



AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

MAPPING THE DISCOURSE OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM  
IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

by  
BRIANNA LEE RYAN

A thesis  
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
to the Department of Political Studies and Public Administration  
of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences  
at the American University of Beirut

Beirut, Lebanon  
January 2021

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

MAPPING THE DISCOURSE OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM  
IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

by  
BRIANNA LEE RYAN

Approved by:



---

[Dr. Hiba Khodr, Associate Professor]  
[Political Studies and Public Administration]

Advisor



on behalf of Dr Tell

---

[Dr. Tariq Tell, Assistant Professor]  
[Political Studies and Public Administration]

Member of Committee



---

[Dr. Coralie Hindawi, Assistant Professor]  
[Political Studies and Public Administration]

Member of Committee

Date of thesis/dissertation defense: January 27, 2021

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

THESIS RELEASE FORM

Student Name:     
  Ryan  Brianna  Lee  
  Last  First  Middle

I authorize the American University of Beirut, to: (a) reproduce hard or electronic copies of my thesis; (b) include such copies in the archives and digital repositories of the University; and (c) make freely available such copies to third parties for research or educational purposes:

- As of the date of submission
- One year from the date of submission of my thesis.
- Two years from the date of submission of my thesis.
- Three years from the date of submission of my thesis.

             8/2/2021

Signature

Date

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to all the people, places, inspirations, challenges, and animals—especially the dogs—that crossed my path during this period of my life. The opportunity to attend graduate school has been a privilege that I do not take lightly.

This thesis was supported by the Nadim Makdisi Memorial Fund at the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, American University of Beirut.

# ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Brianna Lee Ryan for

Master of Arts

Major: Public Policy and International Affairs

Title: Mapping the Discourse of Violent Extremism in the United Arab Emirates

In the last decade, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has worked to establish itself as a global hub for Countering Violent Extremism (CVE). After the September 11, 2001 attacks on the U.S. World Trade Center, the Emirates moved swiftly to re-establish their image after being implicated as the financial and transit conduit for the hijackers. The Emirates remained a close ally in the US-led ‘War on Terror’ and an active participant in international CVE initiatives. Between 2010 and 2020, the Emirates has established over 15 ministries, forums, and institutions working in the field of counter violent extremism, passed four related laws, and hosted numerous high-profile events focused on CVE. Many of these policies encompass broad approaches to preventing violent extremism—part of a worldwide trend in emphasizing the importance of early interventions that stop the ‘radicalization’ process of individuals joining extremist groups.

The following thesis is based on seven interviews with experts working in the field of CVE in Abu Dhabi and Dubai, and on primary documents from state government and client institutions. Through a discourse analysis that examines the Emirates’ approach to CVE in its own words and interviews that provide context for the analysis, this investigation explores Emirati security in relation to violent extremism.

Looking at the relationship between power and discourse, it argues that the global discourses of terrorism—characterized by the ‘war on terror’ rhetoric—has been co-constituted through complex, intertwined global histories of economic accumulation and cultural transmission—structured by a post-colonial world order. It finds that the primary target of the Emirati CVE discourse is Islamist groups, predominantly, the Muslim Brotherhood. In addition, this study locates the ‘counterterrorist’ identity of the Emirati state and its core features: a model of ‘tolerance’, moderate Islam, and role as Middle East ‘visionary’. This research also explores possible implications of the UAE’s discourse on violent extremism in relation to domestic, regional, and global structures of power and constructions of security in the Persian Gulf. It suggests that, by appropriating elements of the global ‘war on terror’ rhetoric, the UAE is able to wield discourse as a symbolic technology with the aim of establish themselves at the top of a regional hierarchy, and delegitimizing domestic dissent.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   |    |
|---|----|
| ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....   | 1  |
| ABSTRACT.....   | 2  |
| ILLUSTRATIONS.....  | 6  |
| TABLES.....   | 7  |
| Chapter   |    |
| I. INTRODUCTION .....   | 8  |
| II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE                                |    |
| REVIEW .....  | 13 |
| A. Definitions and Legal Context.....                                   | 15 |
| B. A Critical Discourse-Based Model for Studying Violent Extremism..... | 19 |
| C. The ‘War on Terror’ rhetoric .....                                   | 24 |
| III. METHODOLOGY.....   | 27 |
| A. Data.....  | 27 |
| B. Analysis.....  | 31 |
| IV. SETTING THE CONTEXT .....   | 34 |
| A. The Politics, Economy, and Society of the United Arab Emirates.....  | 34 |
| 1. History and State Formation.....                                     | 35 |
| 2. Government .....   | 39 |
| 3. Society .....  | 41 |

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| 4. Economic Policy.....  | 44        |
| B. Security, Terrorism, and Countering Violent Extremism in the UAE..... | 46        |
| 1. Changing Security Dynamics.....                                       | 47        |
| 2. Regional Dynamics.....  | 49        |
| 3. The War on Islamists.....   | 51        |
| 4. Terrorism in the UAE.....   | 53        |
| 5. Counterterrorism and Countering Violent Extremism in the UAE.....     | 55        |
| 6. The Muslim Brotherhood and the UAE.....                               | 59        |
| <b>V. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION.....</b>                                   | <b>63</b> |
| A. Constructing Violent Extremism.....                                   | 64        |
| B. The UAE’s Counter-Extremist Identity.....                             | 67        |
| C. Narratives of Violent Extremism.....                                  | 71        |
| 1. Moderation.....   | 71        |
| 2. Tolerance.....  | 73        |
| 3. Ideology.....   | 74        |
| 4. The “root” of extremist thought.....                                  | 75        |
| D. Discussion.....   | 79        |
| 1. Extending the ‘war on terror’.....                                    | 80        |
| 2. Pirates, power, and policy.....                                       | 83        |
| 3. In the name of moderation.....  | 86        |
| 4. ‘Tolerance’ for what?.....  | 87        |



VI. CONCLUSION.....89  
APPENDIX INTERVIEW QUESTIONS .....91  
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....93

# ILLUSTRATIONS

## Figure

1. Labels associated with violent extremism .....65

## TABLES

### Table

1. Timeline of countering violent extremism initiatives in the UAE, 2010-2019 .....57
2. Elements of a counter-extremist identity .....68

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

A report released in 2015 by the Global Center on Cooperative Security asserted that the field of countering violent extremism is a “field that has risen to prominence in a manner disproportional to its achievements” (Romaniuk, 2015). Notably, this criticism comes from a think tank receiving funding to conduct research on countering violent extremism best practices. However, violent extremism, or terrorism by another name, is considered “one of the most serious threats to international peace and security” by the United Nations (UN) Security Council—who asserts that it “will not be defeated by military force, law enforcement measures, and intelligence operations alone,” emphasizing the need to address the conditions conducive to its spread (Resolution 2178 (2014), 2014). This recognition that preventative measures are equally integral to fighting terrorism has led to an influx of time and money spent on efforts to address the conditions that are thought to lead an individual to ‘radicalization’ in countries across the globe. These policies to prevent or counter violent extremism (CVE/PVE), while under the larger field of counterterrorism, have diverged from traditional security measures to incorporate a broad variety of interventions, overlapping with fields such as education, psychology, peacebuilding, and poverty alleviation. The evolution of these broad approaches coincides with an apparent expansion of what ‘terrorism’ is and how it can be stopped. According to the United Nations Secretary-General, violent extremism also “includes forms of ideologically motivated violence that falls short of constituting terrorist acts” (General Assembly of the United Nations, 2015, para. 4). In their comprehensive CVE literature

review, Nasser-Eddine et al. (2011) conclude that this ambiguity of this terminology suggests that CVE strategies are directly informed by how ‘violent extremism’ is conceptualized.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has emerged as a regional leader in countering violent extremism activities (Embassy of the United Arab Emirates, 2020a). Over the last decade, the UAE has launched numerous initiatives to counter violent extremism (Embassy of the United Arab Emirates, 2020c). Policies have included the creation of a Ministry of Tolerance, which promotes and monitors messages of tolerance and moderation in religious sermons, through public service campaigns and in education curricula. A Fatwa Council for issuing Islamic rulings was also established. Two laws have been passed in recent years, one criminalizing hatred and discrimination, and another imposing harsh sentences on any individual who supports or joins one of the UAE’s 83 designated terrorist organizations. Additionally, the UAE is home to Hedayah, the International Center of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism, and to the Sawab Center, a joint initiative with the United States (US) to counter extremist narratives online.

The UAE’s enthusiastic embrace of a preventative approach to countering terrorism appears to be following a global trend<sup>1</sup>. Interestingly, however, is the apparent paucity of terrorist incidents in the UAE. According to data compiled by the Institute for Economics and Peace for the 2020 Global Terrorism Index, the top five countries most impacted by terrorism are Afghanistan, Iraq, Nigeria, Syria, and Somalia. UAE ranks at number 135 with a score of 0.00—holding the lowest rank of any state included in the

---

<sup>1</sup> For example, see the numerous national strategies on countering violent extremism that have emerged in recent years, such as in Belgium, Lebanon, Macedonia, Slovakia, Jordan and Latvia.

index (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2020). The Emirates are not alone in their heightened focus on terrorism. Globally, only 0.05% of deaths were attributed to terrorism in 2017—which is 34 times less than death attributed to HIV/AIDS (Global Burden of Disease Collaborative Network, 2017). Regardless, countries around the world are increasingly dedicating resources to CVE programming (Heydemann, 2014).

The UAE's initiatives, however, stand out with their apparent focus on tolerance and religion. Between the country's unique 'model of tolerance' that guides cohesion in their diverse society and their 'zero-tolerance' policy towards extremism, the UAE's distinctive approach to CVE merits exploring its policies and their contextual specificities. This research project seeks to better understand the UAE's philosophy on violent extremism and how this understanding shapes its preventative approach. Through an analysis of discourse on countering violent extremism in the UAE, this research will ask: how does the UAE construct the policy problem of violent extremism? While research has been conducted on countering violent extremism policies in Western liberal democracies, no research to date has looked at the UAE's approach to CVE and how violent extremism is understood in this specific context.

It is important to note the ambiguity of divisions between the terms 'terrorism' and 'violent extremism'. Attempts have been made to definitively separate the two (Nasser-Eddine et al., 2011; Onursal & Kirkpatrick, 2019), but in practice the terms are used interchangeably. This is the case within the Emirate's discourse under study. While the implications of the convergences, divergences, and usage of the two terms converges with this study, a full exploration of this phenomena is outside of the scope of the present research. This paper uses both terms to reflect the literature and discourse consulted for this

study and specifies when a distinction is necessary to the analysis. The section that follows briefly delves into theories on why and how these two terms are intermittently intertwined and divergent.

This project builds on the assumption that violent extremism as a concept—one which changes significantly by context—is mediated and constructed by language, which can be analyzed in discourse. Thus, the first question guiding the research is: How does the UAE conceptualize ‘violent extremism’ within their discourse? Further, as identities of social actors are similarly developed within a discourse, this research project asks: Which actors are constituted through this discourse on violent extremism, and what are their roles? These two questions help to clarify the structure of the discourse, the policy problem and the social agents. Of particular interest in this study is the uncovering the role of the Emirati state within this discourse. The question guiding this inquiry is: How is the UAE building an identity and/or projecting an image as a ‘counter-extremist state’ through this discourse on violent extremism? Bringing the previous questions together, the final questions guiding this research is: What ‘narrative’ on violent extremism is being presented in the UAE’s countering violent extremism discourse?

By engaging with and breaking down the Emirates’ discourse on violent extremism, this research will contribute to the field of critical security studies in the region. This project is inspired by the somewhat recent emphasis on preventative policies aimed at finding solutions for the ‘root causes’ of terrorism. These initiatives reach well beyond traditional counterterrorism measures, and are not yet as prolifically studied as ‘counterterrorism.’ The study is also driven by a perceived dearth of attention to countering

violent extremism models in states that are not Western, liberal democracies. Thus, this project will provide insight on the contextually specific dynamics of CVE in the UAE and ideologies underpinning the discourse on violent extremism. While directing its target of focus away from dominant centers of discourse production in the West, this study will also look at the UAE's positioning as regional 'leader' in CVE and how this relates to the larger, global project of countering violent extremism.

This is an exploratory study that aims to open avenues for future research on the possible implications of how violent extremism discourse might be used by states as a technology of power. Due to limitations inherent in a master's level thesis, the scope of this particular study is small, yet nonetheless seeks to contribute to a growing body of research that explores significance of the 'war on terror' discourse around the world. To the best of my knowledge, there has not yet been research analyzing government discourses on terrorism or extremism produced by the United Arab Emirates.

The first section of this paper outlines the study's theoretical framework and provides an overview of relevant literature on violent extremism, terrorism, and security discourses. It introduces the field of Critical Terrorism Studies, highlights previous analyses of the 'War on Terror' discourse, and gives a legal context for counter-extremism policies. Chapter 3 presents the study design and data sources. An in-depth profile of the United Arab Emirates in Chapter 4 offers a richer understanding of the unique background context within which the discourse on violent extremism is situated. In the final section, data analysis findings are presented and discussed.



## CHAPTER II

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This section constructs a theoretical framework for the present study, based in social theories of International Relations. Situated within a tradition of critical security studies and critical terrorism studies, this section summarizes previous studies on the contested nature of terrorism and violent extremism, as well as studies that analyze the content and implications of the ‘War on Terror’ discourse. It also addresses debates on relations between language and the material world, proposing a conceptualization of discourse as a mobilization of symbolic and material resources.

#### **A. An Exploration of Language and Power**

As noted, it seems that the definition of violent extremism is fraught with such ambiguity and fluidity as to practically render it meaningless. The term “terrorist” is used liberally by groups against their enemies. Terrorism is ubiquitous yet elusive, a far-away phenomenon whose threat permeates global security, permitting all but draconian security measures to protect our population against these extremists. Who are they? What do they want? What violent extremism distinct from other forms of violence? Is there really a difference between violent and non-violent extremism? And what distinguishes other ideologies or beliefs from being “extremist” or not?

While inspired by the difficulty in definitively answering these questions about who, what, and how extremism is, the goal of this study is not to draw up parameters for understanding violent extremism. The goal, rather, is to take these questions as a starting point, and to explore how they might be answered by careful analysis of UAE discourse on the topic. In doing so, I seek to deconstruct the conditions under which these meanings arose in the first place—the guiding ideologies, the manifesting constellations of power, and the geopolitical developments that underscore the way the above questions might be answered in this context. The conceptual framework of this study lies in the belief that a systematic analysis of language can be a useful tool to explore a new and uncharted waters—to unearth cached power dynamics and underlying ideologies that provide the grounds for discussion and action on a topic such as violent extremism.

It is curious to witness the UAE, which is enthusiastically advertised as safe and not considered a prominent target for terrorist attacks (Davidson, 2008), direct significant efforts toward preventing violent extremism measures. This study sets out to explore what constitutes this extremist threat through an analysis of counterterrorism discourse in the UAE. No study of counterterrorism can be complete without an orientation to the global ‘War on Terror’ and the role of the UAE in the international system. Thus, the methodological approach adopted in this study, which grounds its discourse analysis in a constructivist analysis and adoption of a Critical Realist stance, allows me to highlight local dynamics, while keeping in mind how these local subjectivities insert themselves into larger global hierarchies organized/constructed around a capitalist international order supported by neoliberal ideologies and security alliances consolidated in order to shield against threats to these systems.

Much of the findings relate to foreign policy—the texts under study, after all, are entirely in English, suggesting a certain ‘international’, Western audience for this discourse. The implications, however, of discourse and its dialectical relationship to social practices which help to shape and reinforce the hierarchical power structures in society (See: Wendt, 1999), are enormous and multi-directional. Most of these implications reach far beyond the scope of this study. However, this exploratory research aims to open future avenues of study of the seemingly endless ways in which the ‘war on terror’ has come to shape the world—and how discursive spaces are another battlefield in this ‘war’.

## **B. Definitions and Legal Context**

Pinning down exactly what *is* violent extremism is a pervasive problem endemic to this field of research. Ditarych (2014) raises the alarm about the consequences of writing about ‘terrorism’ as a definite object, creating a field based entirely in unfounded assumptions, normative constructions, and reflexivity. Perpetuating the study of a topic as contentious as violent extremism, as Zulaika and Douglass (1996) point out, may only serve to perpetuate the category of extremist violence and therefore ensure that the violence is endowed with the special status that encourages extremism in the first place. In order to hold space for the implications of this existential and moral quandary, it is important to roughly depict the structures that bring ‘violent extremism’ into being—and into the forefront of global security. This subsection briefly outlines the ambiguity of ‘terrorism’ and ‘violent extremism’ terminology, presents key definitions used by international and regional institutions, and establishes the legal context for policies and legislation that target

these phenomena. This will place the UAE's activities in a larger historical context and shed light on the somewhat-recent divergence to the preference of 'violent extremism' terminology over the use of the word 'terrorism'.

The domain of Countering Violent Extremism (also referred to as 'Preventing Violent Extremism') owes its existence to the field of counterterrorism. In fact, it was in the perceived *failure* of counterterrorism that CVE emerged. This shift toward a broader set of predominantly preventative approaches to counterterrorism is attributed to the failure of the 'War on Terror' and spread of Foreign Terrorist Fighters or "homegrown" terrorism in the West (Harris-Hogan et al., 2016; Heydemann, 2014). While Heydemann suggests that CVE has evolved into a "catch-all category" that lacks precision and focus, he notes that a main feature and conceptual divergence from "traditional" counterterrorism is the inclusion of non-coercive measures (2014, p. 9). CVE incorporates a broad variety of interventions, borrowing from and overlapping with fields as varied as education, peacebuilding, psychology, and poverty alleviation. This is distinct from counterterrorism—which, as Bianchi (2019) notes, "is not a term of art with a distinct pedigree in international law," but rather "it was coined after 9/11, and was later developed to refer to the set of laws and policies adopted as a response to terrorism" (p. 559). In De Graff's (2016) account of the rise of counterterrorism as a practice and a concept in itself, she shows how counterterrorism largely originates from Western governments as a response to non-state violence. In short, counterterrorism seeks to define and identify a certain type of violence in order to invoke special legal, administrative, or military measures against it, while CVE seeks to intervene pre-violence.

While most states have anti-terrorism laws, any act of terrorism would generally already be criminalized. Yet, terrorism constitutes its own category of violence in most countries. Legal definitions of terrorism typically include a few core concepts: acts of violence, targeting of civilians, and ideological, political, or religious motivation (Bianchi, 2019; Tadjini, 2012). The United Nations defines an act of terrorism as any individual or group that:

[...] by any means, unlawfully and intentionally, causes (a) death or serious bodily injury to any person; or (b) serious damage to public or private property [...] when the purpose of the conduct, by its nature or context, is to intimidate a population, or to compel a Government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act. (United Nations, 2013)

Already there lies a discrepancy between the United Nations definition and the findings of Tadjini and Bianchi on a terrorist motivation: whether the act is motivated by ideology or religion, or is intended to intimidate a population. Another common element of terrorism that is omitted from the UN's definition is the *threat* of violence.

Terrorism is also distinguished from a 'just' act of war. The distinction is often drawn in two ways: first, terrorism intentionally targets civilians while just war discriminates between military and civilian targets; second, terrorism is perpetrated by nonstate actors while war is carried out by states (Asad, 2010). Yet, these core principles that draw a boundary around 'terrorism' seem to only preferentially appear in legal definitions. This framing of what constitutes 'terrorism' varies drastically from state to state, where more detailed descriptions become codified in counterterrorism legislation. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation, an intergovernmental body of which the UAE is

a member, eases the requirement of a terrorist ‘intent’, while including a threat to the state’s stability and integrity:

Any act of violence or threat thereof notwithstanding its motives or intentions perpetrated to carry out an individual or collective criminal plan with the aim of terrorizing people or threatening to harm them or imperiling their lives, honors, freedoms, security or rights or exposing the environment or any facility or private property to hazards or occupying or seizing them, or endangering a national resource, or international facilities, or threatening the stability, territorial integrity, political unity or sovereignty of independent States. (Organization of Islamic Cooperation, 2002)

In Egypt, al-Raffie (2019) notes that the government does not differentiate between violence and non-violence in their definitions, while Meijer (2012) observes the definition adopted by Saudi Arabia considers terrorism to be anything targeting members of the royal family. As definitions have expanded, there is even less consistency among what a ‘terrorist act’ might be. However, the definitional quandary of what constitutes a terrorist act has been unimportant in the sense that typically any act of terrorism would be already criminalized. Instead, the foundation of ‘terrorism’ is attaching a sort of moral stigma that appears to be deduced by the *intent* of the actions or of its perpetrator (Bianchi, 2019).

Assessing the last few decades of developments in counterterrorism, Bianchi concludes that a global trend toward preventative intervention—stopping an individual from ‘becoming’ a terrorist—corresponded with a change in terminology from ‘terrorism’ to ‘extremism’. Because of this focus on *intent*, Bianchi suggests that the use of violent extremism rhetoric, in lieu of terrorism, has become increasingly common. However, a clear distinction between ‘terrorism’ and ‘violent extremism’ remains undefined. At the UN

level, the Secretary-General observed that “violent extremism encompasses a wider category of manifestations” than terrorism since it includes forms of ideologically motivated violence that falls short of constituting terrorist acts” (General Assembly of the United Nations, 2015, para. 4). Following this logic, all terrorism is violent extremism, but not all violent extremism is terrorism—not if it “falls short” of constituting a terrorist act. Regardless, this distinction tends to go unacknowledged, and in practice the terms flip-flop without a discernable pattern throughout the discourse. The consequences of this blending, however, and the wide adoption of extremism discourse, seem to indicate an acceptance of an expanded understanding of terrorism—to the point that violence or violent intent is peripheral (or, in some cases, irrelevant) and beliefs are the defining feature.

### **C. A Critical Discourse-Based Model for Studying Violent Extremism**

In 1988, Alex Schmid and Albert Jongman published one of the most comprehensive research guides to terrorism: a 700-page book covering concepts, theories, and literature on the subject. For the first 200 pages, the authors survey previous attempts to construct a universal definition of terrorism. Beyond a lack of agreement on basic concepts, they find that even the general framework that is chosen for definition is at issue (Schmid & Jongman, 1988). In the three decades since Schmid and Jongman’s comprehensive guide was published, the world has undergone an unimaginable upsurge in terrorist violence—from a reported 3,721 terrorists attacks worldwide in 1988 to 16,903 in 2014 (National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, 2017). Along with rising incidents, there has been a parallel explosion of research on the subject. Yet, the

ever-expanding field of terrorism studies *still* suffers from the same methodological and epistemological problems as it did three decades ago. The *fact* of terrorism is undeniable. However, ambivalence on how to delineate the violence—its causes and solutions, its motives and methods, its heroes and villains—has remained a major blind spot in the field. The lack of common understanding surrounding violent extremism is not merely an intellectual problem, but points to a flawed foundation undercutting the way we discuss, perceive, and devise policies to counter violence.

Approaching violent extremism from a critical standpoint informs the theoretical and conceptual framework for this study. Given the contested, contextual, moralized, and politicized nature of ‘terrorism’, both the employment of the terminology and a thorough assessment of its surrounding circumstances are necessary to explore the meanings and possible implications of the UAE’s discourse on violent extremism. This is achieved through a multi-disciplinary approach that falls within critical security studies, bridging constructivist traditions with a focus on discourse. Ulrichsen (2015) outlines a holistic, integrated constructivist approach to the study of security in the Persian Gulf. His model incorporates the impact of globalization, factors linked to societal change, and survival mechanisms, considering both material and ideational structures. Following this approach, this study then culminates in an exploration of how *language* is linked to security by constituting ideational structures of power through discourse. For example, Barnett (1998) demonstrates how pan-Arabism was used as a tool for legitimacy to Arab rulers, showing how a deployment of ‘symbolic power’ enhanced security state security by bolstering a ‘pan-Arab image’ (Barnett, 2008 in Ulrichsen, 2015). This study is based in the premise



that an important factor in the creation and deployment of a ‘pan-Arab image’ resides in language. While acknowledging a notion of ‘security’ that stems from the international system, this research also follows the critical security studies tradition and posits that conceptualizations of security vary, and multiple dimensions of security work to comprise the idea of being externally ‘secure’.

Language is central to research on countering violent extremism. The discursive move from ‘terrorism’ to ‘violent extremism’ and the corresponding deepening of preventative policies is enough to raise alarm, considering the ambiguous language and dubious policies surrounding terrorism. For example, Jackson (2005) looks at the way that rhetoric has been used to justify the global counter-terrorism offensive as a response to 9/11. Discourses can be wielded in many ways: to securitize people or things, legitimize policy, enhance public relations, increase security, and maintain the status quo through the knowledge-power nexus. Through discourse, problems are framed in such a way “so as to highlight certain possibilities while precluding others” (Krause & Williams, 2015, p. 196). Language is inextricably linked to social practices and social relations, and “can be deployed as a political technology in the hegemonic projects of various agents such as state elites” (Jackson, 2007, p. 491). Doty (1996) analyzes post-colonial discourses underlying Western foreign policy to demonstrate how the way in which language naturalizes meaning in North-South encounters has real, material consequences—such as the appropriation of land and labor, resource subjugation, and the extermination of peoples. Furthermore, Banta (2013) notes that, too often, there is an avoidance of discourse “in the study of empirical puzzles which clearly involve some significant impact being attributed to a particular

discourse or discourses” (p.380). Considering the controversial labeling and efforts at knowledge production in the UAE’s CVE campaign, an attention to language should provide deeper insight to the labels, images, metaphors, and narratives presented in this discourse on violent extremism.

The discourse analytic approach adopted in this study is based in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and utilizes a Critical Realist philosophy of social science in order to that study discourse “as a causal mechanism in the generation of events — and one relationally connected to mechanisms of differing kinds” (Banta, 2013, p. 379). Norman Fairclough fathered the CDA approach that dialectically relates discourse to systems of power. He defines discourse in a Foucauldian tradition, as the ‘domain of statements’ at various levels of abstraction which constitute a way of ‘representing aspects of the world’(Fairclough, 2003, p. 215). Specifically, the ideational character of discourse is important, as it is related to the domains of meaning and meaning-production that are essential for human activity. Underlying this commitment is a constructivist understanding of meaning—such that the material world itself does not emit its own meaning but rather meaning is a social construction (Milliken, 1999, p. 229). Thus, to sharpen Fairclough’s use of Foucault, for this study discourse is understood as “a specific ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categorizations that are produced, reproduced and transformed to give meaning to physical and social relations” (Flatschart, 2016, p. 31). Further, through an intervention informed by the philosophical position of Critical Realism (CR)—which is fundamentally useful here for the way it emphasizes ontological reflection over epistemology—language is seen as a strategic, meaning-making resource (Banta, 2013).

Because CDA is necessarily interdisciplinary, it incorporates ‘extra-discursive’ theories selected based on the subject matter (Fairclough, 2003). For this research, a contextual analysis following a political economy and constructivist approach guides the findings. Based on an understanding of ‘security’ as outlined above—a concept that should be advanced using a “holistic approach that locates the drivers of change within the rapidly-globalizing international environment and interlinks them with socio-political and economic dimensions” (K. Ulrichsen, 2015, p. 5), this study adopts a political economy analysis of the Gulf. Thus, discourse is just one social practices that shapes and reshapes what we would consider CR’s domain of ‘the real’—the historical totality that comprises social structures and the ever-present material condition (Flatschart, 2016, p.30). We might call this ‘capitalist-patriarchal society’ (Flatschart, 2016) or the ‘colonial present’ (Gregory, 2004)—it is the larger global hierarchies constructed through geo-political historicity, the consolidation of global capitalism, and proliferation of neoliberal ideologies. In order to connect CR and CDA, this study follows the logic of Banta in his analysis of humanitarian discourse as a causal mechanism in war.

To understand how something like humanitarian discourse transmits its power from the order of discourse into the field of social practice that is war, CDA demands using theories of war to place discourse in its political context. We do this to identify what the realist philosopher Dave Elder-Vass (2011: 10) calls a ‘discourse circle’, or the group of positioned individuals who act and speak in such a way that a discourse becomes ‘endorsed and enforced by a wider social group that makes such behaviour more effective than it would be if simply perceived as the behaviour of certain specific individuals’. It is only through such groups and persons, always structurally embedded, that discourse can eventually affect events. (Banta, 2013, p. 393)

In practice, this entails first uncovering the order of a discourse, assessing how it draws on and reorders other genres style and discourses (Banta, 2013). The application of other discourses—such as the ‘war on terror’ discourse—is key, as it shows how selective recontextualization of knowledge articulates relations of power (Lundborg & Vaughan-Williams, 2015). ‘Power’ is the distribution of material power, wealth and geographical conditions, ideas, identities, and norms. The adopted approach to CDA expands upon the ideational constructions of power, seeing discourses as exercising power because “they institutionalize and regulate ways of talking, thinking, and acting” while also drawing attention to those that have the power to exert influence over a discourse (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 35).

#### **D. The ‘War on Terror’ rhetoric**

This study builds on previous scholarship that critically deconstructs the War on Terror discourse and exposes the how profoundly our world has been shaped by ideas of the ‘Muslim other’. Jackson (2007) lays out how “the [war on terror] discourse derives a great many of its core assumptions, labels and narratives from the long tradition and archive of orientalist scholarship on the Middle East and Arab culture and religion” (p. 339) which depicts Arab as fanatical, violent, savage, backward, irrational and anti-Western (Said, 1978). Jackson’s extensive work (Jackson, 2005, 2007; Jackson et al., 2009) on the US-led ‘war on terror’ discourse reveals how the concepts and narratives within this rhetoric have structured the grid of intelligibility for any discourse on violent extremism or terrorism that follows. According to his research, the main features of the ‘war on terror’

rhetoric are: 1) terrorists are anti-modern, motivated by hatred for USA and the West, modernity, seculars, and globalization; 2) terrorism is motivated by religious goals, not political goals; 3) because terrorism is equated with Islamic terrorism, “moderates” should take the lead to battle extremism on the level of ideas 4) terrorists are deluded and irrational, which disqualifies negotiation or compromise, instead preferring policies of eradication or deterrence (Jackson, 2005, 2007).

The categories put forth within this hegemonic discourse provides the starting point for countries around the world to address *their* problem of extremism and possible responses—or to construct a problem where there is none. The failure to universally agree on a definition of terrorism makes it the ideal mutable threat—malleable to any national political agenda. Discourse on terrorism has allowed those in power to reaffirm—and in some cases rearrange—identities of self and other, to securitize certain geographies and populations, and to regulate the way we can conceive of policies to address this phenomenon known as extremist violence.

A number of scholars have looked at non-Western states adopting the ‘War on Terror’ discourse to further existing political agendas by local political elite. In the name of counterterrorism, anti-government groups are silenced and delegitimized in Pakistan (Sahill, 2018), while Turkey’s AKP party attempts to use discourse to sentence human rights activists critical of the government on the Kurdish issue (Martin, 2018). Nepal, previously removed from global politics, opportunistically used “terrorism” to enter international affairs with a newly developed “counterterrorist” identity while simultaneously using the discourse to label Maoist rebels as terrorists (Dixit, 2013). Yet,

this post-9/11 ‘shift’—at least discursively—in associating terrorism with Islam has demanded more nuanced maneuvering from the states that identify as Islamic to prove they are ‘with us’ and not ‘against us’. For example, Malaysia’s Muslim-majority population—with one of the highest concentrations of Islamic State (ISIS)<sup>2</sup> supporters in the world according to a Pew Research poll—was able to adapt elements of the ‘War on Terror’ discourse to augment its global standing and domestic credentials by promoting “correct” Islam and campaigning for “moderation” (Chan, 2018). Moroccan political discourse similarly portrays radicalization as a foreign threat, and adopts the notion of Islamic radicalization stemming from modernization (Bartolucci, 2010). Bartolucci explains how this “outside phenomenon” discourse serves to shift responsibility and avoid a scenario where the authoritarian structure of the state or its development model might be held accountable. Erjavec and Volčič (2007) show how 9/11 attacks were “localized and negotiated” in public discourses and through media to retrospectively legitimize violence against Muslims in the 1990s. Where Eastern Europe, and the Balkans specifically, was previously constructed through discourse as “the Other,” the study shows how a new discursive order of the world is invoked in the ‘War on Terror’ discourse: a Christian/Muslim split (Erjavec & Volčič, 2007). What these studies show is that the ‘War on Terror’ discourse is so pervasive that it provides the structure and language for every proceeding discourse on terrorism and violent extremism around the world.

---

<sup>2</sup> The Islamic State is also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or Daesh. For this essay, the commonly-known acronym “ISIS” is used.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the study design and sources of data. The project uses a multi-methods toolkit which incorporates fieldwork, interviews with subject experts, and a discourse analysis of public documents. Because this study takes an exploratory approach to analyzing the field of countering violent extremism in the UAE, qualitative research methods such as interviews and analyses of primary documents are best suited to the task at hand. Qualitative data can be a powerful source of analysis. It is inherently contextual and can provide a why and how to a phenomenon rather than a simple snapshot (Gray, 2004, p. 320). By incorporating mixed methods and varied sources of data, the ability to triangulate findings within a multi-method approach strengthens a study and can aid in balancing out potential weaknesses present in data collection and analysis methods (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Gray, 2004).

#### **A. Data**

This study draws from public discourses on countering violent extremism found in the public domain and from data collected from key respondent interviews. In order to analyze the content of a discourse, written materials are an excellent source of data. Written documents are stable, precise, and unobtrusive sources of data unimpacted by potential researcher bias (Gray, 2004). Because the study is focused on a high-level policy issue like

counterterrorism, the primary data is produced by or closely linked to the government of the United Arab Emirates and its officials. Gray (2004) describes organizational documents and communication media as running “records of society,” highlighting the usefulness of these sources for studying organizations and their development of policy (p.267). The written material collected for discourse analysis include: Government websites, press releases, statements, legislation, news articles, policy briefs, pamphlets, and tweets.

The time frame selected for the study was 2010 to 2020. This ten-year span allowed the study to capture a comprehensive picture of CVE discourse while also noting periods of high and low activity. In order to select a sample representative of official discourse, the data sources were selected based on their proximity to the government. Approximately 5-10 texts from each source below were analyzed, aiming for a rough distribution of two sources per year from each source. Because religious and political research is closely monitored in the UAE, the newspapers and think tanks selected are presumed to reflect an official Emirati stance on CVE. The sources from which textual materials were drawn from include:

- The Government of the United Arab Emirates
- Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research (ECSSR)
- Emirates News Agency (WAM)
- Emirates Policy Center (EPC)
- Gulf News
- The National
- Official Fatwa Center
- Sawab Center
- Tabah Foundation
- TRENDS Research & Advisory
- Wikileaks



All of the data sources used for discourse analysis were in the English language. The use of English-only sources was purposeful in order to capture the discourse *targeted to* an international, English-speaking audience.

As part of a multi-methods approach, interviews were conducted with respondents working in the field of countering violent extremism and based in the UAE. Although the interview can hold dual functions in discourse theoretical studies—as either a source of empirical data or as a research method (Cruickshank, 2012, p. 42)—in this case, interviews were treated as a methodological tool rather than as data to be analyzed through discursive methods. There were greater perceived advantages to using interviews as a distinct method versus pooling them in the data chosen to represent public discourses on violent extremism. Because interviews allow for a more in-depth understanding behind certain trends, especially the attitudes behind written output (Cruickshank, 2012; Gray, 2004), this approach allows us to triangulate the findings of our discourse analysis and strengthen the interpretations. Furthermore, the interview can reveal tensions between high-level discourses perpetuated by the government and its everyday usage by practitioners in the field. Finally, interviews are typically well-suited for exploratory research (Gray, 2004), and thus were useful for the topic of CVE in the UAE, which has limited existing scholarship.

The interviews sought to understand (1) the interviewees' conceptualization of violent extremism, and (2) the broader context of the Emirati approach to countering violent extremism, including the intervention, policies, and politics surrounding it. The semi-structured interview format lent consistency to interviews while allowing for

flexibility during the event. The interview guide was designed to first build a rapport between interviewer and interviewee, starting with basic details and later progressing to more abstract, conceptual queries and questions deemed potentially sensitive. The first series of questions asked about the participant's work history, current projects, and overview of their organization. Next, the interview moved to a cluster of broad questions about preventing violent extremism initiatives and approaches in the UAE. Progressing next to semantic elements of preventing violent extremism, the questions asked participants to define commonly used terminology and elaborate on categorical differences between similar concepts. The survey concluded with an inquiry on the specifics of the participant's work as it relates to the UAE context. Questions that were considered potentially sensitive—such as the subjects/targets of the work or research—were positioned near the end of the interview in anticipation of more comfortable and open responses after a degree of trust had been established.

The fieldwork was conducted in Abu Dhabi and Dubai, over a period of two weeks in February 2020. Semi-structured interviews lasting roughly between 60 and 90 minutes were held with seven researchers, academics, and practitioners. The participants were selected based on perceived competence and experience in the topic of preventing violent extremism. Ensuring validity of the interview data can be difficult with constrained time and resources. Although the sample size was relatively small, it proved adequate to find common themes across participants to cross-validate data findings in the discourse analysis. Aiming to enhance the reliability of the interviews, audio recordings were made where possible for an accurate account of the interviewee responses. Further, the interview

protocol and questions asked were consistent across participants. See Appendix for a list of questions included in the Interview Instrument.

Recruiting participants and conducting interviews in the UAE poses a special set of challenges due to the high level of political secrecy and fear of repercussion for criticisms of the state or its leaders. Several organizations declined the invitation to participate, typically after requesting more information about the study, and the researcher was urged by colleagues to be cautious when asking about violent extremism, which is perceived as a sensitive topic in the UAE. To mitigate the anxiety surrounding participation in the study, participants maintained anonymity, questions were worded to avoid overtly sensitive topics, and handwritten notes were taken where audio recordings were declined. Nonetheless, each interview had a discretionary tone, and interviewees displayed varying levels of restraint when offering information.

## **B. Analysis**

The analysis began with scouring the text for linguistic choices, (1) a hyperfocus on certain synonymous words or short phrases, (2) connoted words or phrases, (3) structural oppositions or binaries, and (4) the way in which actors are represented. Hyperfocusing on certain synonymous words or short phrases helps to construct a framework for understanding undefined phenomena. Additionally, repetition and the use of connoted words or phrases (for example, choosing to use “freedom fighter” rather than “terrorist” can reveal underlying beliefs or ideologies that the author holds. In this phase,

special attention was also paid to what is referred to as “representational strategies” (Fairclough, 2003; Fowler et al., 1979)—the way in which actors are presented linguistically and their positioning vis-à-vis other actors and narrative elements. This mainly entailed tracking excessively used descriptors and highlighting specific elements of an identity while repressing other elements. In addition, some less immediately apparent representational strategies include the use of personal versus impersonal nouns, the use of which can serve to obscure specific responsibility. Finally, individual versus collective descriptors were noted, as these choices can reveal underlying ideology when one subject is given individual characteristics—essentially, is “humanized”—instead of collective or general categories.

The next step of discourse analysis looked at the texts in relation to broader discourses and surrounding context. This analysis answered: (1) How do the texts in question reference or relate to other texts, theories, and concepts outside this immediate discourse, (2) what concepts are taken for granted by the author, and (3) what is the narrative being presented, and (4) what roles are different actors assuming in this story? The findings from these questions were compared with interview data in order to strengthen themes found within the discourse and connections with surrounding contexts. In addition to identifying basic elements of the UAE’s discourse of violent extremism, the analysis also focused on identifying the key conceptual elements that underlie the UAE’s approach to countering violent extremism.

The final phases of analysis looked at the discourse in relation to broader, ‘global’ discourses and surrounding context. This analysis answered: (1) How do the texts in

question reference or relate to other texts, theories, and concepts outside this immediate discourse, (2) what concepts are taken for granted or ‘appropriated’ by the author, (3) what is the narrative being presented, and what roles are different actors assuming in this story?, and (4) how does the discourse contradict itself, omit information, and highlight specific versions of events and representations? To complete the analysis, findings were assessed in relation to broader situations, what Fairclough (1992) refers to as “cultural context.” This allowed the findings of the interviews and the discourse analysis to be assessed in tandem with their surrounding environments— including historical events, institutions, and social structures. This helped to reveal the politicized nature of the discourses, to suggest ways in which discourses are co-constitutive of power structures.

## CHAPTER IV

### SETTING THE CONTEXT

This section provides background context on The United Arab Emirates, a loose federation and constitutional monarchy of seven emirates (Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Dubai, Fujairah, Ras al Khaimah, Sharjah and Umm al Quwain) that was founded in 1971. Profiling the country's politics, economy, security and foreign policy, as well as internal and global dynamics, offers a richer understanding of the unique background context within which the discourse on violent extremism is situated. This background information is divided in two parts: The first part of this section begins by situating the Emirates in global economic systems and constellations of power, proceeded by tracing the modern nation-state's colonial heritage and early internal disputes. Following an overview of domestic politics, government and distinct features of Emirati society, the first part concludes with a look at the Dubai model of development and 'nation branding'. The second part focuses on the Emirate's approach to security—moving between regional, international, and domestic challenges and opportunities. It provides context for terrorism and violent extremism policies, describes the UAE's related initiatives, and delves into regional dynamics and the country's history with the Muslim Brotherhood.

#### **A. The Politics, Economy, and Society of the United Arab Emirates**

The United Arab Emirates is embedded in global systems of capital, its political economy was co-constituted with that of the global (Hanieh, 2018, p. 7). As a major node

of power and capital, the UAE and its fellow Gulf states were instrumental in the rise of the United States as the dominant world-capitalist power (Hanieh, 2018). During and after the Cold War era, the resource-rich Gulf monarchies' interdependence with global markets has come to shape the Middle East. The UAE owes its staggering wealth to ample oil reserves, early diversification efforts, and its tenacious foothold in global capital flows. The country boasts the second largest economy in the Middle East (after Saudi Arabia), characterized by a free-market economy and state-owned oil production that accounts for a notable 3.4% of the global oil industry (Davidson, 2011, p. 70). The Emirates, like their neighbors, took advantage of the 1960s/1970s oil boom to rapidly invest in fundamental infrastructure and establish an allocative welfare state, and to fund their economic diversification projects. The extent to which oil came to shape the political, social and human development in the Emirates cannot be understated—from financing transformations to preempting political, economic, and social reforms (Askari, 2013). However, this rapid economic growth and development was made possible by integration into global markets, keeping the monarchies “wedded to the international order that founded them and facilitated their development” (Henry & Springborg, 2010, p. 213). US economic policy has come to rely heavily on the Gulf states to provide hydrocarbons to the world, purchase capital and consumer goods, and supply petrodollars to the US-dominated financial system (Hanieh, 2018).

### ***1. History and State Formation***

The elite power structures and contemporary boundaries that laid the foundation for the modern Emirati state were largely shaped by foreign interests during the British

colonial era. The Trucial States, as they were known during the period of British control in the Persian Gulf from 1763 to 1971, were “sparsely populated desert sheikhdoms, with little more than subsistence economies based on fishing and pearl harvesting” (Askari, 2013, p. 168). The area, however, was geographically strategic for the British Raj, namely, for controlling trade routes through the Gulf. Imperial Britain’s approach was to prop up local tribal rulers to subdue potential hostilities to the foreign presence. In turn, these partnerships “reinforced the separate identity of the shaykhdoms and helped the chiefs to establish themselves more securely” (Zahlan, 1978, p. 5). These somewhat loose territorial divisions of the Arabian Peninsula served the needs of British administration for centuries, until Britain’s withdrawal converged with the discovery of oil in the region. This made distinct boundaries, in a Western tradition, more important (Zahlan, 1978, p. 6) entering the final period of gestation for the birth of the contemporary Emirati state. Fearing instability and invasion following British withdrawal, the Emirates was first and foremost an arrangement to secure the sovereignty of the present ruling families—and protect their access to their emerging oil incomes that were rapidly climbing during the 1960s oil boom. In 1971, as the British withdrew from their nearly 150-year long subjugation of the Trucial States, boundaries and ruling arrangements were formalized as the nascent state was transferred to the local elite—the same families and tribal relations in power today.

The British-drafted provisional constitution of 1971 faced numerous trials since its inception (Davidson, 2011), necessitating that the emirates remain close to the Anglo-American power structure to ensure territorial sovereignty and internal power-sharing arrangements. In the constitution, individual emirates retained significant power and federal



government was limited at first in order to merely “keep the family together” and avoid intractable disagreements (Davidson, 2011). The union of the somewhat disparate territories was met with varying degrees of enthusiasm by the rulers. From the start, Ras al Khaimah abstained from officially joining the Emirates until 1972—and Dubai required special constitutional concessions to quell their apprehensions. Abu Dhabi, being one of the keener emirates as well as the wealthiest and the largest, took the de facto presidency and remained the “most committed champion” of the federation at the outset (Heard-Bay, 1981, p. 308). However, the Emirates’ survival leading up to and following its independence was still dependent on sustained British intervention.

Without security forces of their own, and sandwiched between more robust regional powers, the Emirates found themselves exposed to a myriad of potential threats: invasion from their neighbors Iran, Oman, and Saudi Arabia, as well as an encroaching Soviet presence in the region. The constitutional arrangement was part of a deal brokered to maintain the presence of British troops to defend from invasion and protect disputed borders (Davidson, 2008). In addition, both Britain and the local rulers had no interest in forfeiting their privileged positions in the territories to a spreading pan-Arabist movement. Even before the state was passed over to Emirati elite, some necessary power shuffles within the ruling families were executed to increase the likelihood of a successful federation. In 1964, when the ruler of Sharjah, Saqr bin Sultan al-Qasimi, inspired by Nasserism to envision an Arab union for the Trucial States and to challenge Britain’s position, Saqr was quietly exiled and replaced with his more amenable brother (Davidson, 2011). In Abu Dhabi, Britain assisted Zayed bin Sultan al-Nahyan’s to overthrow his

miserly older brother and ruler of the emirate, Shakhbut bin Sultan al-Nahyan. When Zayed took power in 1966, he “transformed the emirate virtually overnight, spending oil money freely and winning a great deal of popular support among Abu Dhabi citizens” (Herb, 2016).

Amongst the emirates, however, there was little cooperation and cohesion. Davidson (2011) calls the period between 1979 and 1996 the “long struggle” in the Emirates’ history. The emirate of Dubai, led by Rashid bin Saeed Al Maktoum from 1958 until 1990, had a long independent streak as it transformed Dubai from a modest trading post into a modern port city and commercial hub. While Dubai and Abu Dhabi thrived, development across the emirates was uneven. Apart from Dubai and Abu Dhabi, the only other emirate with oil is Shajrah—with reserves just 1.6% the size of Abu Dhabi’s. While Shajrah and remaining emirates of Ajman, Fujairah, Ras Al Khaimah, and Umm Al Quwain (and eventually Dubai, following its economic decline) benefited financially from the federation, this did not altogether quell lingering animosity from previous violent border disputes,<sup>3</sup> or political struggles<sup>4</sup>. Hostilities between ruling families, although the incidents and causes are too numerous to include in the scope of this paper, ameliorated over time, suggesting that the federation was effective enough to create some form of internal stability (Herb, 2016, p. 128).

---

<sup>3</sup> For example, war broke out between Dubai and Abu Dhabi over a border dispute in 1947. The British intervened to create a buffer zone, but no formal resolution was found until 1979. (See Zahlan 1978)

<sup>4</sup> For example, the rise to power of Abu Dhabi’s Al-Nahayan family was at the expense of the Shajrah’s al-Qawasem (Davidson, 2013, 21)

The Emirates is still a “state in formation” (Young, 2014, p. 104) that has just recently experienced closer cooperation from shifting dynamics between the two most powerful emirates, Dubai and Abu Dhabi. In Dubai, the passing of Sheikh Rashid in 1990 brought his sons into power, led by Maktoum bin Rashid Al Maktoum. With ambitious development plans on the horizon and declining in oil reserves, Dubai agreed to make the provisional constitution permanent in 1996, thereby offloading some of its administrative costs (Davidson, 2011). This move cinched Abu Dhabi’s supremacy in the federation, while finally uniting disparate security forces foreign policies, and placing security under the care of the al-Nahayan family (Davidson, 2011). Power further consolidated for Abu Dhabi when it bailed out Dubai in the aftermath of the 2007-2008 global financial crises that devastated Dubai’s real estate industry. Michael Herb notes that the “abrupt renaming of the world’s tallest building from Burj Dubai to Burj Khalifa—after the ruler of Abu Dhabi—drove home the change in the balance of power between the emirates” (Herb, 2016, p. 198).

## ***2. Government***

The Emirates are governed by “dynastic monarchy,” organized around family rule (Herb, 2016). The regime is characterized by neopatrimonialism, which organizes positions of power “around the ruler as an individual, maintaining other members of the elite in a relationship of personal dependence on his grace and good favor” (Hvidt, 2009, p. 400). Following independence, ruling families and tribal relations in each emirate were converted into one “big political party operating in a single-party system” (Davidson, 2011, p. 95).

Political appointments are distributed among Sheikhs and Sheikhas of the ruling families and other close relations in their immediate orbit. Because of this, the state, writes Herb (2016), “is the creature of the ruling families, molded around their arrangements for sharing power, presiding over a population of mostly foreigners, and oriented toward the interests of the ruling families” (p. 130). Overlaying these dynastic monarchical political structures, a build-up of government institutions gives the appearance of a rational legal process (Davidson, 2011). The UAE’s governing body, the Federal Supreme Council, is made up of hereditary rulers from the seven emirates—while Dubai and Abu Dhabi still retain special veto powers. The legislative body, UAE’s Federal National Council (FNC), serves a mainly consultative role, and consists of contingents from each emirate. Elections are supposed to be held every five years, but only have occurred once, when current president and prince of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed al Nahayan, succeeded his father in 2004. Further, the FNC has been criticized for having an essentially insignificant role (Davidson, 2011; Herb, 2009). Abu Dhabi’s leadership, unsurprisingly, holds the role of president, while Dubai’s Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum serves as current prime minister and vice president. Although Sheikh Khalifa is technically the current incumbent president, since his stroke in 2014, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Mohammed bin Zayed bin Sultan (widely known also “MbZ”), leads as the de-facto ruler.

While the politics of the UAE are described as “subdued, largely hidden, and not at all democratic” (Herb, 2009), those applying theories of ‘legitimacy’ to the Emirati state point to wealth distribution to explain state-citizen relations and political allegiance. As an allocative state, the Emirates is able to use its oil wealth to provide generous benefits to its

citizens (Hvidt, 2009) further deriving authority through “internal dynastic strength,” “carefully co-opted tribal alliances,” and overall good governance (Mason, 2018, p. 122). In Abu Dhabi, one of the “purest examples of a benevolent allocative state,” Sheikh Khalifa was known for his showy displays of welfare—highly publicized ceremonies bestowing the keys of new houses and cars to his citizens (Davidson, 2008). As one newly-nationalized citizen said: “those who drink from a well would never throw dirt in it” (Davidson, 2008, p. 131). Kanna (2011) describes this as a “so-called ruling bargain” fashioned by the dynasty “in which valuables distributed by the state would be exchanged for political demobilization” (Kanna, 2011, p. 25). It is also important to note that Article 7 of the UAE constitution designates Islamic Shari’a as a main source of legislation in the UAE (United Arab Emirates Constitution, 2011), which can be an important tool for legitimacy in Islamic states (Ayubi, 1991). Overall, it is difficult to make definitive assertions on the nature of state-society relationships in the UAE, because each individual emirate has different political cultures, socioeconomic conditions, and varying degrees of conservatism in policy (Freer, 2018).

### **3. *Society***

The demographic (im)balance of the United Arab Emirates is a critical feature of the state. Emirati citizens are a small proportion of the UAE’s population (11%), with expatriates making up the rest of the estimated 9 million inhabitants (Katzman, 2019). The society has a long history of coexistence between nationals and foreigners—especially Dubai’s centuries-long tradition of hosting foreign merchants. Rather than restricting

migrant labor, Dubai adopted a sort of ‘infinite growth’ population model, which aided its rapid development, attracting workers from poorer emirates, surrounding Arab countries, and eventually the world. Now, foreign laborers are a profitable commodity in the country (Heard-Bay, 2017, p. 312), and the economy is reliant on an outside workforce. Workers are employed through the tiered kafala (sponsorship) system that effectively divides expatriates into lower and upper classes (Kanna et al., 2020). The low-paid, predominantly South Asian migrant workers who receive work permits as ‘unskilled’ labor face exploitation by their employers to whom they are indebted for their visa sponsorship. Those entering the country as so-called ‘skilled’ workers receive significantly higher wages and are therefore less vulnerable to exploitation. Heard-Bey (2017) observes that the migrant population of the Emirates are divided into “foreign laborers” and “European experts” (p. 311). To illustrate this discrepancy, she paints the picture of foreign workers swimming to shore from boats, trying to enter the country illegally—while European businessmen live comfortably, sharing in the wealth of the capitalist economy (Heard-Bay, 2017, p. 311). While there are still many laborers from surrounding Arab countries, Hanieh notes that much of the foreign Arab working class was intentionally replaced with disposable foreign labor following the country’s independence to lessen the threat of growing socialist or Arab nationalist movements. Population imbalance became a means of political stability for post-oil UAE (Kanna, 2011).

Within these societal strata, Emiratis form a natural upper class, with the citizenship nearly impossible to obtain. The Emirati population is kept as distinct as possible from the rest of the population—physically separated with designated areas for

foreigners, and visually distinguished with traditional attire. For example, there are hotels and special areas designated for foreigners and outlawed for citizens, where alcoholic beverages forbidden by Sharia law can be consumed, segregating the privileged expats from the 'locals' (Davidson, 2008, p. 90). Owing to this demographic imbalance, and as part of the ongoing nation-building project, there has been a concerted effort to produce a strong "imagined community" through "heritage projects and proto-natalist policies that grow a patrilineally defined citizen population" (Dresch 2005; Khalaf 2000; 2002 in Ulrichsen, 2015). Kanna (2010) notes that the Emirati cultural project is shaped by specific historical contexts of negotiating citizenship, politics, and economics in the neoliberal era. This sort of nation-building project, while in reality engenders complex and sometimes contradictory identities, helps to mobilize the population to adapt to increasing globalization and neoliberal policies (Kanna, 2010). In his research focusing on young working Emiratis in Dubai, Kanna concludes that:

Whatever shape their particular fashioning of neoliberal Emirati identity, they simply assumed that Dubai was a prosperous, progressive, and liberal place, and that this was a direct consequence of the magnanimity and wisdom of the shuyukh. In the colonial period, Britain's plenipotentiaries routinely asserted, perhaps disingenuously, that it was the 'immemorial Arab custom' for the Emiratis to live under an unaccountable, centralized, hierarchical dynastic state. (Kanna, 2010, p. 125)

While he claims that none of this population would "would dare to openly question the objective structure of power in Dubai" (Kanna, 2010, p. 125), this is perhaps untrue for other different Emirati citizens. While the majority of citizens are perceived to be satisfied

with the political system (Katzman, 2019), public opinion does exist, however, without outlets to express this (Herb, 2009). The UAE, like other authoritarian states, has garnered ample criticism within certain channels for its lack of political freedom and suppression of public opinion (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Wary of underground activism, the government closely monitors the Internet and other communication means (Katzman, 2019).

#### ***4. Economic Policy***

While Abu Dhabi holds the majority of the UAE's oil reserves, Dubai's long history of international business and hosting foreign merchant populations has significantly shaped the entire country's economic policies (Davidson, 2008). The astounding success of Dubai's approach has led it to be dubbed the "Dubai model" of development. The model, in brief, is marked by policies aimed at attracting flows of people and capital in order to spur economic growth. These policies have historical roots. As the primary trading hub in the lower gulf at the turn of the 20th century, Dubai has consistently attracted people from nearby countries and less wealthy emirates, while its laissez-faire policies have attracted ample international business. Like most of the Gulf states, the UAE displays three general features of development: (1) rapid economic growth; (2) development possible by integration into global economies; (3) economic diversification and promotion of knowledge-based economies (Kamrava et al., 2011). However, the UAE found more success as a wealthy 'rentier state' than some of its neighbors, such as Kuwait (Davis, 2006). Herb (2009) posits that the historical jockeying for power between Dubai and Abu



Dhabi serves to explain the UAE's especially successful economic diversification and preeminent economic development. Davis (2006) suggests that the Dubai model's success is due to a relatively small national population, early economic diversification, ambitious investment strategies, success with tourism, and its excellent reputation as a place for doing business (Davis, 2006).

Reputation is an important consideration for the Emirates, and “branding” is a key element in Dubai's development strategy (Hvidt, 2009). This tradition dates back to the state's inception, when a flurry of “nation branding” activities occurred in the months following independence, such as designing a flag, stamps—even a contest for the national anthem was held (Davidson, 2011). Today, maintaining the Emirates' “brand” is a critical strategy across sectors. This is accomplished through multiple means. For example, a huge foreign aid program showing strong support for Islamic causes and activities has helped the Emirates gain credibility and respect in the Muslim world (Davidson, 2011). Censorship and efforts to limit bad press in foreign media help the UAE curate its image (Davidson, 2011, p. 159).

Going beyond fostering a positive image, “nation branding,” a term coined by Simon Anholt (Anholt, 2006 in Zeineddine & Nicolescu, 2013), comes into play as an immaterial but powerful force behind the UAE's policymaking. Nation branding is about carving a niche based on fostering global perceptions, such as Dubai as a global hub for investment, business and leisure (Zeineddine & Nicolescu, 2013). Dubai and Abu Dhabi both have an office for exactly that. “Brand Dubai” has helped to attract a certain ‘class’ of foreign worker (usually some intersection of upper or middle classes, white, and Western)

to shape Dubai's knowledge economy (Vora, 2012). Recently, the UAE's public diplomacy strategy has focused on "projecting an image of a visionary, futuristic and forward-looking state in the Middle East" (Jeong, 2020)—a project that appears to encompass everything from promoting a progressive vision for societal diversity to establishing the first inhabitable human settlement on Mars by 2117 (United Arab Emirates, 2020). The brand of diversity being sold by the Emirates is based in what Vora (2012) calls "neoliberal belonging"—a model of tolerance and societal harmony reflecting the "neoliberal enclaves and zones of exception" that have come to symbolize "openness" to the culture, religion, and activities of privileged foreigners" (Kanna, 2011, p. 27).

## **B. Security, Terrorism, and Countering Violent Extremism in the UAE**

When the United States replaced Britain as the Middle East's resident hegemonic power, the Gulf became vital to the region's geopolitical balance of power during the Cold War through the framework of the 1957 Eisenhower doctrine, and 1969 Nixon Doctrine (K. Ulrichsen, 2015). With the help of the Americans, the Gulf was carved into its own sub-region within the Middle East. During the Cold War era, shifting patterns of capital accumulation and threats to the regional balance of power led the US to encourage the formation of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in 1981 (Hanieh, 2011; K. Ulrichsen, 2015). Following Saddam Hussein's rise to power in Iraq, the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, and fearing the encroaching Soviet influence and the spreading pan-Arab movement, the United States' regional supremacy appeared to be in jeopardy—and the Gulf served as a counterweight to any challengers. Following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, the UAE,

and its GCC member state allies, were pulled further into the American power orbit (Krause, 1996). Despite its official ‘neutral’ stance and small stature, the UAE was a key military ally to the United States in every regional war since its independence. Over the past decade, however, the Emirates has further embedded itself in the global military-industrial complex through serious investments in its domestic defense industry. As Timothy Mitchell (2002) writes, “the oil and arms industries appear as two of the most powerful forces shaping what is called the capitalist world economy” (Mitchell, 2002, p. 16), and the Emirates is at the center of both.

### ***1. Changing Security Dynamics***

Considering the UAE’s dramatic economic development and apparent drive to ‘outdo the competition’, it is unsurprising that the state’s role in the region is rapidly expanding. The UAE is classified as a small state—therefore, dependent on stronger outside powers (Mason, 2018). Major developments in the Emirate’s foreign policy in the past decade, however, have challenged conceptions of state classification and behavior. Mason (2018) argues that the UAE has broken the “small state” mold, broadening its influence in the international system primarily through bandwagoning with Saudi Arabia alongside its military coordination with the US. Under Mohammed bin Zayed’s ambitious foreign policy program, the UAE has crystalized as both one of the US’s closest regional allies and a contender for GCC leadership. These developments are a significant departure from the UAE’s earlier approach, which suffered from reactionary, disjointed policies. Prior to the consolidation of power toward Abu Dhabi and the rise of MbZ, the UAE

embraced a policy of what Davidson (2008) calls “active neutrality” and an aggressive maintenance of a corresponding ‘Arab intermediary’ identity.

Changes to the international order have increased the role of the Gulf region. The weakening of the United States ‘empire’ (and imperial overreach into Asia) has made bolstering the Gulf states’ proxy power a vital US strategy (O’Reilly & Renfro, 2007). Pro-American monarchies in the Persian Gulf are a central node of power in the United States’ informal empire of bases (O’Reilly & Renfro, 2007). While the US is still the hegemonic power in the region, “the mass protests forcefully destabilized – whether consciously or not – a regional system that had been nearly four decades in the making” (Hanieh, 2018, p. 241). As the regional balance of power has favored the GCC states. Lynch (2018) explains the recent changes to regional dynamics:

Wealthy and repressive Gulf countries—Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates—are thriving. The proliferation of failed and weakened states has created new opportunities for competition and intervention, favoring new actors and new capabilities. Regional dynamics are no longer determined by formal alliances and conventional conflicts between major states. Instead, power operates through influence peddling and proxy warfare. (Lynch, 2018)

Observing a steady increase in GCC states’ military spending between 2000 and 2009, Ibish (2017) notes that the rise in interventionism has been closely linked with economic expansion.

The United Arab Emirates is leading this trend, building up a mercenary army and turning their security sector into a viable industry. While considered “weak” only as recently as 2008 (Davidson, 2008, p. 264), the Emirates’ military is now one of the most

advanced in the developing world and one of the world's largest mercenary armies (Mason, 2018). In 2011, the UAE confirmed that it had secured a 529-million-dollar contract with the security firm Reflex Response, headed by Blackwater's Eric Prince, to build "a foreign mercenary battalion for domestic security threats" (Young, 2014, p. 109). The Emirates security sector benefits from privileged technology and intelligence sharing with the US (Mazzetti & Hager, 2011), who praises the UAE for its loyalty and impressive military buildup, especially relative to its size. Senior military officials have been referring to the UAE as "Little Sparta," according to retired Marine Gen. James Mattis, who ran the U.S. Central Command from 2010 to 2013 (Chandrasekaran, 2014). In addition, the Emirates has established itself in the global defense industry, turning into "the world capital for weapons makers" (Cohen, 2020). The country has further shown its commitment to establishing itself militarily by adding conscription for the first time in 2014. While it somewhat addresses the manpower shortage, "conscription also has the added advantage of boosting a greater sense of national identity and nationalism among, and providing jobs to, a youth demographic that could be more at risk to the discourse of the Arab Spring," reports Al Jazeera (Mason, 2018).

## ***2. Regional Dynamics***

Arguably, the UAE's military is not to defend the nation's borders in a traditional sense. While Iran is the UAE's greatest "external" threat (Davidson, 2008, p. 271), the most significant traditional security concern for the UAE, along with neighboring Gulf states, is Iran's ambitions for regional hegemony (Ibish, 2017, p. 5). While Dubai has been home to

Persian expats for centuries, competing ownership claims over three islands in the Persian Gulf—Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunbs—have been a source of friction between the two territories for almost as long. Despite their small size, “they are of very great strategic and economic importance for the two countries, as the islands overlook the Strait of Hormuz, through which about 40 percent of global oil production passes daily” (Redondo, 2020). In light of a future joint Israeli-Emirati pipeline project running through the Gulf, Iran’s control of these islands leaves the possibility of blocking this project, should they so choose (Redondo, 2020). In the post-2011 uprisings struggle to “redraw the Middle East map,” both Iran and GCC states have intensified their efforts of “deliberately fostering sectarian conflict for political ends” (Hanieh, 2018, p. 243). With MbZ at the helm, the Emirates alongside the Saudi Arabian crown prince and defense minister Mohammed bin Sulman (colloquially, “MbS”), are confronting Iran via proxy wars in Libya and Yemen. While the wars were not instigated by the Gulf states, they have “powerfully shaped their subsequent trajectories” (Hanieh, 2018, p. 242). Taking advantage of the regional power imbalance and domestic conflicts, the UAE and its allies have sought to “embrace this malleability” to both preserve the regional political economy and to shape a future that will be advantageous to their own interests (Hanieh, 2018, p. 242).

Another major shift in the regional balance has been the attempt to isolate Qatar. In Libya, the alliance of Russia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE are pitted against Qatari-backed Islamist forces, but the rift runs much deeper. The boycott of Qatar, led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, has divided the Gulf Cooperation Council, weakening what was “the most successful Arab international organization” (Lynch, 2018).

In 2014, the UAE, Saudi Arabi, Bahrain, and Egypt withdrew their ambassadors from Qatar. In 2017, all diplomatic and economic ties with Qatar were cut, alleging that Qatar was sponsoring terrorists and growing too close to Iran. Hanieh suggests that Qatar’s move toward power—aligning with the Muslim Brotherhood and using Al Jazeera to promote its regional interests—increased friction and threatened the Emirati/Saudi power axis (Hanieh, 2018). The public relations warfare has cut both ways. Without a news organization to rival the reach of Qatar’s Al Jazeera, the Emirates hired European PR firms to frame Qatar as a sponsor of terrorist groups—and even allegedly paid a Norwegian NGO to publish fake human rights index reports with the UAE high in the ranking and Qatar at the bottom (Vice article) (Mondloch, 2015). The underlying politics behind this mutual manipulation of think tanks and media, says Davidson, seem clear—there is a Gulf cold war between Qatar and the Emirates (Donaghy, 2015).

### ***3. The War on Islamists***

The campaign to discredit and isolate Qatar and involvement in Yemen’s and Libya’s civil wars are being framed by Emirates as a crusade against Islamists. Fighting Islamists—predominantly the Muslim Brotherhood, which arguably has the widest support across the Muslim world—plays a central role in both the UAE’s regional and internal security policies. To understand this preoccupation with Islamist groups, Gause (2003) contends that states in the Middle East are more threatened by ambiguous external threats to regime stability more than the immediate military threats from antagonistic neighboring countries. He writes “the Middle East leaders view external challenges to their domestic

legitimacy and security, based upon transnational ideological platforms of Islam and pan-Arabism, as being more serious than threats based simply upon a preponderance of military capabilities” (Gause, 2003, p. 303).

Inside Abu Dhabi and Dubai, however, is a panopticon state security apparatus, through which the country boasts exceptionally high levels of domestic ‘security’ and stability (CIA, 2020). The country controls border entry using a biometric database, sharing intelligence with the United States (Davidson, 2011). While Dubai in particular has been known to turn a blind eye to organized crime networks taking advantage of the emirate’s laissez-faire policies and centrality in global flows of people, goods, and capital, levels of petty crime are nonetheless quite low (Davidson, 2008). More realistically, the wave of uprisings in 2011 posed a threat to internal stability and inspired increased militarization and a censorship (Young, 2014). This suggests there is a disconnect between the force of the anti-Islamist campaign and the magnitude of the threat that the Muslim Brotherhood group poses. In the Trucial states, the threat of pirates was a British “obsession” during the 19th century (Kanna, 2011, p. 23). The threat, however, was to Britain’s unchallenged control of the area and adjacent trade routes that provided unfettered access to India. Britain moved to counter the rising power and growing naval forces of the Qawasim tribe—one of the two major tribes in the region, alongside the Bani Yas—by invoking the “pirates” label (Kanna, 2011, p. 23). Today, the Qawasim continue to hold seats of power in the emirates of Ras al-Khaimah and Sharjah, while the Bani Yas control Dubai and Abu Dhabi. Thus, Freer (2017) observes that the Muslim Brotherhood threat could be inflated in order to legitimize increased security policies—both domestically and regionally.



#### ***4. Terrorism in the UAE***

While the UAE is not eminently threatened by terrorist attacks, it has a modest history of incidents and is in relationship with regional terrorist movements and the global ‘War on Terror’. Davidson notes that terrorism is “unlikely to be an immediate concern” in the UAE (Davidson, 2011, p. 142)—although Dubai has suffered from some terrorist attacks and political violence in recent history. Most of these attacks have been aimed at discrediting the ruling family, allegedly based on the rulers’ questionable relationship to the West and other religious and cultural shortcomings (Davidson, 2008, p. 290). In 2005, for example, the Dubai political establishment reported receiving a threatening statement accusing the emirate of transforming into a “secular” state, and claiming that they had been complicit in bombarding Muslims in other countries (Davidson, 2008, p. 297). Davidson (2008) suggests that Dubai’s massive expat population causes more vulnerability to terrorist groups that prefer targets representative of the West. In nearby Abu Dhabi, an incident in 2014 was categorized as a terrorist attack when Ibolya Ryan, a Hungarian-American teacher in Abu Dhabi, was killed by a woman who was said to have been radicalized by online propaganda (Ibish, 2017).

Following the 9/11/2001 attacks on the US World Trade Center, the UAE—mainly, their banking system—came under scrutiny. While two of the hijackers were Emirati nationals, one from Shajrah and one from Ras al-Khaimah, the more prominent implication was the 9/11 Commission report findings that several of the hijackers had flown to the US via the UAE (Davidson, 2008). Within the same year of the attacks, the

Emirates quickly passed an anti-money laundering law from the Council of Ministers as a response to widespread rumors that al-Qaeda transferred money through Dubai (Davidson, 2008, p. 286). Furthermore, the UAE, along with other Gulf states, has been accused of ‘buying off’ terrorists (Davidson, 2008, p. 295). This places the UAE in a complicated relationship between countering terrorist network activities, while securing safety by permitting and even paying off these groups that operate in the shadows of Dubai’s black market. Thus, an escalation of terrorist activity and destabilization of the country would hurt the illicit networks that might benefit from this arrangement as much as it would “seriously undermine or even destroy the emirate’s increasingly foreign-investment dependent economy” (Davidson, 2008, p. 264).

Paradoxically, terrorism is both endangering and advantageous to the Emirati economy. The oil-rich emirates have built an economy that profits off of fear—the “fear” of instability in the region which increases profits from oil wealth with price spikes, and subsequently increased investment in the “green zone” or safe haven of Dubai itself (Davis, 2006). Explaining this disjunction of how ‘terrorist threats’ operate for the Emirates, Davis (2006) writes that

fear is also the most dynamic component of the oil revenues that turn [Dubai’s ruler Mohamed al-Maktoum’s] sand dunes into malls and skyscrapers. Every time insurgents blow up a pipeline in the Niger Delta, a martyr drives his truck bomb into a Riyadh housing complex, or Washington and Tel Aviv rattle their sabres at Tehran, the price of oil (and thus Dubai’s ultimate income) increases by some increment of anxiety in the all-important futures market. The Gulf economies, in other words, are now capitalized not just on oil production, but also on the fear of its disruption. (Davis, 2006, p. 60)

Not only does terrorism have significant implications for the UAE given its role in the global economy—the country has also positioned itself as the United States’ “key partner” in the War on Terror by providing the US with reinforcement, important strategic bases for regional military interventions (Davidson, 2008), and avenues to spy on Iran (Davis, 2006). Unsurprisingly—given its long history of military allegiance for US operations in the Middle East—Commander in Chief of the US Central Command, General Anthony Zinni calls the UAE-US partnership “the strongest relationship that the United States has in the Arab world today” (Embassy of the United Arab Emirates, 2020c).

##### ***5. Counterterrorism and Countering Violent Extremism in the UAE***

The website of the Emirati embassy to the United States declares that post-9/11, the UAE has emerged as a leader in regional counterterrorism efforts (Embassy of the United Arab Emirates, 2020c) and is home to many organizations fighting extremism and amplifying moderate voices (Embassy of the United Arab Emirates, 2020b). Adopting what they call a “holistic” approach to combating violent extremism, the UAE’s efforts are focused on “cutting off funding [to extremist groups]; disrupting the recruitment of foreign fighters; securing borders; halting the spread of hate and promotion of violence via the web and social media; and, preventing the use of religious centers to radicalize and recruit” (Embassy of the United Arab Emirates, 2020b). They highlight the many channels in which their messages of “tolerance” and “moderation” are broadcast through education curriculum, public service campaigns, and monitoring of religious messaging (Embassy of

the United Arab Emirates, 2020b). The table below provides a timeline of CVE activities in the UAE.

*Timeline of Countering Violent Extremism Initiatives in the UAE, 2010-2019*

| <u>Year</u> | <u>Activity</u>   |
|-------------|---|
| 2010        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General Authority of Islamic Affairs and Endowments established to provide guidelines to mosques for Friday sermons to prevent violent extremist preaching.</li> <li>• UAE hosts Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Summit in Abu Dhabi and calls for world counterterrorism center</li> </ul>   |
| 2011        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participates in first Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) ministerial meeting in New York</li> <li>• UAE is cochair of GCTF CVE Working Group with the UK</li> </ul>  |
| 2012        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation of retina-scanning devices at border controls to enhance security measures</li> <li>• UAE Ministry of Interior hosts fifth regional field meeting for Project al Qabdah: Counterterrorism for the Middle East and North Africa</li> <li>• Hosted Third GCTF Ministerial Meeting in Abu Dhabi</li> <li>• Launch of Hedayah, International Center of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism</li> <li>• Reforms to Islamic education curriculum introduced in government schools, with a new emphasis on tolerance</li> </ul>   |
| 2013        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Federal Law No. 7 of 2013 passes, securing Hedayah’s place as an independent, international organization.</li> <li>• Trail of 94 members of designated terrorist group Al-Islah (affiliate of the Muslim Brotherhood)</li> </ul>   |
| 2014        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Federal National Council (FNC) amends to key money-laundering legislation to better strengthen efforts to combat terrorist financing raised by the International Monetary Fund</li> <li>• UAE issued Terrorism Law No. 7 of 2014, identifying the legal definitions of terrorist acts.</li> <li>• GCTF adopts Abu Dhabi Memorandum on Good Practices for Education and CVE at Fifth Ministerial Meeting in New York City, drafted with support of Hedayah</li> <li>• UAE participates in coalition airstrikes in Syria against Daesh</li> <li>• UAE mission to the UN hosts panel discussion on the role of women in CVE in New York City</li> <li>• Cabinet approved list of designated terrorist organizations and groups in support of Terrorism Law No. 7.3</li> <li>• Abu Dhabi Police arrest self-radicalized terrorist suspect less than 48 hours after attack on American teacher and attempted bombing of Egyptian-American doctor</li> </ul> |

- Hedayah hosted first Global CVE Expo in Abu Dhabi
  - Launch of Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies with high-level conference in Abu Dhabi on combating violent extremism
  - Establishment of Muslim Council of Elders to promote peace in Muslim communities
- 2015
- Anti-Discrimination and Hatred Law, law passed, criminalizing any acts that stoke religious hatred and/or which insult religion through any form of expression
  - Sawab Center, a joint EAE/ U.S. online counter-messaging initiative is launched
- 2016
- National Program for Tolerance launched, promoting values of tolerance and coexistence and rejecting attitudes of discrimination and hatred
  - The UAE appoints its first Minister of State for Tolerance, making Sheikha Lubna Khalid Al Qasimi the world's first tolerance minister
- 2017
- International Institute for Tolerance established by Law No. 9 of 2017, aiming to provide solutions to the challenges of extremism and promote the UAE as a role model for tolerance
- 2018
- Fatwa Council established to unify and regulate Fatwa practices
- 2019
- The year 2019 declared the “Year of Tolerance” in the UAE
  - Pope Francis visits Abu Dhabi
  - Creation of the “Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together,” a joint statement signed by Pope Francis of the Catholic Church and Sheikh Ahmed el-Tayeb, Grand Imam of Al-Azhar
  - The Higher Committee of Human Fraternity established to oversee implementation of Human Fraternity document
  - Announcement of 'Abrahamic Family House' interfaith center for Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, to be completed in 2022
  - Conference on “Empowering Youth and Promoting Tolerance: Practical Approaches to Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism Conducive to Terrorism” held in Abu Dhabi

Table 1 Timeline of Countering Violent Extremism Initiatives in the UAE, 2010-2019

It is important to note that there is not a direct correlation in timing between terrorist attacks and CVE activity. While the UAE responded quickly with new banking regulations following the 9/11 Commission Report that named Dubai as a transit site for 17 of the 19 hijackers and implicated UAE's banking system in laundering funds for Al Qaeda, the

preponderance of CVE activities occur a decade after the 9/11 attacks. Furthermore, there is very little reported incidence of violent extremism within the UAE, suggesting that this is not a driving factor in their CVE policy.

In conjunction with CVE initiatives that focus on non-coercive activities, the UAE officially criminalized terrorism, including membership in any of their designated terrorist groups. The 2014 Anti-terrorism Law

“[...] defines the act of terrorism as including any action or inaction constituting a crime under the provisions of the law. Acts of terrorism under the law include activities that pose a threat to the security of the state and the royal family; enticement to join terrorist organizations; and financing terrorist elements or organizations inside the country and abroad.” (Sadek, 2014)

In the same year, the UAE released a comprehensive list of 83 organizations it considers terrorist groups, including ISIL, the Muslim Brotherhood and its UAE branch Al Islah, Al Qaeda, and the Houthi rebels in Yemen (Vela, 2015). Referencing the list designating terror groups, Foreign Affairs Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed stated that UAE’s threshold for extremism is “quite low,” explaining that “for many countries the definition of terror is that you have to carry a weapon and terrorize people. For us it’s far beyond that. We cannot tolerate even the smallest and tiniest amount of terrorism” (Vela, 2014).

## ***6. The Muslim Brotherhood and the UAE***

In order to understand the target of the UAE's war on Islamists—the Muslim Brotherhood—it is necessary to trace their history within the country. Like other revivalist groups in the region, The Muslim Brotherhood aimed to safeguard Muslim religious identity and the Islamic nature of the state (Al-Raffie, 2019). The movement was founded in Egypt in the 1920s by Hassan al-Banna, a schoolteacher and Islamic scholar. Like other countries in the region, the Brotherhood sentiments found their way to the Emirates via Egyptian teachers that were widely recruited (Al-Raffie, 2019; Freer, 2017), and found popularity primarily in the northern emirates. The movement is not unitary, but instead has its local branches—the locally-established Emirati chapter known as Al-Islah. As a whole, the core of the Muslim Brotherhood “has remained non-violent and instead pursued the desired change largely through legitimate social and political avenues” (Al-Raffie, 2019, p. 298).

Al-Islah had a non-violent agenda in the UAE, and were tolerated in the country for many years. Naturally, they were highly involved in the education sector, with Islah supporters serving in the Ministry of Education. The sector became a battleground between ideologies of religious conservatism and tradition opposing ‘Westernization’ and secular nationalism (Freer, 2018, p. 98). The government moved to reduce the influence of the Brotherhood over the education sector in 1983, when they removed the Islah-affiliated Sheikh Said Abdullah Salman from his role of Education Minister and reformed the curriculum (Freer, 2018). It was in 1987, Freer finds, that Mohammed bin Zayed's rising

influence in the country's politics opened a new era of repression against Brotherhood influence. She writes:

The honeymoon the Islamists enjoyed under Sheikh Zayed al-Nahyan came to an end in 1987. Sheikh Zayed's third son, Muhammad bin Zayed, emerged as an influential figure with ambitions to beat his two older brothers to the throne. It is believed that Bin Zayed was personally tutored by individuals who held a deep grudge against the Muslim Brotherhood. The same year, Bin Zayed tried to unseat the ruler of Sharjah, the third-ranking emirate in the federation. Sharjah's ruler, Sheikh Sultan al-Qasimi, had been an outspoken critic of some of the policies adopted by the central government in Abu Dhabi. (Freer, 2017)

The real crackdown, however, came in the 1990s. The types of regime legitimacy questions that were raised by Islamist groups were reinvigorated during a prolonged historical low in oil prices, and more easily disseminated through increasing access to communications technology (K. Ulrichsen, 2015, p. 30). Bin Zayed took charge of the UAE security agency in the early 1990s, and, guided by former Egyptian security officers, enacted a plan called 'drying the springs' to rid any and all Islamists from any public office (Freer, 2017). All of the Islah branches across the emirates were closed, along with any other Islamic charity or Koranic studies group. While not officially outlawed, after removing all of Al-Islah's members from positions of power, the government was largely 'ambivalent' towards the group (al-Zo'by & Başkan, 2015). A new round of arrests targeting al-Islah occurred in 2001 after the two Emirati nationals were implicated in the 9/11 attacks (Ardemagni, 2019).

Mohamed bin Zayed's animosity towards to Muslim Brotherhood was long in the making, but the uprising of 2011 created a turning point. Demonstrations of varying



intensity spread across the region, centered on demands for more democratic systems of governance. In the United Arab Emirates, a mixed group consisting of liberal non-Islamists united with members of Al-Islah composed and sent a letter addressed to Sheikh Khalifa and the Supreme Council. The 133 signatories petitioned for reforms to the Federal National Council that would increase its electorate body, strengthen its legislative power, and reinforce the governance of each individual emirate (Freer, 2015). At the same time, small, easily contained protest begin in the relatively deprived Northern emirates (Ardemagni, 2019). Sheikh Khalifa swiftly gifted land to less wealthy Abu Dhabi nationals and created a \$2.76 billion fund to help citizens with low incomes (al-Zo'by & Başkan, 2015). In April of 2011, five of the signatories were arrested on the grounds of “publicly insulting the UAE’s leaders,” while seven activists were stripped of their Emirati citizenship later that year (Freer, 2015). A full raid on Islamists (and political activists) in the country was underway, with arrests throughout 2012—even detaining Sheikh Sultan al Qasimi, a member of the al-Qassemi royal family and first cousin of the emir of Ras al Khaimah and leader of the Emirate’s branch of Islah (Ardemagni, 2019). Trials began in 2013, against 94 Emiratis for “seeking to oppose the basic principles of the UAE system of governance and to seize power” (al-Zo'by & Başkan, 2015, p. 406). Of the 94, 56 were sentenced to prison for up to eight years for allegedly planning a coup. Eight were sentenced in absentia to 15 years in jail, and 26 were acquitted.

Many scholars remain skeptical of the government’s coup narrative (al-Zo'by & Başkan, 2015; Ardemagni, 2019; Freer, 2018). Freer (2015) suggests that the state is inflating the Muslim Brotherhood threat to increase security policies. The Abu-Dhabi based

central government, inspired by MbZ's "distrust of the Brotherhood and conviction that it held sway in important sectors of political life," has accentuated the Brotherhood danger—which had its main support base in the North—to aid in strengthening Abu Dhabi's control of the country (Freer, 2017). Freer summarizes the root of the friction and diverging visions for the state:

In reality, the Emirati Muslim Brotherhood has been concerned primarily with adjusting social policies inside of the UAE, especially in the face of increasing secularization and Westernization. Its attempt to promote more conservative social practices, however, was taken to be a threat to an Emirati leadership, largely under the control of Shaykh Mohammed bin Zayed, which increasingly defines itself as progressive and secular. (Freer, 2017)

As a result, the Brotherhood presents a challenge mainly because "it generates oppositional discursive activism that contests the state's claim of legitimate and moral power" (al-Zo'by & Başkan, 2015, p. 411). Forstenlechner et. al (2012), writing from the UAE, argue that the problems with the Brotherhood have nothing to do with political participation and democracy. Rather, the Muslim Brotherhood are terrorists, the authors assert, and then proceed to separate 'dissent' into two categories: religious and democratic (Forstenlechner et al., 2012, p. 57). The core problem, it seems, is that the religious sort of dissent opposes "in theory at least, the very concept of the nation-state" (Forstenlechner et al., 2012).

## CHAPTER V

### ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The previous sections outlined the lack of universality around definitions of violent extremism, with a variety of possible targets, an ambiguous link to terrorism, and a spectrum of extremist activities ranging from holding ideas to committing violence. This study uses this ambivalence as a point of departure for constructing the narrative of violence extremism in the UAE. This section discusses findings based on the following questions: How is violent extremism rhetorically constructed in the UAE's discourse? How are identities built within the UAE's discourse on CVE? How does the UAE identify and position itself as a counter-extremist state through its discourse? What 'narrative' is the UAE putting forth in their discourse on violent extremism? What ideologies are underlying these ideas, and how does this relate to surrounding power structures?

This chapter attempts to answer these questions through an analysis of texts comprising the UAE's discourse on violent extremism. As outlined in Section 2, this analysis entails scouring the text for: (1) a hyperfocus on certain synonymous words or short phrases, (2) connoted words or phrases, (3) structural oppositions or binaries, (4) the wording used to describe actors. The results of this analysis are presented in the following sections, illustrating the definitions, the actors, and the key concepts found within the discourse. Data from interviews with key respondents is used to provide context to the discourse analysis findings in this phase. Emerging themes from interview transcriptions were collated and compared with the results of the textual analysis to find where

impressions corroborate, explain, or contradict the findings. The following discussion is not a conclusive description of violent extremism discourse in the Emirates, but it illustrates key discursive constructions, guiding narratives, and primary assumptions of the overall discourse.

Expanding the lens of analysis to include the broader surrounding context within which the discourse is produced and reproduced, this chapter concludes with a discussion connecting findings from the rhetorical analysis with the information set forth in the previous chapter. Looking at the suppression or promotion of variants in narratives and interpretations, and the selective reappropriation of ‘war on terror’ rhetoric suggests the ways in which language is in conversation with social, economic, political, and physical realities.

### **A. Constructing Violent Extremism**

The first part of analysis involved scouring texts for descriptive words used to depict violent extremism. Rather than relying on legal definitions or seeking to construct a conclusive definition of violent extremism, this exercise sought to extract the core concepts associated violent extremism as ‘building blocks’ for the rest of the analysis. Furthermore, this study, like others, found such great levels of conceptual ambiguity in the usage of ‘violent extremism’ as to likely render a singular definition impossible. Words and phrases used to describe violent extremism within the texts were collated and the results were recorded in Excel, grouping similar words (for example, ‘international’ was coded as

‘global’ and ‘beliefs’ was coded under ‘ideology’) and counting their frequency of appearance. There were roughly ten main ideas affiliated with violent extremism, which included: terrorist (16), ideology (14), Islamist (12), violence (12), hate (11), threat (7), intolerance (6), global (4), intimidation (3), political Islam (3), and ISIS (2). The graph below visualizes the key themes and their frequency.

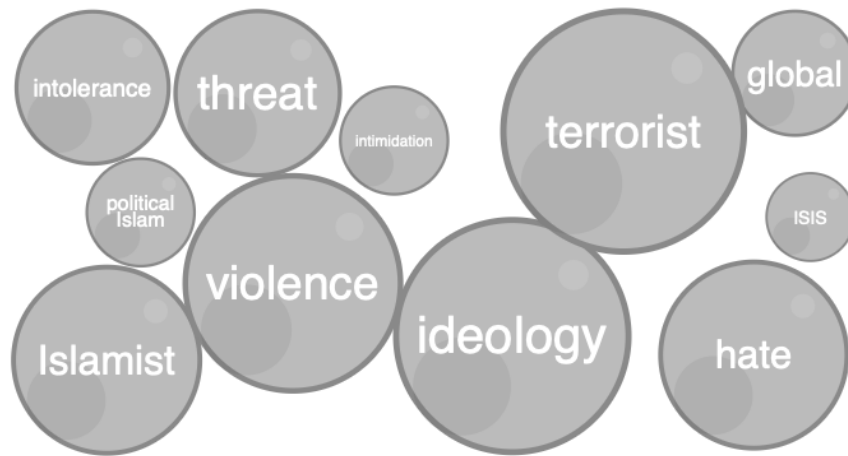


Figure 1 Labels associated with violent extremism

These results suggest that violent extremism is linked to hateful, intolerant beliefs and violence. ‘Terrorism’ was so frequently interchanged with ‘violent extremism’ that no clear pattern of differentiation could be established in the scope of this study. Many texts would switch between the two terms within the same paragraph. Furthermore, key descriptors surrounding terrorism and violent extremism did not consistently reveal if violent extremism is understood to be a predominantly *external*, *regional* or *international*

security problem, or an *internal* threat to *domestic* security in this context. Conflicting data insinuated all of these possible configurations at different points, either referring to violent extremism as a global phenomenon, not specifying and addressing extremism in general, or positioned it as a hypothetical societal problem within the UAE.

When asked for their definitions of violent extremism, five of the seven respondents agreed that terrorism and violent extremism are synonymous. However, one respondent said that they recall the UAE’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs having stated that violent extremism *leads* to terrorism—although the ultimate distinction between the two was not provided. Notably, every respondent used the word “violence” in their given definition—whether actual or threatened. The other themes mentioned were: religious or political motivations (2), illegal violence (1), non-state actors (1), threat of violence (1), ideology (1). One respondent mentioned that defining violent extremism was avoided in their work because it changes from context to context.

Incidentally, when asked about the difference between *violent* extremism and *non-violent* extremism, none of the respondents provided criteria to differentiate the two. Rather, the responses focused on the difficulty of drawing a conceptual line between the two.

“So this is where you kind of get into these grey lines” (Academic 2)

“It’s a grey area” (Practitioner 1)

“I mean, there’s a very thin line between when a person is just an extremist and when he takes up violence, right? It’s just one step [away]” (Practitioner 2)

These findings were generally consistent with the literature describing ambiguous definitions and differences of terrorism and extremism. Violent extremism is both a precursor to terrorism and/or a synonymous term, linked to the pathos or ideas. Hate, intolerance, and political Islam appear to be equated with an extremist posturing. Furthermore, these *ideas* appear to be intimately linked to *violence*, and attention is mainly focused on ‘*Islamic*’ extremist ideologies.

## **B. The UAE’s Counter-Extremist Identity**

The UAE unambiguously promotes itself as a ‘role model’ for countering violent extremism. Similar to the above analysis, repetitive words and phrases used to describe the United Arab Emirates were recorded and collated by common themes. The results were later divided into three salient aspects: (1) the UAE’s status in the field of countering violent extremism, (2) the core values embodied by the state and society, and (3) the role of the state vis-à-vis its population. The results of this are illustrated below in Figure 3.

| Elements of a counter-extremist identity |                   |           |                         |
|--|-------------------|-----------|-------------------------|
| Group                                    | Descriptive words | Frequency | Included ideas          |
| Status                                   | Model             | 9         | Role model, example     |
|  | Leader            | 6         | Spearheading, leading   |
|  | Praised           | 4         | Lauded                  |
|  | Wise guidance     | 3         | Wisdom, wise            |
| Values                                   | Tolerance         | 16        | Acceptance              |
|  | Coexistence       | 16        | Peaceful coexistence    |
|  | Moderate          | 13        | Moderation              |
|  | Peaceful          | 7         | Peace                   |
|  | Open              | 5         | Openness                |
| State                                    | Secure            | 5         | Stable, stability, safe |
|  | Protectors        | 3         |                         |
|  | Empire            | 2         |                         |

Table 2 Elements of a counter-extremist identity

The UAE ‘role model’ discourse was echoed by respondents, who agreed that the Emirates is “leading the region” in countering violent extremism (Analyst 1), as well as “proud,” “dedicated,” and “committed” (Practitioner 1) to the endeavor. The word “model” was often used in conjunction with the concepts of “tolerance” and “coexistence” within the texts, suggesting that the UAE seeks to portray its positive values as a model rather than specific, transferrable policies.



Underlying this ‘model of tolerance’ discourse is an ideological positioning where the UAE situates itself between the Muslim world and the global community at large. As one respondent notes:

“We work with the government here—there’s not a big problem of radicalization here, locally. I think the UAE sees that they want to be sort of an ambassador for CVE internationally, so they have been very supportive of our activities and our initiatives.” (Practitioner 1)

Expanding on this theme, respondents also depicted the UAE as both a geographic and a cultural channel to CVE work in the region:

“The Emirates is the ‘heart of the beast’ [and] also geographically closer to Africa and Asia than North America is.” (Academic 1)

“It’s a very good location in terms of crossroads [and also...] a non-Western country, to give it flavor and perspective.” (Practitioner 1)

“Embassies want to get suggestions for policy development from the UAE to help with their Muslim populations at home.” (Academic 2)

When discussing state security and domestic extremism, all respondents believed there was little-to-no problem of extremism inside of the UAE, and when prompted to explain, all respondents echoed the same ideas contained within the UAE’s discourse that portrays itself ‘stable’ and ‘secure’ and purged of extremism.

“This is a very safe country, of course” (Practitioner 2)

“The UAE is very stable” (Academic 1)

“There’s no problem here” (Researcher 1)

“There’s not a big problem of radicalization here, locally” (Practitioner 1)

“There are no issues here, no radicals here” (Analyst 1)

However, several of the respondents proceeded to modify their statements—unprompted—correcting the sweeping claim that extremism does not exist domestically, and provided more nuanced answers hinting at the ways in which extremism may still be present:

“Inside, you can say that there are some extremists, but they don’t—they are not violent. So, the issue is the violent extremists. [They are] outside the UAE, in general.” (Researcher 2)

“Very little is known of how much of an issue this is over here. Like, how many people actually try to join or have gone. I mean, this kind of stuff is kept under wraps.” (Academic 2)

“There was that incident at the Dubai airport a couple years ago [...] and in 2015... but they caught her! They’re all isolated, very isolated incidents.” (Practitioner 1)

“I think lone wolves would be a more common things in the UAE because it’s very difficult to organize anything here.” (Practitioner 2)

When prompted to elaborate on why the UAE appears secure against violent extremism, causes were listed as: the successful ‘model of tolerance’, the peaceful environment, political and economic stability, just rule of law, early prevention, and strict immigration policies.

“[When discussing violent extremism] we are talking about action, there is action. What they think and what they believe, and action. If they have this thought it’s easy to become a behavior and become an action. If you bring a person—he has this religion, this terrorism, and you put him here in UAE—he can’t make any action.

But maybe you take him—the same person—to another environment, you must look what he can do.” (Researcher 1)

“A lot of reasons. One, the tolerance that the UAE [creates]. Most of the people came here to work. This is the first example. But all people bring their ideas, and their religion, and their ideology with them. But the shade and the atmosphere here is peaceful. Peaceful. They solved the problems from the beginning. You know the cancer cell, if you don’t give them sugar, they will not grow. This is a small example.” (Researcher 1)

“You have your rights.” (Researcher 2)

“Just because the issues we have in the UAE—if you compare to, say, Libya, or one of the other North African failed states, where you have a large number of [ISIS] recruits coming, it’s very different than over here. There’s a lot more political stability. There’s a lot more economic stability. A lot of the grievances people have—they don’t exist here. And also, immigration is strictly controlled here. A lot of the people living in the country—they’re expatriates. They just came here to work; they don’t care about the politics of the region.” (Academic 2)

Each respondent affirmed that the UAE elicits a unique or special context that is successful in discouraging extremism and achieving stability and security.

## **C. Narratives of Violent Extremism**

### ***1. Moderation***

The core assumption underlying the UAE’s discourse on violent extremism is the characterization of violent extremism as Islamic violent extremism. This assumption underlies almost every aspect of the UAE’s discourse and its approaches to countering violent extremism (see Table 1 for a timeline highlighting key CVE initiatives). Within this premise, ‘moderate’ Islam, based on ‘correct’ interpretations of religious texts, is contrasted

to extremism—an ‘incorrect’ and ‘deviant’ offshoot of the authentic reading. The topic of one campaign from the Sawab Center—‘sources of extremism’—focused on the correct/incorrect dichotomy. One tweet reads: “Corrupting religious discourse with violent extremist ideology is one of the #SourcesOfExtremism. Use your reason and judgement to determine who legitimately speaks in the name of religion” (Sawab Center, 2018). The campaign frequently used the hashtag “#DeludedFollowers” in reference to those who believe extremist narratives. The discourse equates the Emirates’ denomination—Maliki Islam—as a moderate Islam that is portrayed as the panacea for extremism. One respondent pointed out that the UAE being a Malak sect meant it “escaped Salafi Wahhabism—it is a different context” (Analyst 1). Concerning the meaning of ‘moderate’, the same respondent explained that extremism is the result of a “tough stance”—that is, *only* secular or *only* religious. They also referred to the UAE’s foreign policy as “moderate” and stated that the country requires a “moderate” environment for its economic activities. This narrative of corrective, moderate Islam in opposition to extremist interpretations also manifests in the UAE’s promotion of Islamic values within their violent extremist discourse, and helps to explain policies that focus on countering extremist narratives (Sawab Center) and monitoring religious messaging (Fatwa Council).<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> The Council on Fatwa was created to ensure moderate Islamic rulings, help eradicate extremism, and centralize messaging (Emirates News Agency, 2017).

## ***2. Tolerance***

With its “moderate” stance on religious freedoms, the Emirates portrays itself as the model state for tolerance and peaceful coexistence. These two most frequently occurring words in the discourse—coexistence’ and tolerance—are attributed to values of Sheikh Zayed, arguably the state’s most important founding father. According to a Minister of State, H.E. Zaki Anwar Nusseibeh, the Emirati foundations of tolerance are part of the “Sheikh Zayed legacy”—first, that mankind is a family; second, god is omnipotent; and third, that he [God] could have made us follow one God if he had so desired (Harvey, 2019). In 2019 the UAE celebrated their “Year of Tolerance,” with the Minister of Tolerance, Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak, declaring that “religion is a positive force in the world, and, in the UAE, everyone is free to practice their faith in peace” (Emirates News Agency, 2018). Tolerance is proudly celebrated as a key trait in the Emirates and is aggressively promoted. Early in 2019 the UAE arranged for a historical visit from Pope Francis (the first papal visit to the Arabian Peninsula), followed by a high-profile “Interfaith Iftar” held at the UAE Embassy in Washington, DC. Tolerance is even written into law, through an anti-discrimination law—which prohibits blasphemy, discrimination, and hate speech—providing a “sound foundation for the environment of tolerance, broad-mindedness and acceptance in the UAE” (Emirates News Agency, 2015). Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid is clear about the project of publicizing the country as a “global role model for tolerance,” stating that “we intend to transform that value into a sustainable institutional work that will reflect positively on our peoples in the Arab world” (UAE Cabinet, 2018).

### 3. Ideology

A pivotal conviction of the Emirates' discourse on violent extremism is leveling extremist ideology with extremist action. The discourse emphasizes the importance of prevention, early intervention, and weeding out the ideological 'root causes' of terrorism. Seeing thoughts as the driver of violent extremism leads the rhetoric suggesting that pre-violent extremist ideology is a more significant problem than a violent act. One respondent referred to extremism an "intellectual phenomenon that needs to be faced" now that [ISIS] has been "militarily defeated" (Analyst 1). The literature constructs an idea of what an extremist ideology is (discussed in the following paragraphs) but rarely includes violence or violent intent as a defining feature in these extremist beliefs. This frequent linguistic omission of 'violence' from 'violent extremism' found within the discourse also manifests in legislation. Federal Law 2014/7, "On Combatting Terrorism Offenses," opens with definitions of "Terrorism Offence," "Terrorist Purpose," and "Terrorist Result." A terrorist offence, according the law, is "any criminal action or *inaction*" that aims to achieve a terrorist purpose, which is defined as "a criminal action *or inaction*" with the intent of a terrorist outcome (Federal Law No. (7) of 2014 On Combatting Terrorism Offenses, 2014). Within this narrative, both violent actions and non-violent extremist 'thought' is criminalized. The extremist 'inaction' criminalized under the UAE's "zero-tolerance"<sup>6</sup> policy is unclear, partially obscured by disjointed narratives appearing at random throughout the discourse.

---

<sup>6</sup> "Zero-tolerance" is a phrase often used to describe UAE's policy towards violent extremism (United Nations, 2018)

#### ***4. The “root” of extremist thought***

There are three distinguishable extremist veins of thought that appear rhetorically. The three ideological stances that can be extracted in the discourse are: (1) Radical Islamic ideology, (2) intolerance and hatred, and (3) opposition to the state. Characteristic of the radical, ‘deviant’ religious interpretations that are frequently associated with the Islamic State and Al Qaeda are outlined in the previous section. These beliefs are the primary target of the counter-narrative interventions. The second interpretation of extremist thought is echoed in the aforementioned Law 2015/7, “On Combatting Discrimination and Hatred” which conveys an extremist stance as one disrespecting religion or discriminating against peoples based on their religious or cultural differences. In a podcast on Emirates Airlines in-flight entertainment system, Minister Nusseibeh declares that “one of the root causes of violent extremism is intolerance, ignorance, and bigotry” (Harvey, 2019). An article from ECCSR (2020) responding to the UAE-Israel peace agreement, frames the decision as a “brave step” against extremism. Connecting hatred, discrimination, extremism, and terrorism, the article opens as follows:

Hatred is the initial motive that leads to other evils such as extremism, radicalism and finally terrorism. Hatred originates as a result of continuous and violent collective incitement through discriminating against others who are seen as different in terms of race or faith. This manifests through distorting and demonizing others to the point where hatred becomes an irreversible doctrine that is hard to change, which requires a great deal of courage and will to address. (ECSSR, 2020)

The piece, entitled “The Peace Accord Silences the Discourse of Hatred and Extremism” captures one employment of extremism rhetoric building the UAE’s identity through binaries—as role model of tolerance and peace building.

The final conceptualization of extremism found in the discourse unambiguously links extremist ideology to dissidence. Although this narrative appears less frequently in high-profile discourses, it is *explicitly* criminalized in UAE’s terrorism law. The Emirates’ 2014 anti-terrorism legislation defines a “Terrorist Purpose” as:

Inciting fear among a group of people, killing them, or causing them serious physical injury, or inflicting substantial damage to property or the environment, or disrupting security of the international community, *or opposing the country, or influencing the public authorities of the country or another country or international organisation while discharging its duties*, or receiving a privilege from the country or another country or an international organisation. (Federal Law No. (7) of 2014 On Combatting Terrorism Offenses, 2014)

When placed in context with the definitions of terrorist offence and purpose, an opposition to the country *in any form* could be considered criminal. A staff writer at ECSSR (2015) illustrates this element of the discourse, when writing about individuals arrested by UAE authorities in 2015 over allegations of plotting to establish a caliphate. They write:

“The country has zero tolerance towards anyone imagining that he/she could breach the impregnable wall of this country and hamper the security, stability and prosperity of those living here, citizens or expatriates.” (ECSSR, 2015)



Criminalizing the mere ‘imagining’ of disrupting state affairs is not merely an ideological theme, but manifested in action when 94 members of Al Islah (The Muslim Brotherhood) were arrested in 2012 and charged with plotting to overthrow the state. The group was later named a terrorist organization in the official list published in 2014, following the implementation of counterterrorism law 7/2014.

This narrative element is woven throughout the discourse in such a way that all roads to extremism eventually lead back to the Muslim Brotherhood. Reading from a pre-scripted response, one respondent spent the majority of the interview presenting a historical accord of how and why the Muslim Brotherhood is considered an extremist organization. The story presented began with Muslim Brotherhood members in official positions taking a stance against modernity and coexistence. The Muslim Brotherhood was “given a very good chance” but they “protested Westernization, rejected secular cabinet appointments, rejected teaching English in schools, music education, and studying abroad” (Analyst 1).

[The Muslim Brotherhood] “missed the chance to be part of this progress in the UAE, the ‘Development March’. Because of its history, the UAE must take a ‘tough stance’ on the Muslim Brotherhood.” (Analyst 1)

Painting the Muslim Brotherhood as anti-modern and anti-Western is only a small part of this storyline. The thesis of this narrative is the assertion that all Islamic extremist groups stem from the Muslim Brotherhood. The think tank ECSSR published a 2017 book entitled *Muslim Brotherhood and Terrorism: Facts and Evidence* which details the

ideological connection between the Brotherhood and other terrorist groups such as ISIS,

Al-Qaeda and Boko Haram:

“While the Muslim Brotherhood insists that such extremist organizations are splinter groups and do not represent it, this does not deny the fact that they all share the same intellectual basis promoted by the Muslim Brotherhood, and which has been adopted by these groups and reflected in their extremist and violent behavior.” (ECSSR, 2017, p. 8)

Some respondents reiterated this sentiment:

“If you talk about al Qaeda, also Da’esh, also Boko Haram. Any organization. If you took the schedule of this organization and the history, they start from the thought or from the ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood. From their books.” (Researcher 1)

“Many extremist movements came from the Muslim Brotherhood.” (Analyst 2)

“Osama bin Laden read Sayyid Qutb [a Muslim Brotherhood scholar] and talked about ‘how they were affecting his mind’.” (Researcher 1)

This narrative highlights the binary opposite of the “tolerance model” for other faiths in the “zero tolerance” policy for Islamist groups. Through the language surrounding this story, the logic reads that all Islamist groups are extremists, and that all extremist groups pose the same level of threat due to their shared ideology. Furthermore, most Islamic extremist ideology stems from the Muslim Brotherhood, therefore the ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood are the root of extremism in the Muslim world and should not be

tolerated. UAE State Security Director Sheikh Hazza bin Zayed al-Nahyan makes this connection while joining thoughts and violent actions:

We believe that in the future [the Muslim Brotherhood] are going to commit the same stupid things as al-Qaida. There is no difference between the ideology of al-Qaida and the Muslim Brotherhood. (US Embassy Abu Dhabi, 2006)

It appears that the Emirates has made a concerted effort to justify outlawing the Muslim Brotherhood, promoting the narrative that links violent extremism to the ideological threat of the group—juxtaposing the Emirates’ values of tolerance, peaceful coexistence, and moderation that situate the state as the premier voice for countering violent extremism in the region.

#### **D. Discussion**

Derek Gregory (2004) argues that the ‘colonial present’ is articulated in the ‘war on terror’. This can be seen in the attempts to establish a US-led global narrative corresponding to the constellations of power that preserve the imperial state’s hegemony (Gregory, 2004). The United States’ development and utilization of the ‘war on terror’ discourse occurs at all times against ‘historical totality’—such that which language is infused with meaning through its diametric relationship to social practices and greater structures of power. Gregory describes how these “enduring codifications” that structure our discursive grids of intelligibility are mutually, but unevenly shaped:

These all take place within a fractured and highly uneven force-field in which other cultures entangle, engage, and exert pressure. But this process of colonial transculturation is inherently asymmetric, and colonial modernity's productions of the other as other, however much they are shaped by those various others, shape its constitution of itself in determinate and decisive ways (Gregory, 2004).

Just as the global economy was co-constituted with that of the Gulf states, so too does the 'war on terror' discourse reflect the complex cultural entanglements of international society and the neoliberal world order. We see this in the reflections from respondents on what makes the field of countering violent extremism in the United Arab Emirates unique. It adds "flavor" and "perspective" as a non-Western country (Practitioner 1). It is physically located in the "heart of the beast" and is geographically closer to Asia and Africa than North American is (Academic 1, Practitioner 2)—a favorable position for an American 'empire of bases'. Furthermore, the Emirates contributes to discourses on violent extremism as a Muslim country where embassies can solicit suggestions to "help with [policy development for] their Muslim populations at home" (Academic 2).

### ***1. Extending the 'war on terror'***

While the previous chapter detailed the context within which this violent extremism discourse is situated, it would be helpful to review the key conceptual features of the US-led global 'war on terror' that has delineated the grid of intelligibility in this 'discursive space' surrounding violent extremism. The main features of the 'war on terror' rhetoric are: 1) terrorists are anti-modern, motivated by hatred for USA and the West, modernity, seculars, and globalization; 2) terrorism is motivated by religious goals, not

political goals; 3) because terrorism is equated with Islamic terrorism, “moderates” should take the lead to battle extremism on the level of ideas 4) terrorists are deluded and irrational, which disqualifies negotiation or compromise, instead preferring policies of eradication or deterrence (Jackson, 2005, 2007).

As previously noted, the Emirates adopts the notion of ‘Islamic terrorism’ without reservation. The UAE asserts that religion—an incorrect reading of Islamic texts—is the ‘root cause’ of extremism. Within their discourse, however, they extend the meaning to include all forms of political Islam—even those with non-violent ideologies. This assumption of extremism equaling Islamic deviance, however, is somewhat at odds with the part of their 2014 anti-terrorism law which criminalizes “opposing the country” outright (Federal Law No. (7) of 2014 On Combatting Terrorism Offenses, 2014). As underlined earlier, the UAE’s legal definition diverges significantly from broad international ‘standards’ in definitions of terrorism or violent extremism in that it precludes targeting or threatening the public, threatening or enacting violence—or even requiring an *action* to be considered terrorism. The respondent who read from a pre-prepared, typed statement during the interviews emphasized that the UAE’s definition is based on its context, before proceeding to narrate the history of the Muslim Brotherhood in the country. The context upon which these understandings arose are embedded in long histories of political struggle, economic development, state alliances, changes to regional and international structures of power, and constructions of identity.

The Emirates is certainly not the only country that has adopted an expansive understanding of what ‘terrorism’ is and codified it, but it is through discourse that the

conceptual bridge becomes more traceable. Ideas can be criminalized within some degree of normalcy as ‘terrorism’ is conflated with ‘violent extremism’ and the ‘violent’ angle is increasingly omitted. Further, through intermingled, overlapping narratives—such as the fight against ISIS, the history of the Muslim Brotherhood, and the denunciation of ‘hatred’ and ‘intolerance’—they obscure a clear comprehension of what the ‘threat’ of extremism, or terrorism, is. Legally, a terrorist threat could be a plethora of things beyond violence, including destabilizing the state, harming the environment, insulting religion, or influencing public authorities (Law 2014/7). The law later extrapolates, in a section entitled “Special Substantive Provisions,” that “a person shall be deemed as posing terrorist threat if said person adopts the extremist or terrorist ideology to the extent that he/she seem likely to commit a terrorist offence” (Law 2014/7). This aligns closely with the heavy use of ‘ideology’ and ‘beliefs’ within the discourse. In 2006, UAE State Security Director Sheikh Hazza bin Zayed al-Nahyan told US Department of State Coordinator for Counterterrorism, Henry Crumpton, “we believe that in the future [the Muslim Brotherhood] are going to commit the same stupid things as al-Qaida. There is no difference between the ideology of al-Qaida and the Muslim Brotherhood” (Crumpton, 2006).

The UAE’s ‘zero tolerance’ policy rejects the “ideological nuance” of different beliefs on the permissibility of using violence, unlike in Egypt, for example, which allows some of these groups to exist (Al-Raffie, 2019, p. 311). In Egypt, where the Muslim Brotherhood core also has a similar non-violent history, they were designated a terrorist group in 2013, following the military coup that removed the Brotherhood-backed President Mohamed Morsi who had been installed during the 2011 revolution. Two months prior to

the UAE's 2014 counterterrorism law, ISIS—which had been gaining attention as it drove Iraqi Defense Forces out of areas in Western Iraq during the first half of the year—captured the city of Mosul, ushering in a new understanding of violent extremism and the size of its threat. A large spike in 'discourse production' can be noted between 2011 and 2015, with a renewed flurry coinciding with the rise of ISIS. With ISIS now the epitome of terror, discourse in the Emirates began to lump the Muslim Brotherhood with Al-Qaeda, and ISIS. The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, among a few other think tanks in the UAE, appeared to focus attention on knowledge production that connected the Muslim Brotherhood to ISIS via the scholarship of Brotherhood founder Hassan al-Banna. This narrative, detailed in the 90-page self-published book from ECSSR, *Muslim Brotherhood and Terrorism: Facts and Evidence*, was echoed by three of the respondents. A selective suppression of alternative narratives to the Muslim Brotherhood's history—demanding political reform or questioning the state's religious authority—accentuates the UAE's role as the 'moderate' model of Islam while the Al-Islah are 'extremists'. With the heightened fear of ISIS, this narrative appears to have been accepted without much friction in powerful political circles (Savage et al., 2019). Further, this narrative aligns with the larger discourse on terrorism that suggests the best policies to fight 'ideas' are those that prevent or correct, thereby eliminating the threat from society as early and completely as possible.

## ***2. Pirates, power, and policy***

The timeline of Mohamed bin Zayed's moves to consolidate power in favor of the Abu Dhabi elite suggests that this violent extremism discourse could be, as Freer (2018)

argues, inflating the threat of the Muslim Brotherhood in order to increase security measures inside the Emirates. This evokes Britain's labeling of the Qawasim as 'pirates' in a move to reorganize tribal power in the Trucial States (See: Kanna, 2011, p. 23). Ulrichsen (2015) notes that a conflation of national security with regime security tends to characterize security discourse in the region. With the al-Nahayan family's strengthened hold over the country's political and economic sphere following the 2008 financial collapse which weakened Dubai's position, it appears that the reforms to the Federal National Council, proposed in the 2011 letter, could strengthen the federation's power and be seen as a threat to Abu Dhabi's preeminence. This discourse intersects with regional objectives as well. Since 1980s, Hanieh (2018) observes that within the context of the regional balance of power between Iran and the Gulf states, all have consistently wielded Islam for very political reasons – as a means to promote their regional influence and isolate political opponents” (p.243). The production and dissemination of this discourse can be seen as a part of the campaign to discredit Qatar and a tool to legitimize military interventions in Yemen and Libya.

The boundaries between some of these discourses are unclear, which makes it increasingly difficult to deduce the intended audience. To whom is the Emirates justifying its meddling in other countries' affairs, for example? The international community? Its small proportion of nationals? Its more significant number of expat workers? Although English is the medium for the texts under analysis, numerous possible domestic implications of these security narratives can also be observed by the labeling and narratives of extremism. As noted, much of the UAE's CVE initiatives focus on Islamic terrorism and



eradicating these ideological ‘root causes’. As a result, these policies aimed at uprooting the Muslim Brotherhood extend beyond this to tighten control of Islamic discourse in the country. Because the government controls the power to define the ‘good Muslim/bad Muslim’ categories, when the Sawab Center tweets, “Use your reason and judgement to determine who legitimately speaks in the name of religion” (Sawab Center, 2018), the only ‘legitimate’ authority is necessarily the state. Ironically, perhaps, it appears as though other religious communities have more freedom to practice their faith in this Muslim country governed by Shari’a law than the Muslim community itself does.

Attempts to control religious dialogue were historically part of a policy to contain the influence of Al-Islah (Freer, 2018, p.102). During the 1980s, when the federal government took issue with the Brotherhood’s perceived influence,

Two decrees from [the ministry of Culture] reflected its desire to contain the religious sphere. The first, enacted in 1986, “asked preachers to steer clear of contention.” The second, issued in January 1988, demanded that preachers “deposit written, advance copies of their Friday sermons with the Ministry and to avoid all areas of controversy and sectarian sensitivity, limiting their remarks to guidance on Islamic practice.” (Freer, 2018, p.100)

Freer (2018) notes that the pushback against the Brotherhood generally followed a pattern of retaliation to any challenge of the state’s moral authority. Ayubi (1991) has observed that a state laying claim to secularism has enabled some counterforces to appropriate Islam as “their own weapon”, thus the state embraces Islam in a defensive way, having to justify its own “version” of Islam. (Ayubi, 1991, p.4). Much of the historical battles between the Brotherhood and the federal government appear to be over instances where the state’s ‘moral authority’ is challenged—such as when the government places primacy on

nationalism and economy before religion, or enacts policies that conflict with Shari'a law. Under the umbrella of countering violent extremism, the UAE has institutionalized control over Islamic discourse and established its own Fatwa council to issue religious rulings. When the potentially unpopular move to (publicly) establish relations with Israel was announced in August of 2020, a Fatwa was issued by the council shortly thereafter, commending the decision as "right and proper" (Emirates News Agency, 2020). According to the press releases, it was "diplomatic milestone" for the Emirates' identity "as a pioneer in peaceful coexistence both in the region and across the world," said Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak, the Minister for Tolerance and Coexistence (The National staff, 2020).

### ***3. In the name of moderation***

Promoting its excellence in countering violent extremism—the leader of CVE efforts, its model of tolerance, and embodiment of 'moderate' Islam—reads as a nation-branding effort to foster global perceptions and secure its importance in the international arena. With its high-profile visits from the Pope, aggressively promoted 'interfaith' initiatives, and advertisement of its multicultural population living in peaceful coexistence, the UAE is asserting its niche as the bridge to mend antagonism between Christianity, Judaism, the West, and Islam—which is the rift regarded in the 'war on terror' discourse to be one of the core causes of violent extremism and its perpetuation. Of course, US officials did not invent or discover this concept of 'moderate Islam' as they spoke of terrorism. This is an example of the complex power dynamics between the US and its allies—seen through the co-constitutive existence of dominant discourses that nonetheless are situated in the

‘historical totality’ of society, which includes existing discourses on religion, politics, and Islam that originate outside of Western centers of knowledge production.

The UAE’s conception of ‘moderate’, as noted by one respondent, refers to more than a moderate interpretation of Islam that opposes extremism as its binary opposite. The UAE also requires a ‘moderate’ work environment—that is, not “only” secular or “only” religious, asserted the interview respondent reading from their script (Analyst 1).

Considering the state’s political economy and history, ‘moderation’ appears to be a deeply rooted concept beyond its application as part of the UAE’s counterterrorist identity. This can be seen throughout the Emirates’ history—attempting to strike a balance between embracing global markets and attracting people and capital while maintaining a moral-religious authority over its citizens with enough wealth accumulation to maintain good graces of its citizens.

#### ***4. ‘Tolerance’ for what?***

The ‘model of tolerance’ which is touted as the solution to *intolerance* is in dialogue with the notions that modernity, Westernization, secularism, globalization, and the US are all the objects of hatred for Islamic terrorists according to the ‘war on terror’ rhetoric. With the United States at the center knowledge production for this discourse, it is unsurprising that a ‘moderate’ state and ‘tolerant’ society are fundamentally linked to an acquiescence of a global capitalist agenda. The supposed “openness” of the “New Dubai,” according to Ong (2007) is symbolized by neoliberal enclaves and zones of exception (Ong, 2007 in Kanna, 2010, p. 27). Davis confers that “when expats extol Dubai’s unique

‘openness’, it is this freedom to carouse and debauch—not to organize unions or publish critical opinions—that they are usually praising”(Davis, 2006, p. 64). This suggests an immense power present in the selective usage and interpretation of concepts. All but one of the ‘Western’ expats that were interviewed found no discrepancy between the Oxford definition of tolerance, which is “the ability or willingness to tolerate the existence of opinions or behaviour that one dislikes or disagrees with,” and the Emirati model of tolerance that is truncated with a “zero tolerance” for political dissent. As one respondent had noted, “people came here to work, they don’t care about the politics of the region” (Researcher 1). Indeed, the majority of respondents praised the country’s efforts to create social cohesion through cultural activities that build bridges between different religions and nationalities that took place during 2019’s “Year of Tolerance” initiative. One respondent took note of the ‘selective’ definition of tolerance, explaining that

“it’s kind of just assumed that tolerance is: ‘I accept you, you accept me, but we’re not going to talk about these other things.’ So, it’s very surface-level: like, your food is great, my food is great, your dress is nice, my dress is nice, but when it comes to issues of, especially, politics or different views or interpretations on theology, that’s not tolerated at all. It works well to a degree, but ultimately it is very surface level.” (Academic 2)

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

This thesis set out to uncover the definitions, ideologies, and narratives present in the United Arab Emirates' discourse on violent extremism. It found that the ambiguous, unstable nature of violent extremism definitions create a fertile ground for the powerful to use the discourse in order to justify censorship, deportation, religious and political repression and imprisonment in the name of national security. In deconstructing the 'counter-extremist' identity of the state, this paper found numerous ways in which discourse is integral to the Emirates' foreign and economic policy—promoting an atmosphere of 'tolerance' to attract upper-class expatriate workers, bolstering attempts to isolate and weaken Qatar's regional positioning, legitimizing military interventions in Libya or Yemen, and justifying the move to make peace with Israel. Through discourse, the UAE is able to promote a narrative of the Muslim Brotherhood as the root of all extremism and intolerance while promoting itself as the embodiment of the 'moderate' Islam that connects East and West—and antidote to the 'clash of civilizations' binaries that underpin the 'war on terror'.

Numerous authors have been raising the alarm of how 'terrorism' is merely a power-infused label—one that will always be defined by those who *have* power. This study showed how counter violent extremism has continued this contentious tradition, allowing for even greater control to be exerted in the name of counter-extremism. It demonstrated

how, in the UAE context, violent extremism discourse allows the state to reframe policy choices that in one light would be repressive as a valiant effort to rid the country and the world of extremism. Importantly, it modestly contributed to an exploration of how language can be used to exert force on structures of power.

## APPENDIX

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

#### *General questions on interviewee and organization*

1. Would you consider yourself a researcher, practitioner, or other role?
2. Approximately how long have you, as a professional, been working on projects related to Countering/Preventing Violent Extremism?
3. Could you tell me a bit about the work your organization does?
4. How long has the organization been working on C/PVE-related projects?
5. Could you please describe the objectives of the kind of work you do related to Counter/Preventing Violent Extremism?

#### *Mapping PVE work in the UAE*

1. Would you identify and describe current Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism efforts and initiatives taking place in the United Arab Emirates?
2. To the best of your knowledge, what organizations are working on C/PVE in the UAE?
3. Could you explain how an organization like yours contributes to the greater project of C/PVE?
4. How do you see the role of the UAE in the MENA region in their efforts to prevent violent extremism? And how do you see the UAE's role globally?
5. How would you describe the working relationship between the United States and the UAE in fighting extremism?

#### *Understanding / defining VE and P/CVE*

1. Do you have a working definition of Violent Extremism that you use in your work? Could you describe the definition?  
To the best of your knowledge, could you explain the source of this definition (i.e. UN convention)?
2. How do you perceive Violent Extremism to be different from *Non-Violent* Extremism?
3. Do you differentiate between Violent Extremism and Terrorism? If so, could you elaborate on the differences between the two terms?
4. If you consider that Violent Extremism and terrorism are not interchangeable terms, what characterizes the field of *Preventing/ Countering* Violent Extremism?

#### *Sharing expertise*

1. Would you describe the types of approaches to Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism (research methods or practical methods) that you employ in your work?
2. Who are the targets/subjects of the type of work/research you do? Please do not identify any individuals by name. (i.e., Are the same groups targeted in the preventive work you do; who are the main actors involved in the preventive violence).

3. Based on your expertise and experience in the field, what do you see as the greatest obstacles to eradicating violent extremism?
4. Have you worked in/on other contexts to which you might compare your work on Countering Violent Extremism the United Arab Emirates? Can you share your experience?  
[or Q.5]
5. What do you find unique about working on Countering Violent Extremism/Violent Extremism in the specific context of the United Arab Emirates?



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Al-Raffie, D. (2019). Egypt: Extremism in moderation: Understanding state response to terrorism in Egypt. In M. J. Boyle (Ed.), *Non-Western Responses to Terrorism* (pp. 294–322). Manchester University Press.
- al-Zo'by, M., & Başkan, B. (2015). Discourse and oppositionality in the Arab Spring: The case of the Muslim Brotherhood in the UAE. *International Sociology*, 30(4), 401–417. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580914554664>
- Ardemagni, E. (2019). “Martyrs” for a Centralized UAE. <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/79313>
- Asad, T. (2010). Thinking about terrorism and just war. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 23(1), 3–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557570902956580>
- Askari, H. (2013). Collaborative colonialism: The political economy of oil in the Persian Gulf. In *Collaborative Colonialism: The Political Economy of Oil in the Persian Gulf*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137353771>
- Ayubi, N. (1991). *Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab World*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315143842-5>
- Banta, B. (2013). Analysing discourse as a causal mechanism. *European Journal of International Relations*, 19(2), 379–402. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066111428970>
- Bartolucci, V. (2010). Analysing elite discourse on terrorism and its implications: the case of Morocco. *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 3(1), 119–135. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17539151003594269>
- Bianchi, A. (2019). Counterterrorism and International Law. In E. Chenoweth, R. English, A. Gofas, & S. N. Kalyvas (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Terrorism* (pp. 658–676). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198732914.013.36>
- Chan, N. (2018). The Malaysian “Islamic” State versus the Islamic State (IS): evolving definitions of “terror” in an “Islamising” nation-state. *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 11(3), 415–437. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2018.1447217>
- Chandrasekaran, R. (2014). *In the UAE, the United States has a quiet, potent ally nicknamed ‘Little Sparta.’* [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/in-the-uae-the-united-states-has-a-quiet-potent-ally-nicknamed-little-sparta/2014/11/08/3fc6a50c-643a-11e4-836c-83bc4f26eb67\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/in-the-uae-the-united-states-has-a-quiet-potent-ally-nicknamed-little-sparta/2014/11/08/3fc6a50c-643a-11e4-836c-83bc4f26eb67_story.html)

- Freer, C. (2017, June 15). UAE and the Muslim Brotherhood: A Story of Rivalry and Hatred. *Middle East Monitor*. <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20170615-uae-and-the-muslim-brotherhood-a-story-of-rivalry-and-hatred/>
- CIA. (2020). *UAE World Factbook Entry*. CIA World Factbook. <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/united-arab-emirates/>
- Cohen, N. (2020, October). The UAE Is Turning Into the World Capital for Weapons Makers. *Foreign Policy*.
- Cruikshank, J. (2012). The Role of Qualitative Interviews in Discourse Theory. *Critical Approaches to Discourse Analysis across Disciplines*, 6(1), 38–52.
- Crumpton, H. A. (2006). *S/CT COORDINATOR CRUMPTON DISCUSSES COUNTERTERRORISM WITH UAE STATE SECURITY DIRECTOR*. Wikileaks Public Library of US Diplomacy. [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06ABUDHABI1930\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06ABUDHABI1930_a.html)
- Davidson, C. M. (2008). *Dubai: The Vulnerability of Success*. Columbia University Press.
- Davidson, C. M. (2011). *Abu Dhabi: Oil and Beyond*. Oxford University Press.
- Davis, M. (2006). Fear and Money in Dubai. *New Left Review*, 41, 47–68.
- de Graaf, B. (2016). Counter-terrorism and conspiracy: historicizing the struggle against terrorism. In L. Randall D. (Ed.), *The Routledge history of terrorism* (pp. 411–427). <https://doi.org/10.5860/choice.193354>
- Ditrych, O. (2014). Tracing the Discourses of Terrorism. In *Tracing the Discourses of Terrorism*. Palgrave Macmillan UK. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137394965>
- Dixit, P. (2013). The rhetoric of ‘terrorism’ and the evolution of a counterterrorist state in Nepal. *Global Change, Peace & Security*, 25(2), 159–174. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14781158.2013.772973>
- Donaghy, R. (2015). *UAE and Qatar: public relations warfare*. Middle East Eye. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/features/uae-and-qatar-public-relations-warfare>
- Doty, R. L. (1996). *Imperial Encounters: The Politics of Representation in North-South Relations*. University of Minnesota Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199584727.003.0002>
- ECSSR, T. E. C. for S. S. and. (2015, August 3). Zero Tolerance towards Compromising With the Security of the Homeland. *Akhbar Alsaat*.
- ECSSR, T. E. C. for S. S. and. (2017). *Muslim Brotherhood and Terrorism: Facts and Evidence*. The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research. <http://library1.nida.ac.th/termpaper6/sd/2554/19755.pdf>

- ECSSR, T. E. C. for S. S. and. (2020). *The Peace Accord Silences the Discourse of Hatred and Extremism*. [https://www.ecssr.ae/en/reports\\_analysis/the-peace-accord-silences-the-discourse-of-hatred-and-extremism/](https://www.ecssr.ae/en/reports_analysis/the-peace-accord-silences-the-discourse-of-hatred-and-extremism/)
- Embassy of the United Arab Emirates. (2020a). *Stopping the Spread of Extremism*. UAE USA United. <https://www.uaeusaunited.com/story/stopping-extremism/>
- Embassy of the United Arab Emirates. (2020b). *Tolerance & Inclusion*. Embassy of the United Arab Emirates. <https://www.uae-embassy.org/about-uae/tolerance-inclusion>
- Embassy of the United Arab Emirates. (2020c). *UAE Counterterrorism*. <https://www.uae-embassy.org/about-uae/foreign-policy/uae-counterterrorism>
- Emirates News Agency, W. (2015). *Experts deem anti-hate speech law will safeguard country and its people against bigotry and hatred*. <http://wam.ae/en/details/1395283559065>
- Emirates News Agency, W. (2017, May 30). *UAE Cabinet approves establishment of both UAE Council for Fatwa and Sharia Board for Banking and Finance*. <http://wam.ae/en/details/1395302616825>
- Emirates News Agency, W. (2018). *In UAE everyone is free to practice their faith in peace: Sheikh Nahyan*.
- Erjavec, K., & Volčič, Z. (2007). 'War on terrorism' as a discursive battleground: Serbian recontextualization of G.W. Bush's discourse. *Discourse & Society*, 18(2), 123–137. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926507073370>
- Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analyzing discourse: Textual analysis for social research*. In *Psychology Press*. Rout.
- Flatschart, E. (2016). Critical Realist Critical Discourse Analysis: A Necessary Alternative to Post-marxist Discourse Theory. *Journal of Critical Realism*, 15(1), 21–52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767430.2015.1118588>
- Forstenlechner, I., Rutledge, E., & Alnuaimi, R. S. (2012). The UAE, the “Arab Spring,” and Different Types of Dissent. *Middle East Policy*, XIX, No. 4(Winter), 54–67.
- Fowler, R., Hodge, B., Kress, G., & Trew, T. (1979). *Language and Control*. Routledge.
- Freer, C. (2015, December 17). The Muslim Brotherhood in the Emirates: Anatomy of a crackdown. *Middle East Eye*. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/big-story/muslim-brotherhood-emirates-anatomy-crackdown>
- Freer, C. (2018). Rentier islamism: The Influence of the Muslim Brotherhood in Gulf Monarchies. In *Rentier Islamism: The Influence of the Muslim Brotherhood in Gulf*

- Monarchies*. Oxford University Press.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190861995.001.0001>
- Fusch, P., & Ness, L. (2015). Are We There Yet? Data Saturation in Qualitative Research. *The Qualitative Report*, 20(9), 1408–1416.
- Gause, F. G. (2003). Balancing what? Threat perception and alliance choice in the Gulf. *Security Studies*, 13(2), 273–305. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636410490521271>
- General Assembly of the United Nations. (2015). *Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism Report A/70/674 of the Secretary-General*. <https://undocs.org/en/A/70/674>
- Global Burden of Disease Collaborative Network. (2017). *Share of deaths by cause, World, 2017*. Global Burden of Disease Study 2017. <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/share-of-deaths-by-cause?tab=chart&stackMode=absolute&region=World>
- Gray, D. E. (2004). *Doing Research in the Real World*. In *Sage Publications*. Sage Publications.
- Gregory, D. (2004). *The Colonial Present: Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq*. Wiley-Blackwell. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1474474006eu348xxx>
- Hanieh, A. (2011). *Capitalism and Class in the Gulf Arab States*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://www.ajis.org/index.php/ajiss/article/view/1107>
- Hanieh, A. (2018). *Money, Markets, and Monarchies*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108614443>
- Harris-Hogan, S., Barrelle, K., & Zammit, A. (2016). What is countering violent extremism? Exploring CVE policy and practice in Australia. *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, 8(1), 6–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19434472.2015.1104710>
- Harvey, S. (2019). *H.E. Zaki Nusseibeh discussing 2019, The Year of Tolerance [Audio podcast episode] in Emirates World*. Emirates World.
- Heard-Bay, F. (1981). *From Trucial States to United Arab Emirates*. Addison-Wesley Longman Ltd. <https://www.amazon.com/Trucial-States-United-Arab-Emirates/dp/0582780322>
- Heard-Bay, F. (2017). *Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates, and the Gulf Region: fifty years of transformation*. Gerlach Press.
- Henry, C. M., & Springborg, R. (2010). *Globalization and the Politics of Development in the Middle East* (Second). Cambridge University Press.

- Herb, M. (2009). A nation of bureaucrats: Political participation and economic diversification in Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 41(3), 375–395. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743809091119>
- Herb, M. (2016). The Wages of Oil. In *The Wages of Oil*. Cornell University Press. <https://doi.org/10.7591/cornell/9780801453366.001.0001>
- Heydemann, S. (2014). Countering Violent Extremism as a Field of Practice. *United States Institute of Peace Insights, Spring*(1), 1, 9–11.
- Human Rights Watch. (2020). *United Arab Emirates: Events of 2019*. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/united-arab-emirates#>
- Hvidt, M. (2009). THE DUBAI MODEL: AN OUTLINE OF KEY DEVELOPMENT-PROCESS ELEMENTS IN DUBAI. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 41(3), 397–418. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743809091120>
- Ibish, H. (2017). *The UAE's Evolving National Security Strategy*. [www.agsiw.org](http://www.agsiw.org).
- Jackson, R. (2005). *Writing the War on Terrorism: Language, Politics and Counterterrorism*. Manchester University Press.
- Jackson, R. (2007). Constructing Enemies: “Islamic Terrorism” in Political and Academic Discourse. *Government and Opposition*, 42(3), 394–426.
- Jeong, H. W. (2020). *Nation Branding and Public Diplomacy in the United Arab Emirates*. The Center on Public Diplomacy Blog. <https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/nation-branding-and-public-diplomacy-united-arab-emirates-0>
- Kamrava, M., Sez nec, J.-F., Ulrichsen, K., Hertog, S., & Moshaver, Z. (2011). The Political Economy of the Gulf Summary Report. In *SSRN Electronic Journal* (Issue June). <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2839175>
- Kanna, A. (2010). Flexible Citizenship in Dubai: Neoliberal Subjectivity in the Emerging “City-Corporation.” *Cultural Anthropology*, 25(1), 100–129.
- Kanna, A. (2011). *Dubai: the city as corporation*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Kanna, A., le Renard, A., & Vora, N. (2020). Beyond Exception. In *Beyond Exception*. Cornell University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501750328>
- Katzman, K. (2019). The United Arab Emirates (UAE): Issues for U.S. policy (updated). *Key Congressional Reports on International Affairs*, 125–161.
- Krause, K. (1996). Insecurity and State Formation in the Global Military Order: The Middle Eastern Case. *European Journal of International Relations*, 2(3), 319–354.

- Krause, K., & Williams, M. C. (2015). *Critical Security Studies* (K. Krause & M. C. Williams, Eds.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203501764>
- Lundborg, T., & Vaughan-Williams, N. (2015). New Materialisms, discourse analysis, and International Relations: a radical intertextual approach. *Review of International Studies*, 41(1), 3–25. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210514000163>
- Lynch, M. (2018). New Arab World Order. *Foreign Affairs*. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2018-08-14/new-arab-order>
- Martin, N. (2018). The A.K. Party and the Kurds since 2014: A discourse of terror. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 45(4), 543–558. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2018.1430531>
- Mason, R. (2018). Breaking the mold of small state classification? The broadening influence of United Arab Emirates foreign policy through effective military and bandwagoning strategies. *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal*, 24(1), 95–112. <https://doi.org/10.1080/11926422.2018.1427123>
- Mazzetti, M., & Hager, E. B. (2011). Secret Desert Force Set Up by Blackwater's Founder. *The New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/15/world/middleeast/15prince.html>
- Meijer, R. (2012). Saudi Arabia's War on Terrorism. In J. Deol & Z. Kazmi (Eds.), *Contextualizing Jihadi Thought* (pp. 165–190). Columbia University Press. <https://book.org/book/2593368/5c04d2>
- Milliken, J. (1999). The Study of Discourse in International Relations: A Critique of Research and Methods. *European Journal of International Relations*, 5(2), 225–254. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066199005002003>
- Mitchell, T. (2002). McJihad: Islam in the U.S. Global Order. *Social Text*, 73, 20(4), 1–18.
- Mondloch, C. (2015). *The UAE Campaign Against Islamist Extremism Is a Royal Pain For Qatar*. Vice News. <https://www.vice.com/en/article/nem8wb/the-uae-campaign-against-islamist-extremism-is-a-royal-pain-for-qatar>
- Nasser-Eddine, M., Garnham, B., Agostino, K., & Caluya, G. (2011). Countering Violent Extremism Literature Review. In *Perspectives on Terrorism*.
- National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism. (2017). *Number of terrorist attacks, 1970 to 2017*. Global Terrorism Database. <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/terrorist-incidents?tab=chart>
- Institute for Economics & Peace. (2020). *Global Terrorism Index 2020: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism*. <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/GTI-2020-web-1.pdf>

- Onursal, R., & Kirkpatrick, D. (2019). Is Extremism the ‘New’ Terrorism? the Convergence of ‘Extremism’ and ‘Terrorism’ in British Parliamentary Discourse. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 00(00), 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2019.1598391>
- O’Reilly, M. J., & Renfro, W. B. (2007). Evolving empire: America’s “emirates” strategy in the Persian Gulf. *International Studies Perspectives*, 8(2), 137–151. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1528-3585.2007.00277.x>
- Redondo, R. (2020, October 6). Iran warns UAE over disputed islands near Strait of Hormuz. *Atalayar*. <https://atalayar.com/en/content/iran-warns-uae-over-disputed-islands-near-strait-hormuz>
- Romaniuk, P. (2015). *Does CVE Work? Lessons Learned from the Global Effort to Counter Violent Extremism*. [https://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Does-CVE-Work\\_2015.pdf](https://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Does-CVE-Work_2015.pdf)
- Sadek, G. (2014). *United Arab Emirates: Anti-Terrorism Law Approved*.
- Sahill, P. H. (2018). The Terror Speaks: Inside Pakistan’s Terrorism Discourse and National Action Plan. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 41(4), 319–337. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2017.1284448>
- Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books.
- Savage, C., Schmitt, E., & Haberman, M. (2019, April 30). Trump Pushes to Designate Muslim Brotherhood a Terrorist Group. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/30/us/politics/trump-muslim-brotherhood.html>
- Sawab Center, T. (2018). *Corrupting religious discourse with violent extremist ideology is one of the #SourcesOfExtremism. Use your reason and judgement to determine who legitimately speaks in the name of religion*. Tweet. <https://t.co/kv6V5tv866>
- Schmid, A. P., & Jongman, A. J. (1988). *Political Terrorism: A New Guide to Actors, Authors, Concepts, Data Bases, Theories, and Literature*. North-Holland Pub. Co.
- Tadjdini, A. (2012). The Organization of Islamic Cooperation and regional challenges to international law and security. *Amsterdam Law Forum*, 4(2), 36–48.
- The National staff. (2020). *Historic UAE-Israel peace accord hailed as ‘breakthrough.’* The National. <https://www.thenationalnews.com/uae/government/historic-uae-israel-peace-accord-hailed-as-breakthrough-1.1063540>
- UAE Cabinet. (2018). *MOHAMMED BIN RASHID LAUNCHES GLOBAL INITIATIVE FOR TOLERANCE, OPENNESS*. News.

- Ulrichsen, K. (2015). *Insecure Gulf: The End of Certainty and the Transition to the Post-oil Era* (K. C. Ulrichsen, Ed.). Oxford University Press.  
<http://publications.lib.chalmers.se/records/fulltext/245180/245180.pdf>  
<https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12380/245180>  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jsames.2011.03.003>  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gr.2017.08.001>  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.precamres.2014.12>
- Federal Law No. (7) of 2014 On Combatting Terrorism Offenses, (2014).  
[https://www.google.com/search?q=federal+law+no.+7+of+2014+on+combating+terrorism+offences&rlz=1C5CHFA\\_enFR866FR866&oq=federal+law+no.+7&aqs=chrome.1.69i57j0l5.19310j0j4&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8](https://www.google.com/search?q=federal+law+no.+7+of+2014+on+combating+terrorism+offences&rlz=1C5CHFA_enFR866FR866&oq=federal+law+no.+7&aqs=chrome.1.69i57j0l5.19310j0j4&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8)  
[https://www.moj.gov.ae/assets/2020/Federal Law No 7 of 2014](https://www.moj.gov.ae/assets/2020/Federal%20Law%20No%207%20of%202014)
- United Arab Emirates. (2020). *UAE future 2030-2117*. The Official Portal of the UAE Government. <https://u.ae/en/more/uae-future/2030-2117>
- United Arab Emirates Constitution, 1 (2011).
- United Nations. (2018). *UAE Calls for Zero Tolerance Policy Towards Terrorism to Restore Stability in the Middle East*. Un.Int. <https://www.un.int/uae/news/uae-calls-zero-tolerance-policy-towards-terrorism-restore-stability-middle-east>
- Resolution 2178 (2014), Pub. L. No. S/RES/2178 (2014).  
[http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s\\_res\\_2178.pdf](http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_res_2178.pdf)
- US Embassy Abu Dhabi. (2006). *TOWNSEND DISCUSSES REGIONAL STABILITY, COUNTERTERRORISM WITH ABU DHABI CROWN PRINCE* Wikileaks Cable: *06ABUDHABI1724\_a*. Dated April 29, 2006. Wikileaks Public Library of US Diplomacy. [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06ABUDHABI1724\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06ABUDHABI1724_a.html)
- Vela, J. (2014, November 22). UAE's Tolerance of Extremism Is 'Quite Low.' *The National*. <https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/uae-s-tolerance-of-extremism-is-quite-low-1.588788>
- Vela, J. (2015, November 15). UAE Names Extremist Groups as Terrorists. *The National*.
- Vora, N. (2012). Free speech and civil discourse: producing expats, locals, and migrants in the UAE English-language blogosphere. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 18(4), 787–807. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9655.2012.01792.x>
- Wodak, R., & Meyer, M. (2009). *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* (R. Wodak & M. Meyer, Eds.; 2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Young, K. E. (2014). *The Political Economy of Energy, Finance and Security in the United Arab Emirates*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107415324.004>



Zahlan, R. S. (1978). *The Origins of the United Arab Emirates*. Palgrave Macmillan UK.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-03949-4>

Zeineddine, C., & Nicolescu, L. (2013). Nation Branding and its Potential for  
Differentiation in Regional Politics: The Case of the United Arab Emirates and Qatar.  
*Management Dynamics in the Knowledge Economy*, 6(1), 167–185.  
<https://doi.org/10.25019/mdke/6.1.10>

Zulaika, J., & Douglass, W. (1996). *Terror and Taboo*. Routledge.  
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315538846>

