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Rethinking the Threat of Islamic Extremism: The Changes Needed in U.S. Strategy

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Executive Summary

The new Trumps Administration, as well as our European allies and Arab partners, need to fundamentally rethink key aspects of their struggle against terrorism and Islamic extremism. They need to see it as an enduring threat that will be present for at least the coming decade, regardless of what happens to ISIS, ISIL, or Daesh. They need to consider how this threat is tied to the confrontation between Iran and most Arab states, and the growing tensions between Sunnis, Shi'ites, and other minorities. They need to stop thinking largely in terms of terrorism and consider the threat posed in terms of insurgency and efforts to seize control of largely Muslim states. They also need to address the fact that any strategy based on counterterrorism alone will fail unless they also cooperate in addressing the causes of terrorism, insurgency, and unrest.

The United States has made progress in improving its homeland defenses and international counterterrorism efforts. It has restructured its security partnerships with largely Muslim states to help give the same emphasis to counterterrorism that they have given to military security. The United States is also making major progress in defeating the ability of ISIS to hold territory, act as a protostate, and provide a sanctuary for training fighters and efforts to widen its grasp and number of affiliates. The threat of Islamist terrorism within the United States and Europe has been all too real, but it has only been a limited aspect of a far more serious series of threats it poses within the Islamic world. The fight is primarily a fight between moderate governments and popular majorities committed to Islam's traditional values and extremists seeking to use almost any form of violence—and mix of terrorism and asymmetric warfare—to seize power. It is a “clash *within* a civilization” and not a “clash *between* civilizations.”

At the same time, far too much of the U.S. and European effort is now centered around the immediate threat from ISIS, and the external threat it poses to the U.S. homeland and to Europe. Far too few in the United States understand the importance of the strategic partnerships the United States has forged with largely Muslim states, the fact that the primary fight with Islamic extremism is inside Muslim states, and that it is a fight for the future of Islam—rather than the limited threat it poses to faiths and countries outside it.

The United States, Europe, and other non-Muslim states cannot defeat terrorism—or defeat the broader threat posed by Islamic extremism—by trying to isolate themselves from Muslim countries, or by treating Muslims as if violent Islamic extremist were more than a tiny minority of Muslims. Policies like banning Muslim immigrants and visitors, treating all of Islam as the enemy, and needlessly alienating Muslims rather than seeing them as partners in the fight against extremism are exactly the goals that movements like ISIS seek in carrying out attacks in the United States and Europe. They aid terrorism and extremism rather than fight it.

Repeating the mistakes made in attacking German and Italian-Americans in World War I, refusing to see the plight of the Jews before World War II, and interning Japanese-Americans during World War II are the worst possible examples to follow. Islam is far too important a force within the world, and growing too quickly, to try to isolate or segregate. Moreover, polls show that the vast majority of Muslims oppose extremist ideology and violence, while most Muslim governments are key partners in the fight against extremism and terrorism, as well as key security partners in dealing with other threats.

The key challenges to the United States and the new Administration are to revitalize the security partnerships that allow the United states to work with largely Muslim states, to develop better

collective approaches to both the threat of extremism and other threats like those posed by Iran, and make Muslims and the Muslim world a full partner in fighting extremism. The United States needs to show that it can act decisively and that it is a partner that its partners can trust.

At the same time, the United States must work with its Muslim security partners to help them address their own failings in developing effective counters to extremism and in developing better efforts at collective defense, and to address their failure to fully address the causes of Islamic extremism. Both the West and Muslim states have also focused too narrowly on the symptoms of Islamic extremism rather than curing the disease. Movements like ISIS, al Qaeda, and the Taliban are the symptoms of the disease of extremism, and not the cause.

Far too little attention is being given to key civil trends and problems within a steadily expanding Islamic world. These problems have been the key causes of Islamic violence and extremism, and the political upheavals within largely Islamic states that began in 2011. They include sharp population pressures, failed governance and corruption, ethnic and sectarian division, grossly inadequate economic development, massive unemployment and dead end careers, and related issues that could feed extremism and violence for decades to come.

The United States—and its Muslim and non-Muslim allies—need to focus on the fact that extremist violence can be contained and defeated in detail, but no lasting victory can be possible until the causes of extremism are addressed as well as the fight against extremist movements. In practice, the forces that now divide the Islamic world will almost certainly make the “fight” against Islamic extremism part of a struggle that will go on long after ISIS is defeated in Iraq and Syria, and that will have to deal with new movements, and broader tensions between Sunni and Shiites and other minority sects.

The United States and Europe also need to address the forces that alienate Muslims in the U.S. and Europe, and that drive a tiny minority to violence. This cannot be done by excluding Muslims from entering their territory, by letting prejudice and fear dominate security policies, or by confusing the true teachings and history of Islam with extremism. Doing this achieves the very goal that extremist movements have in using terrorism: isolating Muslims from the rest of the world and pushing moderate Muslims towards extremism. The key must be better vetting, better cooperation with the governments in Muslim states in vetting and security procedures, and mobilizing the support of modern Muslims in the United States and Europe. Partnership, not prejudice, is the answer.

Table of Contents

UNDERSTANDING THE FULL THREAT POSED BY ISLAMIC EXTREMISM	6
THERE ARE GRIM LINKS BETWEEN ISLAMIC EXTREMISM AND GLOBAL TERRORISM AND VIOLENCE.....	6
<i>Islamist Extremism as the Cause of Total Terrorist Killings.....</i>	<i>7</i>
Figure One: Patterns in Global Terrorism: 2011-2015	8
Figure Two: Attacks versus Deaths from Terrorism in 2010-2015.....	9
Figure Three: Attacks versus Deaths and Wounded from Terrorism in 2010-2015.....	10
ISLAMIST EXTREMISM AND INSURGENCY VERSUS TERRORISM	11
THE BROADER COSTS OF EXTREMISM GO FAR BEYOND THE “BUTCHERS BILL”	12
<i>The Broader Economic Costs of Extremism</i>	<i>12</i>
Figure Four: UN Security Level by Country, January 2011 and July 2016	16
Figure Five: Conflicts in MENA versus Rest of the World, 1946–2015.....	17
<i>Iraq and Syria as Case Studies.....</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Evaluating Human Impacts</i>	<i>18</i>
Figure Six: Illustrative Estimates of the Development Cost of the Wars in Syria and Iraq.....	21
Figure Seven: IMF Estimates of the Development Cost of War	22
A “CLASH WITHIN A CIVILIZATION”	23
EXTREMIST TERRORIST ATTACKS OVERWHELMINGLY CONSIST OF MUSLIMS KILLING FELLOW MUSLIMS	23
SO DID THE BROADER PATTERNS IN THE HUMAN COST OF SUCH ATTACKS	23
Figure Eight: Terrorist Attacks in the World: January 1, 2015 – July 16, 2016.....	24
Figure Nine: Terrorist Attacks and Deaths by Region: 2014-2015	25
LOOKING BEYOND “TERRORISM” AND FOCUSING ON THE BROADER THREATS.....	26
ALL POWER CORRUPTS: KEY ISLAMIST EXTREMIST GROUPS SEEK POWER	26
PUTTING ISIS IN PERSPECTIVE	26
Figure Ten: Key Perpetrators and the Search for Power	28
IRAN AND SUNNI-SHIITE TENSIONS AND VIOLENCE	29
<i>Iran and Islamic Extremism</i>	<i>29</i>
<i>Iran and the Risk of War.....</i>	<i>29</i>
THE U.S. SIDE OF REFORGING STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS WITH MUSLIM STATES.....	30
THE ARAB SIDE OF REFORGING STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS	32
THE GROWING STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF ISLAM AND THE CAUSES OF EXTREMISM AND UNREST..	34
DEALING WITH MASSIVE POPULATION GROWTH	34
THE GROWING IMPACT OF ISLAM	35
Figure Eleven: Global Growth of Muslim Populations – Part One	37
Figure Eleven: Global Growth of Muslim Populations – Part Two	38
PUTTING ISLAMIC EXTREMISM IN PERSPECTIVE	39
<i>Limited Numbers of Volunteers and Fighters.....</i>	<i>39</i>
Figure Twelve: Foreign Fighters vs. Total Population per Million	39
<i>Polling Data Show Limited Support for Extremism and Violence.....</i>	<i>40</i>
Figure Thirteen: Varying Estimates of General Support for Islamic Extremism	42
Figure Fourteen: The Importance of Religion in the Islamic World - Part One.....	43
Figure Fourteen: The Importance of Religion in the Islamic World - Part Two.....	44
Figure Fifteen: Arab Popular Attitudes Towards the Islamic State	45
Figure Sixteen: How Arab Young Men Perceive Key National Challenges	46
DEALING WITH THE POLITICAL AND CIVIL CAUSES OF VIOLENT ISLAMIC EXTREMISM	47
THE IMPACT OF “FAILED SECULARISM”	47
<i>Population Pressure, “Youth Bulges,” Jobs, Poverty and Alienation</i>	<i>47</i>
Figure Seventeen: The Gulf and MENA Region as a Case Study: Population Growth and the “Youth Bulge” - Part One	49

Figure Seventeen: The Gulf and MENA Region as a Case Study: Population Growth and the “Youth Bulge” - Part Two	50
FAILED GOVERNANCE	51
Figure Eighteen: The Gulf and MENA Region as a Case Study: Governments as a Threat to Their Peoples	53
Figure Nineteen: Failed Governance: Key Case Studies in World Bank Ratings – Part One.....	54
Figure Nineteen: Failed Governance: Key Case Studies in World Bank Ratings – Part Two	55
Figure Nineteen: Failed Governance: Key Case Studies in World Bank Ratings – Part Three	56
Figure Twenty: GDP Per Capita – A Metric of Failed Economic Development and Government Activity	57
Figure Twenty-One: From Wealth to Poverty: GDP Per Capita in Moslem Majority Countries.....	58
DEALING WITH THE GROWTH OF MUSLIM POPULATIONS AND THE SECULAR CAUSES OF ISLAMIC EXTREMISM	59
<i>Extremism and Failed States</i>	59
<i>The Implications for U.S. Strategy</i>	60
<i>The Implications for Largely Muslim States</i>	60
Figure Twenty-Two: Perceptions of Greatest Challenges	61
Figure Twenty-Three: Overdependence on State Employment and Perceptions of the Reasons for Unemployment.....	62
<i>Extremism and Western Fears, Prejudices, and Alienation</i>	63
Figure Twenty-Four: Illustrating the Correlation Between Attacks on ISIS and the Flow of Potential Terrorists Back to Their Home Countries,.....	66
CONCLUSIONS	67

Understanding the Full Threat Posed by Islamic Extremism

Only a small portion of Muslims support any form of violent Islamic extremism. As is the case with Christian and Jewish extremists, they do not represent the true values of their faith. At the same time, far too many discussions of terrorism fail to address or highlight the fact that it is Islamic extremism that now presents one of the most serious security threats in the modern world.

Failing to openly address “Islamic extremism” is like failing to address the fact that all the world’s great religions have dangerous extremists who pervert their values, or to address the historical reality of Christianity during the worst moments of the battles between, during, and in the Reformation and Counterreformation, and the Crusades, or to address the most extreme aspects of Jewish violence during the period before 69 AD.

The reality is that Muslims, non-Muslims, and the Trump Administration cannot afford to ignore the reality that a small minority of Muslims is using Islam to attack the very fabric of modern civilization. Calling such violence “Islamist” extremism rather than “Islamic” may soften the semantics, but it does not alter the reality. Religiously inspired fighting within Islam has been a critical source of violence, not only in terms of terrorism but also within a far more serious pattern of civil wars, insurgencies, and efforts to seize power within the largely Muslim states.

It is also a pattern of violence whose primary casualties are other Muslims, not only in terms of deaths and injuries, but also in terms of hope for development and for the future. The grim irony behind “Islamic extremism” is that it claims to return to the roots of Islam at a time when Islam led the world in culture, science, medicine, and development—but calls for social, economic, and intellectual practices that are so extreme, that it is hard to see how any state that adopts them can actually grow and develop and meet the needs of its population.

There are Grim Links between Islamic Extremism and Global Terrorism and Violence

Terrorism is only part of the overall pattern of Islamic extremism and violence. Nevertheless, **Figure One** shows that it is still a very critical part and serves as a warning that it is likely to continue to be such a threat regardless of what happens to ISIS’ ability to control a “caliphate” centered in Mosul and Raqqa. During the period between the start of the upheavals in the Arab world at the start of 2011 and the end of 2015, the START terrorism database that the U.S. State Department uses to report statistics on terrorism lists a total of 62,022 incidents.¹

Such numbers do present serious uncertainties. The START data base is one of the best and most transparent unclassified data bases on terrorism. However, a review of the START data base shows that it fails to identify the extent to which attacks are made by specific religious extremist groups, or are the result of sectarian fighting.

The detailed data in the chronologies do identify perpetrator groups where this is sometimes possible, but START—like most other unclassified efforts—must draw heavily on media reporting that often avoids making such distinctions for political reasons. As a result, the input data and outputs of the START model are sometimes “politically correct” at the expense of reality. As a result, there is no reliable way to tie counts of terrorist incidents and deaths specifically to Islamic terrorism, or to broadly quantify the religious beliefs of the perpetrator or the target.

However, if one looks at the patterns in the total attacks in largely Muslim states in the Middle East, North Africa, Sub Saharan Africa, Central Asia, South Asia, and East Asia, some broad patterns are all too clear. These states account for 52,295 of the 62,022 incidents or 84 percent of all incidents. Moreover, if one focuses on the total number of terrorist attacks in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, they account for 22,953 incidents or 37 percent of the global total.

Islamist Extremism as the Cause of Total Terrorist Killings

The number of terrorist incidents is only part of the story. The impact of terrorist acts is more critical than their number. There are many ways to measure this impact, and deaths or “number killed” are only one of the most serious. Data on the numbers killed ignore the massive human impact of terrorism on refugees, displaced persons, economic damage, failure to educate, loss of jobs and businesses, effective governance and rule of law, cuts in the GDP and GDP per capita, and economic growth and development—as well as on the inability to implement the true values of Islam.

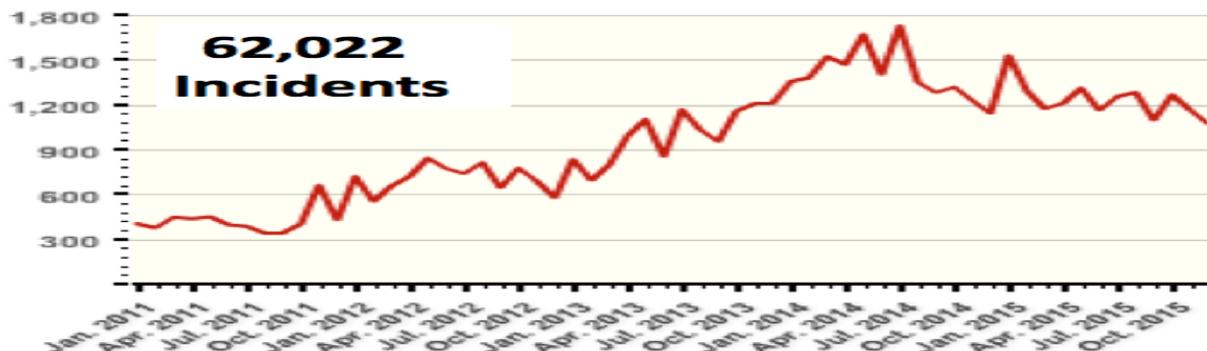
But every death does matter, and **Figure Two** compares a different set of estimates of terrorist attacks versus deaths, drawn from the START database, and made by the Institute for Economics and Peace in its *Global Terrorism Index 2016*.² **Figure Two** shows that 72 percent of the deaths worldwide occurred in Iraq, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Syria—countries with high levels of Islamist terrorism.

Figure Three addresses both incidents and casualties. It shows data reported in the *Arab Human Development Report for 2016* which compares attacks, killed, and wounded. It uses a slightly different definition of the Arab world, but finds that 36.1 percent of the terrorist incidents (26,058 out of 72,184) between 2000-2014 occurred in the Arab world. So did a total of 43.68 percent (74,080 out of 169,589) of the killings, and 49.12 percent (127,957 out of 260,496) of the wounded. These latter calculations are important for several reasons. They cover the fully period from 9/11 to the peak of ISIS gains, well over 90 percent of the area involved is Muslim, the authors and consultants drafting the Arab Development Report are largely Arabs and Muslims, and they chose to use the same START data base used by the U.S. State Department and many analysts in the West.³

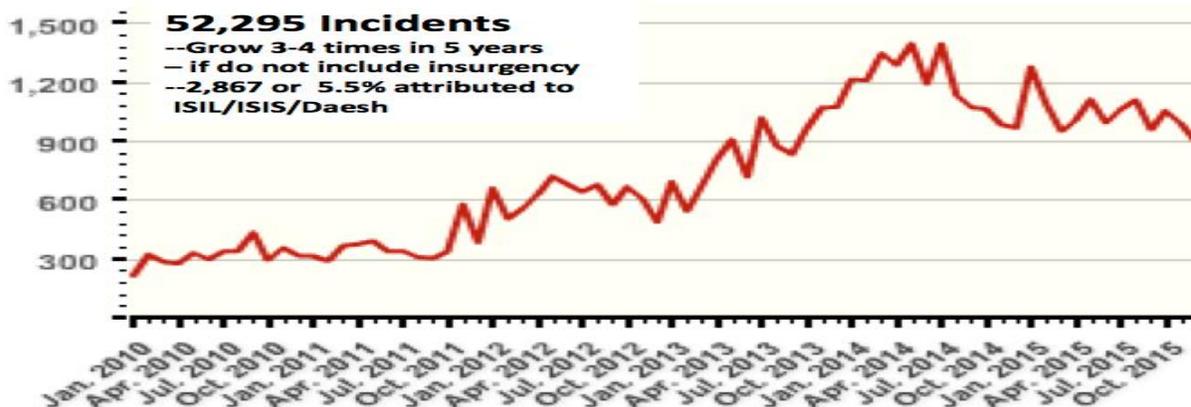
The START data base also shows that some perpetrators are far more dangerous than others. According to the START database, only three Islamist extremist movements—ISIS, Boko Haram, and Taliban—accounted for 55 percent of deaths in 2015. ISIS killed 6,141 in 2015, or average of 6.7 deaths per attack. ISIS accounted for 62 percent of deaths in Iraq, even though the perpetrator in 37 percent of the cases was unknown. Boko Haram killed 5,478, some 75 percent in Nigeria, an average dead of 11 per attack. The Taliban killed 4,502, a figure 18 percent above its total in 2014, and an average of 4 deaths per attack.

Figure One: Patterns in Global Terrorism: 2011-2015

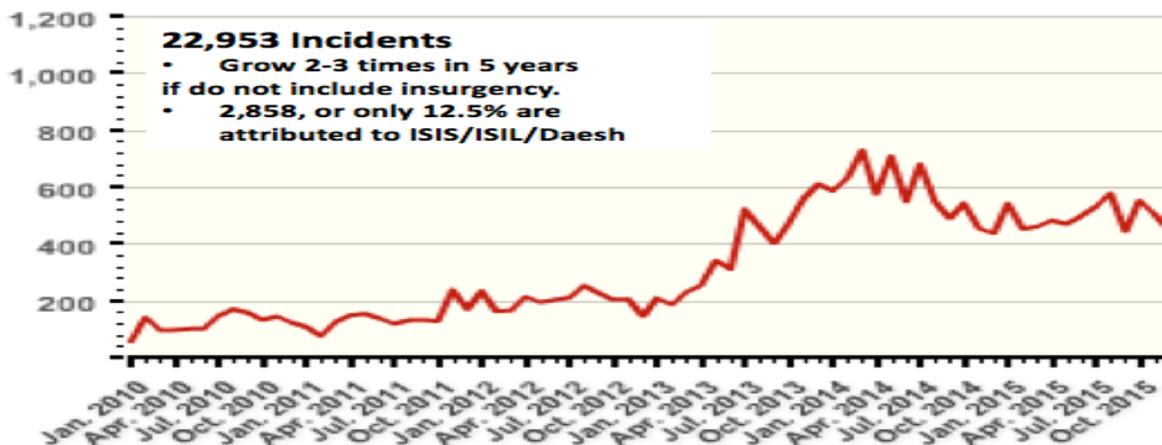
Total Worldwide: 2011-2015



Total in Largely Muslim States in Middle East, North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, Central Asia, South Asia, and East Asia



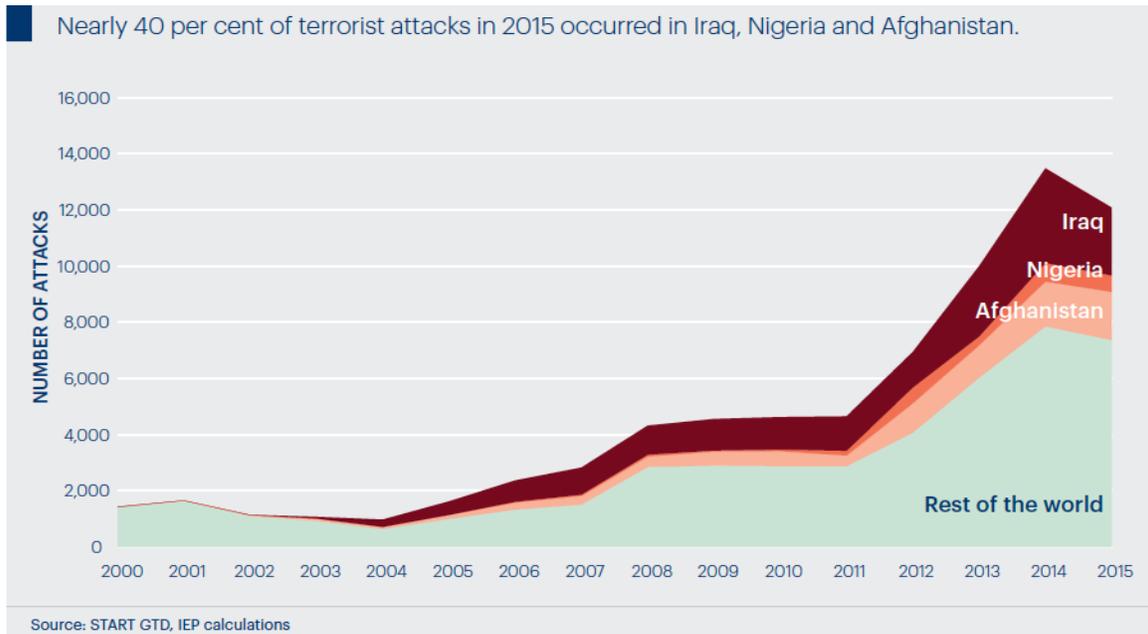
Total in Largely Muslim States in Middle East and North Africa,



Source: START Data Base, <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/>, and https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/Results.aspx?start_yearonly=2010&end_yearonly=2015&start_month=&start_day=&end_year=&end_month=&end_day=®ion=10&asmSelect0=&perpetrator=40151&dtp2=all&success=yes&casualties_type=b&casualties_max

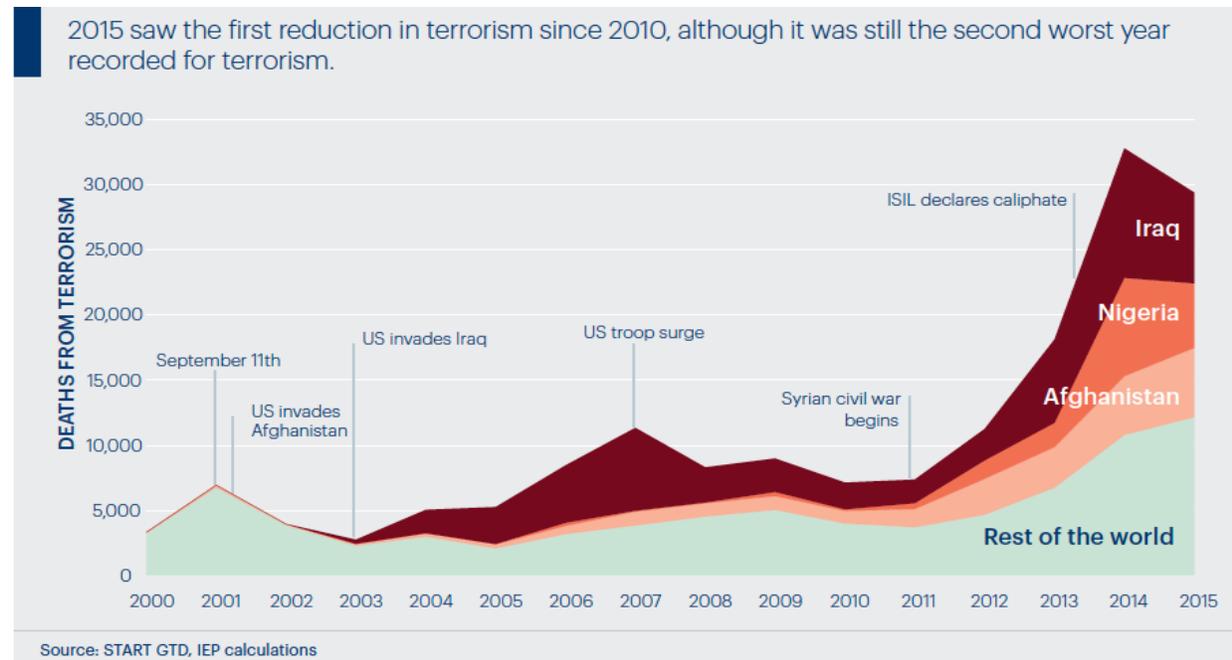
Figure Two: Attacks versus Deaths from Terrorism in 2010-2015

Attacks



Source: Adapted from Institute for Economics and Peace. *Global terrorism Index 2016*, <https://www.google.com/search?q=institute+for+economics+and+peace+global+terrorism+index&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8>, pp. 18-19.

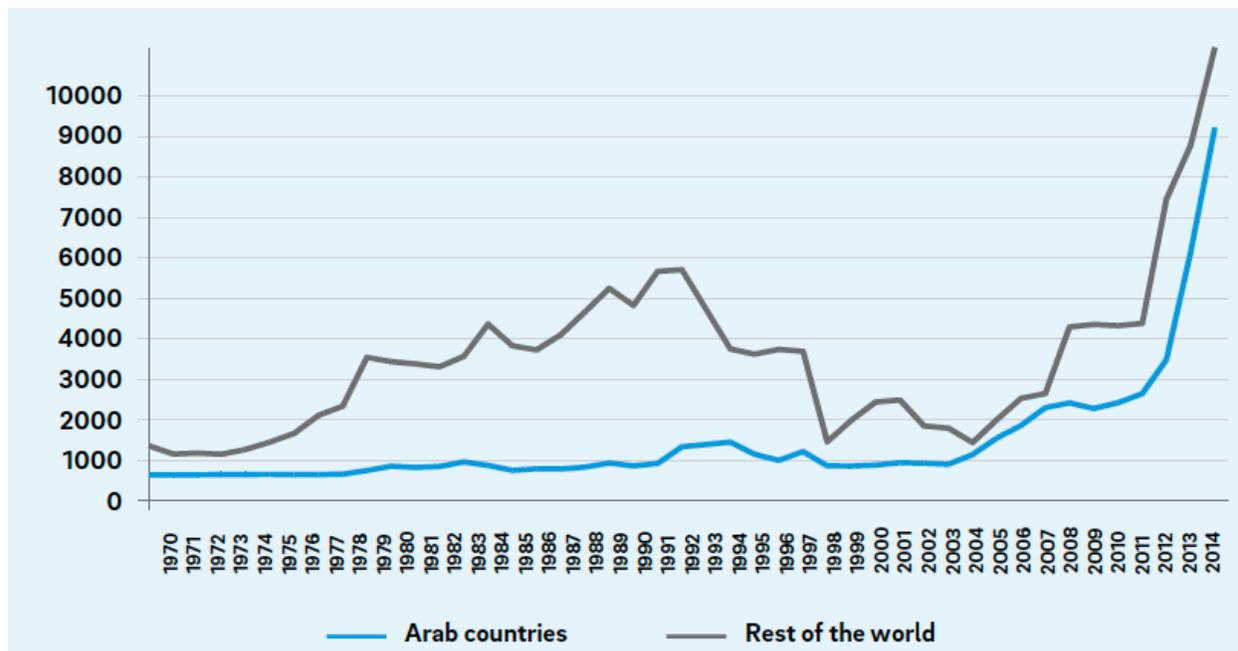
Deaths



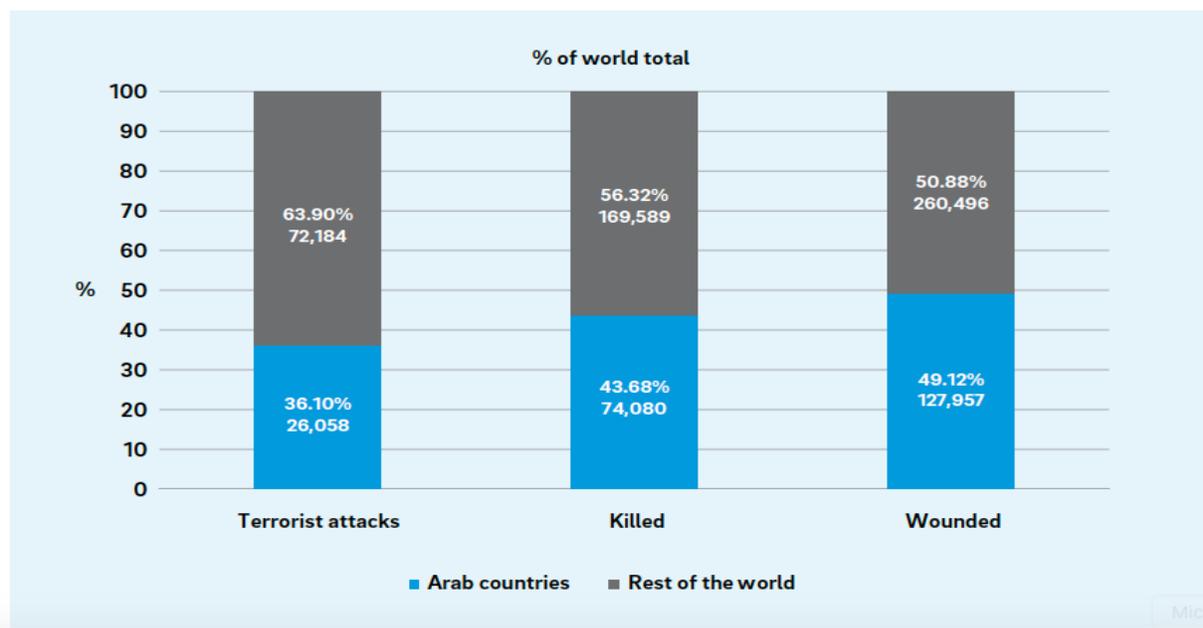
Source: Adapted from Institute for Economics and Peace. *Global terrorism Index 2016*, <https://www.google.com/search?q=institute+for+economics+and+peace+global+terrorism+index&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8>, p. 16.

Figure Three: Attacks versus Deaths and Wounded from Terrorism in 2010-2015

Number of terrorist attacks, 1970–2014



Terrorist attacks and their victims in the Arab region versus the rest of the world, 2000–2014



Source: START 2015, and UNDP, *Arab Human Development Report 2016: Youth and the prospects for human development in changing reality*, Figure 1.7 and Figure 8.3, http://www.arabstates.undp.org/content/rbas/en/home/library/huma_development/arab-human-development-report-2016--youth-and-the-prospects-for-/.

Islamist Extremism and Insurgency versus Terrorism

Important as these figures are, the Western focus (and that of the Obama Administration and President Trump during his period as a candidate) on terrorism to the exclusion of other forms of violence means that the full impact of Islamic extremism is vastly understated when the total levels of other forms of Islamic extremist violence are ignored. Most of the unclassified data on terrorism do not include at least a significant number of unattributed attacks between sects like those between Sunni and Shi'ites, or the impact of Islamist extremism on the killing, injury, displacement, and kidnapping of minorities. Some only include civilians, and do not include the security personnel that are killed or injured.

At least in the MENA region, the fighting between governments and extremist movements has meant that the major threat to several key governments does not come from terrorism per se, but from insurgencies—where terrorism is only one weapon of many.

No meaningful casualty data exist on the impact of extremism in Libya and Yemen, but it is clear that sect has been a key cause of fighting, suffering, and economic loss in Yemen. It has also been the major cause of casualties in Iraq since 2011, and of much of the casualties in Syria—although such losses have been driven by the ruthless disregard for civilian life by the Assad regime, Iran, Hezbollah, other Shi'ite militias, and Russia.

In the case of Iraq, the best source of data is Iraq Body Count (<https://www.iraqbodycount.org/database/>). Iraq Body Count estimates that—as of the end of November 2016—at least 67,049 Iraqi civilians have died from fighting, triggered largely by Islamist extremism and religious violence since U.S. forces left at the end of 2011. Iraq Body Count also estimates that at least 52,576 civilians have died since ISIS first invaded in late 2013—with a possibility that the total is at least 10,000 higher.⁴

In the case of Syria, there is no way to assign deaths to extremists vs. a collective form of state-driven terrorism and warfighting, but it is all too clear that the number of dead in Syria alone since 2012 is vastly greater than the total killed from terrorism worldwide since 1970. A summary of the different estimates as of October 2016 illustrates this point all too clearly:⁵

Estimates of deaths in the [Syrian Civil War](#), per opposition activist groups, vary between 301,781 and 470,000.^[2] On 23 April 2016, the [United Nations and Arab League Envoy to Syria](#) put out an estimate of 400,000 that had died in the war.^[3]

[UNICEF](#) reported that over 500 children had been killed by early February 2012.^{[4][5]} Another 400 children were reportedly arrested and tortured in Syrian prisons.^{[6][7]} Both claims have been contested by the Syrian government.^[8] Additionally, over 600 detainees and political prisoners died under torture.^[9] The United Nations stated that by the end of April 2014, 8,803 children had been killed,^[10] while the Oxford Research Group said that a total of 11,420 children died in the conflict by late November 2013.^[11] By mid-September 2016, the opposition activist group [Syrian Observatory for Human Rights](#) (SOHR) reported the number of children killed in the conflict had risen to 15,099, while at the same time 10,018 women were also killed.^[1]

The number of fatalities in the conflict, according to the Syrian opposition website *Syrian Martyrs*, is 151,888, updated to 30 April 2016. The number includes 35,859 rebels but does not include members of the government security forces or pro-government foreign combatants who have died. The *Syrian Martyrs* number of civilian deaths is significantly higher than the ones presented by other organizations, including the UN, one reason being they record deaths even when no name is given for the reportedly killed individual.

Other estimates range from 292,815 to 470,000...

Estimates by the U.S. State Department indicate that some 70 percent of Iraq's non-Islamic minorities have left the country since 2003...

The Broader Costs of Extremism Go Far Beyond the “Butchers Bill”

These fatalities are only part of the story. No Islamic extremist movement has yet been able to capture and hold enough territory long enough to demonstrate the full extent to which such ideologies will make effective economic development impossible. Far too many critiques of such extremism ignore the fact that Islamic extremism will impose immense economic and human costs on any society that it can control over time. These critiques also ignore the contrast between the advances in science, medicine, and culture that the tolerance of the original Caliphates made possible, and the retreat into dysfunctional education, governance, and economics demanded by movements like ISIS, al Qaeda, and the Taliban.

There is no doubt, however, about the costs of Islamic extremism in blocking the development of Afghanistan under the Taliban, and the damage ISIS has done in the areas it has governed in Syria and Iraq. Its governance has largely destroyed modern education and the basis for global competitiveness. Its restrictive social customs have led to corruption and abuse, and its economics have consisted largely of theft, ideological fundraising, and extortion. Islamic extremism has never even attempted to offer a practical solution to any of the major problems driving instability in the region, it has only exploited these forces and made them worse.

The Broader Economic Costs of Extremism

The broader economic burden of extremist violence has affected the entire MENA region and much of the rest of the Muslim world. Nothing approaching reliable estimates exist of the cost of the efforts to fight Islamist extremists to the governments involved. However, Iraq spent some 12 percent of its GDP on fighting ISIS and counterterrorism in 2015. Saudi Arabia also spent some 12 percent of its GDP on security in 2015, driven in large part by the threat from extremism, a sectarian threat from Iran, and fighting with Shi’ite Houthi and Salah factions in Yemen.

If one also considers the expenditures of two key countries in South Asia, it seems likely that the total cost of dealing with Islamist extremism in the MENA region, Afghanistan, and Pakistan is now well over 6 percent of the region’s total GDP. This is a critical economic burden on poor developing states, and makes it even harder for moderate regimes in largely Muslim states to meet their people’s expectations and reduce the causes of extremism.

The UN’s Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia published a study in November 2016 entitled *Survey of Economic and Social Developments in the Arab Region in 2015-2016* that addressed the broader costs of the political upheavals and fighting in the MENA region that began in 2011. It concluded on a region-wide basis that,⁶

The transition of Arab countries, initiated in 2011 by sociopolitical events collectively known as the Arab Spring, has resulted in instability and, in several cases, war. The adverse effects have been felt not only in those countries enduring armed violence to varying degrees, such as Iraq, Libya, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, but also in neighboring countries. ... The Survey finds that – as compared with projections made before 2011 – conflicts in the region have led to a net loss of \$613.8 billion in economic activity, and an aggregate fiscal deficit of \$243.1 billion.

Conflicts have worsened other economic and social indicators, such as debt, unemployment, corruption and poverty. The international refugee crisis has placed a strain on communities that have lost populations, on countries coping with refugee influxes, and above all on the refugee populations themselves, which suffer from poor health and malnutrition, and have limited access to employment and education. Crisis affects everyone, but women have faced the most adverse effects. Greater policy interventions are needed to address

these issues and to prevent the rise of a “lost generation” of Arab youth affected by conflict.

The UN report provided the following summary description of the longer-term cost of recovery and reconstruction in Syria,⁷

Now in its sixth year, the Syrian civil war has led to one of the most severe humanitarian crises of the new millennium. The international community has failed to end the conflict or provide adequate aid. Recent estimates put the total death toll at 470,000. The country’s population has decreased by one fifth, due to casualties and emigration. The war has been accompanied by atrocities, the rise of the so-called “Islamic State”, a regional and global refugee crisis, and external intervention that has only fueled hostilities...The conflict has left a once middle-income economy in ruins... According to National Agenda for the Future of Syria (NAFS) estimations, the Syrian conflict has caused losses of \$259 billion since 2011, including \$169 billion from lost GDP as compared with pre-conflict projections, and \$89.9 billion from accumulated physical capital loss.

The *Arab Human Development Report for 2016* raises similar issues. One section warns that,⁸

Armed conflict is destroying the social fabric of the Arab region, causing massive loss of life not only among combatants, but also and increasingly among civilians. Conflicts today are considerably less well defined, and civilians, including children, are paying the price, as many more fatalities occur away from battle zones. For every person killed directly by armed violence, between 3 and 15 others die indirectly from diseases, medical complications and malnutrition.

Conflicts also interfere with economic development by destroying productive economic resources, capital and labor, especially within the territory of the nations where they are fought.

Conflicts divert resources primarily through high military spending, which reflects the multiple conflicts in the region, the legacy of cold war rivalries and the nervousness of political systems on the defensive. Several Arab countries are among the most militarized in the world and are characterized by huge military outlays and high proportions of the population under arms (table 1.4). However, while arms-producing countries may reap economic dividends from the arms trade, this spending represents only missed opportunities to invest in broader economic and social progress among Arab countries.

The five biggest global importers of arms during 2009–2013 were India, China, Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, the latter two Arab countries importing 32 percent of the global total

If faced with real military threats, Arab countries, including those with large defense budgets, almost invariably call on foreign troops for protection and pay the major share of the cost. This was the case, for example, of the second Gulf War (1990–1991). “Such dependence mocks the vast sums invested in Arab arsenals”, a recent ESCWA report dryly observes...Rising military expenses curtail spending in more effective areas such as education, health care, poverty reduction or infrastructure. They are also linked to the mounting cost of maintaining armed forces, which makes these expenditures even more exorbitant.

Conflict and destruction trigger massive displacement. In 2014, almost 41 percent of the world’s forcibly displaced population were represented by the Arab region, which has only 5 percent of the world’s population ...The share – more than 22 million people –was almost five times higher in 2014 than 14 years earlier. This increase was first driven by the aftermath of the U.S. invasion of Iraq and the civil war in Darfur around 2003 and then by the Syrian crisis in 2011...Some 98 percent of forcibly displaced individuals from the region originate from the conflict-ridden countries of Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen. A sizeable share of these vulnerable groups are children...

Besides displacing hundreds of thousands of refugees outside their borders, some Arab countries are also heavily burdened internally by war-related displacement. One person in five in Lebanon is a refugee, and one in three in Syria is either a refugee (most from Iraq) or has been internally displaced. Somalia’s ratio of internally displaced persons exceeded 10 percent of the population in 2014. Syrians are the single largest group of internally displaced persons, with 6.5 million displaced in the country in 2013.

While this part of the Arab Human development Report does not address the ties between conflict and Islamic extremism in these quotations, almost all of the conflicts involved combined threats from Islamic terrorism with uprisings by sectarian or ethnic groups that were discriminated against

in their own country (often for religious reasons) and uprisings against authoritarian or failed governments which later parts of this analysis show have been a critical factor feeding Islamic extremist terrorist and insurgencies.

A later part that focuses more specifically on terrorism and conflicts driven largely by Islamic extremism notes that,⁹

More than any other phenomenon, conflict strips people, communities and countries of the options they require to become productive, establish security and plan for a better future. It erases hard-won gains in development and makes progress in addressing long-standing challenges all the more difficult.

War and violence inflict enormous damage on young individuals and the prospects for their future. Over the past five years, the Arab region has witnessed a sharp rise in the number of conflicts, accompanied by an increase in the number of violent terrorist attacks...In 2014 alone, the region accounted for almost 45 percent of all terrorist attacks worldwide ... These attacks claimed the lives of more than 21,000 people.

In addition to the deterioration in living conditions, the destruction of property and the suffering and death among people, these events adversely affect human development in the region. A clear example is the contraction of GDP in Iraq, where terrorism is estimated to have cost US\$159 billion (in purchasing power parity dollars) since 2005. This is equivalent to 32 percent of the country's 2014 GDP...In the case of Syria, the ongoing crisis led to a decline by almost 31.0 percent in GDP in 2012, and the drop had almost reached 38 percent by the end of 2013...

Conflict has led countries to allocate large shares of public expenditure to military and security programs, further weakening the prospects for development. Currently among the most militarized in the world, several Arab countries are characterized by huge military outlays, which represent missed opportunities to invest in broader economic and social progress. In 1988–2014, military expenditures in the Arab region reached almost US\$2 trillion. Military expenditures increased by a factor of more than two in 2000–2014, and per capita military expenditures in the Arab states grew 2.5 times in 1990–2014.

Another adverse effect of conflict on human development is massive displacement. The Arab region is home to only five percent of the world's population, but also home to 47 percent of its internally displaced, and 58 percent of its refugees – the latter growing from 34 percent in 2000.⁹ In a matter of days in June 2014, 500,000 people were displaced in Iraq... In Yemen, at least 2.5 million were internally displaced since the conflict erupted in March 2015 (as of December 2015) ...Three of the six main countries of origin of refugees are Arab countries (Somalia, Sudan and Syria), in addition to the long-standing plight of Palestinians, who constitute the largest refugee group worldwide (more than five million) ...

Conflict also disproportionately damages the autonomy and development of women, particularly young women. In situations of conflict or poverty, young women's educational opportunities are greatly reduced, and the physical and economic insecurity can be a lead determinant in earlier or less-favorable marriages for them. Young women in conflict situations also suffer from higher rates of gender-based violence, and such rates are usually even higher if the women also belong to a minority or marginalized group.

...Two bits of data are indicative: The Arab region is home to 5 percent of the world population, but around 18 percent of the world's conflicts over 1948–2014...Over 2010–2013, the Arab region was home to one-fourth of the world's conflicts..

While past conflict is not necessarily a recipe for future violence, the number of people in the region living in countries at high risk of conflict is projected to grow from about 250 million in 2010 to over 305 million in 2020; the number is likely to double over 2010–2050...To stop the past from defining the future, mediating ongoing crises and preventing future violence are crucial.

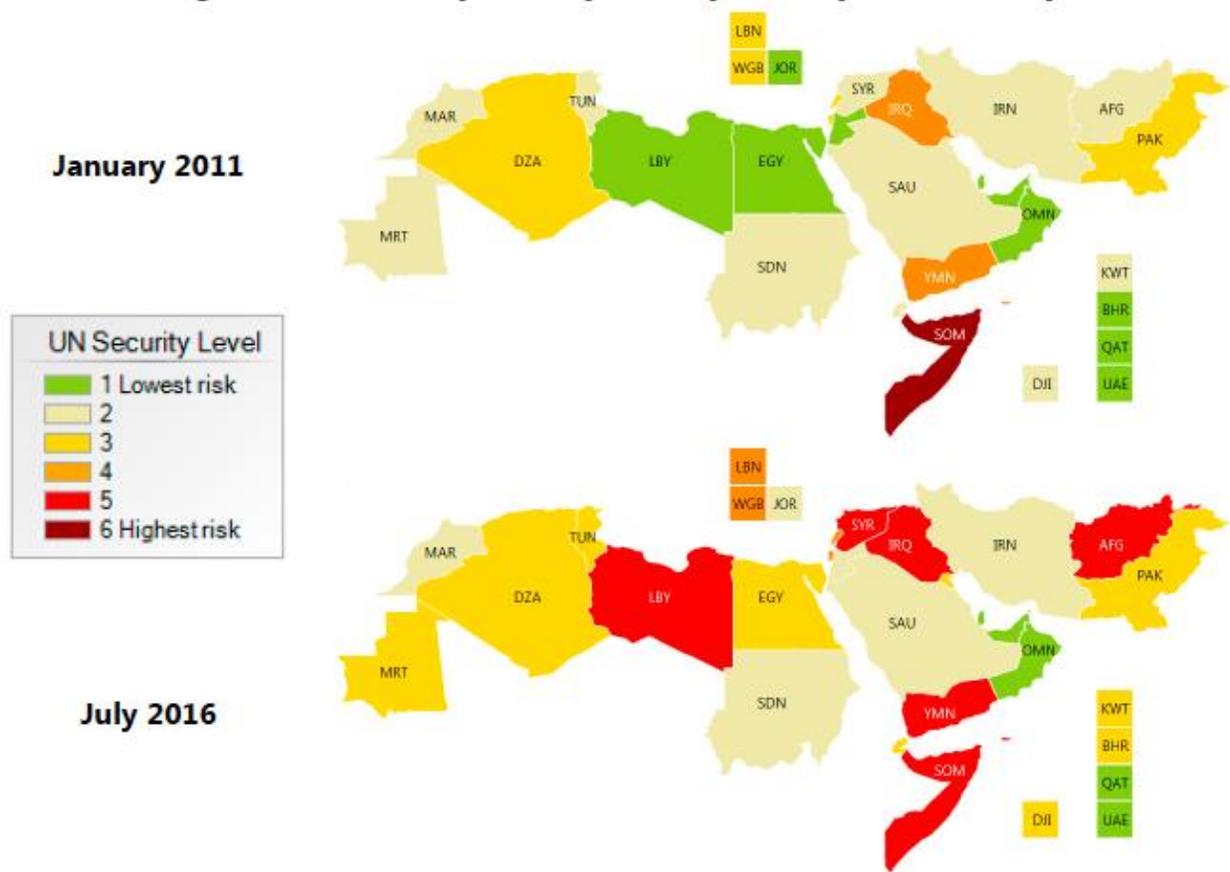
An IMF Study issued in September 2016, and entitled *The Economic Impact of Conflicts and the Refugee Crisis in the Middle East and North Africa*, provides the broader comparison of the risks and instability in the MENA region since its political upheavals began in 2011 shown in **Figure Four**. It makes it clear that today's conflicts may well not be the end of wars emerging out of the threat of Islamic extremism,¹⁰

Conflicts are proliferating in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).² Almost daily, global media report intense violence, large-scale human suffering, and destruction in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen. These conflicts have fundamentally changed the region's physical, economic, and social landscape, which, at the onset of the Arab Spring just over five years ago, looked much more hopeful (Figure 1). Two distinctive features of the wave of conflicts are the importance of non-state actors such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), who wield increasing power in and beyond the region; and a large-scale refugee crisis, mainly as Syrians flee civil war. Moreover, there is every reason to believe that the MENA conflicts will persist for some time. Their root causes in social and political polarization fueled by strong population growth, economic inequality, and ideological and religious schisms, are deeply entrenched.

The IMF study also provides the trend analysis shown in **Figure Five**, and shows how it relates to both past conflicts in the region, and conflicts in other parts of the world: ¹¹

This new wave of conflicts is just the latest in a region long marked by violence. Figure 5 illustrates the MENA region's unique exposure to conflict in the world. Indeed, conflicts have affected its countries, on average, for over one-quarter of the period since the end of World War II, yet only one-fifth of that time in the rest of the world. In addition, the region's spells of conflict have been more intense and have tended to become deeply entrenched, making them especially difficult to overcome. From 1946–2015, 12 out of 59 conflict episodes in MENA lasted more than eight years, and in about half of these episodes the ensuing peace lasted less than 10 years. As a result, the region accounts for 40 percent of the estimated global total of battle-related deaths since 1946, according to the Uppsala Conflict Data Program, and for about 60 percent of all casualties since the turn of the millennium.

Figure Four: UN Security Level by Country, January 2011 and July 2016

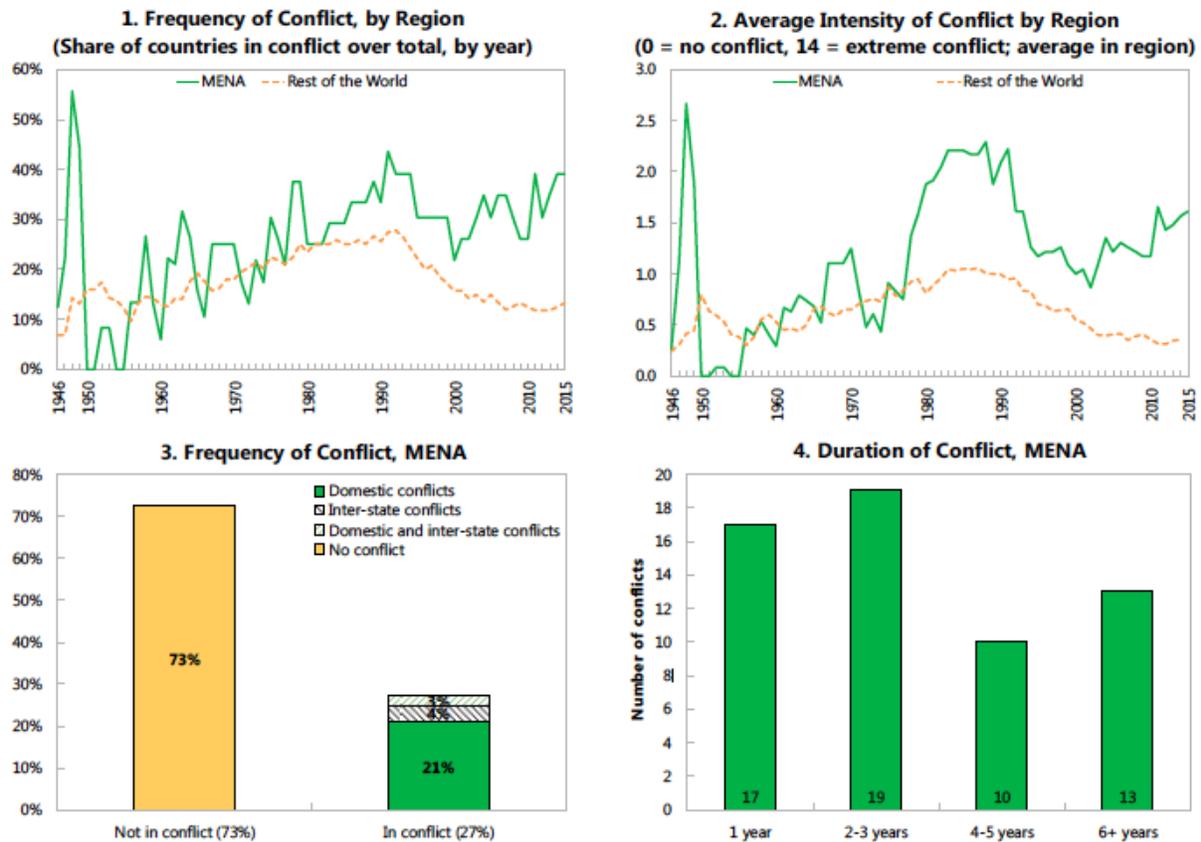


Source: IMF Security Services.

Note: Country borders do not necessarily reflect the IMF's official position.

Björn Rother, Gaëlle Pierre, Davide Lombardo, Risto Herrala, Priscilla Toffano, Erik Roos, Greg Auclair, and Karina Manasseh "The Economic Impact of Conflicts and the Refugee Crisis in the Middle East and North Africa," IMF Staff Discussion Note, SDN/16/08, September 2016, p. 6.

Figure Five: Conflicts in MENA versus Rest of the World, 1946–2015



Sources: Center for Systemic Peace; IMF staff calculations.

Note: Frequency is the share of country-years in conflict or no conflict over the total number of country-years in the sample. Duration is the number of conflicts by length. For this chart, uninterrupted spells of country-years in conflict for a given country are considered one continuous event.

Björn Rother, Gaëlle Pierre, Davide Lombardo, Risto Herrala, Priscilla Toffano, Erik Roos, Greg Auclair, and Karina Manasseh “The Economic Impact of Conflicts and the Refugee Crisis in the Middle East and North Africa,” IMF Staff Discussion Note, SDN/16/08, September 2016, p. 7.

Iraq and Syria as Case Studies

Iraq and Syria make two grim, key studies in illustrating both the broader economic costs of the wars driven by Islamic extremism, and the large-scale human impacts as well. It should be noted in reviewing these data that Iraq has also suffered serious losses, and that Yemen – where the data still remain very uncertain – may be overtaking Syria as a “worst case.”

In the case of Iraq, key aspects of the other impacts of the fighting have included:

- People of concern rose from 1.4 million in 2013 to 4.7 million in 2015. UN agencies estimate they may reach over 7 million after a successful campaign in Mosul. (OCHA, UNHCR)
- 10.0 million in need in August 2016; 7.3 million targets for humanitarian assistance. (OCHA)
- At least 3.3 million IDPs in August 2016. Some 277,000 refugees outside Iraq. (OCHA)

In the case of Syria, various sources estimate that,

- UNHCR estimated in July 2016 that Syria had 4.8 million refugees out the country—roughly 22 percent of its prewar population—and 6.5 million people—over one-third of its present population—displaced away from their homes and jobs inside Syria.
- It estimated that 13.5 million Syrians needed protection. 12.1 million people were in need of humanitarian aid, including 5.7 million children. 11.5 million lacked access to health care and scarcity of medicine had led to a catastrophic health situation. Poor food availability and quality, and successive cuts in subsidies on bread, had exacerbated nutritional deprivation.
- An estimated 25 percent of schools were not operational by 2014.
- No reliable estimate existed of how badly the economy had suffered since 2011, but the CIA estimated that Syria's GDP shrank from an already very low \$97.5 billion in 2012 to \$55.8 billion in 2014. Per capita income was only \$5,100 in 2010—before the fighting even began, and ranked Syria only 219th of the world's nations. Unemployment reached 57.7 percent in 2014, and 82.5 percent of the population lived below the poverty line by then—putting Syria at a rank of 202nd, and at the near bottom of the world's nations.
- OCHA estimated that Syria's development situation had regressed almost by four decades. Four out of five Syrians now lived in poverty. Since the crisis began in 2011, life expectancy among Syrians dropped by more than 20 years, while school attendance dropped over 50 percent, with more than 2 million children out of school. Syria has also seen reversals in all 12 Millennium Development Goal indicators. The Syrian economy has contracted by an estimated 40 per cent since 2011, leading to the majority of Syrians losing their livelihoods.
- Turkey hosted over 2.7 million [registered](#) Syrians. In Lebanon, more than a million registered Syrians lived in over 1,700 communities and locations across the country, often sharing small basic lodgings with other refugee families in overcrowded conditions. In Jordan, over 600,000 men, women and children were trapped in exile. Iraq had also seen a growing number of Syrians arriving, hosting nearly 25,000.
- In 2009, 94 percent of Syrian children attended primary and lower secondary education. By June 2016, only 60 per cent of children were in school, leaving 2.1 million children and adolescents without access to education in Syria. In neighboring countries, over 4.8 million Syrian refugees were registered with UNHCR, and 35 percent are of school-age. In Turkey, only 39 percent of school-age refugee children and adolescents were enrolled in primary and secondary education, 40 percent in Lebanon, and 70 percent in Jordan. This meant that nearly 900,000 more Syrian school-age refugee children and adolescents were not in school.

The *Arab Human Development Report for 2016* provides what seems to be relatively optimistic estimate of the economic cost of the fighting in both countries shown in **Figure Six**. Nevertheless, it is one which still warns that it has made all of the problems that helped cause the political upheavals in 2011 far worse.¹²

Regional integration has been affected by the spillovers of conflict in neighboring countries. According to the World Bank, the Arab Mashreq countries – Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria – lost an estimated US\$35 billion in output (measured in 2007 prices) during the first three years of the conflict in Syria (2011–2014) ...More recently, the trade ties among these countries have nearly collapsed because of the troubles in Syria. The Arab Monetary Fund's 2015 Arab Economic Outlook Annual Report states that "Syria's border recurrent closures have impeded regional trade by discontinuing or cutting off a key route connecting the wider Levant and the Gulf states" ...On the investment side, inflows of foreign direct investment to the Arab region declined from US\$66.8 billion in 2010 to US\$47.5 billion in 2013 and to US\$43.9 billion in 2014.

Evaluating Human Impacts

The IMF provides the broader estimates of the cost of current wars shown in **Figure Seven** in its study entitled *The Economic Impact of Conflicts and the Refugee Crisis in the Middle East and North Africa*:¹³

The economic costs of the recent conflicts and the refugee crisis are massive. Indeed, the economic fallout is no less damaging than the humanitarian costs for the stability of the region and its longer-term development potential. Furthermore, the economic costs are not confined to countries directly affected

by conflict. An estimated 10 million refugees originating from the region and registered by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) have stayed mostly in the neighborhood. Since 2010, for example, refugees from Syria and Iraq have increased the populations of Lebanon by one-quarter and Jordan by one-tenth, putting major pressure on budgets, public infrastructure, and labor and housing markets.³ Impacts also include trade disruptions, while declining investor and consumer confidence have hurt the entire MENA region. These would be major macroeconomic problems anywhere, but they are especially acute for a region beset for a long time by severe structural deficiencies, lack of investment (IMF 2016a), and, more recently, the substantial impact of falling oil prices on the oil-producing economies.

... MENA's recent conflicts have slashed economic growth. GDP in Syria in 2015, after four years of fighting, accounted for less than half of its pre-conflict level in 2010. Yemen lost an estimated 25–35 percent of its GDP in 2015 alone, while in Libya—where dependence on oil has made GDP growth extremely volatile—GDP fell by 24 percent in 2014 as violence picked up. West Bank and Gaza offers a longer-term perspective on what can happen to growth in a fragile situation.

The World Bank found that the West Bank and Gaza economy was virtually stagnant over the past 20 years, contrasting with nearly 250 percent average growth in other MENA countries in that period (World Bank 2015a). The strength of these GDP contractions in the presence of conflict is remarkable, given that the literature is more nuanced. Studies tend to conclude that the impact of conflict typically varies significantly with the type, intensity, duration, and geographical scope of the violence (Leeson 2007; Powell, Ford, and Nowrasteh 2008).

... Furthermore, these conflicts have led to high inflation and exchange rate pressures. In Iraq and Afghanistan, inflation peaked at more than 30 percent during the mid-2000s, and in Yemen and Libya at more than 15 percent in 2011, on the back of a collapse in the supply of critical goods and services, combined with a strong recourse to monetary financing of the budget. Syria is an even more extreme case, where consumer prices rose by more than 300 percent between March 2011 and May 2015. Such inflation dynamics are usually accompanied by strong depreciation pressures on local currencies, which the authorities may try to resist by heavy intervention and regulation of cross-border flows. For example, the Syrian pound, which was allowed to float in 2013, officially trades at one-tenth of its pre-war value against the U.S. dollar.

... Conflicts in MENA countries also had economic impact on neighbors. In Jordan, the conflicts in neighboring Syria and Iraq slowed down economic growth by about 1 percentage point in 2013. Meanwhile, despite the slowdown in growth, core inflation accelerated in 2014 to 4.6 percent, from 3.4 percent in 2013, initially mostly driven by rents, partly reflecting additional demand from the country's large refugee population and a limited short-term supply response. This can be seen especially in the case of the Mafraq governorate bordering Syria: rents increased by 68 percent between 2012 and 2014, compared to 6 percent in Amman (IMF 2014). Similar dynamics were at work in Lebanon, where GDP growth slowed to 2.8 percent in 2012 and 2.5 percent in 2013 from an average of 9 percent in 2007–10. Prices of food and rent also increased considerably at the beginning of the crisis in some areas.

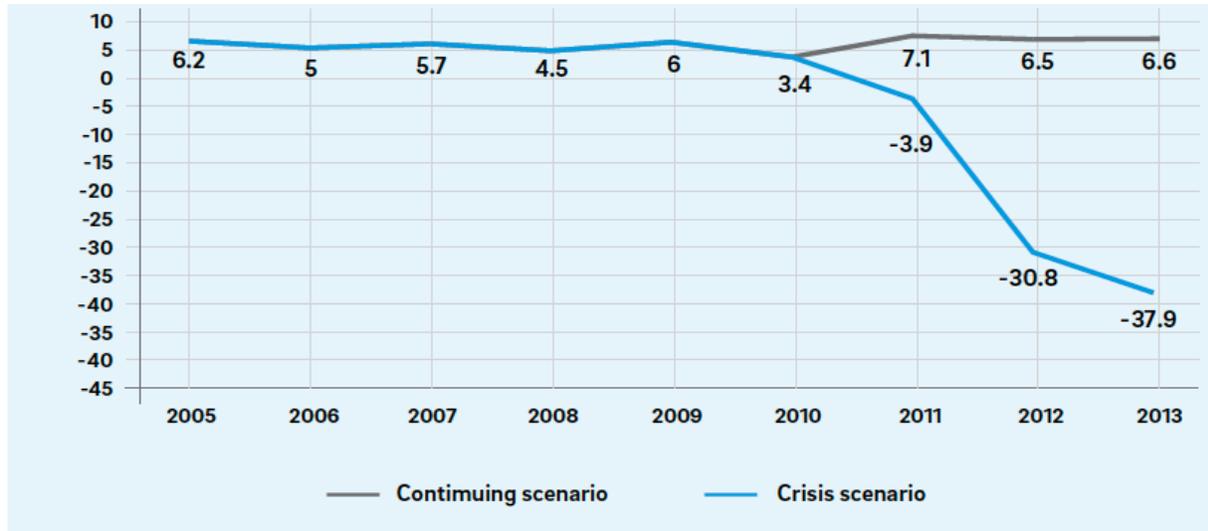
... recovery has often been protracted. This holds true especially where long and intense spells of violence left deep marks on physical infrastructure, human and social capital, and economic institutions. Syria illustrates this point: even with a relatively high annual growth rate of 4.5 percent, it would take the country 20 years or more just to rebound to its 2010 preconflict GDP level. This rate corresponds to the average rate experienced by a broad range of postconflict countries over 1970–2014 that maintained peace for at least 10 years after conflict had ended.

It should be stressed that none of the previous analyses can estimate the number of people who will be permanently displaced, have lost their jobs or businesses, seen their families shattered, be unable to resume their careers, had their education permanently damaged, suffer lasting physical or psychological trauma, or be caught up in the lasting local anger and violence that is often the aftermath of war. No reliable estimates exist of the cost to those involved in actual war zones,

displacement of minorities, or lasting divisions by sect, ethnic group, and tribe. Broad statistics and trends have an antiseptic and theoretical quality that can never reflect the realities on the ground or the real legacies of war.

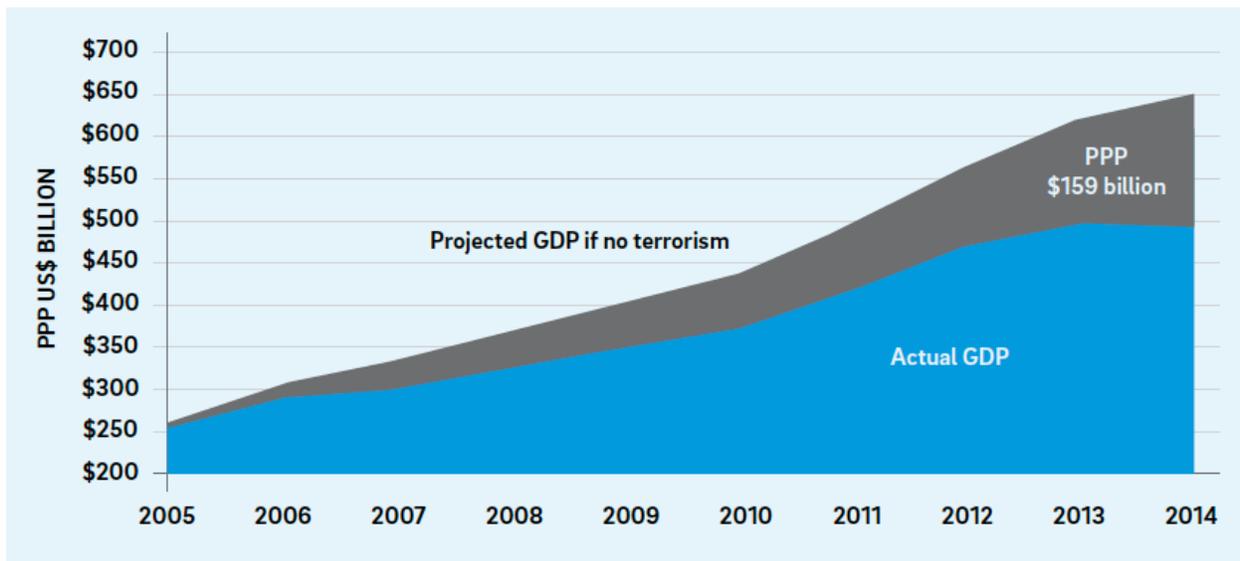
Figure Six: Illustrative Estimates of the Development Cost of the Wars in Syria and Iraq

GDP growth rate 2005–2013 in crisis and continuing scenarios (constant prices 2000), Syria



Source: Mehchy 2015.

Total accumulated losses in GDP because of terrorism, Iraq, 2005–2014



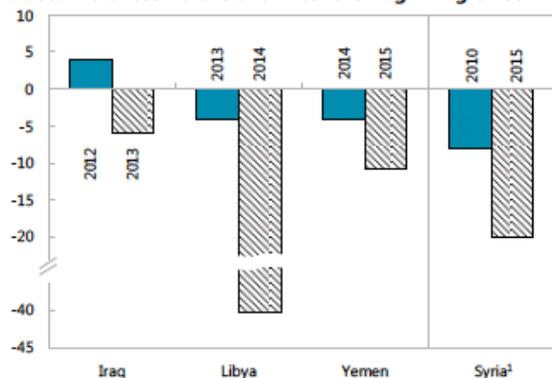
Source: Institute for Economics and Peace 2015.

Source: UNDP, *Arab Human Development Report 2016: Youth and the prospects for human development in changing reality*, Figure 8.4a and Figure 8.4b, http://www.arabstates.undp.org/content/rbas/en/home/library/huma_development/arab-human-development-report-2016--youth-and-the-prospects-for-/.

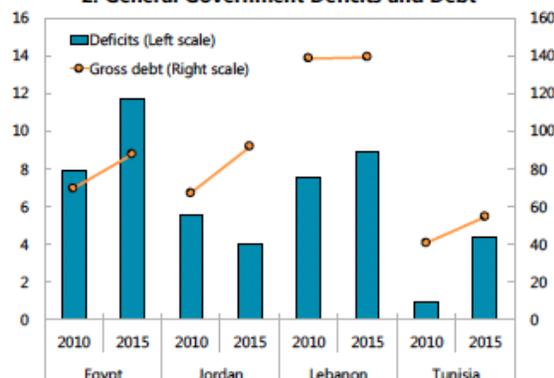
Figure Seven: IMF Estimates of the Development Cost of War

Fiscal Indicators in Selected Conflict and Spillover Countries (Percent of Fiscal Year GDP)

1. Fiscal Balances Before and After the Beginning of Conflict



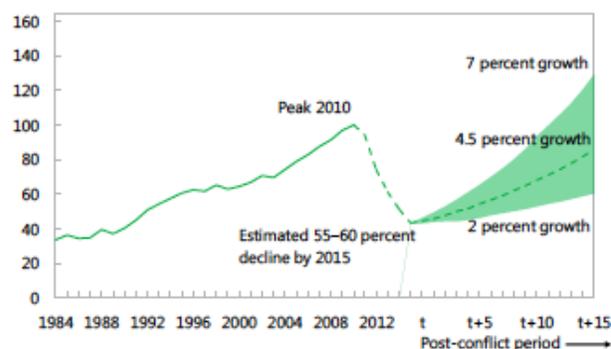
2. General Government Deficits and Debt



Sources: National authorities; IMF staff estimates¹; and IMF staff calculations.

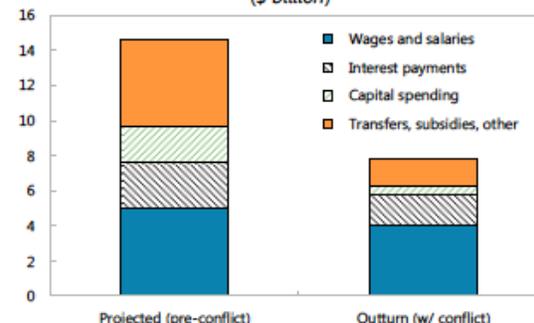
Note: In right chart, Jordan's 2015 deficit includes a transfer to the National Electric Power Company.

Estimated Recovery Path for Post-Conflict Syria
(Real GDP index, 2010=100)



Sources: Staff estimates; Center for Systemic Peace and national authorities.

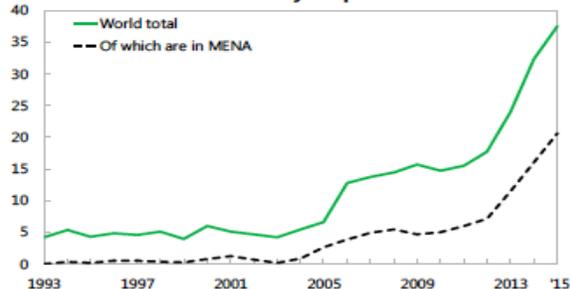
2015 Public Expenditure for Yemen
(\$ billion)



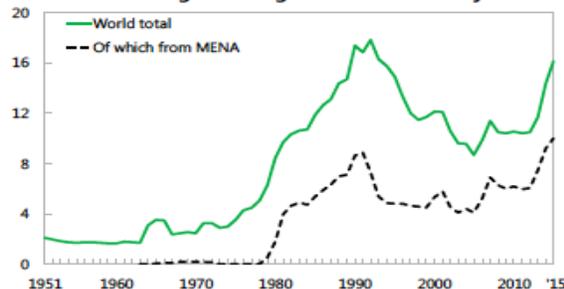
Sources: National authorities; IMF staff calculations.

Displaced Persons in Millions

1. Internally Displaced



2. Refugees Living in Another Country



Sources: UNHCR; IMF staff calculations.

Note: Refugee figures only include those registered with UNHCR.

Data do not include Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and West Bank and Gaza who are registered with the United Nations Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

Björn Rother, Gaëlle Pierre, Davide Lombardo, Risto Herrala, Priscilla Toffano, Erik Roos, Greg Auclair, and Karina Manasseh "The Economic Impact of Conflicts and the Refugee Crisis in the Middle East and North Africa," IMF Staff Discussion Note, SDN/16/08, September 2016, p. 13, 20, 22.

A “Clash Within a Civilization”

It is hard for those outside the Muslim world to keep the threat from Islamic extremism in perspective. No one in the United States or Europe can disregard the cost of terrorism and extremism in their own countries or in other nations outside the Muslim world. No American can ever ignore “9/11” or the other tragedies that have followed. No one in Europe can ignore the tragedies of the last few years, any more than any non-Muslims in the areas affected by similar attacks in Africa and Asia can ignore the cost.

All of the previous data indicate, however, that the levels of Islamic violence outside the Islamic world are largely the spillover of a struggle for its future between moderate regimes and the mainstream of Islam and are largely the result of extremist efforts to separate the Muslim and non-Muslim worlds in ways that deprive the mainstream of Muslims of outside aid and support.

Once again, it is critical that Muslims, non-Muslims, and the Trump Administration fully understand the real patterns of violence on global rather than local basis, where the key sources of attacks and casualties are, and where the focus has to be in fighting them.

Extremist Terrorist Attacks Overwhelmingly Consist of Muslims Killing Fellow Muslims

Regardless of their rhetoric, Islamist extremist groups focus largely on seizing power in largely Muslim states, and not on attacking the United States or any mix of non-Muslims. “Terrorism” is largely the first phase in an effort to create a major insurgency and seize control of a state. The vast majority of victims of Islamist extremism (some 80 percent or more) are fellow Muslims. This not only is in terms of deaths and injuries, but in terms of refugees, displaced persons, economic costs, and damage to every form of hope for the future.

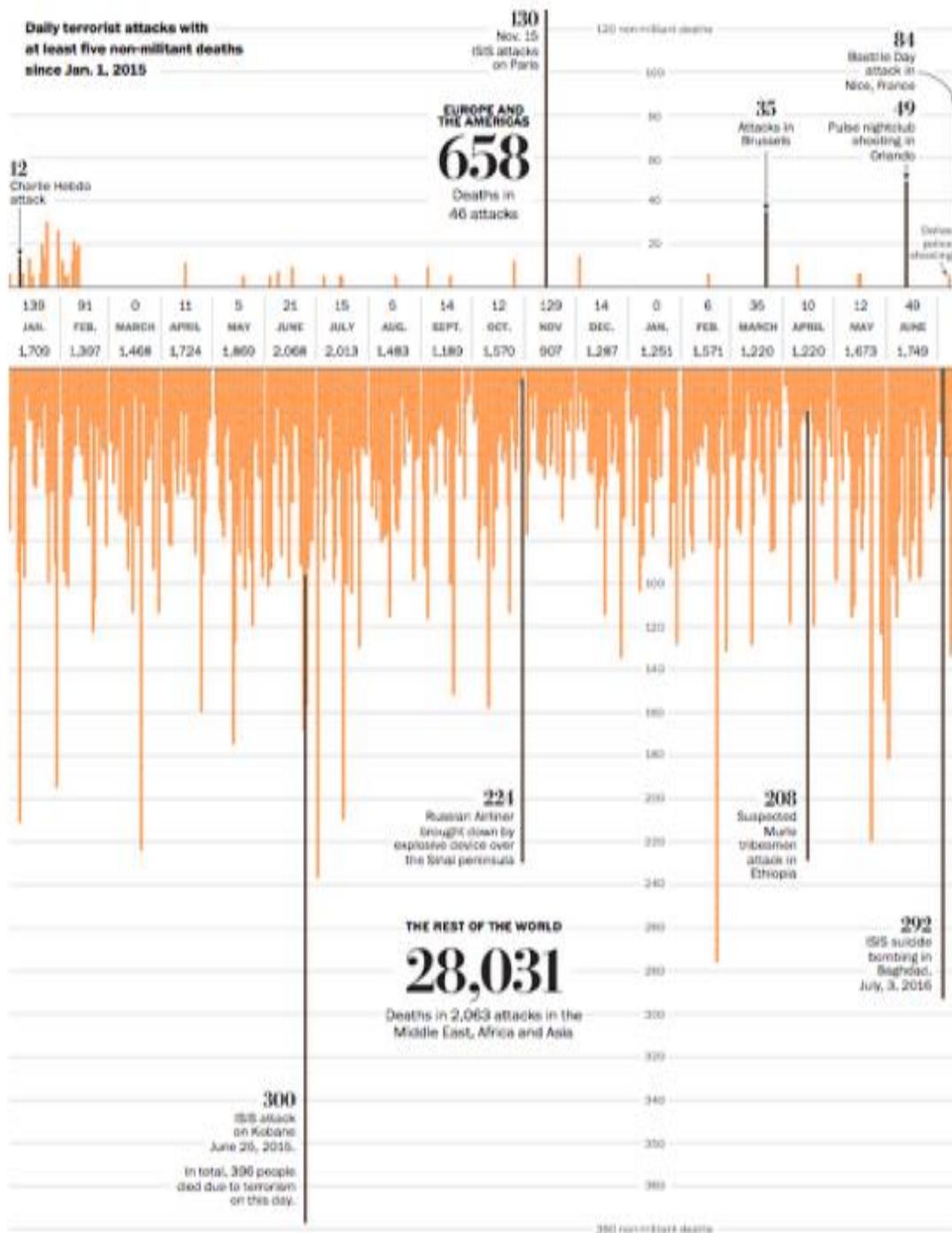
Figure Eight helps put the relative impact of Islamic violence in perspective. A graphic published in the *Washington Post*, and drawing on data from IHS Jane’s, shows that there were only 658 deaths in the United States and Europe between January 1, 2015 and July 16, 2016 in attacks involving non-militant deaths. In contrast, there were 28,031 terrorist killings in the rest of the world—43 times as many—and most were in largely Muslim states and involved Muslims killing Muslims.

So did the Broader patterns in the Human Cost of Such Attacks

Figure Nine shows similar patterns for both total attacks and total deaths. Once again, it does not include the numbers caused by sectarian conflict and Islamist extremism, or include the much larger numbers of deaths and injuries caused by Islamist extremist-driven warfare and insurgencies. **Figure Nine** does show all too clearly, however, that the MENA region, South Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa—regions dominated by Muslims killing Muslims—make up far more of the violence than in North America and all of Europe.

These numbers make it clear that the world does not face a “clash *between* civilizations,” it faces a “clash *within* a civilization” that can be contained in relative terms as long as far more moderate, secular, and modern governments dominate the Islamic world, and can count on the support of outside countries like the United States. As the Taliban and ISIS have shown, the situation becomes radically different if Islamist extremism comes to dominate an actual country or some form of “Caliphate” gives terrorism and extremism a broader power base.

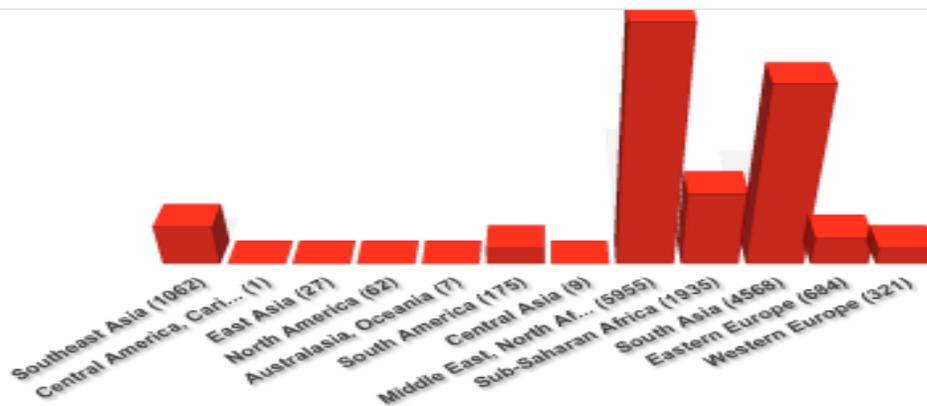
Figure Eight: Terrorist Attacks in the World: January 1, 2015 – July 16, 2016



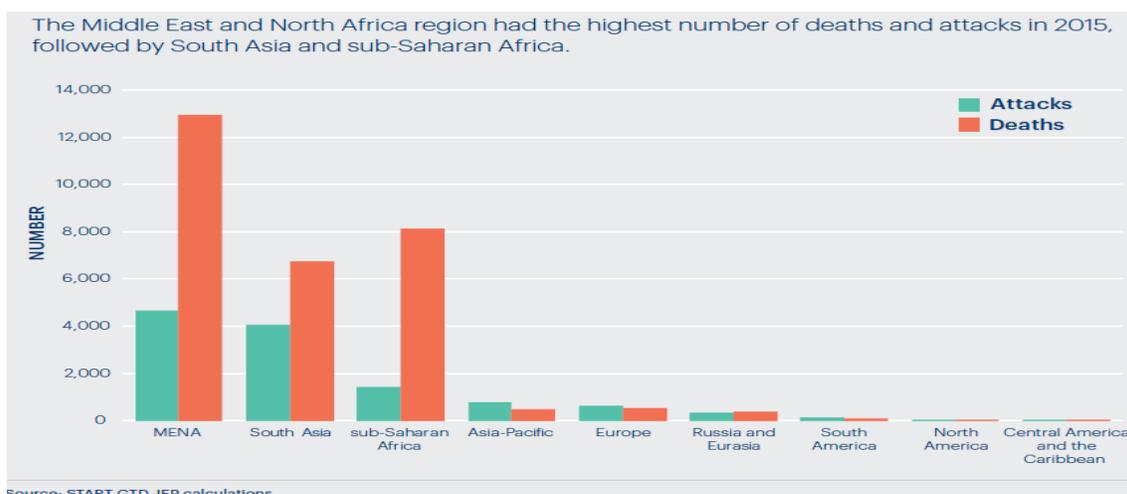
Source: Jane's IHS; [Jarara Samia](#) and [Tim Meiko](#) "How terrorism in the West compares to terrorism everywhere else, Washington Post," July 17, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/world/the-scale-of-terrorist-attacks-around-the-world/?hpid=hp_no-name_graphic-story-at%3Ahomepage%2Fstory

Figure Nine: Terrorist Attacks and Deaths by Region: 2014-2015

Attacks by Region



Deaths by Region



Arab Countries Affected by Violence or Conflict Since Major Arab-Israeli Conflicts, the Iran-Iraq War and First Gulf War: 2000-2015 (Does Not Include lasting conflicts like the one in the Western Sahara)

2000–2003	2010–2015
Iraq	Bahrain
Palestine	Egypt
Somalia	Iraq
Sudan	Lebanon
	Libya
	Mauritania
	Palestine
	Somalia
	Sudan
	Syria
	Yemen

Attack data are from START, https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/Results.aspx?charttype=pie&chart=attack&casualties_type=&casualties_max=&start_year=2015&start_month=1&start_day=1&end_year=2015&end_month=12&end_day=31. Death data are from Adapted from Institute for Economics and Peace. *Global terrorism Index 2016*, <https://www.google.com/search?q=institute+for+economics+and+peace+global+terrorism+index&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8>, pp. 21-22; UNDP, *Arab Human Development Report 2016: Youth and the prospects for human development in changing reality*, Table 1.3, http://www.arabstates.undp.org/content/rbas/en/home/library/huma_development/arab-human-development-report-2016--youth-and-the-prospects-for-/.

Looking Beyond “Terrorism” and Focusing on the Broader Threats

In practical terms, these trends highlight the need for the United States and other outside powers to focus on dealing with the extremist threat within Muslim states. Defending U.S. borders cannot bring stability to the Muslim world, and a failure to work with strategic partners in the Muslim world would almost certainly empower a far greater threat from Islamist dominated states. Working with the governments of largely Muslim states, containing and defeating Islamist extremism, preventing the emergence of any Islamist dominated territory or state, are the best ways to deal with the real world nature of the threat.

All Power Corrupts: Key Islamist Extremist Groups Seek Power

The United States also, however, must focus as much on the threat of Islamist extremist insurgency and efforts to seize power as on terrorism per se. The previous data on the interaction between Islamist extremists and insurgency has already shown that describing the “clash within a civilization” as “terrorism” is a misnomer.

Lone wolves and many attacks outside the Muslim world do involve acts of terrorism, but the vast majority of the violence caused by major Islamist extremist groups occurs part of a broad effort to use violence to obtain political power. Like communism or fascism, ideology is a key element of that search that drives the attempts of Islamist extremist groups to make major changes in the social order, but the primary practical goal is to seize control of largely Muslim states.

The key movements involved are shown in **Figure Ten**. This list does involve some non-Islamist groups, and all the groups listed commit acts of terrorism, but it is Islamic extremist movements that clearly dominate. Recent history has also made it clear that the primary goal of the key perpetrators, is not to create fear—or as one dictionary defines terrorism, to “use violent acts to frighten the people in an area as a way of trying to achieve a political goal.”

The goal of virtually every movement is to use every possible element of force to obtain power and control over specific states or major areas of territory. ISIL wants a Caliphate in Iraq and Syria. Boko Harum wants power in Nigeria and the Muslim areas around it. The Taliban want control over Afghanistan. Al Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula wants power in Saudi Arabia and Yemen. Al Shabaab wants power in Somalia, and so on. Such movements will use virtually any means of violence to create a power base that can achieve this goal. Consciously or unconsciously, however, God and faith become a means to an all too familiar secular and selfish end.

Putting ISIS in Perspective

Figure Ten helps communicate another important message about the threat that the Trump Administration and America’s European allies need to take far more seriously. ISIS/ISIL/Daesh has become something of a proxy for all forms of terrorism and Islamist extremism. It is the most serious such threat at present, both because it has held enough territory to create a sanctuary and breeding ground for extremism, and because its high number of foreign volunteers and ties to affiliated movements gives it an advantage in committing acts of terrorism outside its own “Caliphate,” and potentially surviving military defeats to the extent it can reform somewhere else, or see many of its fighters join other movements.

At the same time, the U.S. and Europe have focused far too much on ISIS to the exclusion of the broader threat, particularly at the political and media levels. The previous data show that ISIS is only one critical movement, and even if the ISIS “brand” is defeated in Iraq and Syria – which is far from a certainty – many of its fighters will disperse. Defeating ISIS is scarcely defeating terrorism.

If looks back to the period before ISIS emerged as a leading group, ISIS attacks only totaled some 4 percent of the total terrorist attacks worldwide between 2000 and 2015, and 12 percent of the attacks in the MENA region.¹⁴

The data in **Figure Ten** cover 2014-2015 – which represent the peak years in the strength of ISIS. During this period ISIS did rank as the second leading cause of terrorism out of the top five perpetrators in the START data base. However, ISIS only carried out 2,021 attacks out of a total of 5,889 (34 percent), killed 12,378 out of a total of 33,161 (37 percent), injured 11,869 out of 25,920 (46 percent), and kidnapped/took hostages of 7,939 out of 12,512 (63 percent).

These data do show that ISIS is all too real a threat. However, they also show that even a total defeat of ISIS would scarcely defeat Islamist terrorism, and many ISIS fighters will disperse at the result of even the most successful real world fight and continue to be a threat. There are good reasons why many experts on the U.S. counterterrorism community feel that Islamist threats will be all too real for at least the next decade – the equivalent of the “long war” that many senior officers and U.S. intelligence experts foresaw after 9/11/

Figure Ten: Key Perpetrators and the Search for Power

Top Perpetrators Carrying Out Coordinated Attacks in 2000-2014

Perpetrator Groups Responsible for the Most Coordinated Terrorist Attacks, 2000-2014		
Perpetrator Group	Coordinated Attacks	Percent of Coordinated Attacks
Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)	757	12%
Boko Haram	558	9%
Taliban	444	7%
Al-Qa'ida in Iraq	400	6%
Communist Party of India - Maoist (CPI-Maoist) / Maoists	337	5%
Al-Shabaab	244	4%
Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)	175	3%
Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)	165	3%
New People's Army (NPA)	119	2%
Fulani Militants	104	2%
Al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)	103	2%
Corsican National Liberation Front (FLNC)	86	1%
Donetsk People's Republic	83	1%
Basque Fatherland and Freedom (ETA)	69	1%
Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)	64	1%
Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)	63	1%
Jemaah Islamiya (JI)	61	1%
United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA)	60	1%
Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Movement (BIFM)	55	1%
Hamas (Islamic Resistance Movement)	52	1%
Unaffiliated Individual(s)	50	1%

Source: Global Terrorism Database

Five Key Perpetrators: 2014-2015

	Total Attacks		Total Deaths*		Total Injured*		Total Kidnapped / Hostages	
	2015	2014	2015	2014	2015	2014	2015	2014
Taliban	1093	895	4512	3492	4746	3313	954	649
Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)**	931	1090	6050	6328	6010	5859	4759	3180
Boko Haram	491	454	5450	6663	3318	1747	1549	1217
Maoists/Communist Party of India-Maoist	343	307	176	191	163	165	707	163
Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)	238	47	287	12	580	19	136	68

Source: data for 2000-2014 are from START, "Mass-Fatality, Coordinated Attacks Worldwide, and Terrorism in France, Background Report, <https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#inbox/151121fc77afeac0>, p. 2-3. Data for 2014-2015 are from National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism: Annex of Statistical Information, [Country Reports on Terrorism 2015](http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2015/257526.htm), U.S. State Department, Bureau of Counterterrorism and Countering Violent Extremism, May 2016, <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2015/257526.htm>

Iran and Sunni-Shiite Tensions and Violence

Sunni Islamic extremism is also not the threat the world must deal with. There is another and very different aspect of religious tension and extremism in Islam, and this is sectarian conflict between Sunnis, Shi'ites, and Islamic religious minorities. While estimates differ, some indicate that Muslims not total some 1.5 billion, that 85 percent are Sunni, and the remaining 15 percent are Shi'ites and other sects. These sectarian splits threaten to become a steadily growing source of terrorism and violence, just as the Christian Reformation and Counterreformation produced an era of terrorism, war, and other forms of extremist violence in Europe.

Most of the movements now designated as Islamic extremists claim to be the legitimate practitioners of Sunni beliefs, but Shi'ites sometimes attack Sunnis. The fighting between the Houthi and other factions in Yemen, between the Alawite led Assad regime and largely Sunni rebels in Syria, Shiite militias and Sunnis in Iraq, and outbreaks of other sectarian violence in countries like Pakistan all illustrate the potential dangers of widening sectarian conflict.

Iran and Islamic Extremism

Iran's "Islamic Revolution," and its adoption of a Supreme Leader or Guardian, pose the most striking potential source of such tension. In fact, the religious aspects of the regional rivalries between Iran and its Arab neighbors pose threats whose religious aspects are often sharply understated, but are at least as important to the U.S., and to U.S. strategic interests, as ISIS.

Iran cannot be called an Islamist extremist state, and its actions must be interpreted in terms of the fact that Iraq invaded it and triggered the Iran-Iraq War – by far the bloodiest conflict in the MENA region in modern times. However, Iran is a theocratic state with a Supreme Leader who has at least supported Iran's hard liners in support of the Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Assad regime in Syria, Shi'ite militias in Iraq, and the Houthi in Yemen. It is also a state that supports Shi'ites in sectarian rivalries throughout the region.

Sunni Arab states have reacted (and sometimes overreacted) by supporting Sunni factions in such contested states, and there is a growing level of tension between Sunnis and Shiites that affects the region and leads to sectarian violence. Many Sunni Islamist extremists also see Shi'ites as heretics and enemies that must be attacked – a factor that has led to brutal sectarian killings outside the MENA region in countries like Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Iran's actions are defensive as well as offensive, and the U.S. has strong strategic incentives to try to forge some kind of more stable relationship both with Iran and between Iran and its neighbors. At the same time, Iran does represent an openly hostile power to the U.S., and most of its Arab neighbors. It has encouraged sectarian divisions and the export of its own Islamic revolution in a number of other countries like Bahrain, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen, and its regional ambitions do much to fuel both Sunni and Shi'ite extremism.

Iran and the Risk of War

These sectarian tensions and conflicts have helped trigger the MENA region's most serious risk of a major war between its states and that could well involve the United States and Europe. Iran not only has used state terrorism against the U.S. and its Arab neighbors, but its military developments have helped to trigger a massive regional arms race. While Iraq that initially invaded Iran, Iran's then invaded Iraq and the second half of the Iran-Iraq War was one where Iran tried to conquer its neighbor. Since that time, Iran led the regional race to acquire nuclear weapons and its nuclear

arms control agreement with the 5+1 has only affected part of its ongoing arms race with its Sunni neighbors.

Even if the JCPOA nuclear arms agreement between Iran and the 5+1 is fully successful, Iran actively poses three major threats to its Arab neighbors and potentially to Israel:

- Iran is competing for influence and control with internal Sunni movements and most other Arab Sunni states in Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq, and to some extent in Yemen and Bahrain.
- Iran has built up a major capability to wage maritime warfare against shipping in the Gulf and Gulf of Oman, using a mix of naval, guards, missile, and air forces, and.
- Iran has built up a major conventionally-armed missile and rocket threat against its Arab Sunni neighbors that it is seeking to give precision warheads which could attack key military, economic, and infrastructure targets.

The secure flow of petroleum exports is critical to many of America's most important trading partners, particularly in Asia – China, Japan, south Korea, Taiwan, and India to name a few. It impacts on a far larger portion of the U.S. GDP than the cost of U.S. oil and gas imports, and affects the health of the entire global economy.

Iran's coastline affects the entire Gulf from Kuwait to the strait of Hormuz and the Gulf of Oman just outside it, The Strait of Hormuz at the gates of the Gulf is also the world's most important chokepoint. Some 17 million barrels of oil exports flow through the Strait every day—about 30 percent of all seaborne-traded oil. [Qatar](#) exports about 3.7 trillion cubic feet (Tcf) per year of liquefied natural gas (LNG) through the Strait of Hormuz, or more than 30 percent of the global LNG trade.¹⁵

Accordingly, the Sunni Islamist extremist threat cannot be decoupled from the Iranian threat, or from the growing tension between Sunni vs. Shiite and other sects of Islam in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and the world. It is also one of the ironies of the U.S. fight against ISIS that U.S. success in Iraq could lead to a significant increase in Iran's influence in that country once Iraq is less dependent on the U.S. unless the U.S. can successfully influence the Iraq government and Iraq's Arab neighbors.

Similarly, defeating ISIS in Syria can polarize Syria into continued rule of part of the country by the same Assad regime that failed to govern effectively before 2011 in western Syria. It can create an eastern Arab part largely under the control of other Sunni Islamist extremist movements, and a Kurdish section in the Northeast polarized against both Syrian Arabs and Turkey. The struggle for security and stability in Syria and Iraq, and against both extremism and Iranian and other outside interference is not going to end regardless of how thoroughly the ISIS "caliphate" is dismantled.

The U.S. Side of Reforging Strategic Partnerships with Muslim States

In short, U.S. strategy cannot focus simply on the Sunni Islamic extremist threat, any more than it can afford to focus on ISIS. It must continue to deal with all of the critical threats to U.S. strategic interests. In doing so, it must recognize that Muslim states are more than key partners in fighting Islamic extremism, they are key security partners in dealing with Iran and with the sectarian and ethnic tensions and conflicts that interact with the extremist threat.

Strategic partnerships with the Arab Gulf states, Jordan, and Egypt are particularly critical, but such partnerships also include states in North Africa like Morocco, and largely Muslim states in Asia. There are good reasons why the annual U.S. State Department country reports on terrorism have long recognized such states key partners in fighting Islamic extremism and violence.

States like Morocco, Egypt, Jordan, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Oman, and the UAE provide key power projection routes, and military bases and contingency facilities for deterring and defending against Iran. They buy large amounts of U.S. arms, and train and exercise with U.S. forces in ways that make them interoperable with U.S. forces.

The Obama Administration made progress in improving such strategic partnerships in many areas, but never acted decisively enough to forge partnerships that could bring lasting security in the face of any of these challenges, and never seriously addressed the equally serious civil challenges addressed later in this analysis. It focused far too much on ISIS alone and on the Iranian nuclear threat, but treated even ISIS largely through a build-up of U.S. military efforts that amounted to "creeping incrementalism" rather than decisive force.

The Trump Administration must to decide whether to pursue or attempt to end the JCPOA nuclear agreement with Iran, but it should not ignore how much the agreement has done to dismantle and limit Iran's advance towards nuclear weapons. It will also need to be careful not to both needlessly reinforce Iranian hardliner's charges that the U.S. cannot be trust and dismantle an agreement where strong U.S. enforcement actions will produce far better results than ending the agreement.

The Administration's most important decisions, however, will be to decide on how to create a level of U.S. effort and strategic partnership with Arab states that can both help them defeat Islamic extremism and bring some degree of lasting stability *and* meet the goal of deterring Iran, reducing the expansion of its regional influence, countering its growing conventionally-armed missile threat, and dealing with the growing naval-missile-air threat it poses to maritime shipping inside and near the Gulf.

In doing so, the Trump Administration will have to deal with both the broad loss of confidence that America's Arab allies have in the U.S. as a result of the outcome of the U.S. invasion of Iraq and the Obama Administration's failure to act more decisively in Syria. It will also have to deal with the reality that Egypt, Jordan, Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE are not only key allies in the fighting against Islamic extremism and terrorism, but all play a key role in giving the U.S. bases and power projection facilities it needs to play a role as a key power in the Middle East.

More broadly, it must take account of the fact that the U.S. has a clear strategic interest in blocking the expansion of Islamic sectarian violence in South, Central, and East Asia and potential in Sub-Saharan Africa. This not only involves Sunnis and mainstream Shi'ites, but all of the smaller sects in Islam—including some that extremist groups treat as heretics and targets where virtually any form of violence is legitimate. Strategic interests are involved in nations like Pakistan, India, Indonesia, and Malaysia, but so are the human rights of both Muslim minorities and the other religious minorities that inevitably become caught up in such violence.

The Arab Side of Reforging Strategic Partnerships

Arab and Muslim states also need to address key weaknesses in the present strategic partnerships. There is still far too much tolerance of private funding of Islamic extremist causes and far too little attention to the rising costs in human and economic terms that have been addressed earlier in this analysis. Governments have been far too ready to fund movements with strong ties to Islamic extremists, or which are extremist, to serve short-term interests in fighting in areas like Syria or contain Iran without considering the cumulative risk and cost of their actions.

As later sections of this analysis show, many Arab governments have also failed their peoples in the ways that helped trigger the upheavals that began in 2011, and have fed Islamic extremism. Such actions make such governments a threat to themselves as well as the peoples they govern. They have done immense damage to the development and stability of the Arab and Muslim world, and no strategic partnership can save a government that fails its people and becomes its own enemy.

While it is not the focus of this study, Arab efforts at military cooperation have also been far too much of a facade. Hollow rhetoric about progress and cooperation has been substituted for real integration, interoperability, and a focus on effective deterrence and warfighting capability—as well as cooperation in counter terrorism. There has been far too little progress in common training and facilities, focusing on key mission capabilities, standardization, and creating fully effective integrated operational capability with U.S. and other outside allies.

There also has been far too little effort to adapt regular and paramilitary forces to deal with the threats raised by asymmetric warfare and extremist threats. The war in Yemen, and the failures of Arab states to develop effective relations with Iraq and with Arab rebel movements in Syria, are further examples of the need for more cooperation with both other Arab states and outside partners like the U.S.

These issues have become far more critical in the Gulf, and for bodies like the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The previous analysis has shown how critical threats from non-state actors have become and how much damage they do to regional development and even to countries that are not directly involved in serious fighting.

Moreover, security economic are now far more of an issue. Expense has never been a substitute for either effectiveness or efficiency. All of the Gulf states now face major problems because of nearly 50 percent drops in their petroleum export income, and the following analyses show that all of the Gulf governments face serious civil as well as security challenges. Countries like Saudi Arabia, Oman, and the UAE have spent far more on security than they can afford to spend in the future, and far better security planning and budgeting is critical.

More broadly, the Arab Sunni states, and states with large Shi'ite and other non-Sunni populations need to be far more careful in providing equal rights for other sects, and suitable political and economic opportunities. The same is true of Iran and states ruled by other sects.

Battles for orthodoxy and struggles along sectarian lines not only feed Islamic extremism; they create the possibility of a steady rise in other forms of religious violence. religious tolerance within Islam is critical to progress, stability, and security within the Muslim world and to the survival of today's moderate regimes. If nothing else, Islam has only to look at the example of the Christian Reformation and Counterreformation to see that intrafaith struggles over orthodoxy and ritual are the enemies of both core religious values and civil progress.

Similarly, it is one thing to deter and contain Iran, and quite another to confront and threaten it. The U.S. must work with its Arab allies to guarantee their security, but they must seek to find political solutions to creating more lasting security. The Iranian military threat, and Iran's adventures in other states, present very real risks. However, the present arms race and low level confrontations within the Islamic world are too costly and too risky for both sides, comes at the cost of development and internal stability, and feeds Islamic extremism. It is effectively a game that neither side can really win, given the costs of any serious conflict, and which both sides now lose.

The Growing Strategic Importance of Islam and the Causes of Extremism and Unrest

Far more attention also needs to be given to the rate at which Islam is gaining as a share of the world's population and is becoming steadily more important to global stability. The United States and other non-Muslim powers need to look beyond extremism and regional threats, and fully recognize the fact that Islam is a sharply growing force within the world, and one that cannot be dealt with in terms of fear, prejudice, and barriers to immigration growing out of the threat posed by Islamic extremism. Muslim populations are already a critical part of global society and the global economy, and will grow sharply as a percentage of the world's population in the years to come.

The U.S. focus on Muslim immigration, and the European focus on Muslim refugees, has combined with the threat of terrorism to lead many to ignore the need to deal with Muslim states and create bridges between Islam and other faiths. Yet, even a brief examination of the trends in global demographics shows why the U.S. and other non-Islamic states must work with Muslim states, and build common understanding and efforts to bring stability, security, and development.

Dealing with Massive Population Growth

There is no way to make a precise count of the world's Muslims, or the demographic importance of largely Muslim states. However, the U.S. Census Bureau's International Data Base provides good estimates of the total population and population growth in primarily Muslim states and states like India that have massive Moslem populations. The results illustrate just how important it is to avoid any form of Islamic extremism coming to dominate a significant part of the world's Muslims.¹⁶

- A rough count of the population of such states indicates that their total population increased from around 660 million in 1950 to 2,544 million in 2016, and that they will increase to 3,572 million in 2050.
- The 2016 total was 3.9 times larger than the 1950 total, and the 2050 total will be 5.5 times larger.
- These totals would be larger if countries with problems with much smaller Muslim minorities like China, Myanmar, and Thailand were included.

As much as 40 percent of the total population of such states is non-Muslim. The key rationale for showing such numbers, however, is to estimate how many people will be directly affected by the struggle for the future of Islam, and how many regions in the world are involved.

The impact of the growth in the Muslim population in every part of Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa is massive. The impact of such population growth is particularly striking in the Middle East and North Africa, even though current estimates indicate it is already 93 percent Muslim. If one uses the State Department definitions of the Near East and North Africa – which is equivalent to the MENA region, the IDB data base estimates the following trends:¹⁷

- The population increased from around 88 million in 1950 to 418 million in 2016, and will increase to 632 million in 2050.
- The 2016 total was 4.8 times larger than the 1950 total, and the 2050 total will be 7.2 times larger.
- Growth was faster in the Near East. The population increased from 44 million in 1950 to 235 million in 2016 (5.3 times), and will increase to 343 million in 2050 (7.8 times).

It is important to note that these latter data affect MENA areas that have limited arable land, large areas of desert, and many countries with declining rainfall and riverine supplies and/or that have made a major drawdown of fossil water. They would put acute pressure on even the best governed states, and some of the states are rated as among the world's worst.

The Growing Impact of Islam

A study by the Pew Trust goes farther, and provides an estimate of both the current portion of the world's population that actively adheres to Islam and its growth between 2010 and 2050.¹⁸ The basic trends are shown in **Figure Eleven**, and they warn that any U.S. effort to deal with Islamic extremism by preventing Muslims from visiting the United States would fail to begin to cope with the need to deal with roughly a quarter of the world's population and a faith that will have over a billion more adherents by 2050.

The executive summary to the study notes that study notes that,¹⁹

Globally, Muslims have the highest fertility rate, an average of 3.1 children per woman – well above replacement level (2.1), the minimum typically needed to maintain a stable population.⁶ Christians are second, at 2.7 children per woman. Hindu fertility (2.4) is similar to the global average (2.5). Worldwide, Jewish fertility (2.3 children per woman) also is above replacement level. All the other groups have fertility levels too low to sustain their populations: folk religions (1.8 children per woman), other religions (1.7), the unaffiliated (1.7) and Buddhists (1.6).

Another important determinant of growth is the current age distribution of each religious group – whether its adherents are predominantly young, with their prime childbearing years still ahead, or older and largely past their childbearing years.

In 2010, more than a quarter of the world's total population (27 percent) was under the age of 15. But an even higher percentage of Muslims (34 percent) and Hindus (30 percent) were younger than 15, while the share of Christians under 15 matched the global average (27 percent). These bulging youth populations are among the reasons that Muslims are projected to grow faster than the world's overall population and that Hindus and Christians are projected to roughly keep pace with worldwide population growth.

The Pew study estimates a growth from 1.6 billion in 2010 to 2.76 billion by 2050 – a growth of 1.16 billion or 73 percent. These estimates are based on the fact that Muslims have highest fertility rate and the youngest population. Some 34 percent of the world's Muslims are under 15 years of age versus a global average of 27 percent, and only 7 percent are 60 and older versus a global average of 11 percent. Muslims have a fertility rate of 3.1 versus 2.5 for the world and 1.7 for the unaffiliated.

The main text of the study notes that,²⁰

Globally, Muslims were younger (median age of 23) than the overall population (median age of 28) as of 2010. Indeed, of all the religious groups included in this study, Muslims had the youngest median age as of 2010. The percentage of the population younger than 15 is another indication of the relative youth of a population. In 2010, 34 percent of the global

Muslim population was under age 15, compared with 27 percent of the overall world population.

In the Asia-Pacific region, where about six-in-ten of the world's Muslims live, the median age of Muslims (24) was five years younger than the median age of the region as a whole (29). Mostly owing to a high number of young immigrants and their children, Muslims in Europe (median age of 32) and North America (median age of 26) also were considerably younger than the general populations in these regions as of 2010.

As a result, the study finds that many other religions are now growing very slowly or declining. The exceptions are Christianity and Hinduism, and the Pew study indicates that Christianity is

growing far more slowly than Islam. It estimates that 29.7 percent of the world's population was Christian in 2010, and 23.2 percent was Muslim. If the Pew projections are correct, the world's Muslim population will be roughly equivalent to the Christian population by 2050: 31.4 percent of the world's population will be Christian in 2010, and 29.7 percent will be Muslim—a growth of 6.6 percent in terms of the world's total population.

The U.S. and Europe are affected by the fact that,²¹

“The number of religiously unaffiliated people, also known as religious “nones,” is increasing in places such as the United States and Europe, and we project continued growth. Globally, however, the opposite is true: The unaffiliated are expected to *decrease* as a share of the world's population between 2010 and 2050 (from 16 percent to 13 percent). This is attributable mostly to the relatively old age and low fertility rates of large populations of religious “nones” in Asian countries, particularly China and Japan...

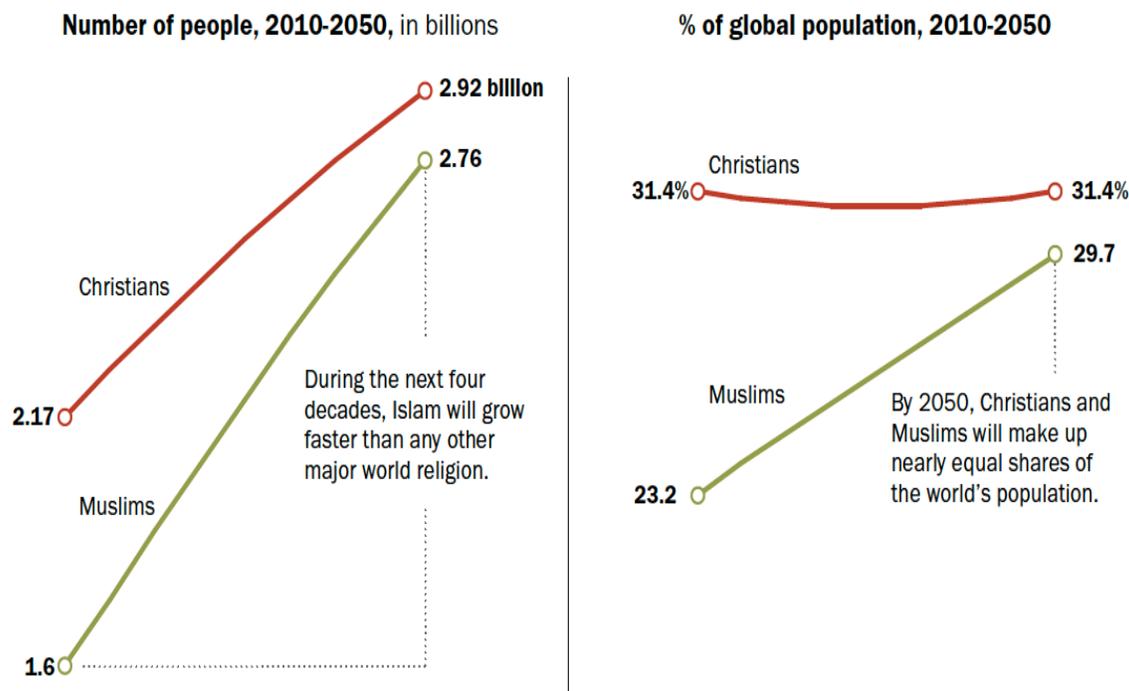
“In the United States, Christians will decline from more than three-quarters of the population in 2010 to two-thirds in 2050, with corresponding rises of religious “nones” as well as Muslims, Hindus and others. At mid-century, Judaism will no longer be the largest non-Christian religion in the U.S.: Muslims are projected to be more numerous than people who identify as Jewish on the basis of religion.

As **Figure Eleven** shows, the Pew study also finds that the primary growth in Muslim is taking place outside the MENA region – against illustrating the dangers in tying the actions of violent extremists in the Middle East to all of Islam. Muslims will increase by 5.2 percent of the population of Asia-Pacific, 5.6 percent of the population of Sub-Saharan Africa, and 4.3 percent of the population of Europe. They already make up well over 90 percent of the population of the MENA region and their share will only increase by 0.7 percent during 2010 to 2050. The increase in North America will be from 1 percent to 2.4 percent, and no increase will occur in Latin American and the Caribbean.

The cumulative impact of trends is so large that they may well be the demographic equivalent of the economic emergence of China. At the same time, they will have a massive impact on the stability and security of the countries involved. Almost all of the growth is taking place in developing states with limited resources. It already has led to major increases in the demand for all forms of state support for jobs, education, and social services and has ensured that there is a high ratio of dependents to actual productive workers.

In the case of the Middle East, and much of Central Asia, population growth taking place in areas where water and arable land are limited, and where agricultural productivity is increasingly tied to increased need for capital and mechanization and to reductions in the work force of actual farmers. As a result, population growth sharply exceeds the ability to provide rural jobs. This leads to population mobility and hyperurbanization – shifts that inevitably put different ethnic and sectarian groups into closer contact, and have a significant increase in creating urban slums and low income areas – another source of tension.

Figure Eleven: Global Growth of Muslim Populations – Part One



	YEAR	REGION'S TOTAL POPULATION	REGION'S MUSLIM POPULATION	% MUSLIM IN REGION
Asia-Pacific	2010	4,054,940,000	986,420,000	24.3%
	2050	4,937,900,000	1,457,720,000	29.5
Middle East-North Africa	2010	341,020,000	317,070,000	93.0
	2050	588,960,000	551,900,000	93.7
Sub-Saharan Africa	2010	822,730,000	248,420,000	30.2
	2050	1,899,960,000	669,710,000	35.2
Europe	2010	742,550,000	43,470,000	5.9
	2050	696,330,000	70,870,000	10.2
North America	2010	344,530,000	3,480,000	1.0
	2050	435,420,000	10,350,000	2.4
Latin America-Caribbean	2010	590,080,000	840,000	0.1
	2050	748,620,000	940,000	0.1

Source: Pew Research Center, *The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050*, April 2, 2015, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/>. The UN and U.S. Census Bureau have similar data on population growth.

Figure Eleven: Global Growth of Muslim Populations – Part Two

10 Countries With the Largest Muslim Populations, 2010 and 2050

	2010 MUSLIM POPULATION	% OF WORLD'S MUSLIM POPULATION IN 2010		2050 MUSLIM POPULATION	% OF WORLD'S MUSLIM POPULATION IN 2050
1 Indonesia	209,120,000	13.1%	1 India	310,660,000	11.2%
2 India	176,200,000	11.0	2 Pakistan	273,110,000	9.9
3 Pakistan	167,410,000	10.5	3 Indonesia	256,820,000	9.3
4 Bangladesh	134,430,000	8.4	4 Nigeria	230,700,000	8.4
5 Nigeria	77,300,000	4.8	5 Bangladesh	182,360,000	6.6
6 Egypt	76,990,000	4.8	6 Egypt	119,530,000	4.3
7 Iran	73,570,000	4.6	7 Turkey	89,320,000	3.2
8 Turkey	71,330,000	4.5	8 Iran	86,190,000	3.1
9 Algeria	34,730,000	2.2	9 Iraq	80,190,000	2.9
10 Morocco	31,930,000	2.0	10 Afghanistan	72,190,000	2.6
Subtotal	1,053,010,000	65.8	Subtotal	1,701,070,000	61.6
Subtotal for Rest of World	546,700,000	34.2	Subtotal for Rest of World	1,060,410,000	38.4
World Total	1,599,700,000	100.0	World Total	2,761,480,000	100.0

Age Distribution of Muslims by Region, 2010

	RELIGION	0-14	15-59	60+	MEDIAN AGE
Sub-Saharan Africa	All Religions	43%	52%	5%	18
	Muslims	46	50	4	17
Asia-Pacific	All Religions	26	64	10	29
	Muslims	31	62	7	24
Europe	All Religions	15	63	22	40
	Muslims	22	67	11	32
Middle East-North Africa	All Religions	33	60	6	24
	Muslims	34	60	6	23
North America	All Religions	20	62	19	37
	Muslims	29	64	7	26
World	All Religions	27	62	11	28
	Muslims	34	60	7	23

Projected Scenarios for Muslims With and Without Migration, 2050

	% MUSLIM WITH MIGRATION	% MUSLIM WITHOUT MIGRATION	DIFF. *
Europe	10.2%	8.4%	-1.8
North America	2.4	1.4	-1.0
Middle East-North Africa	93.7	94.3	0.6
Asia-Pacific	29.5	29.6	0.1
Sub-Saharan Africa	35.2	35.3	0.0
Latin America-Caribbean	0.1	0.1	0.0
World	29.7	29.7	0.0

Source: Pew Research Center, *The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050*, April 2, 2015, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/>, p. 74.

Putting Islamic Extremism in Perspective

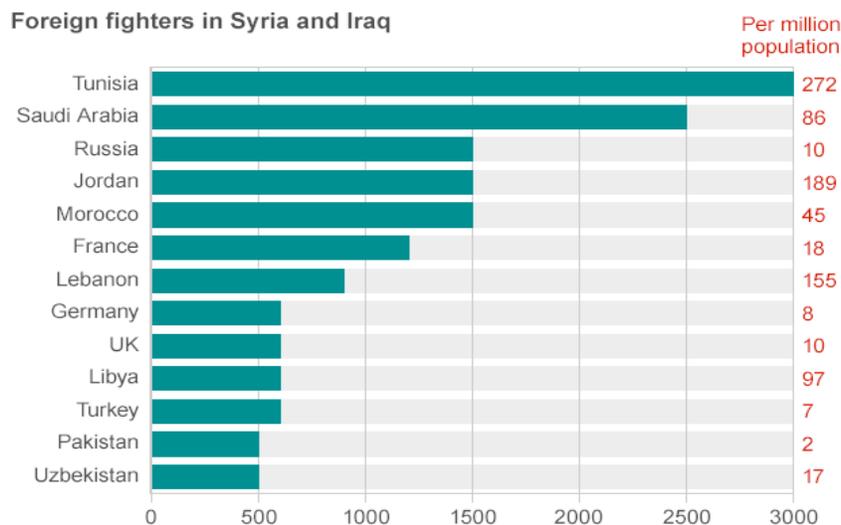
This population growth frightens some, as does the migration of Muslims outside traditionally Muslim areas. Islam's history of tolerance and moderation is often lost in the current Western focus on the Islamic extremist threat and its beliefs. The limits to popular support for such extremism is also lost in the flood of reporting on the numbers of "foreign volunteers" and individual extremists and extremist cells.

Limited Numbers of Volunteers and Fighters

This reporting rarely takes note of the fact that the high end of the estimated totals of such volunteers scarcely involve mass movements, or anything like the waves of fighters for fascist and communist extremism that existed in Europe between World War I and World War II. This latter point is illustrated in **Figure Twelve**, which compares the estimated flow of volunteers to the total population at a peak point in the rise of ISIS.

The striking thing about movements like ISIS is not that they have become so large, but that they have stayed so small. The total number of ISIS fighters has always been very limited in relative terms, and has never come close to the government forces that opposed it. Estimates of the numbers of Islamic fighters have always been low relative to even Moslem youth in the most eligible age groups. For example, U.S. defense spokespersons estimated that ISIS only had a strength of some 6,000 core fighters in Mosul during the key periods of in the fighting in late November and early December 2016.

Figure Twelve: Foreign Fighters vs. Total Population per Million



Note: Upper estimates used. Countries with fewer than 500 fighters not included
Source: ICSR, CIA World Factbook

Source: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27838034>

Polling Data Show Limited Support for Extremism and Violence

It is far harder to estimate the exact levels of public support for Islamic extremist movements, which vary sharply by county and over time. The polling data on these issues is not always reliable, and often involves small or skewed samples. Such data are particularly difficult to interpret when polls measure Moslem anger against various actors or failures in their governments rather than support extremism per se, or when polling uses ambiguous terms like Sharia out of a context that distinguishes between extremism and mainstream Islamic values.

As a result, some polls show substantial support for movements like Al Qa'ida and ISIS in broad terms and others do not. **Figure Thirteen** draws on polling results presented in a recent paper by Brynjar Lia for the Middle East Policy Council to illustrate the range of such results. The often sharp swings in given countries over time seem to be driven by local events and news, and indication that broad attitudes may not be a reliable indication of strong real support.

A series of U.S. government and NATO polls in Iraq and Afghanistan show very limited support for extremism even in countries with conservative Islamic practices, and where Al Qa'ida, Taliban, and ISIS have been able to make significant military gains. It was the internal divisions in the countries involved, and the failures of their governments and security forces, that created windows of opportunity for relatively small extremist forces.

A range of various other polls and prisoner interviews indicate that even supporters of extremist movements know far more about what they were against than about what the extremist movements they supported were for. At a popular level, the governments involved were often seen as corrupt, failing to meet the needs of their people for security and jobs, and as biased against large ethnic and sectarian portions of the population – perceptions broadly validated by UNDP, IMF, World Bank, and NGO reports on the governments and economies of the countries involved.

Nevertheless, polls generally indicate that religion is a very powerful force in countries with large Muslim populations, but that a deep commitment to Islam does not mean a commitment to extremist beliefs or practices. Two recent polls illustrate these points.

Figure Fourteen summarizes a Pew study of the level of popular support for Sharia in a range of largely Moslem countries, but it is clear that support for Sharia does not mean support for movements like ISIS or violence. The Pew team conducting the poll found that,²²

- Recent surveys show (that most people in several countries with significant Muslim populations have an unfavorable view of ISIS, including virtually all respondents in Lebanon and 94 percent in Jordan.
- Relatively small shares say they see ISIS favorably. In some countries, considerable portions of the population do not offer an opinion about ISIS, including a majority (62 percent) of Pakistanis.
- Favorable views of ISIS are somewhat higher in Nigeria (14 percent) than most other nations. Among Nigerian Muslims, 20 percent say they see ISIS favorably (compared with 7 percent of Nigerian Christians). The Nigerian militant group Boko Haram, which has been conducting a terrorist campaign in the country for years, has sworn allegiance to ISIS.
- More generally, Muslims mostly say that suicide bombings and other forms of violence against civilians in the name of Islam are rarely or never justified, including 92 percent in Indonesia and 91 percent in Iraq. In the United States, a 2011 survey found that 86 percent of Muslims ...say that such tactics are rarely or never justified. An additional 7 percent say suicide bombings are sometimes justified and 1 percent say they are often justified in these circumstances.

- In a few countries, a quarter or more of Muslims say that these acts of violence are at least sometimes justified, including 40 percent in the Palestinian territories, 39 percent in Afghanistan, 29 percent in Egypt and 26 percent in Bangladesh.
- In many cases, people in countries with large Muslim populations are as concerned as Western nations...about the threat of Islamic extremism, and have become increasingly concerned in recent years. About two-thirds of people in Nigeria (68 percent) and Lebanon (67 percent) said earlier this year they are *very* concerned about Islamic extremism in their country, both up significantly since 2013.

Figure Fifteen shows the results of another poll that was presented at the 2016 annual meeting of the [*American Political Science Association*](#) (APSA), and which was reported on in the *Washington Post*. When it came to support for extremist ideology, the authors found that,²³

The findings were stark: Not many Arabs sympathize with the Islamic State. The percent agreeing with the Islamic State's goals range from 0.4 percent in Jordan to 6.4 percent in the Palestinian territories. The percent agreeing with the Islamic State's use of violence range from 0.4 percent in Morocco to 5.4 percent in the Palestinian territories. The percent agreeing that the Islamic State's tactics are compatible with Islam range from 1.0 percent in Jordan to 8.9 percent in the Palestinian territories.

It's important to dig deeper, though. While very few respondents express positive attitudes toward the Islamic State, it is possible that some who support the Islamic State's goals or tactics or believe the group's actions are compatible with Islam decline to answer the question or say they don't know, rather than explicitly express approval of the Islamic State.

... What about younger and poorly educated men, who seem to be a primary audience for the Islamic State message? Breaking out the responses of male respondents age 36 or under who have had less than secondary schooling shows that even among this key demographic there is also little support for the Islamic State's goals or for its use of violence, and that few consider the Islamic State's tactics to be compatible with the teachings of Islam. Indeed, in some instances, positive attitudes toward the Islamic State are held by fewer individuals in the key demographic category.

... Only 3.4 percent of poorly educated younger Tunisian men express support for the Islamic State's goals, and only 2.3 percent agree with its violent tactics. Nevertheless, it is notable that Tunisians in the demographic category that is the primary target of the Islamic State messaging are significantly more likely than other Tunisians, and their counterparts in other Arab countries, to consider the Islamic State's tactics compatible with Islam.

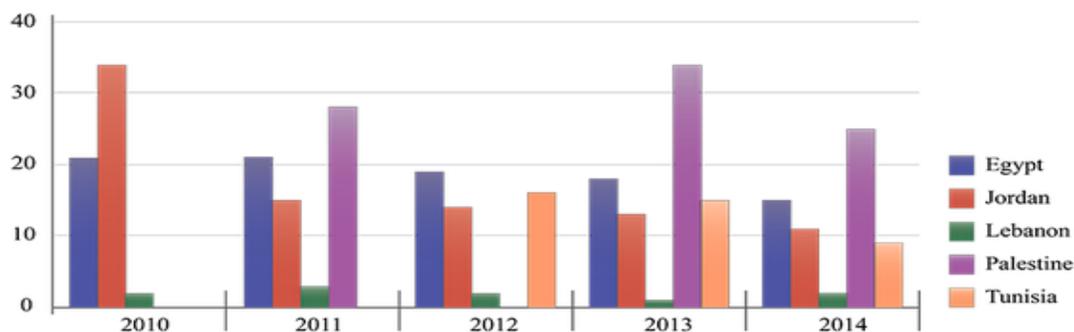
The scholars conducting this research also found that the more young men actually learned about ISIS and its actual beliefs, the less they supported it. More importantly, however, they found that the same samples perceived critical problems in their governments, economies, and social structures that are summarized in **Figure Sixteen**.

One key aspect of such polls is harder to quantify, but also should be kept in mind. They can be very volatile which given countries feel nations like the U.S. or European powers are becoming anti-Muslim, or when moderate Muslim governments fail their peoples, are excessively repressive, or discriminate against given sects and ethnic groups. Such shifts rarely last more than a year, but they are a further warning against both counterterrorism that discriminates broadly against Muslims, and the theory that repression can bring lasting stability.

Figure Thirteen: Varying Estimates of General Support for Islamic Extremism

Pew Research Center 2014

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS EXPRESSING EITHER A "VERY FAVORABLE" OR "SOMEWHAT FAVORABLE" OPINION OF AL-QAEDA IN SELECTED ARAB COUNTRIES



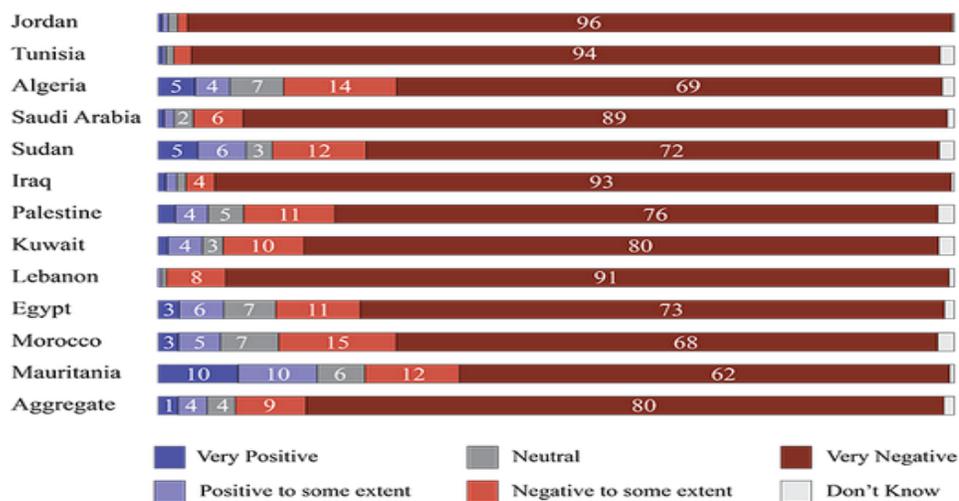
Figures show the aggregate share of respondents choosing "very favorable" and "somewhat favorable" to the question "[p]lease tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable or very unfavorable opinion of al Qaeda" (in percentage).

Note: Data unavailable for Palestine in 2010 and 2012, and for Tunisia for 2010 and 2011.

Source: "Concerns about Islamic Extremism on the Rise in the Middle East," Pew Research Center, July 2014.

Doha: Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies, 2015

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS EXPRESSING A "VERY POSITIVE," "POSITIVE TO SOME EXTENT," "NEUTRAL," "NEGATIVE TO SOME EXTENT" OR "VERY NEGATIVE" OPINION OF THE ISLAMIC STATE



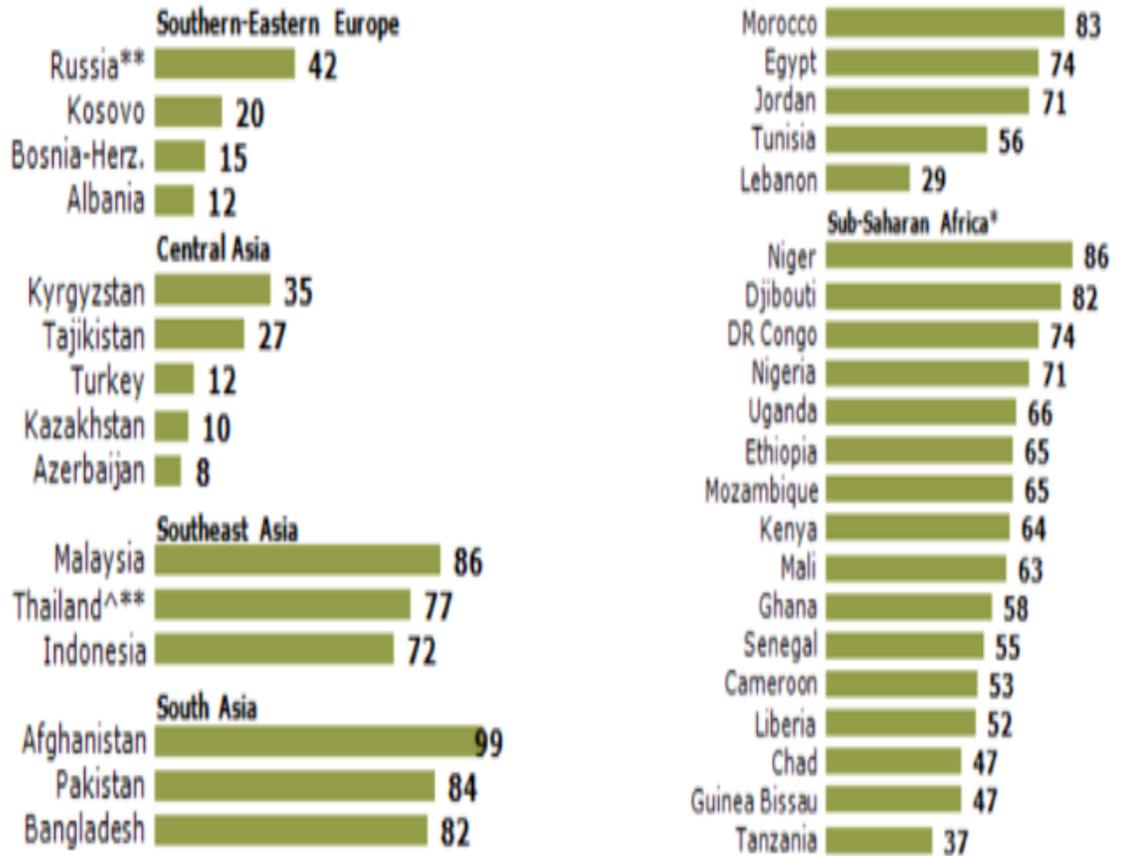
Source: "Arab Opinion Index 2015," Doha: Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies, 2015, www.dohainstitute.org.

Brnjar Lia, "Jihadism in the Arab World After 2011, Explaining its Expansion," Middle East Policy Council, Winter, 2016, <http://www.mepec.org/journal/middle-east-policy-archives/jihadism-arab-world-after-2011>.

**Figure Fourteen: The Importance of Religion in the Islamic World -
Part One**

Public Support for Sharia by Country (Percent)

*% of Muslims who favor making sharia the
official law in their country*



Source: Pew Research Center, Michael Lipka, *Muslims and Islam: Key findings in the U.S. and around the World*, December 7, 2015, p. 4. Also see Michael Lipka, *Muslims and Islam: Key findings in the U.S. and around the World*, July 22, 2016, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/07/22/muslims-and-islam-key-findings-in-the-u-s-and-around-the-world/>.

*Figure Fourteen: The Importance of Religion in the Islamic World -
Part Two*

Religion is an Important Part of Your Daily Life? Percentage Answering Yes

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Algeria	...	...	...	...	94	93	92	...	...	...
Bahrain	...	...	...	96	96	94	...	...	...	...
Comoros	...	...	...	96	99	99	97	...	...	...
Djibouti	...	...	98	98	97	91	...	...	...	...
Egypt	98	98	100	98	97	98	98	97	98	...
Iraq	...	...	81	86	85	79	84	87	90	...
Jordan	92	96	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Kuwait	84	...	...	93	97	...	...	...	...	...
Lebanon	88	88	86	89	87	84	85	80	84	...
Mauritania	...	95	97	98	99	99	99	98	92	99
Morocco	...	...	...	...	93	94	99	96	...	...
Palestine	88	90	89	93	95	94	95	93	98	...
Qatar	...	...	92	95	...	98	...	...	...	...
Saudi Arabia	98	98	96	94	...	...	...	...	...	...
Somalia	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	95	...
Sudan	...	...	...	95	97	92	95	...	...	...
Syria	...	...	84	88	83	78	82	75	...	...
Tunisia	...	...	...	95	93	93	96	89	88	91
UAE	98	...	...	91	95	...	...	...	...	...
Yemen	96	...	...	96	96	98	98	100	99	...

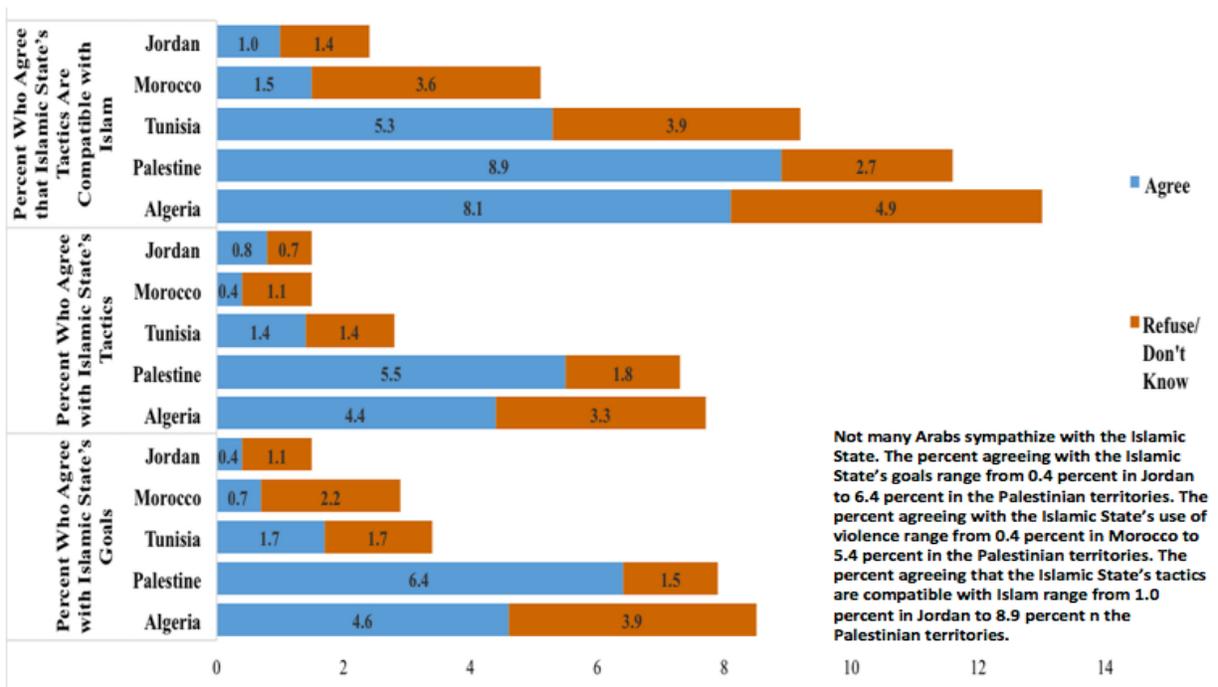
Source: Gallup 2015.

Note: "..." not available

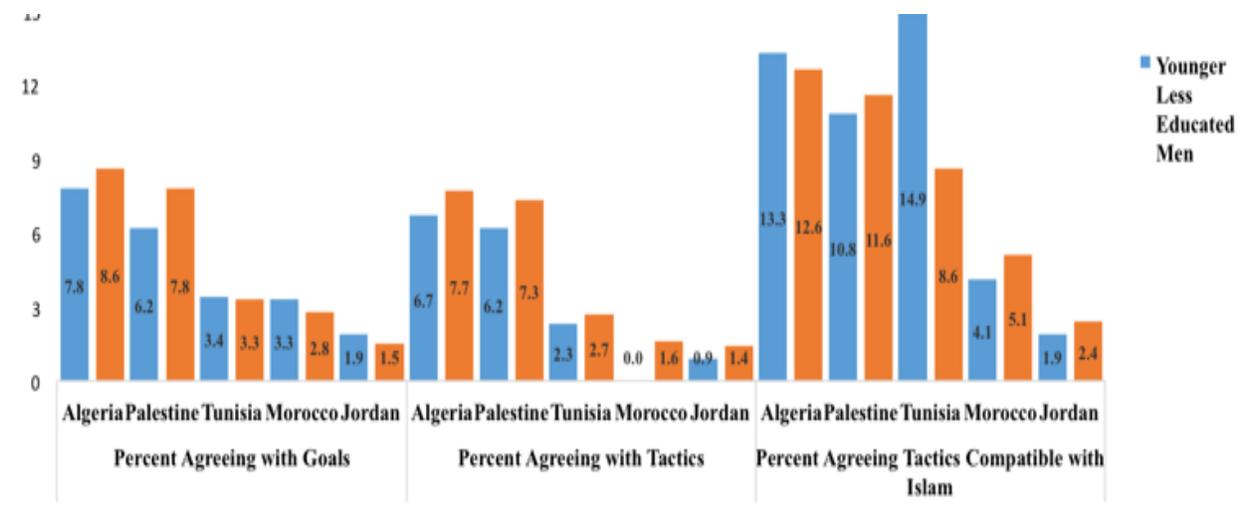
UNDP, *Arab Human Development Report 2016: Youth and the prospects for human development in changing reality*, http://www.arabstates.undp.org/content/rbas/en/home/library/huma_development/arab-human-development-report-2016--youth-and-the-prospects-for-/. Table 1.2

Figure Fifteen: Arab Popular Attitudes Towards the Islamic State

Attitudes Towards the Islamic State in Five Arab Countries



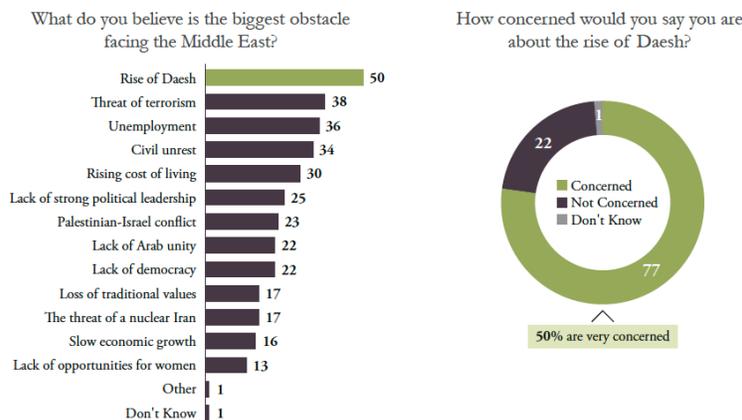
Attitudes Towards the Islamic State of Younger Less Educated Men and Others



Source: Adapted from Mark Tessler, Michael Robbins and Amaney Jamal, *What do ordinary citizens in the Arab world really think about the Islamic State?* Washington Post, July 29, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/07/27/what-do-ordinary-citizens-in-the-arab-world-really-think-about-the-islamic-state/>, and <http://cpsblog.isr.umich.edu/?p=1541>.

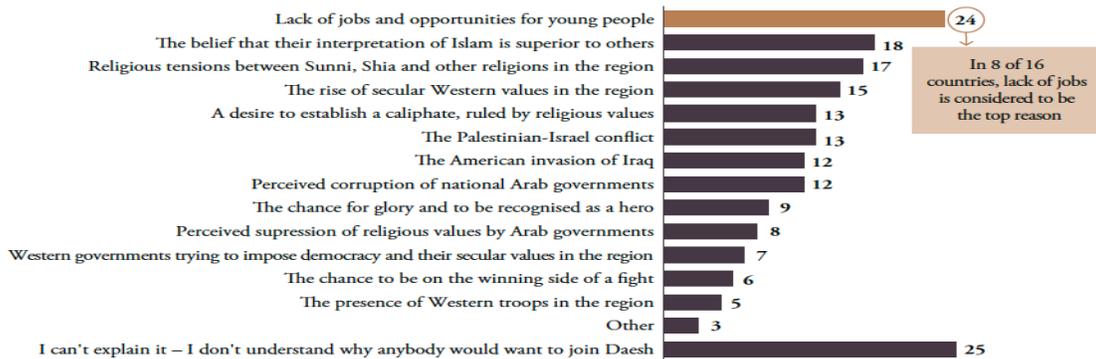
Figure Sixteen: How Arab Young Men Perceive Key National Challenges

FOR THE SECOND YEAR IN A ROW, ARAB YOUTH VIEW THE RISE OF DAESH AS THE TOP OBSTACLE FACING THE MIDDLE EAST AND NEARLY 4 IN 5 EXPRESS CONCERN ABOUT THE TERRORIST GROUP'S RISE.



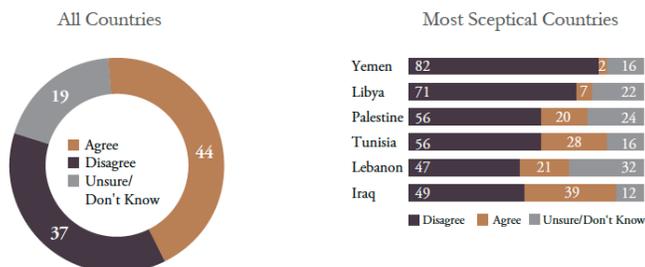
LACK OF JOBS IS SEEN AS THE TOP REASON YOUNG ARABS BELIEVE PEOPLE JOIN DAESH, ALTHOUGH 1 IN 4 DO NOT UNDERSTAND WHY ANYBODY WOULD JOIN THE GROUP.

Which of the following, if any, do you think are the primary reasons why some young people are attracted to Daesh? Please choose up to three reasons.



FEWER THAN HALF OF ARAB YOUTH BELIEVE THERE ARE GOOD JOB OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE TO THEM, AND THE ISSUE IS PARTICULARLY ACUTE IN THE COUNTRIES WHERE DAESH HAS ACTIVELY RECRUITED YOUNG PEOPLE.

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the statement?
 "There are good job opportunities in the area I live in"



Source: Adapted from the Asda'a Burson-Marsteller Arab Youth Survey 2016, <https://www.google.com/search?q=Arab+Youth+Survey.com&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8>.

Dealing with the Political and Civil Causes of Violent Islamic Extremism

Both the previous data on population growth, and the polling data showing the level of concern with issues like corruption, employment, and security serve as an introduction to another area where U.S. policy towards Islamic extremism needs to change. There is a clear need to continue to disrupt and destroy extremist movements and counter extremist religious ideology and indoctrination efforts. At the same time, there is an equal need to find new ways to address the causes of alienation and anger within the Muslim world, and the failures of current governments, that serve as key causes of terrorism and all forms of violent extremism.

The Impact of “Failed Secularism”

Religion is clearly a critical force in shaping the political views of Muslims, and the political structure of largely Muslim states. It also is a key aspect of the life of Muslims in Europe, the United States, and other areas where they are a small minority, and often feel isolated or the subject of prejudice. Polls like the ones summarized in **Figures Thirteen to Sixteen**, and many earlier polls in individual countries and the MENA region show, however, that support for Islamic extremist practices and goals is heavily shaped by the failure of governments to meet the needs of their people, and alienation in countries that are largely outside the Muslim world.

It is no coincidence that the growth of extremism has taken place in countries where work by the UN, World Bank, IMF, and NGOs has shown for decades that their governments did not meet the needs of their peoples. Population pressure has been key factor in creating some of the problems involved, but so has failed governance, corruption, failed economic development, repression, and discrimination by sect, ethnicity, and tribe. The rise and success of extremism has been at least as much as much the result of “failed secularism” as the efforts of extremism movements to use their version of Islam to recruit Muslim fighters and supporters.

The forces involved are complex, do not follow any single pattern, and cannot be separated in any clear way from the political and religious causes of violence and extremism. At the same time, the level of correlation between many obvious examples of “failed secularism” and extremism is too close, not to involve a high degree of correlation.

Population Pressure, “Youth Bulges,” Jobs, Poverty and Alienation

The previous analysis has already shown the acute level of population growth, how young many largely Muslim populations are, and how rapidly the labor forces has grown (and will grow) in most Islamic states. **Figure Seventeen** highlights these forces in the MENA region, where key governments failed for decades to meet the needs of both their youth and general population for economic growth and jobs.

The estimated population growth between 1950 and 2015 reached the following levels in key countries – often in spite of civil conflict and war:

- Egypt grew 4.5 times.
- Iran grew 5.0 times
- Iraq grew 7.4 times

- Libya grew 6.8 times
- Syria grew 4.9 times
- Tunisia grew 3.2 times
- Yemen grew 5.7 times
- Afghanistan grew 4.1 times
- Pakistan grew 5.0 times

To put these changes in perspective, Western Europe's population grew by only 1.4 times during this same period, and the U.S. population grew by 2.1 times.

The key unstable countries in terms of a "youth bulge" are highlighted with red arrows in the lower part of **Figure Thirteen**, and Afghanistan is added to the total.

In far too many MENA and largely Muslim states, this population pressure has led to massive youth unemployment or underemployment, hyperurbanization and growing slums, dead end careers in the form of government or SOE employment, a slow deterioration education and other services.

As a result, no accurate data are available on the scale of key problems in many countries, although World Bank, IMF, UNDP, and Arab Human development reports warned how serious the situation was become well over a decade before the political upheavals the began in 2011. They have also made it clear that Governments sharply understate unemployment and non-productive, "make work," and state subsidized jobs that make up underemployment.

Furthermore, no current data are available on the scale of such problems in most crisis and conflict states since 2010, but the situation has clearly become far worse. Some sources put youth unemployment/underemployment in Tunisia at 40 percent in 2015, and it is unlikely that the figure is below 20 percent in anything but the wealthiest petroleum export countries – where non-productive government and SOE jobs disguise the problem.

As noted earlier, the lack of water and arable land has also forced much of the growing population and labor force into urban areas. While there are no reliable data, the percentage of urbanization in many largely Muslim countries has almost certainly tripled between 1950 and 2016 – usually creating large slums and pushing sects, ethnic groups, and tribes into a new – and sometimes tense or hostile – proximity. As a result, population pressure not only increases unemployment, especially among youth, it creases new population concentrations in slums in urban areas where costs are generally higher than in rural ones.

Many governments disguise the scale of such problems although they do so at their peril. While many largely Muslim countries seem to sharply underreport their poverty rates, the definition of poverty they use also often set too low a threshold for poverty in increasingly urbanized country. Moreover, little effort has been made in most such countries to address key practical issues like the ability to afford the cost of marriage or an independent home, or trends in the distribution of income that favor the rich and successful at the expense of the rest of the population.

*Figure Seventeen: The Gulf and MENA Region as a Case Study:
Population Growth and the “Youth Bulge” - Part One*

The Arab Youth Bulge Compared to Other Regions in the World -- 1970–1990 and 1990–2010: The biggest rise in youth populations in the Arab region (in 1,000s)

	Youth population increase, ages 15–29									
	1950–1970	Increase as % of total population, 1970	1970–1990	Increase as % of total population, 1990	1990–2010	Increase as % of total population, 2010	2010–2030	Increase as % of total population, 2030	2030–2050	Increase as % of total population, 2050
Sub-Saharan Africa	25,521	9%	55,832	11%	101,473	12%	154,835	11%	174,896	8%
Arab states	11,085	9%	29,458	13%	41,800	12%	20,208	4%	11,326	2%
Africa	32,583	9%	73,303	12%	121,189	12%	162,809	10%	178,810	7%
Latin America and the Caribbean	29,189	10%	52,018	12%	31,860	5%	2,286	0%	-13,110	-2%
Asia	169,880	8%	378,188	12%	192,653	5%	-57,138	-1%	-76,549	-1%
Oceania	1,921	10%	1,975	7%	1,526	4%	1,663	4%	1,413	2%
Northern America	16,429	7%	9,816	3%	6,477	2%	2,896	1%	7,471	2%
China	70,146	9%	146,539	13%	-6,248	0%	-95,377	-7%	-38,726	-3%
Europe	6,452	1%	15,792	2%	-13,312	-2%	-26,805	-4%	-8,315	-1%
Japan	6,652	6%	-2,167	-2%	-6,418	-5%	-3,738	-3%	-2,044	-2%

Source: Report team calculations based on UNDESA 2013c.

Demographic Pressures in Selected Countries: 1950-2050 (In Thousands)

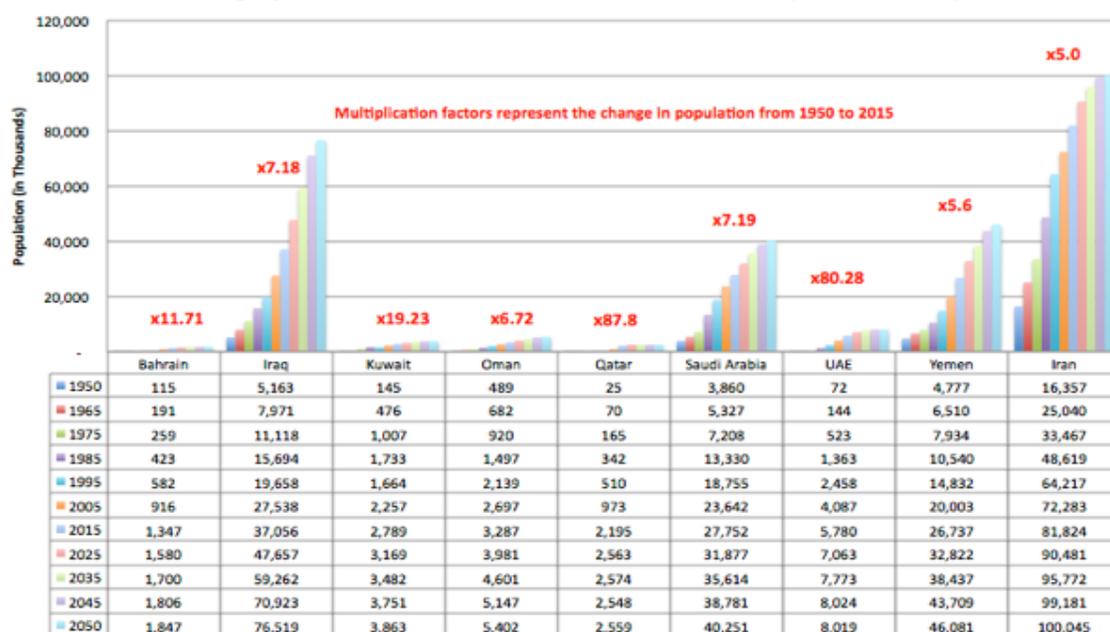
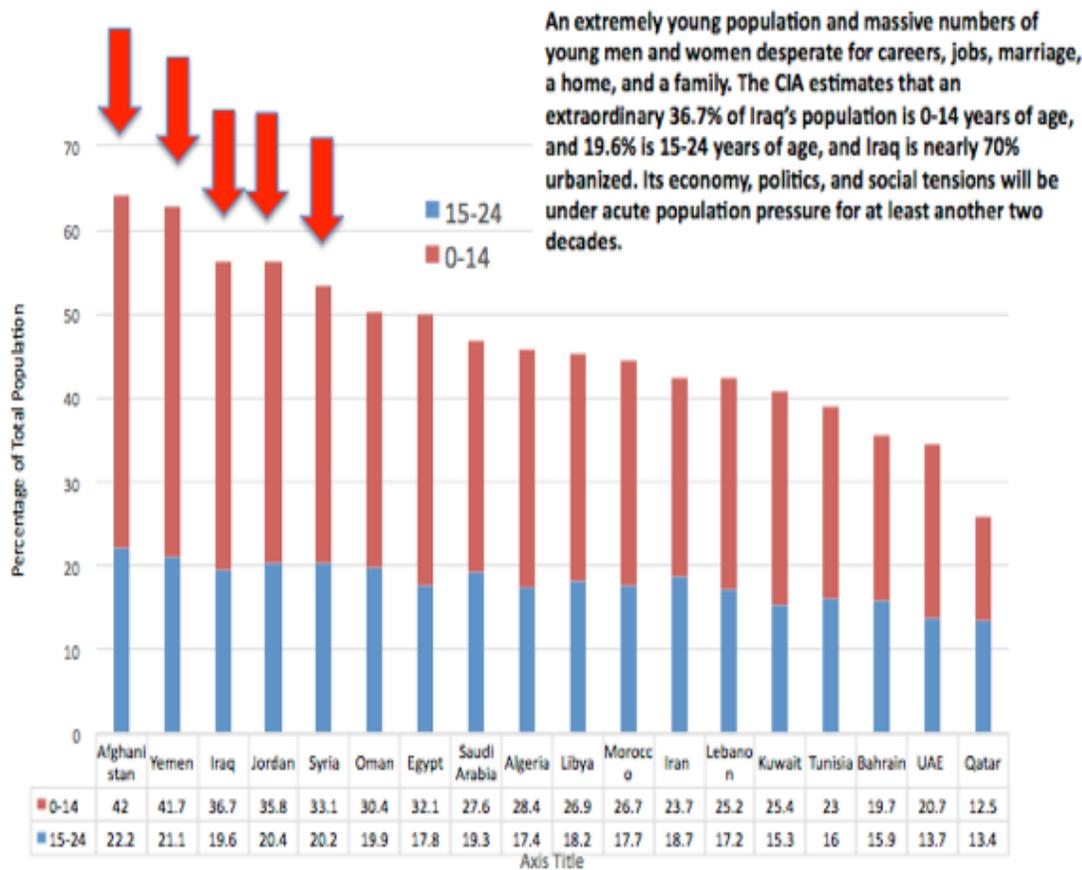


Figure Seventeen: The Gulf and MENA Region as a Case Study: Population Growth and the “Youth Bulge” - Part Two

The Broader MENA “Youth Bulge:” Percent of Native Population Under 25 Years of Age



Sources: Source; UNDP, *Arab Human Development Report 2016: Youth and the prospects for human development in changing reality*, Table 1.1 and Figure 8.7b, http://www.arabstates.undp.org/content/rbas/en/home/library/huma_development/arab-human-development-report-2016--youth-and-the-prospects-for-, p. 160; United States Census Bureau, International Data Base, Accessed April 2015. <http://www.census.gov/population/international/data/idb/informationGateway.php>, and Central Intelligence Agency, World Factbook 2015, Accessed April 2015, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>.

Failed Governance

These factors interact in far too many largely Muslim states with failed governance. Far too many governments with largely Muslim populations have failed key portions or all of their populations. World Bank and NGO reports by bodies like Transparency International have consistently reported extraordinary levels of corruption, nepotism, kleptocracy, and cronyism over extended periods of time—with a steadily widening gap between a rich power structure and the rest of the population.

Figure Eighteen shows both the World Bank ratings of corruption in MENA governments and the ratings of overall governance. It uses measures of how well a given government functions rather than its level of democracy or human rights. It is not surprising that both the general population and the nation's youth see corruption – the most obvious flaw in governance – as the key source of the government's failures, but it is equally obvious that much of the problem lies in the low overall quality of governance and not simply in corruption.

Figure Nineteen shows the long history of failure in several key countries with largely Muslim populations and histories of major political upheavals and violence. What is striking about all of the cases shown – and virtually all of the cases where Islamic extremism has been a major factor – is just how consistently the government of such countries has failed at the secular level. Repression and authoritarianism have succeeded for years in several of these states, but only at the cost of making a nation's problems steadily worse until they eventually created political explosions, violence, and civil war.

- Iraq shows a consistently dismal pattern of governance under Saddam, U.S. occupation, and Maliki. This tracks with equally critical World Bank and IMF assessment of its economy. The U.S. made many mistakes during the period following its invasion in 2003, but the poor pattern of governance long predates the U.S. invasion, and was largely Iraqi-driven after 2005-2006.
- Syria and Libya show that stability and freedom from violence under the Assads and Qaddafi -- before 2012 -- did not mean anything approaching effective overall governance. Once again, the governments' policies were equally bad in dealing with economic development.
- Yemen is another crisis country with a dismal history of both governance and development – factors that are closely related, have a key impact in job creation and the stability of youth, and often create serious tensions between ethnic and sectarian groups, and key factions within the population – with the less successful sometimes moving from resentment to political upheavals or violence.
- Afghanistan has been a conflict state ever since the late 1970. Like Iraq, it shows a consistently dismal pattern of governance, regardless of rule and the shift from the Taliban to something approaching a secular democracy. Its consistent history as one of the most corrupt governments in the world – coupled to constant internal violence -- has been a key factor in public resentment of the government although polls have shown limited support for the Taliban and other forms of Islamic extremism.
- Pakistan is one of the world's leading centers of terrorist attacks, but also has been a de facto sponsor of state terrorism through its ties to the Taliban, Haqqani Network, and a variety of Islamist extremism groups it has helped train and arm to put pressure on India. Its poor overall standards of government have help encourage internal instability, as have its poor development policies.

The alienation caused by poverty interacts with alienation because of corruption, a lack of opportunity, and low overall incomes. **Figure Twenty** provides an illustrative comparison of the very different levels of GDP per capita in given countries with largely Muslim populations, and serves as a rough metric of economic well-being or suffering. Such data can be deeply misleading because many of the countries listed in this Figure have terrible income distribution, with a small, corrupt, ruling majority taking much of the nation's wealth. GDP per capita also does not reflect

acute differences by sect, ethnicity, tribe and other factors, and the problems women face in employment and income in many states.

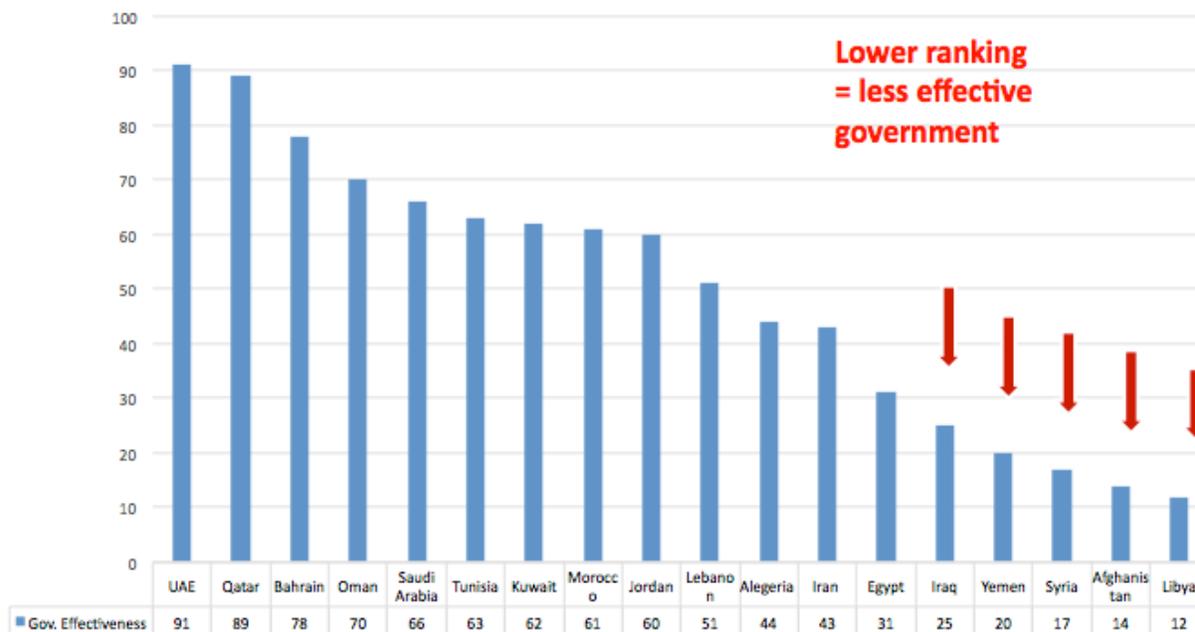
Even so, the widely different GDPs per capita in **Figure Twenty** do reflect some of the practical realities of failed economic policies, and the impact of government barriers to economic development, outside investment, doing business in, and employment. **Figure Twenty-One** also makes it clear that several the countries with the worst GDP's per capita have suffered the most from political upheavals and civil war.

Figure Eighteen: The Gulf and MENA Region as a Case Study: Governments as a Threat to Their Peoples

Corruption breeds anger and extremism: See Syria, Yemen, Libya, Iraq and Afghanistan

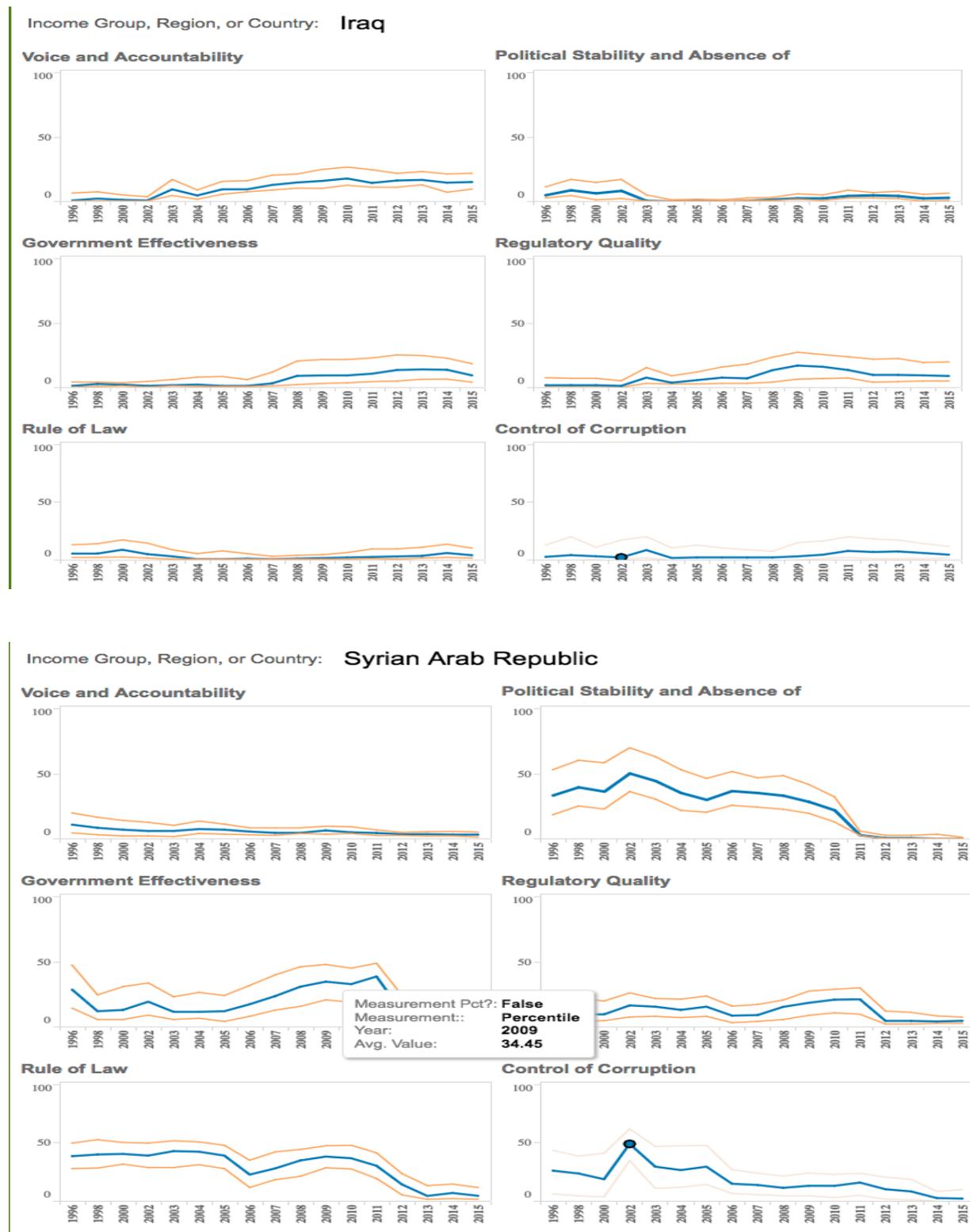


Failed governance leads to violence and extremism, or civil conflict. Authoritarianism and repression do not suppress them, simply bottle them up until they explode.



Source: Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index, Accessed February, 2016. <http://www.transparency.org/cpi2015/#results-table>, and World Bank, "Worldwide Governance Indicators," info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.aspx#home, June 2015.

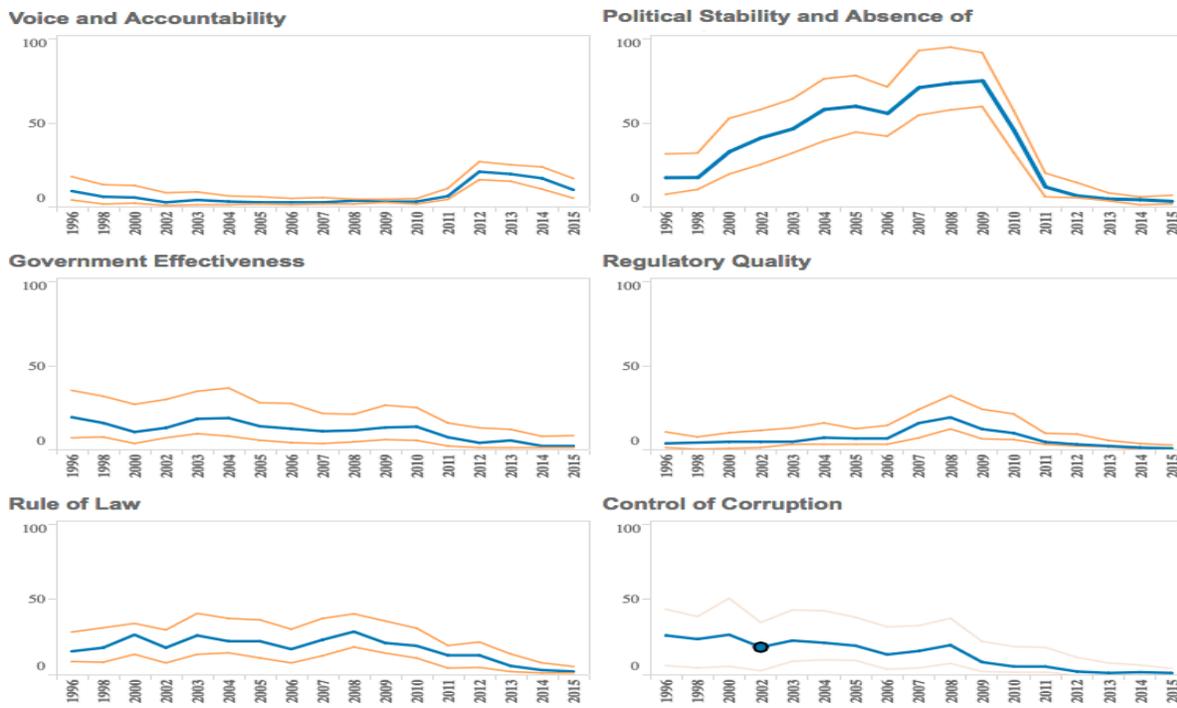
Figure Nineteen: Failed Governance: Key Case Studies in World Bank Ratings – Part One



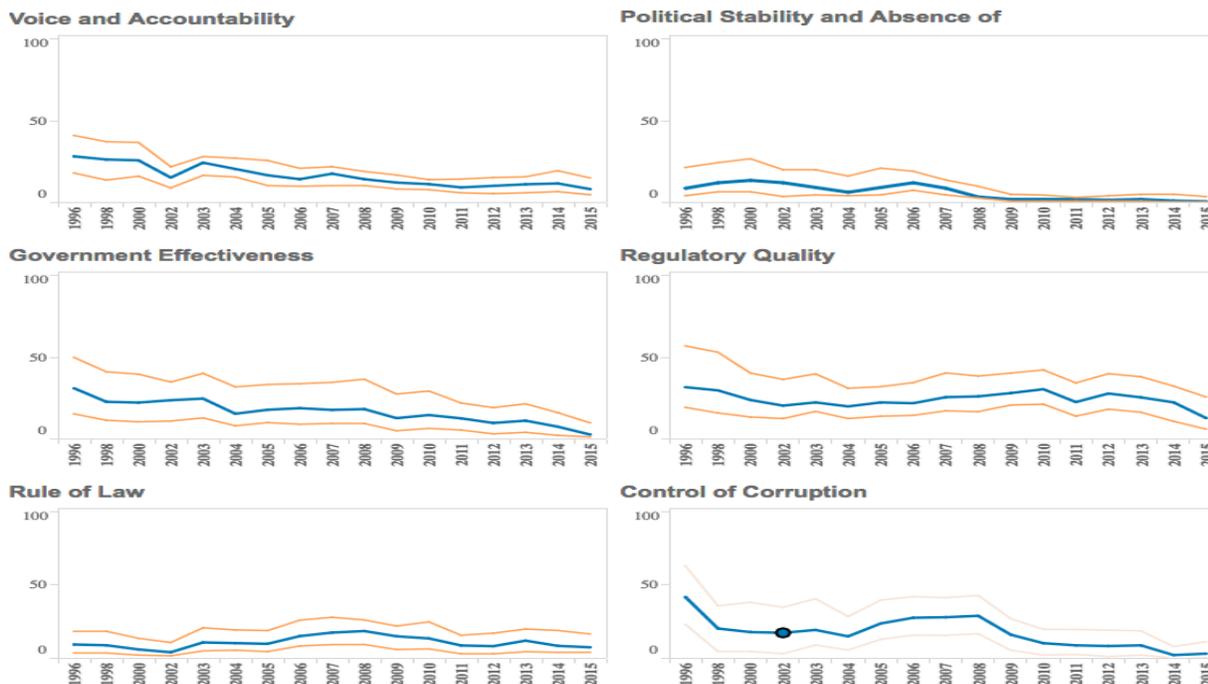
Source: World Bank, <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.aspx#reports>.

Figure Nineteen: Failed Governance: Key Case Studies in World Bank Ratings – Part Two

Income Group, Region, or Country: **Libya**

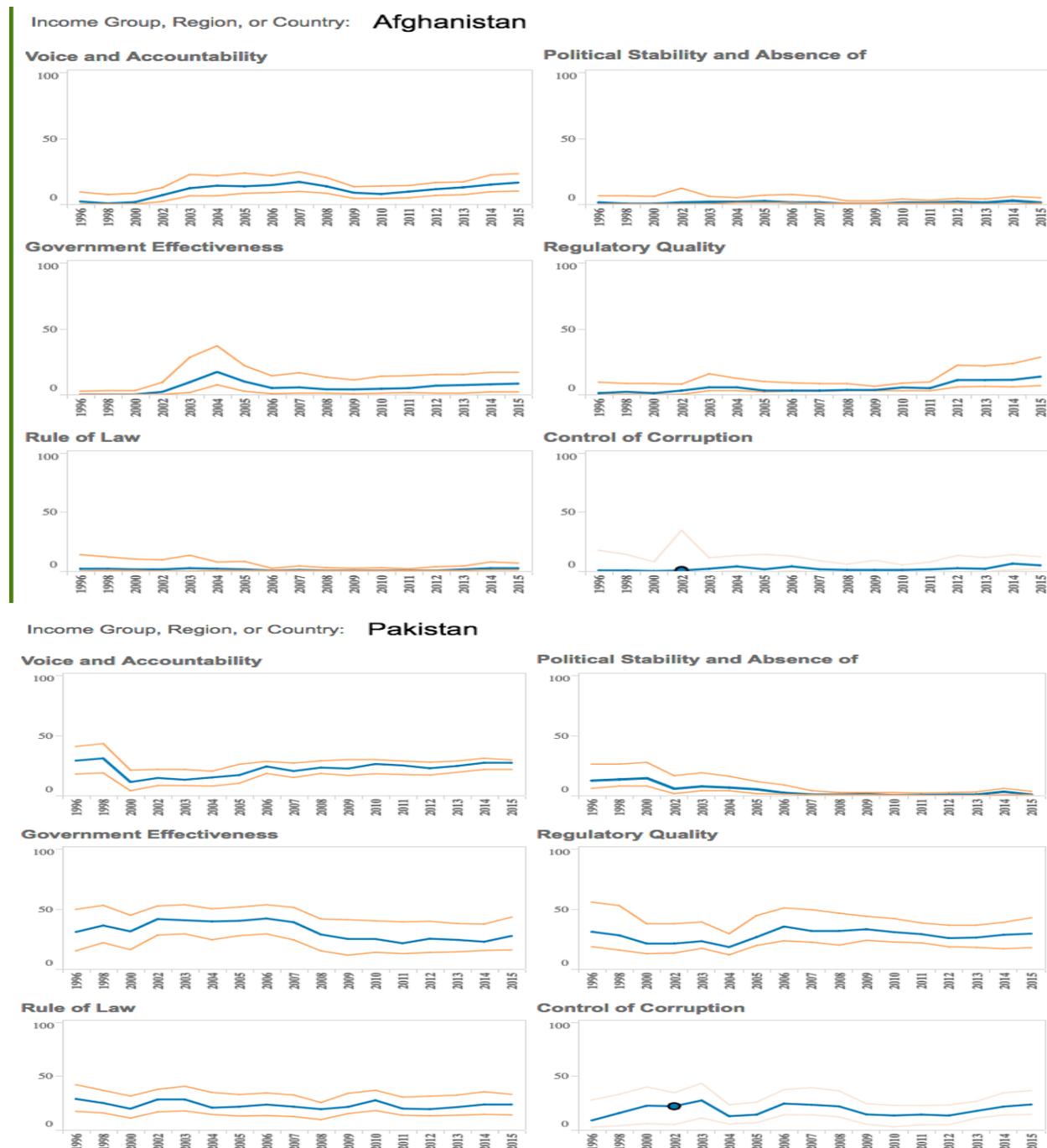


Income Group, Region, or Country: **Yemen, Rep.**



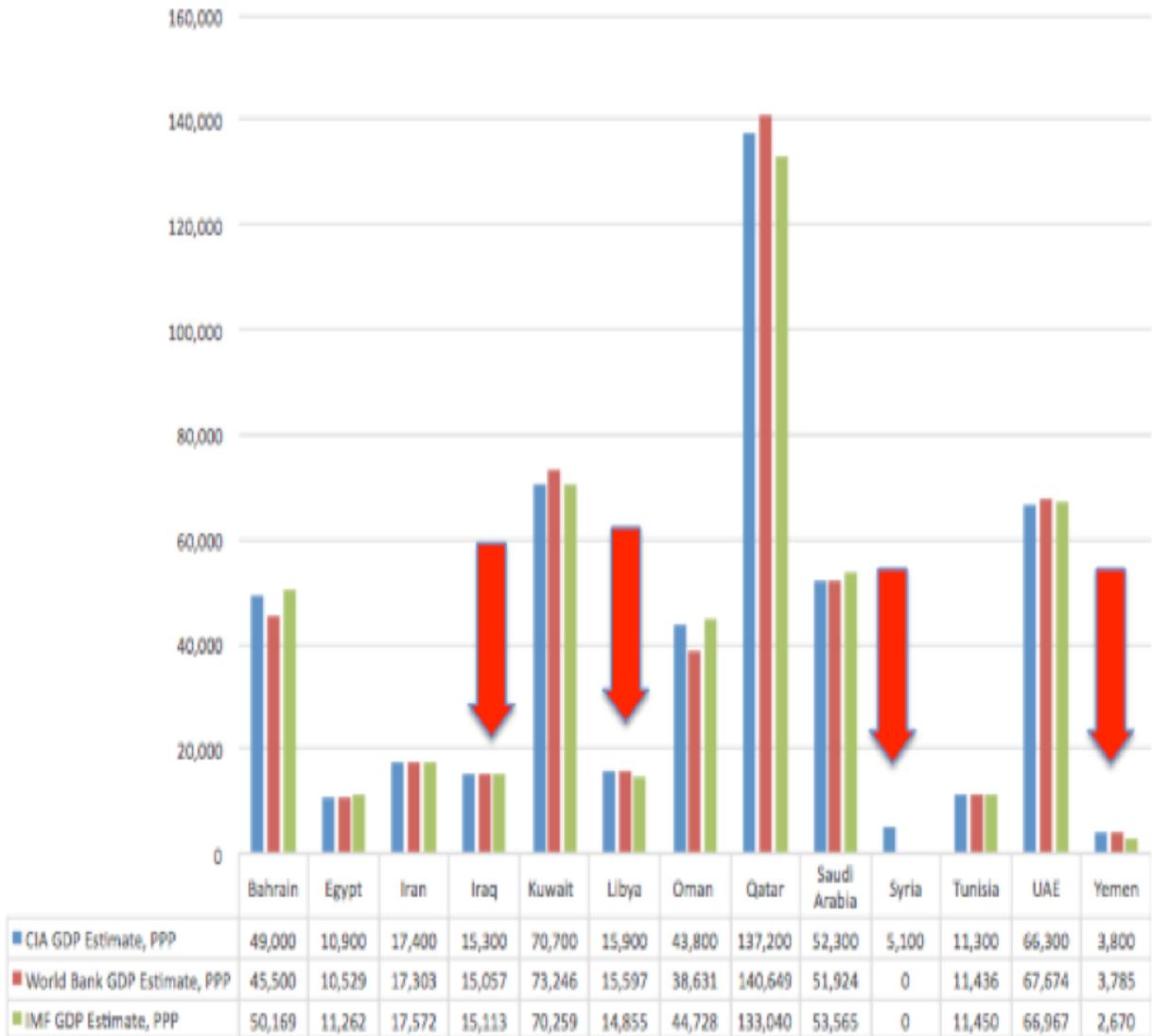
Source: World Bank, <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.aspx#reports>.

Figure Nineteen: Failed Governance: Key Case Studies in World Bank Ratings – Part Three



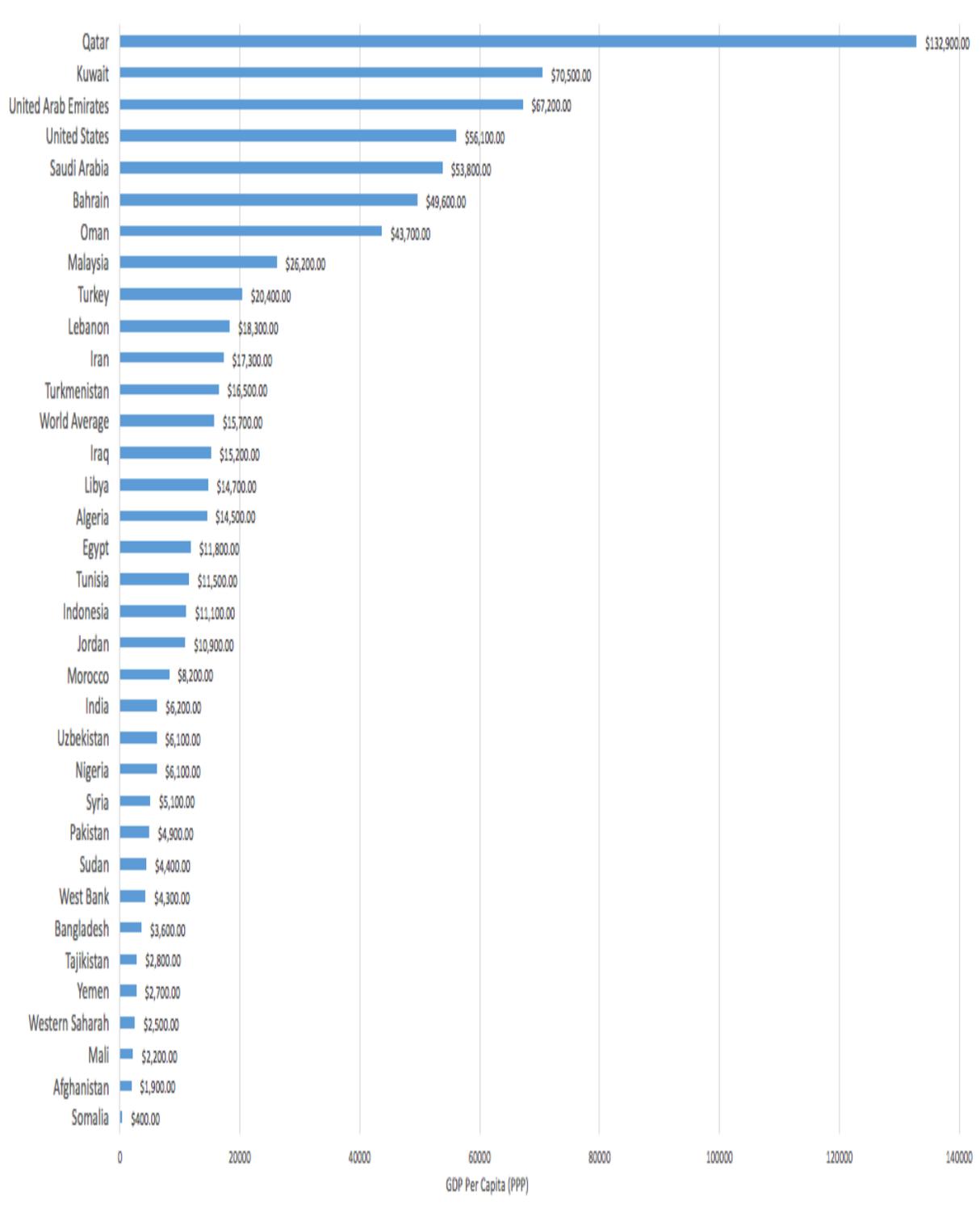
Source: World Bank, <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.aspx#reports>.

Figure Twenty: GDP Per Capita – A Metric of Failed Economic Development and Government Activity



Source: GDP Figures: “GDP per Capita (current US\$),” *The World Bank*, accessed February 10, 2016. Wealth Figures: “Global Wealth Data Book 2012,” Credit Suisse, October 2015, Accessed February 11, 2016, p. 19-22.

Figure Twenty-One: From Wealth to Poverty: GDP Per Capita in Moslem Majority Countries



Source: CIA World Factbook data for 2015 or latest year, accessed December 2, 2016, <https://www.google.com/search?q=cia+world+factbook&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8>.

Dealing with the Growth of Muslim Populations and the Secular Causes of Islamic Extremism

There is no reliable way to know the extent to which such secular pressures have driven a small minority to support Islamist extremism, and how such secular forces interact with exposure to extremist religious beliefs. Such forces also do not explain very different secular or non-religious factors that lead to the limited level of Muslim support for violent extremism in Europe and the United States, and cases like “lone wolf” attacks where psychological factors may be more important than any mix of religion and material causes.

There can be little doubt, however, about the extent to which extremism and terrorism have been strongest in countries that have been both the subject of intense population pressure, failed government, and failed economic growth and development. In case after case, these nations have had massive political upheavals, see large parts of the population to turn to violence, and given extremism leverage and opportunity.

Extremism and Failed States

This combination of population growth, failed governance and failed development has several major implications for U.S. policy. First, it reinforces the need for the U.S. and non-Muslim states to work with largely Muslim states and treat them as strategic partners. No U.S. foreign and security policy can succeed that tries to ignore or isolate the Islamic world.

Second, it reinforces the need for every aspect of U.S. foreign and national security policy to clearly separate Islamic extremism from Islam. Like the previous analysis of the Islamic Extremist threat they show that Muslims are critical partners in the fight against extremism. the U.S. must build mutual understanding, rather than to try to exclude Muslims or see them as a threat.

Third, it highlights a critical missing dimension in U.S. strategy, as well as in most regional efforts to deal with extremism and instability. Counterterrorism and military security are critical, but they are not enough. They only deal with half the problem and they can only provide temporary fixes to problems that have other and deeper and more lasting causes.

Population pressure, the youth bulge within the Muslim world alone involve forces that cannot be dealt with by even the most effective counterterrorism and security efforts. Combined with failed governance, corruption, and failed economic policies; they create underlying forces for instability that will last at least one to two decades. There are no quick answers because the future growth of the labor force and strain on most Muslim states is already born, political and governance reform are inevitably slow and evolutionary, and the economic challenges are so great.

There are good reasons why reports from the IMF, World Bank, and the *Arab Human Development Report for 2011* have warned that it would take more than a decade to carry out such reforms before any of the full implications of the political upheavals that began that year became apparent, and why the report for 2016 has concentrated on calls upon Arab countries to invest in their young people and "empower them to engage in the development process as an urgent and critical priority in its own right and prerequisite to achieving sustainable."²⁴

Figures Thirteen to Sixteen have already provided an example of polls that show just how concerned Arab young men are with the impact of the failures and problem caused largely by their governments. **Figure Eighteen** provides another indication of such attitudes in the broader polling

efforts reported in the UNDP's 2016 *Arab Human Development Report*, while **Figure Nineteen** uses the same source to show how many young Arab see unemployment as a critical issue and tie it to government policies.²⁵

The Implications for U.S. Strategy

Countering Islamic extremism, along with the broader forces of instability and conflict, requires U.S. policies that address the very different levels of civil strain and tension in given Muslim countries, and that go far beyond traditional diplomacy and the "normal embassy." They also require patient long-term efforts, many of which will have to involve cooperation with other states and international organizations.

As U.S. efforts at nation building in Afghanistan and Iraq have shown, efforts to rebuild other nations from the outside, and impose different values from those sought by its population, are incredibly wasteful failures and ones the United States and its allies cannot possibly afford. The story could be very different if it means patient but proactive U.S. efforts to persuade states to adopt necessary reforms, and working with other states, the UNDP, World Bank, and IMF to reform plans and provide affordable incentives.

Fighting Islamic extremism and instability in the Muslim world must address causes as well as the symptoms. Cooperative efforts in bringing development and jobs and at least offering hope for the future is one critical step. More quietly pushing for more honest and effective governance is another—particularly when it focuses on popular benefits and support rather than trying to restructure the political and legal system.

The civil problems that help drive extremism and instability will take years and probably well over a decade to solve, particularly given the long history of inaction in the past, and the damage that the political upheavals have triggered since 2011. It is hard to see, however, how any effort to end Islamic extremism and instability can succeed unless they are addressed.

The Implications for Largely Muslim States

Once again, however, the United States and outside states can only do so much. No outside power can save Arab governments from themselves and event since 2011 have warned just how fact self-inflicted wounds can sometimes be. Reforms in local counterterrorism and security practices that cutoff or reduce the remaining elements of support for religious extremism and violent Islamic extremists are only one cause of those self-inflicted wounds.

As the Arab Human Development Reports have point out since 2002, and continued to point out in 2016, Arab governments need to become far more honest, transparent, and effective. Corruption, favoritism, nepotism, and cronyism are as dangerous as extremism. As **Figures Eighteen** and **Nineteen** show, governments that fail their peoples threaten themselves and their own survival. Repression without major reform and development simply makes that threat worse over time and the eventual prospect of civil war, major political upheavals, and violent Islamic extremist more likely.

At the same time, Muslim government must take full responsibility for make such changes and reforms. No amount of outside security and economic aid can help unless they do. If there is any key lesson of the history of development and stability in the post-colonial/postwar era, it is that no outside force can help a government that does not help itself.

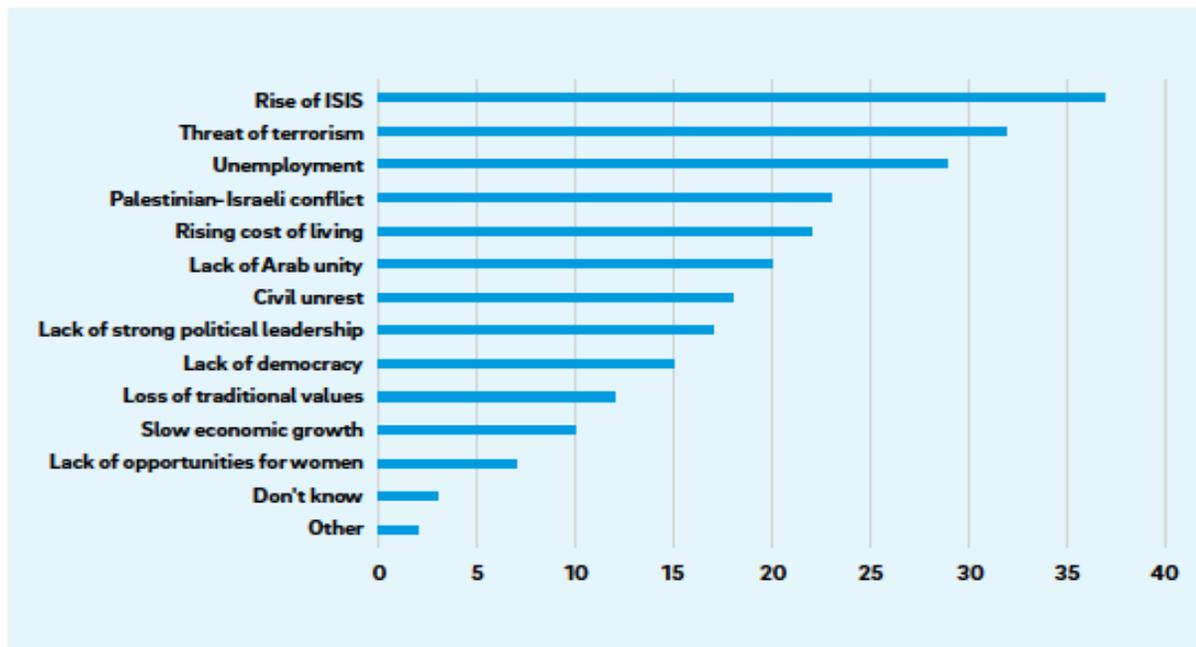
Figure Twenty-Two: Perceptions of Greatest Challenges

What Are the Most Important Challenges Your Country is Facing Today (percent)?

	The economic situation (poverty, unemployment and price increases)	Financial and administrative corruption	Enhancing (strengthening) democracy	Achieving stability and internal security	Other
Algeria	76.9	14.9	2.7	3.3	2.2
Egypt	87.6	6.5	1.4	1.3	3.1
Iraq	52.5	32.5	3.5	9.7	1.7
Jordan	81.0	14.0	1.1	0.7	3.3
Kuwait	56.5	25.3	9.4	0.9	8.0
Lebanon	60.6	24.4	3.5	7.1	4.3
Libya	23.1	32.3	2.3	0.7	41.6
Morocco	83.9	9.6	2.1	0.8	3.6
Palestine	50.3	8.7	1.3	3.0	36.6
Sudan	74.2	17.2	2.3	3.4	2.8
Tunisia	88.4	8.6	0.7	0.9	1.6
Yemen	74.6	17.1	3.9	2.8	1.6

Source: Arab Barometer 2014.

Youth perceptions: What do you believe is the biggest obstacle facing the Middle East?

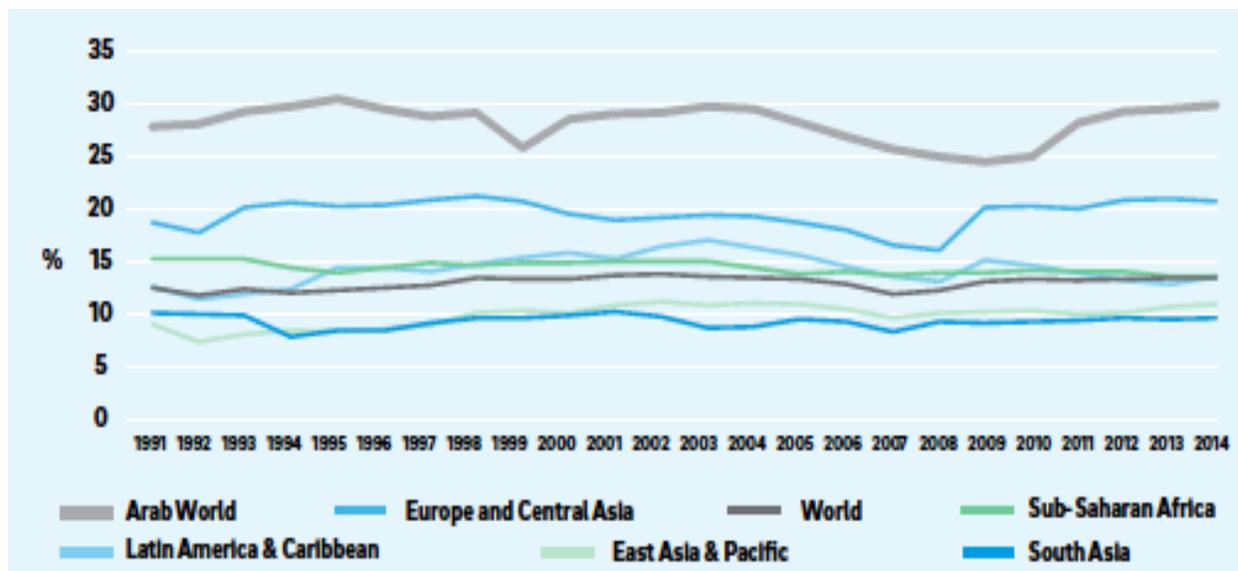


Source: Asda'a 2015.

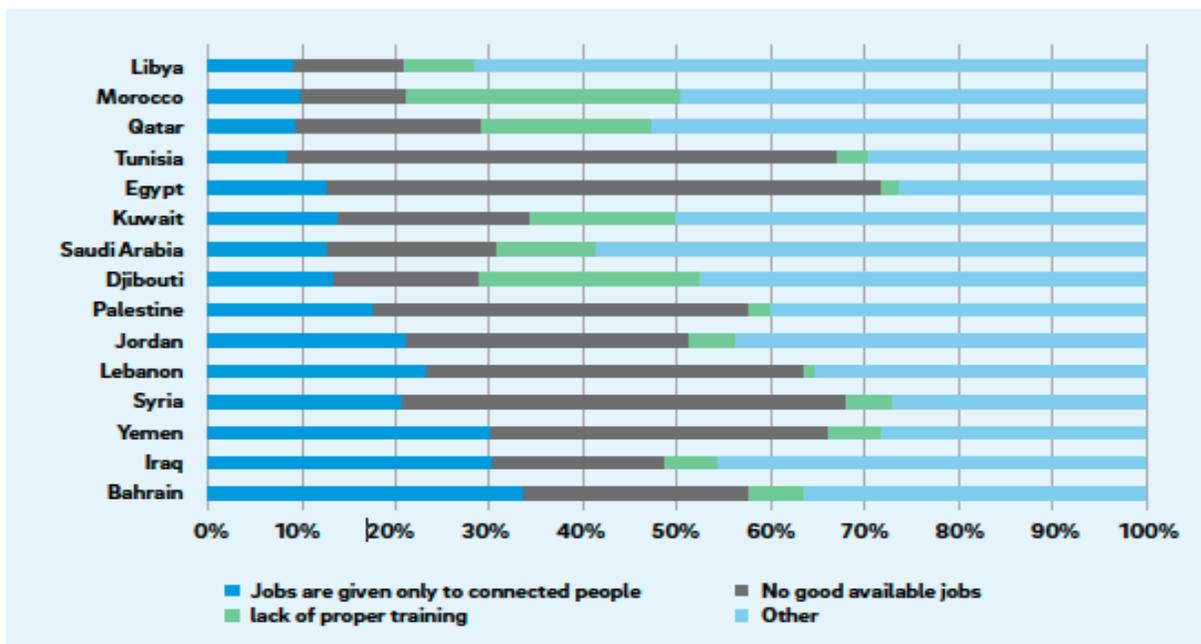
Source; UNDP, *Arab Human Development Report 2016: Youth and the prospects for human development in changing reality*, Table 1.1 and Figure 8.7b, http://www.arabstates.undp.org/content/rbas/en/home/library/huma_development/arab-human-development-report-2016--youth-and-the-prospects-for-/.

Figure Twenty-Three: Overdependence on State Employment and Perceptions of the Reasons for Unemployment

Youth unemployment rate (percent of total labor force ages 15–24, modelled ILO estimate), 1991– 2013



Perceptions of youth on the constraints to obtaining a job, selected Arab countries, 2013



Source: World Bank 2014b.

Source; UNDP, Arab Human Development Report 2016: Youth and the prospects for human development in changing reality, Table 1.1, http://www.arabstates.undp.org/content/rbas/en/home/library/huma_development/arab-human-development-report-2016--youth-and-the-prospects-for-/. Figure 3.2 and Figure 8.1.

Extremism and Western Fears, Prejudices, and Alienation

There is a separate, but related, set of problems in dealing with Muslim minority populations in Europe, the U.S., and other countries with different dominant religions and cultural patterns. Muslims often suffer from both religious and racial prejudices, and face the same discrimination that other waves of immigrants have faced in the past.

Unfortunately, it only takes a few terrorist acts in the name of Islamic extremism to have a massive impact on U.S. and European public opinion and turn such prejudices into fear and rejection. Past attacks outside the Muslim world have shown that the end result can be the alienation of non-Muslims and broad hostility to Islam, which in turn helps create of forces that encourage a small minority of Muslims in the West and non-Muslim countries to become violent extremists.

Figure Twelve and the previous polling data have shown that the numbers of actual extremist fighters are limited and that most Muslims do not support Islamist extremist views of Islam or the extremist use of violence. Exaggerated fears and false perceptions, however, can all too easily become the reality

Regardless of the actual numbers involved—and of that fact so few Moslems support Islamic extremist ideology or act in support of such movements—it only takes small numbers of extremist attacks in western and non-Muslim states to polarize Western opinion against native-born Muslims, immigrants and refugees, and visiting businessmen, students and tourists.

Moreover, the more the United States and other outside countries support largely Moslem countries and governments in fight Islamic extremism, the greater the incentive Islamic extremist movements will have to use terrorism to divide the U.S., Europe, and outside powers from Moslem states and to provoke anger and violence between Moslems and non-Moslems.

Wherever Islamic extremism gets a secure foothold in largely Islamic states, or even becomes a major source of violence and insurgency, it creates networks of recruiting and indoctrination that reach out into other countries, that attract volunteers and would be fighters, and create cadres that extremist groups can use. The more the U.S. and European aid in Muslim counterterrorism and counterinsurgency efforts, the more incentives that Islamic terrorist movements have to use such assets to carry out strikes in the West and to attempt to separate the West from Islam, and undermine popular support for Western strategic partnerships with largely Muslim states.

The Trump Administration and all of the non-Muslim governments fight Islamic terrorism need to understand, however, that measures like banning Muslims, registering Muslims, excessive counterterrorism actions, the expulsion of legitimate refugees, and careless rhetoric about Islam weakens U.S., European, and other outside support for the fight against Islamic terrorism in the largely Moslem states where that fight is most important, and most needs to be won.

At the same time, it serves to encourage Moslem hostility toward the U.S. and its non-Moslem allies inside the Moslem countries extremists most want to control. Moreover, major victories against movements like ISIS do not put an end to extremism, they disperse key figures and surviving fighters—many of which return to non-Muslim countries. this creates new cadres with formal training and/or experience in the fighting in Muslim states where Islamic extremist have propaganda centers, sanctuaries, and ongoing insurgencies.

Such measures also combine with Islamic extremist use of the Internet and other forms of social networking to help polarize a few individual Muslims and non-Muslims who lack such ties to

extremism. This leads to “lone wolf” attacks by largely self-indoctrinated individuals, some born as citizens of the U.S. and other non-Muslim countries. Most either fail or produce limited bursts of nearly random violence, but again, even limited successes and casualties produce major outbursts of fear and anger and create climate of broad distrust of Muslims and Islam. Serious successes have even more impact.

Figure Twenty-Four illustrates some of the risks involved, although it also presents the critical problems that the horizontal axis does not show the number of volunteers involved. It is based on a report in the *Washington Post* of a study by German authorities that covered German volunteers to ISIS and that was reported by the German newspaper *Die Welt*.²⁶

The fact such volunteers are returning will create at least a limited threat, and the German study found that only 10 percent of the returnees to Germany were disillusioned with extremist ideology, and that 8 percent might have returned to Germany just to recover from being on the battlefield and would try to return to Syria and Iraq. Some 48 percent remained committed to extremist ideology and stayed friendly with other extremists. Moreover, local mosques were often more of a problem in the West than in many Muslim states. Most of those who left for Syria or Iraq were reported to have been radicalized by friends or individuals they met in mosques or in Islamic seminars.”²⁷

What is also striking, however, are the limited numbers involved. The same study found only of 784 Germans who joined violent extremist groups in Iraq and Syria to interview. The number of fighters peaked in the third quarter of 2014, but then dropped sharply, and only a handful left Germany after ISIS began to suffer serious reversals in Syria and Iraq. Only 275 Germans were known to have returned to Germany and most did so in 2013 and 2014. Rather than try to create new cadres in Germany, ISIS seems to have executed at least some for trying to leave Syria and Iraq.²⁸

Various media reports on returnees to France, Belgium, and Russia are far more ambiguous, and the number of attacks in the U.S. from Muslims and other Americans who have never left the U.S. for any contact with extremists still serve as a warning. There will be further attacks for years to come, and successful fights against extremists in the Muslim world may lead to more attacks outside it.

This does not, however, mean the U.S. or any other largely non-Muslim state should try to bar Muslims or limit contact with and alliances within the Muslim world. It means that every effort should be made to improve vetting and screening with minimal intrusion on both an international and internal level, that effective homeland defense and coordination between states in tracking suspect individuals and actions is critical, and that largely non-Muslim states must do everything possible to build popular understanding of Islam and the real nature of the threat, counter efforts at extremist indoctrination, and reduce the causes of alienation between Muslims and non-Muslim in their own countries.

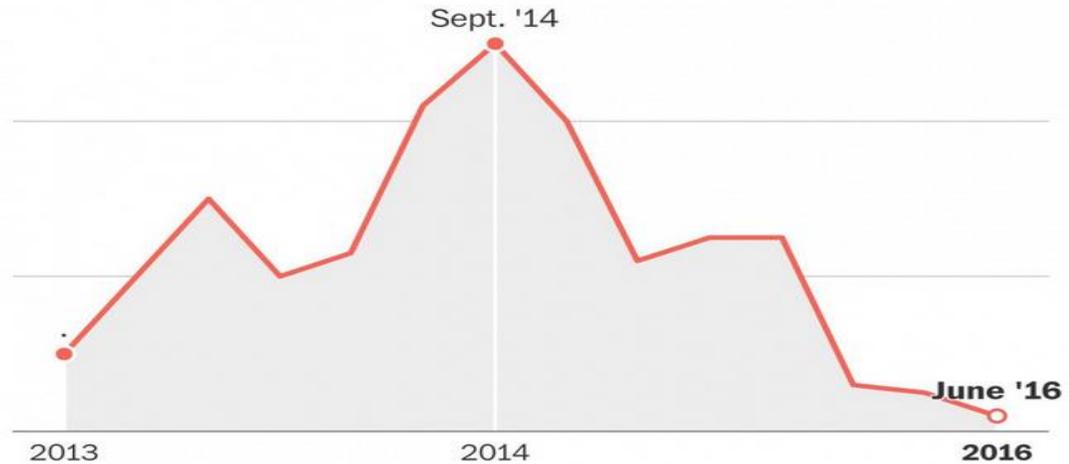
The U.S. and other non-Muslim states must learn to recognize the grim reality that some levels of Islamic extremist terrorism are inevitable even in the face of the most stringent measures, and the more the United States and other non-Muslim powers over-react, the greater the incentive to carry out such strikes. At the same time, the less chance the United States and other non-Muslim powers have of making their own Muslim populations partners in counterterrorism efforts and working support the fight against extremism in largely Muslim states.

Letting Islamic extremists turn counterterrorism in non-Muslim countries into measures that overreact out of fear and hatred makes every terrorist attack a victory for movements like Al Qaeda and ISIS. The solution is to mix the most advanced counterterrorism methods possible with an active outreach to native Muslims.

Figure Twenty-Four: Illustrating the Correlation Between Attacks on ISIS and the Flow of Potential Terrorists Back to Their Home Countries,

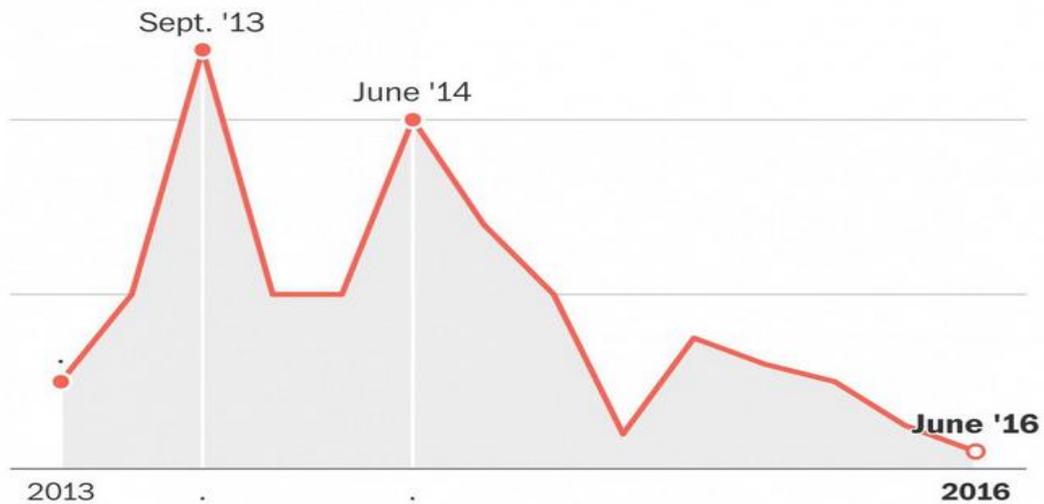
Number of foreign fighters leaving Germany

Fewer people are joining militant groups in Syria and Iraq



Source: German authorities

Number of foreign fighters returning to Germany



Source: German authorities

Conclusions

The preceding analysis has shown that Islamic extremism is a critical threat that dominates global terrorism and is the key source of broader violence within the MENA region. It has also shown that the United States needs to fundamentally rethink key aspects of its struggle against terrorism and Islamic extremism.

The United States has made great progress in improving its homeland defenses and international counterterrorism efforts. It has restructured its security partnerships with largely Muslim states to help them give the same emphasis to counterterrorism that they have given to military security. The United States is also making major progress in defeating the ability of ISIS to hold territory, act as a protostate, provide sanctuary for training fighters, and ISIS's efforts to widen its grasp and number of affiliates.

At the same time, far too much of the U.S. effort is now centered on the immediate threat from ISIS, and the external threat it poses to the U.S. homeland and Europe. Far too few in the United States understand the importance of the strategic partnerships the U.S. has forged with largely Muslim states, the fact that the primary fight with Islamic extremism is inside Muslim states, and that it is a fight for the future of Islam—rather than the limited threat it poses to faiths and countries outside.

The threat of Islamist terrorism within the United States and Europe has been all too real, but it has only been a minor aspect of a far more serious series of threats it poses within the Islamic world. The fight is primarily a fight between moderate governments and popular majorities committed to Islam's traditional values and extremists seeking to use almost any form of violence, and mix of terrorism and asymmetric warfare, to seize power. It is “clash *within* a civilization” and not a “clash *between* civilizations.”

The United States, Europe, and other non-Muslim states cannot defeat terrorism or the broader threat posed by Islamic extremism by trying to isolate themselves from Muslim countries, or treating Muslims as if violent Islamic extremists were more than a tiny minority of Muslims. Islam is growing too quickly, and is far too important a force within the world. Polls show that the vast majority of Muslims oppose extremist ideology and violence. Most Muslim governments are key partners in the fight against extremism and terrorism, as well as key security partners in dealing with other threats.

The key challenge to the United States is to revitalize its security partnerships, work with largely Muslim states, and develop better collective approaches to both the threat of extremism and other threats like those posed by Iran. The United States needs to show it can act decisively and is a partner that its partners can trust. At the same time, the United States must work with its Muslim security partners to help them address their own failings in developing effective counters to extremism, better efforts at collective defense, and their failure to fully address the causes of Islamic extremism.

Both the West and Muslim states have also focused too narrowly on the symptoms of Islamic extremism rather than curing the disease. Movements like ISIS, Al Qaida, and the Taliban are the symptoms of the disease of extremism, and not the cause.

Far too little attention is still being given to key civil trends and problems within a steadily expanding Islamic world. These problems have been the key causes of Islamic violence and

extremism, and the political upheavals within largely Islamic states that began in 2011. They include sharp population pressures, failed governance and corruption, ethnic and sectarian division, grossly inadequate economic development, massive unemployment and dead-end careers, and related issues that can feed extremism and violence for decades to come.

The United States—and both its Muslim and non-Muslim allies—need to focus on the fact that extremist violence can be contained and defeated in detail, but no lasting victory is possible until the causes of extremism are addressed as well as the fight against extremist movements. In practice, the forces that now divide the Islamic world will almost certainly make the fight against Islamic extremism part of a long struggle that will go on long after ISIS is defeated in Iraq and Syria. A struggle that will involve dealing with new movements and broader tensions between Sunni and Shiites and other minority sects.

The United States and Europe also need to address the forces that alienate Muslims in their own countries, and drive a tiny minority to violence. This cannot be done by excluding Muslims from entering their territory, letting prejudice and fear dominate security policies, and confusing the true teachings and history of Islam with extremism. Doing this achieves the very goal that extremist movements have in using terrorism: isolating Muslims from the rest of the world and pushing moderate Muslims towards extremism. The key must be better vetting, better cooperation with the governments in Muslim states in vetting and security procedures, and mobilizing the support of moderate Muslims in the United States and Europe. Partnership, not prejudice, is the answer.

¹ U.S. State Department, Country Reports on Terrorism, 2015, [National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism: Annex of Statistical Information \[PDF version\]](#) [Terrorism Deaths, Injuries and Kidnappings of Private U.S. Citizens Overseas in 2015](#), April 2016.

² Institute for Economics and Peace. *Global terrorism Index 2016*, 2016 <https://www.google.com/search?q=institute+for+economics+and+peace+global+terrorism+index&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8>.

³ UNDP, *Arab Human Development Report 2016: Youth and the prospects for human development in changing reality*, Figure 1.7, http://www.arabstates.undp.org/content/rbas/en/home/library/huma_development/arab-human-development-report-2016--youth-and-the-prospects-for/.

⁴ Iraq Body Count, <https://www.iraqbodycount.org/database/>, accessed 21 November 2016.

⁵ Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casualties_of_the_Syrian_Civil_War

⁶ UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, *Survey of Economic and Social Developments in the Arab Region 2015-2016*, November 2016, pp. 6-7.

⁷ UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, *Survey of Economic and Social Developments in the Arab Region 2015-2016*, November 2016, pp. 83-85.

⁸ UNDP, *Arab Human Development Report 2016: Youth and the prospects for human development in changing reality*, Section 1.4, http://www.arabstates.undp.org/content/rbas/en/home/library/huma_development/arab-human-development-report-2016--youth-and-the-prospects-for/.

⁹ UNDP, *Arab Human Development Report 2016: Youth and the prospects for human development in changing reality*, Section 8.1.2, http://www.arabstates.undp.org/content/rbas/en/home/library/huma_development/arab-human-development-report-2016--youth-and-the-prospects-for/.

¹⁰ Björn Rother, Gaëlle Pierre, Davide Lombardo, Risto Herrala, Priscilla Toffano, Erik Roos, Greg Auclair, and Karina Manasseh “The Economic Impact of Conflicts and the Refugee Crisis in the Middle East and North Africa,” IMF Staff Discussion Note, SDN/16/08, September 2016, p. 6.

¹¹ Björn Rother, Gaëlle Pierre, Davide Lombardo, Risto Herrala, Priscilla Toffano, Erik Roos, Greg Auclair, and Karina Manasseh “The Economic Impact of Conflicts and the Refugee Crisis in the Middle East and North Africa,” IMF Staff Discussion Note, SDN/16/08, September 2016, p. 6.

¹² Source: UNDP, *Arab Human Development Report 2016: Youth and the prospects for human development in changing reality*, Section 8.1.2, http://www.arabstates.undp.org/content/rbas/en/home/library/huma_development/arab-human-development-report-2016--youth-and-the-prospects-for/.

¹³ Björn Rother, Gaëlle Pierre, Davide Lombardo, Risto Herrala, Priscilla Toffano, Erik Roos, Greg Auclair, and Karina Manasseh “The Economic Impact of Conflicts and the Refugee Crisis in the Middle East and North Africa,” IMF Staff Discussion Note, SDN/16/08, September 2016, pp. 6-7.

¹⁴ https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/Results.aspx?start_yearonly=2010&end_yearonly=2015&start_year=&start_month=&start_day=&end_year=&end_month=&end_day=&asmSelect0=&perpetrator=20029&perpetrator=20030&perpetrator=20493&perpetrator=20522&perpetrator=20032&perpetrator=40325&perpetrator=20033&perpetrator=20496&

¹⁵ EIA, World Oil Transit Chokepoints, November 10, 2014, <https://www.eia.gov/beta/international/regions-topics.cfm?RegionTopicID=WOTC>.

¹⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, International Data Base, <https://www.census.gov/population/international/data/idb/informationGateway.php>.

¹⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, International Data Base, <https://www.census.gov/population/international/data/idb/informationGateway.php>.

¹⁸ Pew Research Center, *The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050*, April 2, 2015, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/>.

¹⁹ Pew Research Center, *The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050*, April 2, 2015, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/>.

²⁰ Pew Research Center, *The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050*, April 2, 2015, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/>, p. 77.

²¹ Pew Research Center, *The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050*, April 2, 2015, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/>.

²² Pew Research Center, Michael Lipka, *Muslims and Islam: Key findings in the U.S. and around the World*, December 7, 2015, p. 4. Also see Michael Lipka, *Muslims and Islam: Key findings in the U.S. and around the World*, July 22, 2016, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/07/22/muslims-and-islam-key-findings-in-the-u-s-and-around-the-world/>.

²³ Mark Tessler, Michael Robbins and Amaney Jamal, *What do ordinary citizens in the Arab world really think about the Islamic State?*, Washington Post, July 29, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/07/27/what-do-ordinary-citizens-in-the-arab-world-really-think-about-the-islamic-state/>, and <http://cpsblog.isr.umich.edu/?p=1541>.

²⁴ UNDP, *Arab Human Development Report 2016: Youth and the prospects for human development in changing reality*, http://www.arabstates.undp.org/content/rbas/en/home/library/huma_development/arab-human-development-report-2016--youth-and-the-prospects-for-/.

²⁵ UNDP, *Arab Human Development Report 2016: Youth and the prospects for human development in changing reality*, Table 1.1, http://www.arabstates.undp.org/content/rbas/en/home/library/huma_development/arab-human-development-report-2016--youth-and-the-prospects-for-/.

²⁶ Rick Noack, " Many Islamic State recruits who have returned to Europe remain committed to militant ideology, report says," *Washington Post*, November 29, 2016.

²⁷ Rick Noack, " Many Islamic State recruits who have returned to Europe remain committed to militant ideology, report says," *Washington Post*, November 29, 2016.

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