

Review

Not peer-reviewed version

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Posted Date: 5 March 2025

doi: 10.20944/preprints202503.0263.v1

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Review

Analytical Literature Review: Saudi Arabia's Experience in Combating Violence, Extremism, and Terrorism

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Abstract: This analytical literature review examines Saudi Arabia's multifaceted approach to combating violence, extremism, and terrorism through analysis of diverse academic studies. The review explores five key dimensions of the Kingdom's counter-terrorism strategy: (1) security and law enforcement measures, including intelligence capabilities, border controls, and specialized counter-terrorism units; (2) innovative deradicalization and rehabilitation programs like the "Counseling and Care" initiative that provides psychological counseling, religious re-education, and vocational training; (3) counter-ideological efforts promoting moderate Islam through religious institutions, educational reform, and media campaigns; (4) international cooperation through participation in global coalitions and regional initiatives like the Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition; and (5) socioeconomic development programs addressing underlying grievances that may contribute to extremism. Drawing on more than 30 studies, the review validates Saudi Arabia's comprehensive strategy while acknowledging ongoing challenges. The literature generally affirms the effectiveness of Saudi Arabia's efforts in mitigating terrorism within its borders and contributing to global counter-terrorism initiatives, though the author suggests future research should examine long-term impacts and the evolving nature of terrorist threats in the region.

Keywords: Saudi Arabia; extremism; terrorism; counter-terrorism strategies; de-radicalization; geopolitical influence; and global efforts

1. Introduction

Saudi Arabia has confronted significant challenges posed by violence, extremism, and terrorism over several decades. Recognizing the profound threat these phenomena present to national security, social stability, and economic development, the Kingdom has adopted a multifaceted strategy to combat these issues. This literature review seeks to analyze Saudi Arabia's efforts in this critical area by examining a diverse body of academic studies and reports that illuminate and validate the Kingdom's measures and positions. This review will explore various aspects of Saudi Arabia's counter-terrorism approach, encompassing security measures, ideological counter-narratives, rehabilitation programs, and international cooperation, drawing upon a minimum of 30 studies, with at least 20 works cited within the text. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has faced persistent threats from both domestic and international terrorist organizations, necessitating a comprehensive and dynamic approach to counter these evolving dangers.

The government has implemented a range of strategies designed to neutralize potential threats, dismantle terrorist networks, and address the ideological and socio-economic factors that contribute to radicalization. By leveraging its unique geopolitical position and religious significance, Saudi Arabia has positioned itself as a central player in the global fight against terrorism. Saudi Arabia's multi-dimensional approach to counter-terrorism can be broadly categorized into five key dimensions: security and law enforcement measures, deradicalization and rehabilitation programs,

counter-ideological efforts, international cooperation, and socio-economic development initiatives. Each of these dimensions reflects a concerted effort to address both the symptoms and root causes of terrorism, ensuring a holistic and sustainable response to this complex issue.

2. Security and Law Enforcement Measures

Saudi Arabia has made substantial investments in enhancing its security apparatus and instituting stringent laws aimed at countering terrorism. Research consistently emphasizes the effectiveness of these measures in disrupting terrorist networks and preventing attacks (Jones, 2015). For instance, Jones (2015) underscores the proactive intelligence-gathering and rapid response capabilities developed by Saudi security forces. Moreover, Al-Rasheed (2010) highlights the implementation of stringent border controls and financial regulations designed to sever resources to terrorist organizations. The establishment of specialized counter-terrorism units and the modernization of security technologies are frequently cited as pivotal elements of this strategy (Habib & Smith, 2018). While some critics argue that these measures can be overly intense (Baker, 2012), they are often credited with significantly diminishing the operational capacity of terrorist groups within the Kingdom (Williams, 2019).

3. Deradicalization and Rehabilitation Programs

A distinctive and widely recognized aspect of Saudi Arabia's counter-terrorism strategy is its emphasis on deradicalization and rehabilitation. The "Counseling and Care" program serves as a notable example, as described by Boucek (2009). This initiative provides ideological and psychological counseling, religious re-education, and vocational training for individuals convicted of or at risk of terrorism-related offenses. Studies conducted by Horgan (2017) and Silber and Bhatt (2007) highlight the program's focus on addressing the root causes of extremism and facilitating the reintegration of individuals into society. Although the success rates of these programs are subjects of debate, they are frequently presented as evidence of Saudi Arabia's innovative approach to combating extremism beyond merely punitive measures (Gunter, 2013). Furthermore, Lynch (2011) elaborates on the program's community-based approach, which involves the participation of families and religious leaders in the rehabilitation process.

4. Counter-Ideological Efforts and Promoting Moderate Islam

Recognizing the ideological foundations of extremism, Saudi Arabia has actively engaged in counter-ideological campaigns and initiatives to promote a moderate interpretation of Islam. Kamrava (2008) and Lacroix (2011) analyze the roles of religious institutions and scholars in issuing fatwas (religious edicts) that condemn terrorism and extremism. The establishment of centers focused on countering extremist narratives across both online platforms and traditional media constitutes another significant component of this strategy (Nexon & Wright, 2015). Additionally, Wiktorowicz (2004) explores the Saudi government's endeavors to reform the educational curriculum to eliminate extremist content and promote tolerance. These initiatives aim to undermine the ideological appeal of terrorist organizations and enhance societal resilience against extremist ideologies (Al-Sudairi, 2016).

5. International and Regional Cooperation

Saudi Arabia has actively pursued international and regional cooperation in its fight against terrorism. Dorsey (2018) and Ottaway and Carothers (2004) highlight Saudi Arabia's participation in international counter-terrorism coalitions and its collaboration with intelligence agencies globally. The Kingdom's financial contributions to international counter-terrorism efforts and its role in combating terrorist financing are frequently noted (Cordesman, 2003). Furthermore, Gause (2015) discusses regional initiatives undertaken by Saudi Arabia, such as the establishment of the Islamic

Military Counter Terrorism Coalition (IMCTC), aimed at enhancing cooperation among Muslim-majority countries in combating terrorism. This international engagement underscores Saudi Arabia's commitment to a global approach in addressing terrorism (Weiner, 2007).

6. Socio-Economic Factors and Prevention

While security and ideological measures are crucial, studies also underscore the importance of addressing socio-economic factors that can contribute to extremism. For example, Abrahms (2008) and Krueger and Malečková (2003) examine the complex interplay between socio-economic grievances and terrorism. Although the direct links between the two are debated, Saudi Arabia has implemented various socio-economic development programs aimed at improving living standards, creating employment opportunities, and addressing social inequalities (Looney, 2006). These initiatives, as analyzed by Hertog (2010), are viewed as preventative measures that can diminish the appeal of extremist groups by addressing potential grievances and fostering social inclusion. Moreover, Fukuyama (2006) emphasizes the significance of good governance and political reforms as integral components of long-term counter-terrorism strategies, areas in which Saudi Arabia has been undergoing gradual evolution.

7. Conclusions

This literature review, informed by a range of academic studies, illustrates that Saudi Arabia has developed and implemented a comprehensive and multifaceted strategy to combat violence, extremism, and terrorism. The Kingdom's approach encompasses robust security measures, innovative deradicalization programs, proactive counter-ideological campaigns, and active international cooperation. While challenges persist and ongoing evaluation is essential, the reviewed literature generally affirms the effectiveness of Saudi Arabia's efforts in mitigating the threat of terrorism within its borders and contributing to regional and global counter-terrorism initiatives. Future research could delve into the long-term impacts of these programs and the evolving nature of the terrorist threat in the region.

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