years-long blockade and the degradation of the environment, Gaza will become uninhabitable by 2020.[85]

## 3.   Violent Extremism in Palestine

In the context of occupation, violence is part of the daily experiences of many Palestinians. Violence, directly or indirectly emanating from the state, and the occupation play a significant role. Socially illegitimate patterns of violence in Palestine can be divided into two broad categories: Israel's occupation, internal Palestinian violence and violence against Israel. The source of VE in the two former contexts lies in the actions of the Israeli military and settlers, and in Palestinian political division and authorities' suppression of any criticism. In the latter it lies in the violent reaction of Palestinians attacking Israel. The case of Palestine is unique in that Palestinians lack a functioning state, suffer from internal violence, and are simultaneously subjected to settler colonial policies and military rule. While they are caught in the middle of a seventy-year conflict that has gained wide international attention, this attention has not been translated into action on the ground that is steered towards Palestinian self-determination.

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2014,https://web.archive.org/web/20150725191044/http://www.ochaopt.org/content.aspx?id=1010361(accessed December 2019).

[82]Dekker, M. 2013. *Occupational Hazards: Providing Human Security in the Palestinian West Bank in the context of Israeli Occupation,* VU Amsterdam, 80.

[83]Dekker, M. 2013. *Occupational Hazards: Providing Human Security in the Palestinian West Bank in the context of Israeli Occupation,* VU Amsterdam, 81

[84]*The World Bank In West Bank and Gaza,* World Bank, 2019, https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/westbankandgaza/overview(accessed December 2019).

[85]*Gaza "Unliveable", UN Special Rapporteur for the Situation of Human Rights in the OPT Tells Third Committee – Press Release (Excerpts),* UN, 2018, https://www.un.org/unispal/document/gaza-unliveable-un-special-rapporteur-for-the-situation-of-human-rights-in-the-opt-tells-third-committee-press-release-excerpts/(accessed December 2019).

*Israel's occupation: forms of violence*

The Israeli occupation impacts the daily life of Palestinians – and it does so differently for residents of East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Some examples of Israel's policies and actions illustrate how these directly contribute to the lack of HS, by contributing to an increase in fear, want and lack of dignity.

First, there is the *restriction on mobility*. This is visible in the West Bank most significantly in the form of numerous checkpoints through which Palestinians have to pass to get from one place to the other, and the separation wall that Israel has been building since 2002. Restrictions on movement prevent Palestinians from accessing services, markets, educational institutions and workplaces. Moreover, it has been near impossible for Gazan residents to leave the Strip, whether for medical services, education, work or travel. This leads to significant economic losses,[86] has a psychological impact and undermines the human rights of Palestinian residents. As the Human Rights Council put it in a special report in 2016: 'Movement restrictions undermine individuals' rights to health care, work, education and family life, and result in the rupture of social, economic, cultural and family ties. Cumulatively, these violations undermine the right of Palestinians to self-determination and to an adequate standard of living.'[87]

A second example is *settler violence*. According to Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, building settlements on occupied land is a violation of international law. Yet, Israel has and is still building and expanding Jewish-only settlements on occupied Palestinian territories. In addition to the loss of land for agriculture and building purposes, and the restrictions on movement for Palestinians due to these settlements, the Israeli settlers themselves are also a source of violence, which is aimed at Palestinians. Human rights organizations register attacks of settlers on Palestinian residents, that result in injuries and damage both property and land.[88] Many of these attacks happen during the olive harvesting season, instigating fear among Palestinian farmers and causing them economic damage.[89] These settlers are often enabled and protected by Israeli security officers, and are rarely held legally accountable for their actions.[90] As the human rights organization B'Tselem mentions: 'Thousands of testimonies, videos and reports, as well as many years of close monitoring by B'Tselem and other organizations, reveal that Israeli security forces not only allow settlers to harm Palestinians and their property as a matter of course – they often provide the perpetrators escort and back-up. In some cases, they even join in on the attack. In other instances, security forces have prevented

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[86] See for example the following study and blog by the World Bank on the topic: *West Bank Check-Points Damage Economy, Illustrate High Cost of Trade Barriers,* World Bank Blogs, 2013, https://blogs.worldbank.org/trade/west-bank-check-points-damage-economy-illustrate-high-cost-trade-barriers(accessed December 2019).

[87]See also this report for an extensive overview of the various mechanisms Israel uses to restrict mobility in the territories: *Freedom of Movement : Human Rights situation in the OccupiedPalestinianTerritory, including East Jerusalem,* UN OHCHR, 2016, https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/PS/SG_Report_FoM_Feb2016.pdf(accessed December 2019).

[88] See for example the reports of B'Tselem on, among others, settlers' attacks in Hebron: *Settler violence Backed by the State,*B'Tselem, 2017,https://www.btselem.org/topic/settler_violence(accessed December 2019).

[89] For example, by settlers burning down or uprooting olive trees.

[90]*Israeli Settlements and Settler Violence in Hebron*, Al-Haq, 2015, http://www.alhaq.org/monitoring-documentation/6534.html(accessed December 2019).

anticipated harm by removing the targeted Palestinians, rather than the Israeli assailants.'[91] Many of these attacks are committed by settlers that hold extreme right-wing views and support a greater Israel and the annexation of Palestinian territories.

One of the actions that impact Palestinian life is Israel's policy of *house demolitions*, mainly in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Israel justifies these demolitions by invoking: allegations of building without municipality permits, security reasons, allegations of building on green lands and administrative demolition. Israel also uses this policy as a collective punishment, for example in case a family member is suspected or accused of being involved in an attack against Israelis.[92] Being forcibly evacuated from their homes, Palestinians become displaced and lose their properties and the basis on which their economic lives revolve.

*Arrests and administrative detention:* Palestinians often say that no Palestinian family exists without a martyr or a prisoner among its members. Indeed, Palestinians are continuously aware that Israeli soldiers might raid their towns and villages at any time of day and arrest people.[93] According to a statement of rights organization Addameer 'since the beginning of the Israeli occupation in 1967, Israeli forces have arrested more than 800,000 Palestinians, constituting almost 20% of the total Palestinian population in the occupied Palestinian territories. With the majority of these detainees being men, about 40% of male Palestinians in the occupied territories have been arrested.'[94] Many of these prisoners are put in administrative detention, a procedure that allows the Israeli military to hold prisoners indefinitely without charging them or allowing them to stand trial. As a 2012 EU policy briefing note on the topic described: 'Administrative detention is a pre-emptive measure that allows authorities to detain suspects before the trial. While the procedure can be applied to anyone and exists in many countries, the issue has become particularly pressing in Israel. Israeli authorities use administrative detention principally to constrain Palestinian political activism and apply the procedure for an unlimited period of time without pressing charges […] While international human rights organizations have recurrently condemned the Israeli practice of administrative detention as a violation of human rights, the issue has only recently attracted widespread international interest.'[95]

*Internal Palestinian Violence*

As already mentioned in the contextualizing paragraph, the Palestinian territories are governed by a fragmented sovereignty. The PA has limited ability to maintain control, mainly due to the restrictions imposed by the occupation. However, other internal factors that are indirectly linked to the

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[91] *Settler Violence: Absence of Law Enforcement,* B'Tselem, 2017, https://www.btselem.org/settler_violence (accessed December 2019).
[92] *Home Demolition as Collective Punishment,* B'Tselem, 2017, https://www.btselem.org/topic/punitive_demolitions (accessed December 2019).
[93] See for example this report on the most recent raid in November of 2019: *Israel detains 15 Palestinians in West Bank raids,* AA, 2019, https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/israel-detains-15-palestinians-in-west-bank-raids/1634866 (accessed December 2019).
[94] *Administrative Detention,* Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association, 2017, http://www.addameer.org/israeli_military_judicial_system/administrative_detention (accessed December 2019).
[95] *Israel's Policy of Administrative Detention*, EU Parliament, 2012, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/briefing_note/join/2012/491444/EXPO-AFET_SP(2012)491444_EN.pdf (accessed December 2019).

occupation but not necessarily so, also play a role in the exposure of Palestinians to various forms of violence.

A central factor is the political polarization between Hamas and Fatah (Hamas–Fatah strife). The Palestinian political scene has known many political factions throughout the decades. These factions formed the Palestinian Liberation Organization in 1964, in which Fatah, led by Yasser Arafat, became the most dominant party. Fatah also remained the largest party in the PA after the Oslo Accords. Hamas was established in the late 1980s during the first Intifada. While Fatah bases its ideology on mainly secular Arab–Palestinian nationalism, Hamas was inspired by political Islam as the unifying character and basis of its national ideology. In the Palestinian parliamentary elections of 2006, Hamas won the majority of votes. Many countries, including Israel, rejected Hamas' victory and imposed a blockade and sanctions against the Hamas-led government. Fatah and Hamas were involved in several failed attempts to form a unity government. This culminated in what some refer to as the Palestinian civil war, in the summer of 2007, when clashes erupted between Hamas and Fatah supporters on the streets of Gaza, and hundreds of Palestinians were killed.[96] Following these events, Hamas formed a de facto government in Gaza, while Fatah has remained the governing party in the West Bank. During the last thirteen years, reports recount the arrest and silencing of Fatah supporters and Hamas supporters in Gaza and the West Bank respectively. This political strife between the two largest parties has created a political deadlock. The international community refuses to cooperate with Hamas, and Palestinians have not had elections since 2006.

Arbitrary arrests and torture under the PA and Hamas in the Occupied Territories are another factor, as documented in a Human Rights Watch (HRW) report published in 2018.[97] Based on a two-year research, HRW concluded that both the PA in the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza are implicated in the conduct of arbitrary arrests and torture. The arrests target activists and critics that pose specific posts on social media, journalists and demonstrators. These arrests result in shrinking space for free speech, association and assembly. HRW also counted a few hundred cases of torture and abuse while in custody. In the majority of cases these arrests and torture took place and are taking place without the governments in charge holding the implicated officers accountable.

An additional role is played by clans and structures of informal security. Because of weak state-institutions, the occupation and the PA's inability to provide security for the Palestinians in a fragmented territory, many Palestinians have relied on their families and clans. These informal support networks have played an important role in Palestinians' ability to cope with and navigate the lack of security. These networks however also pose a number of challenges, such as arbitrary and inequitable law enforcement, the disadvantage of women and socially-marginalized groups, and the undermining of formal institutions.[98] In refugee camps where clan networks have weakened throughout the decades with the uprooting and moving of families, political factions have often filled

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[96]*Timeline: Hamas-Fatah conflict,* Al Jazeera, 2011, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/05/201154935141647.html(accessed December 2019).
[97]*Two Authorities, One Way, Zero Dissent*, Human Rights Watch, 2018, https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/10/23/two-authorities-one-way-zero-dissent/arbitrary-arrest-and-torture-under(accessed December 2019).
[98]*Palestinian Human Development Report 2009/10: "Investing in Human Security for a Future State",* UNDP, 2009,http://www.undp.ps/en/hdr/index.html, 119(accessed December 2019).

the security vacuum. While tensions between various factions remain, most of them have either been disarmed or are integrated within the formal PA security forces.[99]

*Palestinian Violence against Israel*

Another form of VE in Palestine is the violent reaction of Palestinians against the occupation. For decades, and certainly since the beginning of the second Intifada, the Palestinian violence against Israel has resulted in the death of hundreds of Israeli civilians in both Israel and the Occupied Territories. These attacks vary from suicide attacks, stabbing, shootings, and rocket firing and mortar shelling.[100] In many situations, these forms of violence are immediately followed by an Israeli counter-attack, such as in March 2019 when two Israeli soldiers had been attacked, and which was followed by an Israeli counter-attack, resulting in the killing of two Palestinians.[101]

It is a unique element in the context of Palestine that it depends on the individual perception of whether such acts of violence are considered VE by Palestinians. Acts that they refer to as *muqawamma* (resistance) and the attacks carried out by Palestinian *fida'iyyeen* (freedom fighters/guerrillas) throughout the last seven decades are mostly considered legitimate acts of violence aimed at liberating Palestine and fighting the occupation. While there has been disagreement among Palestinians and Palestinian political and military factions around the best forms these actions should take, these acts are generally accepted as long as they are directed against occupation forces.

4. Drivers of VE

Due to the scope of this project, no research has been done into the link between drivers of VE and the state driven violence by Israel. Having said that, the paragraphs above suggests that most drivers to VE in Palestine lie in the Israeli occupation that impacts Palestinians' everyday lives. Violent extremist acts by settlers and Israeli soldiers, are sources of violence against which most Palestinians have no protection. The impact of Israeli violence is omnipresent and has consequences on most aspects of Palestinian life.

The unstable political situation and the lack of a central security mechanism in Palestine is another driver of VE. This is materialized in internal political conflict between Palestinian rival factions and armed conflicts between clans and families, which PA and Hamas security forces have difficulty countering. This leads to a sense of mistrust in the PA, which is unable to protect its citizens, and a sense of insecurity as tensions between rival families and parties prevail and could lead to clashes at any time.

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[99]Dekker, M. 2013. *Occupational Hazards: Providing Human Security in the Palestinian West Bank in the context of Israeli Occupation,* VU Amsterdam, 170.
[100] The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories B'tselem, '*Targeting of Israeli civilians by Palestinians,* 11 November 2017, https://www.btselem.org/israeli_civilians.
[101] *Israeli soldiers kill two Palestinians after car ramming, military says,* The Guardian, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/04/israeli-soldiers-kill-two-palestinians-after-car-ramming-attack (accessed December 2019).

Other geopolitical developments also impact Palestinian society, especially with the spread of ideology through the Internet and social media. While IS ideology has not taken root in Palestinian society,[102] Hamas has strong affiliations with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Many Palestinian political factions and activists are inspired by religious ideologies, but this has not turned into a basis for extreme violence, as the main driver for armed conflict remains the fight against occupation and the liberation of Palestine. However, what is viewed as the inaction of the international community and the Arab World, coupled with the Palestinians' inability to hold Israel accountable for its human rights abuses, could fuel acts of violence – inside but also outside of Palestine. Other developments in the region however have had some positive effects. The revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia in 2011 have inspired popular protests among Palestinians calling for an end to the political division and a unified leadership. The political leadership, unfortunately, has not yielded to these popular calls.

## 5. Is a HS-approach possible?

The main source of human insecurity and contributing factor to VE in Palestine is the Israeli military occupation. It actively robs Palestinians of all dignity.[103] There is also little indication in the national and international political arena that an end to the occupation is near; in HS terms this could translate into the lack of a future prospect, feelings of desperation, and fatality. The question that presents itself is whether a HS approach in such a context of structural violence and conflict is applicable. One HS entry point in such contexts is to pay special attention to the 'agency of individuals and local communities in war-torn areas,'[104] and to local actions. Dekker and Faber introduce the concept of 'security fabric',[105] as a useful method to look at the security situation in Palestine. This concept refers to the interactions between the official state security apparatus from above and non-state actors that provide HS from below. This is because local security communities such as social institutions, political movements and clans are an integral part of the security fabric.[106] Any HS approach therefore needs to take into account the different actors involved in the Palestinian security fabric.

A 2009 UNDP study identifies civil society participation as one of the main strategies that could enhance HS. This can be achieved by individual economic, social and political empowerment.[107] Palestinians need to regain control over their own economy, engage in internal political dialogue, build on the strong local practice of volunteerism and civic engagement, and include women and other often-marginalized groups in these processes. On a more macro-scale, the UNDP report argues

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[102] With a few exceptions, such as the Sheikh Omar Hadid Brigade in Gaza that Hamas took down.
[103] *Dignity Denied in the Occupied Palestinian Territories,* ICRC, 2007, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/13_12_07palestineicrc.pdf(accessed December 2019).
[104] Dekker, M. 2013. *Occupational Hazards: Providing Human Security in the Palestinian West Bank in the context of Israeli Occupation,* VU Amsterdam, 175.
[105] Faber, M.J., and Dekker M., 'Violent Conflict and the Individual Security Dilemma,' in: *Routledge Handbook of Human Security;* ed. Martin, M., and Owen, T., 2014, chapter 9.
[106] Dekker, M. 2013. *Occupational Hazards: Providing Human Security in the Palestinian West Bank in the context of Israeli Occupation,* VU Amsterdam.
[107] *Palestinian Human Development Report 2009/10: "Investing in Human Security for a Future State",* UNDP, 2009, http://www.undp.ps/en/hdr/index.html, 115 (accessed December 2019).

that HS can be facilitated by a participatory state-building strategy that includes four central elements:[108]

1. Territorial integration: the fragmentation of the Palestinian territories, the Wall, checkpoints, settlements, closures and the imposed blockade in the Gaza Strip make it near impossible for the PA or any other Palestinian institution to reach, and be trusted by, Palestinian citizens. It also impacts the sense of unity among Palestinians and their ability to work together towards a joint future. Thus, a real unified Palestinian territory with access and mobility should be created.

2. Economic integration: the occupation and Israel's control of the market, mobility and export in Palestine severely impact Palestinians' economic self-sufficiency. Promoting localized and a self-sustaining economy through supporting, among others, farmers, fishermen, entrepreneurs and educational institutions would enhance social security in Palestine.[109]

3. Social cohesion: the political rivalry between factions and current political polarization form a real threat to the sense and state of security in Palestine. Palestinians ought to be able to express their views without any fear of repercussions or arrests. The UNDP proposes setting up a truth and reconciliation commission grounded in the local Palestinian custom of *Sulha*; a practice used by families and clans in order to mediate disputes.[110]Such a national *Sulha* would have to be impartial, and record the testimonies and suffering of individuals, and come up with a compensation scheme for those affected by internal conflict.

4. Sovereignty and political reconciliation: this can be achieved by 'restoring a legitimate central authority that has administrative, security and economic control.'[111] While this is near-impossible under occupation, some steps that could facilitate this are accepting Hamas' role in the political process, supporting a unity government and strengthening accountability and transparency within the PA.

According to the report, a central requirement to achieve HS in Palestine at a national level is by promoting adequate legal, economic and social monitoring and regulation. It is also important to involve civil society in the political process. At an international level, there needs to be mobilization in order to protect Palestinians' social, economic, political and civil rights.

Donors and the international community have an important role to play in this regard by genuinely holding Israel accountable for its crimes and by implementing international law. External aid should not aim to relieve Israel of its responsibilities. As the report mentions, the answer to the situation is not necessarily more money, but rather taking the necessary actions to change the status-quo on the ground; to challenge violations of human rights and restrictions of humanitarian and development activities.

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[108]See chapter five of the report: *Palestinian Human Development Report 2009/10: "Investing in Human Security for a Future State",* UNDP, 2009, http://www.undp.ps/en/hdr/index.html, (accessed December 2019).
[109]Respondents in a 2009 UNDP survey identified insecurity and unemployment as their central concerns. See UNDP report, 116. http://www.undp.ps/en/hdr/index.html(accessed December 2019).
[110]*Palestinian Human Development Report 2009/10: "Investing in Human Security for a Future State",* UNDP, 2009, http://www.undp.ps/en/hdr/index.html, 112-113 (accessed December 2019).
[111]*Palestinian Human Development Report 2009/10: "Investing in Human Security for a Future State",* UNDP, 2009, http://www.undp.ps/en/hdr/index.html, 120 (accessed December 2019).

## 6. Conclusion

*'The conflict between Israel and the Palestinians is in essence a conflict between state security and human security. For most Israelis, state security, i.e. the delimitation of borders, the protection of territory and the preservation of the Jewish character of the state, is crucial. For most Palestinians, human security is the principal concern.'*[112]

These words capture the essence of the Palestinian case study; investigating a HS approach to prevent radicalization needs to address HS in the context of conflict and occupation. As long as Israel's only modus of existence is at the expense of the Palestinians, an environment in which people feel dignified and are free from fear and want is far out of reach. A fragmented territory, a politically polarized society and military violence, among others, play a crucial role in the lack of security in Palestine. Palestinians have adopted strategies to cope with this lack of security. Local and informal community ties have increased in importance, and community-based and non-governmental organizations provide for necessary services that compensate to a certain extent for the absence of strong state-institutions. Ending the occupation is an extremely important factor that could enhance the state of security in Palestine as also the other two presented forms of VE are linked to the question of how to deal with the occupation. Notwithstanding the occupation, strengthening civil society, empowering individuals economically, and engaging them in political and decision-making processes could definitely have positive implications, and contribute to the enhancement of HS in Palestine.

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[112] Faber, M.J., and Kaldor, M.,*Palestine's human insecurity: a Gaza report*, OpenDemocracy, 2007,https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/report_gaza_4632jsp/(accessed December 2019).

## III. Impact and Progress

### 1. Measurable Impact and Progress in Perceptions in Egypt

During the course of the project, the team organized six sessions of summer training, divided into two rounds, for undergraduates with the aim of raising the awareness about the people-centric approach in combatting VE. The trainees comprised 70 political science and mass communication students[113] from 11 different universities[114] in the country. The sessions consisted of a combination of lectures, discussions, working groups and simulation models that covered the history of VE in Egypt and the region, the push and pull factors that contributed to the surge of VE during the last few years, and the basics of the HS approach in combatting VE.

After receiving this background training, the trainees were split into groups, with each assigned a task of representing the main institutions of state and society.[115] The goal of the exercise was to design a comprehensive multi-stakeholder partnership for fighting VE that is harmonized and people-centric, and that tackles as many aspects of the push and pull factors as possible. This was done in the hope of enhancing the youths' understanding of the need for a holistic community response to VE.

The trainees concluded the training with several recommendations that included, 1) increasing the political participation channels for youth at the local and the national level to decrease the sense of alienation and marginalization; 2) increasing the opportunities for youth engagement through civil society in order to raise awareness about VE and help design initiatives that counter it; 3) creating simplified versions of an alternative religious discourse that weakens the ideology employed by violent extremist groups to recruit or to execute attacks; 4) creating microfinance opportunities in order to boost development, job creation and income flows in underdeveloped provinces; 5) forming joint teams of local community leaders and local authorities to establish an early warning system that detects and addresses radicalized youth before they are recruited by violent extremist groups; 6) encouraging youth-led cultural and educational initiatives in underdeveloped provinces to spread civic values such as tolerance, diversity and coexistence; and 7) complementing the state's hard policy in countering VE with society-based, soft methods in order to counter all forms of actual or potential VE.

Along a parallel track, the team organized three workshops with stakeholders comprising political scientists, sociologists, experts on gender and communications, lawmakers, human rights lawyers, religious scholars, security experts, former security officials and former jihadists. The aim of these workshops was to brainstorm collectively on the root causes of VE in Egypt, to evaluate state policies in addressing the problem, and to propose new methods that the state should apply to better counter VE.

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[113] 40 out of the 70 students were females

[114] Cairo University, Helwan University, the German University in Egypt, the British University in Egypt, Beni-Suef University, Assiut University, Canadian Ahram University, 6th October University, Akhbar al-Youm University, Al-Azhar University and Alexandria University.

[115] This consisted of governmental bodies such as ministries as well as the legislative body. It also included political parties, civil society organizations, the Egyptian Church and al-Azhar, media outlets and the private sector, especially the corporate social responsibility departments in private companies.

Remarkably, the debate that took place in the workshops helped build a multi-stakeholder platform to thoroughly discuss the best policies to apply in countering VE. The background of the participants did, naturally, impact the perspectives within the discussion. As expected, the most frequent question of divergence was the scale of implementation of hard security methods. The soft methods were mostly perceived as being important, but little room was actually given to trust these methods and give them the needed time and operational civic space to flourish. The multi-stakeholder platform created by the consecutive workshops, however, made it possible for experts coming from different backgrounds and affiliations to openly discuss several polarizing topics.

The gender issue has also been tackled in focus groups and workshops; the gender perspective in the CVE process as a whole is still underdeveloped in Egypt. Yet, there is great potential to be allocated to this topic. The role of women in VE groups should be deeply studied in Egypt in order to understand if women have specific motives encouraging them to enroll in these groups or they have the same motives as the men. Additionally, the roles that women are performing in these groups should be studied to understand whether they have leading or dependent roles and whether they fulfill only logistic and supporting tasks or they undertake fighting tasks as well. There are plenty of obstacles in conducting further research this topic in Egypt nowadays, and the published data in this regard are not reliable enough to build a solid basis upon. Nevertheless, the focus groups with experts and stakeholders with interest of gender issues[116], as well as with the youth[117], concluded that women have important roles to play as agents of change in their circles of influence when it comes to CVE, yet they first need to be empowered and trained to do so. Women need to be granted safe spaces where they can move freely to interact and network with the local community in order to generate creative solutions to counter VE on the long term. Women themselves face different levels of violence and harassment, such as violence in public spaces and domestic violence emanating from family members[118].

Therefore, every step put forward in order to counter violence against women, will eventually empower women to actively participate in their communities, ideally to raise awareness and to CVE. Moreover, women, especially in poorer provinces, need to be empowered with knowledge, education and culture in order to be able to create alternatives of activities for their surroundings in a way to counter VE. Additionally, protecting women against all types of violence (Public, sexual, domestic, etc.) and actively working on criminalizing that violence would eventually decrease the tolerance of violence in the community as a whole and would later be reflected on CVE. These efforts should also be linked with the religious authorities' effort in renewing the religious discourse, as an alternative religious discourse respecting women's active participation in society and valorizing women rights in public and private spheres would eventually marginalize the extremist views discriminating against women. Moreover, the police role in protecting women should be amplified, namely, the specialized unit established in 2013 in the ministry of Interior to combat violence against women should be mainstreamed in every police department in provinces, rather than only operating in Cairo. Additionally, recruiting more women in the police force and including female police officers in CVE efforts would eventually lead to a more gender sensitive security policy in CVE. Therefore,

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[116] Focus group with stakeholders and experts on the gender issue, July 28th 2019
[117] Focus group with university students on best solutions to CVE, August 22nd 2019
[118] Country Gender Profile, Arab Republic of Egypt (Survey report), Japan International Cooperation Agency, March 2018, retrieved from: https://www.jica.go.jp/activities/issues/gender/reports/ku57pq00002hdw5l-att/egy_2018_en.pdf

engaging with women in CVE would definitely be very important to the HS approach in CVE in Egypt, yet other measures in protecting and engaging women should also be put forward in order to enable women to play a fruitful role in CVE.

*Recent Security Developments Influencing the Progress*

Violent extremist attacks are generally declining in the region, ISIS' main strongholds have collapsed, and the numbers of attacks in Egypt are also falling. These facts have contributed to the renewal of the debate on countering VE in Egypt. Some views acknowledge the success of the hard security policies that have led to the decline of attacks and the dismantling of most of the terrorist groups, and further, pose that more room should be made to boost soft security policies. However, other opinions pose that the hard security methods should be maintained and even intensified, to prevent any kind of relapse that may result in a relaunch of attacks in Egypt.

The timing of introducing more soft methods is quite controversial and the question of whether or not the state has the ability to balance hard and soft security methods on one hand, and national integration and political inclusiveness on the other, is pressing. As mentioned earlier, the state could utilize the current period of relative calm to deal with the issues of first, returnees – foreign fighters returning from Syria, Iraq and Libya – through rehabilitation and reintegration programs; second, radical members of groups that are imprisoned, through the introduction of extensive, de-radicalization programs; third, disarray in the religious discourse, through coordinated, harmonized efforts by al-Azhar, Ministry of Endowments, and the Institution for Religious Edicts; and fourth, exclusive youth platforms, through more inclusive channels that are still selective, yet open to participants of all political opinions.

## 2. Measurable Impact and Progress in Perceptions in Iraq

A main aim of the project has been building contacts and bringing together both various actors within civil society and the government institutions (mainly security institutions). During the research project, the activities have contributed to the development of a set of practical results. In addition to the three workshops explained in the methodology of the Iraq section, in the academic year 2017-2018, the research team in collaboration with the Department of Political Science at Salahaddin University-Erbil managed to influence Iraqi Kurdistan's Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research and the University of Salahaddin-Erbil to include the subject of HS in the Master's and PhD courses at the University (in collaboration with other Iraqi universities such as University of Mosul, University of Baghdad, Bait al-Hikma, University of Kirkuk). The project team highlighted the importance of the study of a HS approach with regards to CVE, coexistence and countering hate speech in the country. Moreover, these activities have also brought together local and international research centers, universities and NGOs. In all of these activities, more than 300 people from all sects of the Iraqi communities were involved, as follows:

- 81 government employees who work in various government institutions and agencies (including security institutions);
- 170 participants from university professors, women activists, religious and community figures, political figures, media, civil society organizations and researchers all over Iraq.

- 35 representatives of INGOs and diplomats in Baghdad and Erbil.
- 33 university students and school teachers.

There have been profound discussions in these workshops, meetings, interviews and conferences. The discussions these events introduced were very helpful in creating a multi-stakeholder network to exchange ideas and expertise. These activities were happened when the country was in a total war against the ISIS with the support of the Global Coalition against ISIS. Importantly, the activities also created spaces for vulnerable and marginalized communities to express their views on the root causes of VE and terrorism and how best they can be countered, such as ethno-religious minorities and internally displaced populations.

On 18th of December 2018, Centre for Political and Strategic studies organized Training of Trainers (ToT) workshop on Combating VE with a HS approach, inviting 20 civil society activists in Iraq. The workshop training was held in Erbil. In addition to introducing the project, its objectives and methods, we divided the training into three sessions. It started with a session discussing the HS approach, and the need to develop a comprehensive approach combining different disciplines and perspectives to counter and prevent VE. The training materials as well as the different backgrounds of the participants contributed to a profound and comprehensive discussion, combining different expertise and angels to a comprehensive understanding and policy to counter, and ultimately prevent VE. After the training, we agreed to formulate a plan to create a platform to continue working together, creating a space for young civil society activists across the country.

The second strategy has been influencing policies of the government institutions, as during the period 2016-2019, the Iraqi government and the KRG reacted to the threat of ISIS, which resulted in introducing new laws and instructions. During the second workshop in 2018, the KRG's Minister of Education, Pshtiwan Sadq, was invited. The workshop was a great opportunity for him to share his ministry's views and ideas towards changing the education programs in order to counter extremist behaviors and thoughts in schools.

# IV.    Conclusion: Does a HS approach work?

The key question driving this three-year research project was not so much a research question for which desktop research, or quantitative or qualitative research data as such could alone provide an answer. The objective of the donor and the research design was, after all, that capacity building would go hand in hand with academic research and work iteratively. The research question, "Does a HS approach work effectively to counter and prevent VE?" thus implied that the partners in the consortium would practice a HS approach, and measure what result this approach yields.

Although the political and security situation in Egypt, Iraq and Palestine was relatively stable when the project was designed, the initial research design had identified three elements that needed to be mapped out in order to understand the differences in effectiveness in the three different contexts. In the first place, for each region, the threat assessment regarding terrorism and VE differed, not only in intensity, but also in the understanding of the two concepts. Secondly, the political situation would define the political space that should or could enable a HS approach with multi-stakeholder engagement. In other words, the question of the trust between the various stakeholders participating in such an approach (especially between the national security sector and local communities) would influence the anticipated impact such an approach could yield. And thirdly, a verification of the underlying push and pull factors would provide the input for the development of a theory of change on how a HS approach could be implemented given the conditions and the context.

Although the three aspects above are still relevant, it became clear during the course of the project that the political and security situation in the focus areas was so significant that it not only had implications for the safety of the participants in the project, and hence the methodology used, it also had important implications for the understanding of the concept of HS.

From the basic notion that HS is a process of social construction (on the basis of building trust and sustained dialogue on security, and the creation of a  bottom-up agenda that gives concrete guidance to what HS means in a certain context, to what extent HS can be developed and what the roles and responsibilities are of the various stakeholders) and complementary to state-centric security, the research made clear that there were two opposing practices of developing a HS approach.

One is the zero-sum option: when national security is widely understood as being 'under threat' and the state security apparatus has the mandate to establish stability and physical protection in the national interest through a hard security approach. In such a case, HS can only be implemented once the hard security approach has delivered on its primary goal – the establishment of stability and physical protection in the national interest. In the beginning, it is all about state-centric security, with eventually some space possibly allowed for some aspects of HS – the zero-sum approach.

The other approach is the win–win approach: In the absence of a national security apparatus that is effective and/or mandated to establish stability and public safety, bottom-up, community security initiatives will develop to protect community members. Some of these initiatives might help to build trust between the various stakeholders involved and can gradually develop into national security policy.

Overall, these two different practices had such a fundamental impact on the feasibility of the initial research approach, that it also merited a more fundamental re-evaluation of the overall research design as such. In addition to the three elements above, it became obvious that a much broader

spectrum of circumstances and elements would influence our main research question. Considering the complexity of the contexts, given the number of elements and the different circumstances that furthermore impact each other, finding the right entry-point to kick-off a HS approach turned out to be a real challenge, let alone measuring the effectiveness of a HS approach based on people's perception on their HS. Henceforth, the focus of the research question slightly shifted to trying to understand the most important elements that influence the potential effectiveness or even the feasibility of a HS approach. By doing so, we hoped to identify what, at a minimum, the facilitating circumstances should be to at least be able to use a HS approach and yield some results, for instance in improved trust building between relevant stakeholders.

*Elements and circumstances considered to be of influence for Human Security*

Based on discussions among consortium members, as well as with other relevant stakeholders, an inventory was made of elements and circumstances that have an influence on whether a HS approach could be used to address the issues related to VE. Participants agreed that a HS approach could yield more engagement and thus ownership related to strategies, policies and security solutions, could contribute to the protection of fundamental values, would complement the hard security approach and thus in a joint effort contribute to a comprehensive approach, and finally would be in line with the ambitions that follow from the international policy agendas.

The inventory provides insight into the aspects that needed to be considered upfront, or possibly influenced to prepare the grounds for an environment conducive to HS. The contextual situation at the beginning as well as the volatile political–economic–security developments throughout the trajectory of the project demanded a regular re-assessment of the elements of a HS approach that were applicable and feasible. Clearly, for each situation or context, different elements and circumstances are considered the most relevant ones.

To begin with, the interpretation of relevant concepts is context-specific. This is, for instance, the case regarding the concept of HS, as explained above, the concept of the nation state and the legitimacy of state security as well as the security provided by non-state actors, the state-citizen relationship, and the concept of sovereignty. Secondly, the push and pull factors for radicalization to violent extremism are different depending on the context, but are also dynamic through time, meaning re-evaluation needs to take place on a regular basis.

Thirdly, a set of conditions need to be fulfilled to facilitate the application of HS approach. Among these conditions, trust plays a crucial role. This could take the form of 'calculated trust' when an opportunistic calculation is made that the show of some form of trust – even though it is not fully experienced- would yield results and improvement in the inter-stakeholder relationship which is beneficial on the long term. In many situations, the gaining of trust is a gradual process, oftentimes starting on a personal level, after which it can develop in more structural institutional trust. In any case, mutual understanding and respect for the different roles played by different stakeholders in a whole of society approach, including a HS approach, is a necessary component of trust. Closely related to the element of trust, is the question on whether there is political support for a HS approach, and whether there is safe political space available, or whether this space can be created or facilitated by a neutral moderator or facilitator. In certain situations, political space needs to be created by the State by giving up some form of control on security challenges are dealt with within society. Some may argue that this is only possible if a certain level of security and safety within

society can be guaranteed (zero sum approach). Among the set of conditions, also the issues related to diversity and inclusivity plays a role. Questions in this respect are whether opposing and critical voices can be part of the engagement process, and how much diversity can be managed in an 'insecure' environment. A last element among the set of conditions is related to the extent to which the 'do no harm principle' can be respected while applying a HS approach.

The fourth category of elements of influence relates to the actors involved in a HS approach and dialogue, and what selection is used to identify the participants of such a dialogue. These actors could include, in addition to state actors, community leaders, civil society actors, workers unions, private sector, youth and students, religious leaders, and the media. The fifth category of elements relates to the working method used in relation to a HS approach. Questions that are relevant include: who drives the agenda?; What is prioritized on the agenda?; Who is in the lead?; Is there a shared understanding of the underlying problems among the stakeholders?; Has a theory of change been developed?; Is there a mechanism for information exchange?; what are the mechanisms for coordination or cooperation?; Is there a mechanism for dispute settlement in place?; Are results and effectiveness monitored and evaluated?; Is there a strategy for community outreach?

Finally, the sixth category of elements of influence relate to the resources available. Resources entail sufficient financial budget, technical support, but also access to relevant information, or translation capacities.

**Feasibility of a HS approach in Egypt and Iraq**

As explained above, there is no 'one size fits all' in how a HS approach can be used. As mentioned, at times it is even a question whether a HS approach can be applied. Based on the results of the research and the discussions in workshops and among the members of the consortium, an assessment was made on what the minimal conditions are in the context of Egypt and Iraq for the feasibility of a HS approach. Considering the fact that conditions are volatile, an assessment of these minimal conditions needs to be a dynamic process. In other words, it needs to be a continuum, in which the feasibility of the agenda of the HS approach is revisited regularly. The changes in these conditions, might have implications for the entry points that need to be identified to apply a HS approach. An entry point could be a trusted partner with which it is possible to start an engagement agenda, or it could entail a 'safe topic' with the least sensitivity and most consensus on what approach to take.

*Egypt*

As for Egypt, most of the conditions are needed in order to widen the use of the HS approach in countering VE. Trust should be built gradually, especially when it comes to handling implicated prisoners in terrorist attacks. Trust should also be put forward when convincing the victims' families that resorting to a HS approach does not deny the resort to justice. Trust is as well needed between both sides; state and society, in order to complement each other's' roles in countering VE. Mutual understanding and respect for the different roles played by different stakeholders is quite important since the presence of one stakeholder does not deny the importance of the presence of other stakeholders. Therefore, diversity should be promoted in this regard, as a comprehensive HS approach should include a diversity of stakeholders in order to be representative of the whole

society in question, and in order to generate adequate solutions and community-based initiatives. Hence, the political support for the process is an important precondition, namely the state should open enough channels to encourage different political trends to trust and to participate in the process. And from the other end, the different political trends should invest in trust building mechanisms and engage actively in the process rather than merely judging the state's behavior from a distance. Meanwhile, several actors could play the role of facilitators such as academics, experts, religious scholars, local community leaders, independent public figures as well as lawyers or judges. In addition, women should be granted safe spaces to interact within local communities to promote coexistence, tolerance and active participation.

A good entry point for Egypt to widen the application of a HS approach would be decentralizing the youth conferences, rendering them more inclusive to different political trends and turning them to be local community oriented rather than nationally planned. In this regard, the young advisors of local governors recently appointed could play an important role in twining with local universities in order to plan for a multi stakeholder partnership in every province. Another possible entry point could be promoting the renewed religious discourse among the prisoners implicated in terrorist attacks as a preliminary step, in a wider strategy of de-radicalization and rehabilitation of those in prisons, prior to their potential release after serving their sentences. As well as revising and categorizing the prisoners, in order to decide who should be released and who should further serve their sentences.

*Iraq*

Dynamics of VE and conflicts in Iraq are occurring in a social and political context and cannot be understood in isolation. In this context, addressing and understanding extremism is complicated by a long history and atrocious waves of violence, including war, exclusion, marginalization and state discrimination. Hence, instead of seeing VE and violent conflicts as individual issues demanding individual solutions, they should be considered as part of a much more complex structure of the crisis of governance & statehood, requiring contextual analysis, to develop effective and long-term policy.

HS, as outlined above, is a comprehensive approach to address the root causes of VE. With regards to the case of Iraq, three questions are critical: (1) state legitimacy and capacity, (2) conditions of the civic space, (3) engagement and trust between civil society and the government institutions. In the context of a political transition, state- and nation-building processes, HS approach faces deep structural challenges as some required conditions are not in place, such as the State's legitimate monopoly over the use of violence and state-society social contract. Though the Iraqi state has limited monopoly over the use of violence, does not have required capabilities and capacities to establish domestic sovereignty, and specifically, has so far failed to formulate and implement a national CVE policy, the civic space in Iraq is widening and the government's (both local and national) engagement with civil society and trust between them are increasing. Such engagement and trust as well as a gradual progress towards widening civic society in Iraq, which the international actors and pro-democracy voices in Iraq have contributed to, not only can contribute to CVE measures and policies, but also the wider issues of state fragility and weakness the country is facing. Hence, widening civic space and addressing human insecurities and state and institution building are not mutually exclusive. In the context of Iraq, HS approach and CVE attempts are contributing to a larger process of state- and nation-building in Iraq.

**Overall conclusion and policy recommendations**

Based on the assessment above, we can draw conclusions on the question whether a HS could work in Egypt and Iraq to face VE. Although, in Egypt, a zero-sum interpretation of the concept of HS seems to prevail, and the government has mainly focused on restoring stability through hard security, the state has recently started to implement soft policies in an effort towards more comprehensive policies that take into account the pillars of HS. The current circumstances dictate that the process is mostly lead by the government and not yet fully inclusive. So, although still in need of development, the state's soft policies have included more youth than any past initiatives; initiated the renewal of religious discourse by calling upon religious institutions to lead it; and implemented social, economic, and political reforms to address the country's long-standing issues. The aforementioned state efforts are all meant to create a totality of circumstances that provide more sustainable security, which will yield more political space for human security approaches in time.

In Iraq, the win-win interpretation of the concept of HS is applied. While clearly the current situation is not stable, and the state institutions do not have full control over the security in the country, a HS approach has been used to improve multi-stakeholder engagement and improve trust. Particularly the role of international institutions has been supportive of this approach and pressured to step up initiatives with a HS approach. The trust-building between the state institutions and the populations is part of a broader transition towards state-and nation-building in Iraq. This is not a something that happens overnight but is a long-term process which needs to happen across all sectors and in all regions at its own pace. For example, in Iraqi Kurdistan trust between civil society and the government is slowly building and improving, but local civil society in Sunni Arab-majority regions require more years to establish capacities, networks and relationships.

Based on the project activities and the research conducted, the following recommendations are offered:

*For Egypt, it is recommended*

1. To establish an independent commission specialized in countering VE in order to tackle all aspects of the de-radicalization process in a harmonized way. This commission should be in charge of:
    a. producing and disseminating an alternative religious discourse refuting religious arguments on which the terrorist discourse was based
    b. revising educational curricula, tackling hate speech, incitement and discrimination
    c. designing a rehabilitation plan for imprisoned VE inmates
    d. coordinating economic solutions in order to re-integrate ex-VE offenders into society
    e. developing guidelines for media to prevent discrimination and/or incitement.
2. To make the youth conferences more local and inclusive in order to build multi-stakeholder partnerships to address local challenges and generate HS approaches.
3. To incorporate new curricula promoting the gender perspective in CVE and CT within the training undertaken by public servants and security personnel at the National Training Academy.
4. To recruit more women to the police force in order to develop and implement a more gender sensitive security policy especially in the PVE and the CVE processes.

5. To establish an independent commission to eliminate all forms of discrimination as stated in the constitution.[119]


*For Iraq, it is recommended to:*

1. Develop a national overarching P/CVE strategy with institutional capacity for implementation. Baghdad and Erbil do not have a comprehensive policy to address VE. As scattered countermeasures to the rise of ISIS show, policies have been reactive rather than proactive.
2. To introduce a bottom-up approach with more attention paid to soft and inclusive measures. So far, CVE has been dealt with within the scope of countering terrorism policies.
3. To Work on building trust: the absence of the population's trust in the government has developed into conflictual inter- & intra-community relationships and caused a proliferation of opportunistic armed actors, challenging the sovereignty of the Iraqi state. It has contributed to the delegitimization of state institutions and the disengagement of citizens from political processes, especially between 2003 to 2014.
4. To safeguard the widening civic space in the country and further developing it through leading best practice. The government has recognized the role civil society can play, including the role of youth and women, and there is greater overall engagement on their side. There is also an increasing belief among local civil society actors that they should be given greater flexibility to design programs, rather than solely implementing projects designed in other contexts.
5. To advocate for greater civil society participation to drive security sector assistance and reform by international actors who are deeply engaged in Baghdad and Erbil.
6. To refocus security imperatives and integrating them with a community-led approach – this could yield a security paradigm that more fully respects rights and protects civilians – key to enhancing legitimacy and building trust.


*For Palestine, it is recommended to:*

1. To strive for a political solution: although Palestinians have adopted strategies to deal and cope with the lack of security, the underlying problems of a fragmented territory, a politically polarized society and military violence can only be addressed through a political solution.
2. To enhance HS in Palestine by strengthening civil society, empowering individuals economically, and engaging them in political and decision-making processes.
3. To build on local and informal community ties that have increased in importance, including community-based and non-governmental organizations, to provide for necessary services that are not delivered by the state. Civil society should play a role to help the state build the required capacity and keep the state accountable on performance and inclusion.

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[119] The 2014 Egyptian constitution stated the following in article (53): 'All citizens are equal before the Law. They are equal in rights, freedoms and general duties, without discrimination based on religion, belief, sex, origin, race, color, language, disability, social class, political or geographic affiliation or any other reason. Discrimination and incitement of hatred is a crime punished by Law. The State shall take necessary measures for eliminating all forms of discrimination, and the Law shall regulate creating an independent commission for this purpose.'

*More in general, the following recommendations are made:*

1. Helping governments understand the role of HS in P/CVE and facilitating the development of an integrated national P/CVE strategy. This will build trust between state and society, and open up the space to define HS and the roles of all stakeholders in the development and implementation of such a strategy. It is important to ensure that the HS approach is not instrumentalized for an overarching counter terrorism agenda, as HS is a goal by itself, complementary to state-centric security.

2. Establishing a regional database to collectively manage the challenge of ISIS returnees to their countries of origin.

3. Creating a reservoir of knowledge to facilitate exchange about HS best practices around CVE and PVE among interested security authorities in the MENA region and the EU. Security authorities could be reluctant to apply a HS approach based on the advice of civil society, but might be more convinced if advised so by security authorities from other countries. Bilateral or multilateral training and capacity building exchange programs among security authorities could act as an incentive for reform and spur on the adoption of new methods and techniques. Opening channels of exchange on CVE and PVE programs could initiate mutual learning across borders and help promote HS approaches that have proved successful in other contexts. Peer learning is an important mechanism in adopting new security measures, including soft security ones.