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Ethnicity, Tribalism, and Pluralism in the Middle East and North Africa: Solutions to Conflict?

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Scholars, policy pundits, policymakers, and journalists have identified any number of reasons for a crisis in the Middle East and North Africa that, starting with the 2011 popular revolts, has swept the region; toppled leaders in four countries – Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen; prompted Saudi-led military interventions in Bahrain and Yemen; ignited brutal insurgencies and wars in Syria, Iraq and Libya; and sparked the rise of the Islamic State (IS) in Syria and Iraq, and the expansion of its territorial reach to the Gulf and Africa. Identifying the root causes of the crisis that is shaking the roots of long-standing autocratic, un-democratic rule in the region, irrespective of whether regimes are monarchies or republics, is key to mapping out solutions, particularly ones that hold out hope for pluralism and respect for human, social, economic, cultural, and ethnic rights. Complicating the identification of root causes is the fact that analysts and policymakers were caught off guard by the challenges to autocracy and the Middle East and North Africa's long-standing nation state order, as well as the emergence of simmering ethnic, tribal and sectarian politics as centrifugal forces.[1]

Turkish Scholar Sener Akturk argues moreover that, on the basis of case studies of Turkey, Algeria and Pakistan, Muslim-majority nations established with a secularist ideology have the potential for struggles over values including pluralism and human rights, between secularists, who are more prone towards universal principles and Islamists, and that these struggles are built at independence into their very nature. These states were "founded on the basis of an Islamic mobilization against non-Muslim opponents but having successfully defeated these non-Muslim opponents, their political elites chose a secular and monolingual nation-state model for these countries, which led to significant and recurrent challenges to the state in the form of Islamist and ethnic separatist movements. Secular nationalism faces a structural and path-dependent crisis of legitimacy in these countries because of what could be described as a historical or "genetic" disjuncture located at the very origins of these nation-states," Akturk wrote.[2]

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[1] F. Gregory Gause III, "Why Middle East Studies Missed the Arab Spring, The Myth of Authoritarian Stability," Foreign Affairs, July/Augist 2011, http://www.foreignaffairs.com/issues/2011/90/4

[2] Sener Akturk, "Religion and Nationalism: Contradictions of Islamic Origins and Secular Nation-Building

Further troubling the waters is the rise of a public and private anti-terrorism industry[3] that sees human rights as second to ensuring security and safety; has a vested interest in couching the problem in terms of law enforcement and counter-terrorism rather than notions of alienation, marginalization, socio-economic disenfranchisement, youth aspirations and rights; is abetted by autocratic Middle Eastern and North African regimes that define any form of dissent as terrorism;[4] and is supported by a public opinion that buys into support of autocrats and some degree of curtailing of rights as a trade-off for security.

Analysts and policymakers have identified a range of causes for the breakdown of the traditional order in the Middle East and North Africa, ranging from a desire for greater freedom and social justice[5] to the fragility of post-colonial regional states as a result of autocratic failure to engage in nation rather than regime building that gave rise to ethnic, tribal and sectarian strife,[6] to inherent flaws in colonial border arrangements at the time of the demise of the Ottoman Empire such as the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Treaty of Sevres.[7] All of those notions contain kernels of truth but they have contributed to it becoming common place to pay lip service to the need to tackle root causes of the crisis in the Middle East, and that can mean almost anything. Many also merely embrace notions that are crucial to creating an environment conducive to respect of pluralism and human rights.

Putting One's Money Where One's Mouth Is

Yet, translating the need to tackle root causes into policy is proving difficult, primarily because it is based on a truth that has far-reaching consequences for every member of the international community no matter how close or far they are from IS's current borders. It involves governments putting their money where their mouth is and changing long-standing, ingrained policies at home that marginalize, exclude, stereotype and stigmatize

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in Turkey, Algeria, and Pakistan," Social Science Quarterly, Vol. 96:3, p. 778-806

[3] John Mueller, Overblown: How Politicians and the Terrorism Industry Inflate National Security Threats, and Why We Believe Them, (New York: Free Press, 2009) / Glenn Greenwald, "The sham "terrorism expert" industry," Salon, August 16, 2012, http://www.salon.com/2012/08/15/the_sham_terrorism_expert_industry/ Paul Harris, "How private firms have cashed in on the climate of fear since 9/11," The Guardian, September 5, 2011, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/sep/05/private-firms-fear-9-11

[4] Sharri Markson, "UK deal to back Saudi Arabia for UN Human Rights Council exposed," The Australian, September 29, 2015, http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/uk-deal-to-back-saudi-arabia-for-un-human-rights-council-exposed/story-e6frg6n6-1227547936664 / Glen Carey, "A Marriage on the Rocks? Saudis Look Beyond U.S. After Iran Deal," Bloomberg, July 30, 2015, http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-07-29/a-marriage-on-the-rocks-saudis-look-beyond-u-s-after-iran-deal / Steven A. Cook, ´ The U.S.-Egypt Strategic Dialogue: Drift Along the Nile," From the Potomac to the Euphrates, Council of Foreign Relations, July 29, 2015, http://blogs.cfr.org/cook/2015/07/29/the-u-s-egypt-strategic-dialogue-drift-along-the-nile/

[5] Sheri Berman, "The Promise of the Arab Spring," Foreign Affairs, January/February 2013, https://www.foreignaffairs.org/articles/libya/2012-12-03/promise-arab-spring

[6] Center for International and Regional Studies, "Fragile Politics, Weak States in the Greater Middle East (Doha: Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Doha, 2014) / Bassam Tibi, The Simultaneity of the Unsimultaneous: Old Tribes and Imposed Nation-State in the Modern Middle East," in Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East, edited by Philip S. Khoury and Joseph Kostiner, 127-151, Berkley: University of California Press, 1990

[7] Nick Danforth, "Forget Sykes-Picot. It's the Treaty of Sèvres That Explains the Modern Middle East," Foreign Policy, August 10, 2015, http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/08/10/sykes-picot-treaty-of-sevres-modern-turkey-middle-east-borders-turkey/

significant segments of society; emphasize security at the expense of freedoms that encourage healthy debate; and in more autocratic states that are abetted by the West, reduce citizens to obedient subjects through harsh repression and adaptations of religious belief to suit the interests of rulers.

The result is a vicious circle: government policies often clash with the state or regime's professed values. As a result, dividing lines sharpen as already marginalized, disenfranchised or discriminated segments of society see the contradiction between policies and values as hypocritical and re-confirmation of the basis of their discontent. Western nations, for example, in the fall of 2015, deferred to Saudi Arabia's objections to an investigation by the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) into human rights violations by all sides during the Saudi-led military intervention in Yemen in which thousands of civilians were killed.[8] Media reports documented, a day prior to the Western cave-in, a British pledge to support Saudi Arabia, one of the world's foremost violators of basic human rights and purveyors of sectarianism, in the Council.[9] The kingdom, at the same time, objected to references to gay rights in the United Nations' newly formulated Sustainable Development Goals.[10]

Creating a policy framework that is conducive to an environment in the Middle East and North Africa that would favour pluralism and respect of human rights and counter the appeal of jihadism and emerging sectarian-based nationalism is not simply a question of encouraging and supporting voices in the region, first and foremost those of youth, or of revisiting assumptions of Western foreign policies and definitions of national security. It involves fostering inclusive national identities that are capable of accommodating ethnic, sectarian and tribal sub-identities as legitimate and fully accepted sub-identities in Middle Eastern and North African, as well as Western countries, and changing domestic policies in the West towards minorities, refugees and migrants.

Tribalism Meets Modernity

Tribal and sectarian identities and loyalty have been reinforced in Middle Eastern and North African nations as the fragility of nation states becomes increasingly evident and the future of nation states like Syria and Iraq in their post-colonial forms becomes ever more uncertain. Those identities are strengthened by youth bulges that see little prospect for social and economic opportunity and participation in politics against a backdrop of rising education levels. As a result, national identity is often an amorphous concept that positions the tribe with its traditional support mechanisms as a more responsive social and political entity. This trend is furthered by youth's greater access to information through the Internet. Educated and Internet-savvy youth are conscious of vast income differences in their country and the failure of governments to provide public goods and services. Mounting frustrations drive calls for an end to corruption and greater rights.

The persistence of tribalism is evident in hiring policies in various Middle Eastern and North African countries that officially adhere to non-discriminatory policies but take into

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[8] Nick Cumming-Bruce, "Saudi Objections Halt U.N. Inquiry of Yemen War," The New York Times, September 30, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/01/world/middleeast/western-nations-drop-push-for-un-inquiry-into-yemen-conflict.html?ref=middleeast&_r=0

[9] Markson, "UK Deal to Back Saudi Arabia"

[10] Associated Press, "Saudi Arabia Protests Inclusion Of Gay Rights In UN Development Agenda," September 27, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/saudi-arabia-protests-inclusion-of-gay-rights-in-un-development-agenda_560841bbe4b0af3706dcaafe

account tribal affiliation. It also emerges in low tribal inter-marriage rates and official government emphasis on the concept of tribal values that focus on maintaining peace, enforcing order, protecting the weak, honouring authority, ensuring an equitable hearing and enforcing justice. Cultural events promoted by governments reinforce the trend towards tribalism.[11] Saudi TV's popular poetry contest, Shaer al-Milyon, The Million's Poet, features exclusively tribal contenders whose participation raises their tribes' profile.[12] Camel races and beauty contests serve a similar purpose. The emphasis on tribal values and culture is part of a larger focus on heritage intended to cement weak national identities.

Renewed emphasis on tribalism has forced tribes to redefine themselves in a 21st century world in which the issues they confront are no longer access to land and water but social and economic development as well as political stability. It involves striking a balance between being part of a national state and accommodating regional differences that often emulate tribal lines. Ironically, one of the most powerful national symbols that transcends tribal and other affiliations often is the national soccer team. "We all support the national team irrespective of who we are," said a young Saudi.[13]

"Young people are finding living conditions harsh and they are asking, where has the money gone? The younger generation has started to use social media and it is they that will cause human rights problems, as they want to be part of government decision-making. It is the young people who are going back to the tribes because they cannot see anything to be proud about in central government. The older generation is content with the government but they are richer than their children will ever be and have benefited more from the country's development of the last 40 years," said a young Saudi.[14] "People are suddenly doing their family trees and looking for their origins. Their family lineages are being revived and they have family diwaniyyat (gatherings) every week with all the family who can come. This is happening right across Saudi Arabia, not just in the Hejaz. Tribalism is back now," added another Saudi.[15]

To accommodate the trend and ensure that it strengthens rather than weakens national identity and promotes greater identification with the state, youth across the Middle East and North Africa are agitating, to various degrees, for more inclusive governance, by introducing free and fair elections, elevating the fight against corruption, and adopting more equitable social and economic policies.[16] This is particularly true in the Gulf states and countries like Syria and Iraq, whose future national borders are in question as a result of civil war that stems from the fragility of a state formed on the colonial legacy of minority rule. The same issues minus tribalism are prevalent in countries like Egypt, a country with a millennial history and a strong sense of national identity.

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[11] Shelagh Weir, A Tribal Order: Politics and Law in the Mountains of Yemen, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 80-83

[12] http://www.livehd.ae/shaer.html

[13] Interview with the author March 21, 2013

[14] Caroline Montagu. 2015. Civil Society in Saudi Arabia: The Power and Challenges of Association, Chatham House, March, http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/field/field_document/20150331SaudiCivil.pdf

[15] *Ibid.* Montagu

[16] Multiple interviews by the author in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait, Oman, Iran, Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, Iraq, Palestine, and Tunisia in the years 2008-2015

Northern Iraq exemplifies the significant setbacks the Middle East and North Africa has suffered as a result of sectarian policies by states and non-state actor and the scars of war. A Yazidi mechanic shop owner, who in 2014 survived the slaughter and mass deportation of members of his sect, Ibrahim Hajj returned in mid-2015 to his abandoned village of Sinouni. His return was to be short-lived. Unwilling to contemplate the return of his Arab neighbours on whom his business depended, Hajj was opting to again become a refugee. "If they (the Arabs) try to come back, and we don't have weapons to kill them, we will tear them apart with our teeth and nails. I haven't made a single cent since I came back — with them gone, I have no customers. I have to go back to the refugee camps," he said.[17] The picture repeats itself in Sunni Muslim towns like Rabea that are populated by tribes that supported the Kurds in their fight against IS. Authorities in the autonomous Kurdish region of northern Iraq have yet to connect the town to the power grid. Deep-seated distrust between Arabs and Kurds has replaced once close communal ties. A former Sunni Muslim policeman was rebuffed when he went to check on a Yazidi co-worker. "All of you Muslims are Isis," the policeman was told.[18]

Source: Financial Times

Increased sectarianism and tribalism have significant consequences for stability, national security, pluralism and respect for human rights, particularly in countries whose armed forces are organized along tribal or ethno-religious lines. The potential risk involved is evident in the embattled militaries of Syria, Iraq and Yemen, and built into the dual structures of countries like Saudi Arabia that has a regular armed force tasked with protecting the kingdom's territorial integrity and a tribal-based national guard that builds on tribes like the Al-Qahtani, Al-Utaibi and the Anizah, for the protection of the regime.[19] Middle Eastern and North African governments prefer to divert or prevent mushrooming anti-government dissent by encouraging tribal, ethnic or sectarian friction. One Saudi

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[17] Erika Solomon, "Arabs pay the price after Kurds drive Isis out," Financial Times, September 30, 2015, http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/c0732b04-65b9-11e5-a28b-50226830d644.html
[18] Solomon, "Arabs pay the price"
[19] James M. Dorsey. 2014. Introduction in Jean-Francois Daguzan and Stephane Valter (eds), Armees et Societe, Le Printemps Arabes Entre revolution et Reaction, Paris: Editions ESKA, p. 13-31 / Interview by the author with tribal leaders in 2001 and 2002

argued that the strategy would fail in the kingdom "because the army and the national guard are tribal. People say there will be no more tribal fighting but it is understood there was fighting near Al-Ha'il earlier in 2014 and trouble in Jouf and Tabuk."[20]

Closely related to the issue of tribalism as well as rights, are differing concepts of justice. Rather than notions of justice or in Arabic, *'adl 'adāla'*, that involve equality, inclusion, non-discrimination and fairness, Middle Eastern and North African tribal societies often employ concepts of *'adāt wa taqālīd*, or tribal customs and traditions to mediate issues of justice and injustice. *'Adat wa taqalid* involves traditions of customary rather than civil or Islamic law. One major difference is that justice in the Western sense of the word involves only parties to a dispute or conflict while tribal tradition can include parties' communities who may not have a direct material stake.[21]

In the case of the international community's effort to defeat IS, inclusiveness means, for example, that victory has to be secured as much in Raqqa and Mosul, IS's Syrian and Iraqi capitals, as in the dismal banlieues, run-down, primarily minority-populated, suburbs of French cities that furnish the group with its largest contingent of European foreign fighters;[22] the popular neighbourhoods in Tunisia that account for the single largest group of foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq;[23] Riyadh, seat of a government whose citizens account for the second largest number of foreign fighters and whose well-funded, decades-long effort to propagate a puritan, intolerant, interpretation of Islam has been a far more important feeding ground for jihadist thinking than the writings of militant Islamist thinkers like Sayyid Qutb;[24] and in Western capitals with Washington in the lead who view retrograde, repressive regimes like those of Saudi Arabia and Egypt as part of the solution rather than part of the problem.

Broadening the Debate

Focussing on root causes that are at the core of both the crisis and deteriorating, if not total disrespect of, human rights, means broadening scholarly and policy debate to concentrate not only on what amounts to applying Band-Aids that fail to halt the festering of open wounds but also to question assumptions made by the various schools of thought on how to solve the problem. The facts on the ground have already convincingly contradicted the notion that Western support of autocracy and military intervention primarily through air campaigns despite paying lip service to ideals of democracy and human rights could counter common enemies like IS. It has so far to produced only limited results. Respect for human rights has, in many Middle Eastern and North African nations, significantly deteriorated since the 2011 popular revolts and IS standing its ground a year into a US-led air campaign, a Russian bombing operation that began in the fall of 2015, and ground campaigns by the Iraqi government and the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.[25]

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[20] *Ibid.* Montagu

[21] Amr Abdalla, "Principles of Islamic Interpersonal Conflict Intervention", Journal of Law and Religion, Vol. 15 (Fall 2001), p. 151   184.

[22] Richard Barrett, Foreign Fighters in Syria, The Soufan Group, June 2014, http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/TSG-Foreign-Fighters-in-Syria.pdf

[23] Barett, "Foreign Fighters in Syria

[24] "Thomas Friedman, "Our Radical Islamic BFF, Saudi Arabia," The New York Times, September 2, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/02/opinion/thomas-friedman-our-radical-islamic-bff-saudi-arabia.html

[25] David Kilcullen, "We're Losing the War Against ISIS in Iraq," The National Interest, September 15, 2015, http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/we%E2%80%99re-losing-the-war-against-isis-iraq-13848

The group continues to advocate a regime that celebrates its rejection of pluralism and human rights and metes out relatively transparent yet brutal justice, and it poses a fundamental threat to the existence of post-colonial nation states as the world knew them, first and foremost Syria and Iraq, but ultimately also others like Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and Libya.

Yet, even a convincing defeat of IS would not solve the problem or promote notions of pluralism and respect of human rights. Al Qaeda was degraded, to use the language of the Obama administration. In the process, it weakened a jihadist force that, despite having no appreciation for concepts of pluralism and human rights, increasingly advocated a gradual approach to the establishment of its harsh interpretation of Islamic law in a bid to ensure public support.[26] Instead of reducing the threat of political violence, the largely military effort to defeat Al Qaeda produced ever more virulent forms of jihadism as embodied by IS. It may be hard to imagine anything more brutal than IS, but it is a fair assumption that defeating IS without tackling root causes would only lead to something that is even more violent and more vicious.

Nonetheless, defining repressive, autocratic rule and IS as the greatest threat to regional stability and security and the furthering of more liberal notions is problematic. In the case of IS, that definition elevates jihadism – the violent establishment of pan-Islamic rule based on narrow interpretations of Islamic law and scripture -- to the status of a root cause rather than a symptom and expression of a greater and more complex problem. It is an approach that focuses on the immediate nature of the threat and ways to neutralize it rather than on what sparked it. It also neglects the fact that the ideological debate in the Muslim world is to a large extent dominated by schools of thought that do not advocate more open, liberal and pluralistic interpretations of Islam.

That is where one real challenge lies. It is a challenge first and foremost to Muslims, but also to an international community that would give more liberal Muslim voices significant credibility if it put its money where its mouth is. Support for self-serving regimes and their religious supporters, as in the case of Saudi Arabia and Egypt, reduces the international community's choices to one between bad and worse, rather than to a palate of policy options that take a stab at rooting out the problem and its underlying causes.

To be sure, change and progress towards the embrace of pluralism and universal human rights will have to originate from within Middle Eastern and North African nations. Saudi and UAE efforts to target political Islam as such that have also resonated in the West, were articulated by former British Prime Minister Tony Blair. Blair argued against "a deep desire to separate the political ideology represented by groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood from the actions of extremists including acts of terrorism." He acknowledged that it was "laudable" to distinguish "between those who violate the law and those we simply disagree with" but warned that "if we're not careful, they also blind us to the fact that the ideology itself is nonetheless dangerous and corrosive; and cannot and should not be treated as a conventional political debate between two opposing views of how society should be governed."[27]

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[26] William McCants, The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy, and Doomsday Vision of the Islamic State, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2015), p. 47-73
[27] Tony Blair, "Why the Middle East Matters," The Office of Tony Blair, April 23, 2014, Why the Middle East Matters

On that basis, it is hard to see why Wahhabism, Saudi Arabia's puritan interpretation of Islam that is the well-spring of much of contemporary jihadist thinking, does not top the list of ideologies that are "dangerous and corrosive." Saudi Arabia, like the Islamic State, was born in a jihadist struggle that married Islamist warriors led by an 18th century jurist Mohammed Abdul Wahab, with the proto-kingdom's ruling Al Saud clan.

The failure of the 2011 popular revolts and the autocratic counterrevolution that they provoked, the rise of IS, increased repression and the region's deterioration of respect for basic freedoms constitutes a wake-up call for many in the Middle East and North Africa. It has fuelled a long-overdue debate among Arabs and Muslims about the kind of world they want to live in.

In an essay entitled 'The Barbarians Within Our Gates,' prominent Washington-based journalist Hisham Melhelm wrote: "The Arab world today is more violent, unstable, fragmented and driven by extremism — the extremism of the rulers and those in opposition — than at any time since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire a century ago... The promise of political empowerment, the return of politics, the restoration of human dignity heralded by the season of Arab uprisings in their early heydays — all has given way to civil wars, ethnic, sectarian and regional divisions and the reassertion of absolutism, both in its military and atavistic forms.... The jihadists of the Islamic State, in other words, did not emerge from nowhere. They climbed out of a rotting, empty hulk — what was left of a broken-down civilization." [28]

For his part, Turki al-Hamad, a liberal Saudi intellectual, questioned how Saudi religious leaders could confront the Islamic State's extremist ideology given that they promote similar thinking at home and abroad. Al-Hamad argued that the Saudi clergy was incapable of confronting the extremism of groups like the Islamic State "not because of laxness or procrastination, but because they share the same ideology."[29]

Neither Melhelm nor al-Hamad are Islamists. Yet, they reflect widespread soul-searching among Islamists and non-Islamists across the Arab world. Theirs is a debate that predates the rise of the Islamic State but has been pushed centre stage by jihadists, autocrats and misguided Western politicians alike. It is a debate that is at the core of tackling the root causes on which jihadist groups feed, and which in turn has become a primary alibi for autocrats to discount pluralism and greater freedoms. It is, however, also a debate that threatens to be squashed by a policy that focuses on military rather than political solutions and promotes status quo regimes whose autocracy chokes off opportunities for the venting of widespread discontent and anger, leaving violence and extremism as one of the few, if not the only, option to force change.

As a result, the Obama administration's alignment with the Middle East's counter-revolutionary forces and targeting of groups other than IS, risks identifying the US with efforts by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt to target political Islam as such. The three Arab nations have cracked down on non-violent groups like the Muslim Brotherhood. The UAE particularly has since called for an expansion of the campaign against the Islamic State to include all non-violent expressions of political Islam. The US alignment prevents it from adopting a policy that would seek to contain IS militarily while

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[28] Hisham Melhem, "The Barbarians Within Our Gates," Politico Magazine, September 18, 2014, http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/09/the-barbarians-within-our-gates-111116
[29] Al Arabiya, "Saudi Author Turki Al-Hamad: Islam Needs a Luther, a Calvin; Ideology of Most Clerics Is ISIS-Like," July 13, 2015, http://www.memritv.org/clip/en/5038.htm

focusing on removing the grievances on which the group feeds. It is a policy that is destined, at best, to provide a Band-Aid for a festering wound.

Medium-term Rather than Short-term
Moreover, in a globalized world, events in the Middle East and North Africa, and among minority populations elsewhere with roots in the region, often mutually reinforce one another. By the same token, there are no quick solutions or short cuts. The key is the articulation of policies that over the medium term can help generate an environment more conducive to more liberal change rather than the continuous opting for knee-jerk reactions to events and facts on the ground as was evident in Tunisia's response to a June 2015 attack on a tourist resort,[30] Kuwait's reaction to the bombing of a Shiite mosque at about the same time,[31] and France's answer to an almost simultaneous assault on its territory by a lone wolf.[32]

Tunisia deployed 1,000 armed policemen to tourist sites even as tourists left the country en masse, and closed 80 mosques suspected of hosting radical clerics; a move that was likely to push militants further underground.[33] Kuwait, which displayed a remarkable degree of inclusivity with Sunnis and Shias joining hands in their condemnation of the bombing of a Shiite mosque that left 27 people dead and more than 200 others wounded, looked at adoption of a stringent anti-terrorism law[34] while France is passing legislation that would authorise sweeping surveillance.[35] None of these measures address the sense of hopelessness and willingness to rebel that potentially pervades predominantly young Muslim minorities in Europe, and is reinforced by increased prejudice sparked by violence and brutality perpetrated by Muslim extremists. That hopelessness is matched by despair and existential fears among youth, minorities, and alienated sects in the Middle East and North Africa.

As a result, Al Qaeda's 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington DC, the 2011 Arab revolts, the rise of IS and lone wolf attacks like the assault in January 2015 on satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo in Paris as well as attacks in Paris, Ankara, Beirut, Tunisia and Kuwait, have served to undermine efforts at greater inclusiveness and assurance of equal rights and opportunity - such as Europe's pursuit of multiculturalism - and sparked violent counterrevolutionary efforts by Arab autocrats. The result has been, in the Middle East and North Africa, fractured states and increased

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[30] Jessica Elgot, "Deadly attack on Tunisia tourist hotel in Sousse resort," The Guardian, June 26, 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/26/tunisia-tourist-hotel-reportedly-attacked
[31] Al Jazeera, "Kuwait holds mass funeral for mosque attack victims," June 28, 2015, http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/06/kuwait-hold-mass-funeral-mosque-attack-victims-150627090813135.html
[32] Matthew Weaver and Haroon Siddique, "France attack: terror inquiry launched and suspect arrested – as it happened," The Guardian, June 27, 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2015/jun/26/suspected-terror-attack-at-french-factory-live-updates
[33] Erika Solomon, "Tunisia's poor neighbourhoods serve as supply line for jihadis," Financial Times, June 29, 2015, http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/675350b6-1e57-11e5-ab0f-6bb9974f25d0.html / Youssef Cherif, "The 3000: Why are Thousands of Tunisians Flocking to Daesh?," LSE Middle East Centre Blog, September 3, 2015, http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mec/2015/09/03/the-3000-why-are-thousands-of-tunisians-flocking-to-daesh/
[34] Middle East Eye, "Kuwait mulls new 'anti-terror' laws after mosque bombing," June 28, 2015, http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/kuwait-mulls-new-anti-terror-laws-after-mosque-bombing-1694868882
[35] Amar Toor, "France's sweeping surveillance law goes into effect," The Verge, July 24, 2015, http://www.theverge.com/2015/7/24/9030851/france-surveillance-law-charlie-hebdo-constitutional-court

repression that seemingly place pluralism and respect of human rights in the realm of wishful thinking. Autocratic and Western responses to jihadist attacks and propaganda play into the militants' hands by fuelling a sense of rejection among disenfranchised and marginalized youth as well as ethnic and religious minorities. All of that is fed by growing intolerance, suspicion of the other, stereotyping, and a feeling of not being welcome among minority groups, and it is strengthened by sectarian policies adopted by Middle Eastern and North African governments.

Ironically, US President George W. Bush's administration concluded, shortly after the 9/11 attacks, that Al Qaeda was as much a product of US support for autocratic Arab regimes as it was the result of politically bankrupt Arab leaders. The acknowledgement amounted to an admission of failure of a US policy designed to maintain stability in a key geostrategic and volatile part of the world and led to Bush's ill-fated initiative to promote democracy in the Middle East and North Africa.[36]

The argument in favour of pluralism and respect for human rights, as opposed to prioritization of security and criminalization of dissent as part of the survival strategy of Middle Eastern and North African regimes, was evident in responses to a video clip produced in 2014 by supporters of storied Moroccan soccer club Raja Club Athletic. At face value, the clip left little doubt about the fans' support of IS.[37] The clip shows fans of a club, that prides itself on its nationalist credentials dating back to opposition to colonial French rule and its reputation as the team of ordinary Moroccans, chanting: "Daesh, Daesh," the Arabic acronym for IS, and "God is Great, let's go on jihad."

The clip appeared to reaffirm IS's widespread emotional appeal to youth across the Middle East and North Africa rather than a willingness on the fans' part to actually become a foreign fighter in Syria or Iraq. To them, IS symbolized successful resistance for many who were disillusioned by the failure of popular revolts; the intransigence of autocratic regimes that fail to live up to their people's aspirations; the lack of prospects for economic advancement and political change; and the West's refusal to empower rebel groups opposed to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad as well as its perceived strengthening of Assad with its military campaign against IS, the foremost opposition to a regime that matches the jihadists in brutality.

The fans attempted to explain their pro-IS video by noting on the group's Facebook page with its 111,000 followers: "We are terrorists… Our goal is to bomb other clubs. We do not want land or oil, we want titles" below a mock picture of Islamic State fighters with the inscription, "Raja's Volunteer Championship." The supporters asserted elsewhere on their Facebook page that "we will not start to argue and beg people to believe that this is a sarcastic action and a joke." Some supporters dismissed the video as a public relations stunt. They insisted that they were demanding reform not radical change. To emphasize the point, the supporters posted two days after the appearance of the video, an image of Osama Bin Laden with the words: "Rest in Pieces Motherf*****r."[38]

The pro-pluralism and human rights argument as a way of solving conflict is also evident in the case of prominent Moroccan dissident rapper Mouad Belghouat, better known as Al

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[36] Richard N. Haas, "Towards Greater Democracy in the Muslim World," Council of Foreign Relations, December 4, 2002, http://www.cfr.org/religion/towards-greater-democracy-muslim-world/p5283
[37] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L9YJwdu5Wb0
[38] James M. Dorsey, "Soccer fan support for the Islamic State: Protest or a new generation of jihadists?," The Turbulent World of Middle East Soccer, October 4, 2014, http://mideastsoccer.blogspot.sg/2014/10/soccer-fan-support-for-islamic-state.html

Haqed, who was arrested, in 2014 on charges of having scalped game tickets, as he was entering a stadium to watch a soccer match. Al Haqed's music, like the chanting of pro-Islamic State slogans, reflected growing popular discontent and an increased willingness to challenge the government whom many see as having backed down on its promises for true political and economic reform.

The arrest occurred a day after he had mocked King Mohammed VI on Facebook because he passed a performing group of musicians on his way to Friday prayers. "In Islam, this would be highly disrespectful given the spiritual solemnity of Jumuah prayer, and an even bigger mistake to be made by the 'Commander of the Faithful' who claims part of the legitimacy of his rule from his religious status," wrote Moroccan blogger Zineb Belmkaddem[39].

"Hope for a more democratic Morocco is fading, as the makhzen (the ruling group around the king) went back to relying on its old ways, reassured by the 'success' of its systematic crackdown that is responsible for disorganizing groups of protestors through repression and propaganda. Slowly dismantling the February 20th protest movement over the past years, the regime seems to have learned nothing and has chosen to walk backwards to its dysfunctional comfort zone," Belmkaddem added, referring to Morocco's 2011 anti-government protests.

Speaking to The New York Times earlier in 2015, activist Moroccan Maouanne Morabit warned that "a major part of the political class refused to discuss in public real issues concerning the ills of our society, namely the role of the monarchy, respect for human rights, the distribution of wealth, and the separation of powers… The kingdom discredited the left, trade unions, civil society and now the Islamists. It will soon face a direct confrontation with the people, and it will no longer have any safety valves."[40]
By contrast to most reactions to political violence and expression of pro-jihadist sentiment, Norway's response to right-wing extremist Anders Behring Breivik's traumatic attacks in 2011 that killed 77 people stands as a model for how societies can and should uphold concepts of pluralism and human rights. Norway refrained from declaring war on terror, treated Breivik as a common criminal and refused to compromise on its democratic values. In doing so, Norway offered a successful example of refusing to stigmatise any one group in society by adopting inclusiveness rather than profiling and upholding the very values that autocrats and jihadists challenge.

Conclusion
The result of exclusively security-focussed approaches, coupled with the exploitation of economic opportunity by autocratic Middle Eastern and North African regimes and Western governments, is an increasingly insecure region in which the creation of pluralistic societies that honour human rights seems ever more distant. Said an Egyptian Islamist militant, whose non-violent anti-government activism is as much aimed at opposing the regime of general-turned-president Abdel Fattah Al Sisi as it is designed to persuade increasingly frustrated youth that there are alternatives to nihilistic violence: "The strategy of brutality, repression and restricting freedom has failed to impose subservience. It hasn't

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[39] Zineb Belmkaddem, Moroccan Rapper El Haqed – L7a9ed- Arrested again by Moroccan Authorities, زينب بلمقدم، بلوك 1، زنقة الحرية، حي الافتراضي ZINEB BELMKADDEM, May 19, 2014, http://belmkaddem.blogspot.com/2014/05/moroccan-rapper-el-haqed-l7a9ed.html
[40] Aida Alami, Morocco 's King Slow to Deliver on Pro-Democracy Vows, The New York Times, June 12, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/world/africa/moroccos-king-slow-to-deliver-on-pro-democracy-vows.html

produced solutions. Governments need to give people space. They need to prove that they are capable of addressing the problems of a youth that has lost hope. We have nothing to lose if they don't."[41] The Egyptian's inclinations pointed towards peaceful protest in favour of a more liberal society, albeit bound by Islamic morality codes; his options, however, left him little choice but to drift towards jihadism.

Creating the kind of options that would give the Egyptian militant real choices is easier said than done and unlikely to produce immediate results. It would, among others, have to involve:

- Recognition that the Middle East and North Africa are in the throes of a brutal process of change that is likely to play out over years. Attempting to halt the process is futile; nurturing it with policies that encourage non-violent, non-sectarian change - even if it means a redrawing of the region's map and regime change - will ultimately far better serve the reestablishment of regional peace and security and the creation of an environment conducive to pluralism and respect of human rights;

- Tying political, military and economic support to governments in the Middle East and North Africa to progress towards support of human rights and greater equality for minorities through the adoption of inclusive, non-sectarian, and non-repressive policies;

- A halt to the global propagation of intolerant ideologies by some Middle Eastern governments and state-sponsored groups such as Saudi Arabia's interpretation of Wahhabism that contrasts starkly with that of Qatar, the world's only other Wahhabi state;

- Abolition of sectarianism in state rhetoric;

- Recognition of minority rights;

- Reform of brutal police and security forces that are widely feared and despised;

- Granting of greater freedoms to ensure the existence of release valves for pent-up anger and frustration and the unfettered voicing of grievances;

- A crackdown on corruption;

- Reform of education systems that produce a mismatch between market demand and graduates' skills.

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[41] Interview with the author, March 2015