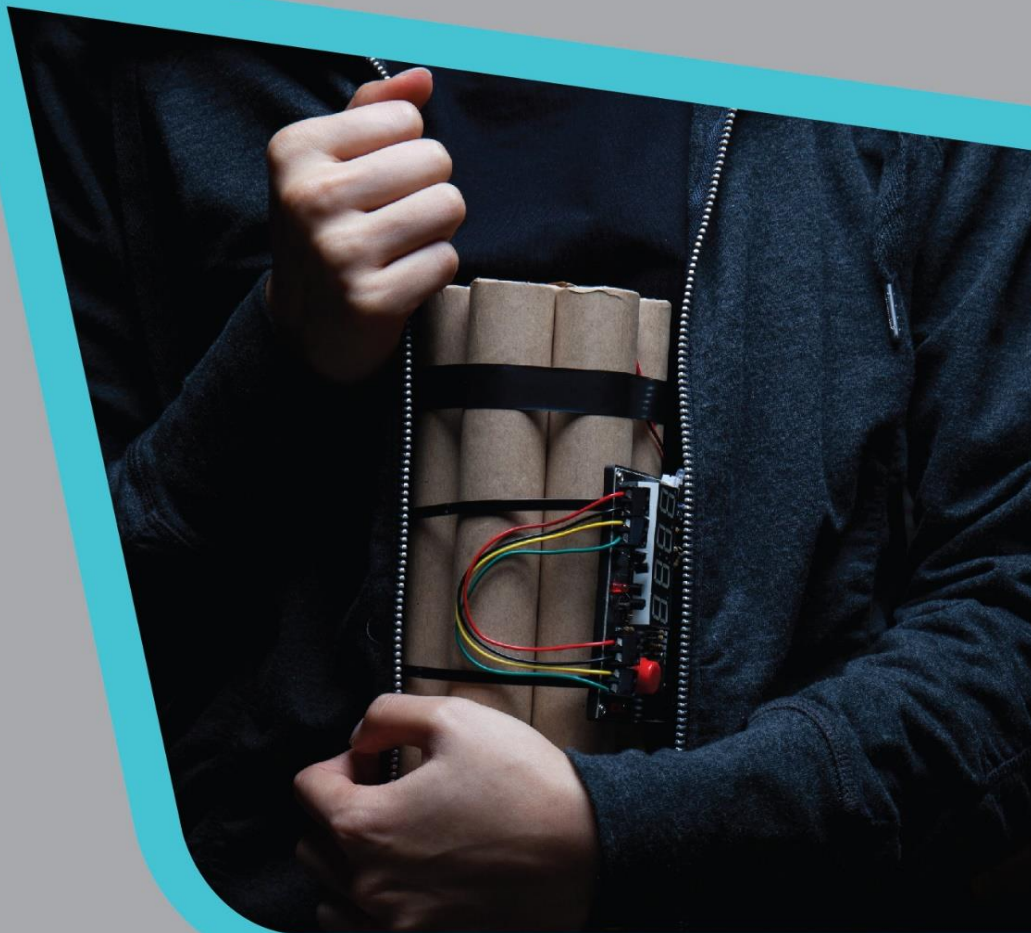


The Global Decline in Suicide Bombing Rates: Motivation, Causes and Arab Gulf Interests



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Abstract

Suicide bombings have garnered much attention from academics and the media alike since the September 11 attacks. Suicide bombing is defined as the death of an instigator as the means to carry out an attack. There are multiple motivational factors for adopting suicide attacks including socioeconomic, ideological, religious and “club mentality” pressures. Suicide bombing rates peaked by 2014 and steadily declined due to the declining intensity of regional conflicts, heightened counter-terrorism military campaigns, and the adoption of alternative means of counter-terrorism, including financial and rehabilitation efforts. The decline in suicide bombings is a positive development for the Arab Gulf states, as a more stable security situation in the Middle East is expected to enhance intra-regional political engagements.

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The Global Decline in Suicide Bombing Rates: Motivation, Causes and Arab Gulf Interests

1. Introduction

Suicide bombings have garnered much attention since the September 11 attacks. Scholars have analyzed and disseminated a wide range of statistics concerning suicide attacks in order to better understand the threat the world is facing. In recent years, records have indicated a clear decline in deaths from suicide bombing rates by 27% between 2016 and 2017. This paper analyzes the causes for this decline, and its consequences for the interests of the Arab Gulf states.

Suicide bombing is defined as a premeditated attack that results in the death of an instigator as an essential component. Throughout the twentieth century, there were numerous forms and uses of suicide attacks around the world, including Japanese Kamikaze attacks during the Second World War, vehicle bombs by non-state terrorist organizations, and Iranian human minesweepers during the Iran-Iraq War.

There are several motivations for the adoption of suicide attacks. Socioeconomic reasons were a motivational factor, where the suicide bombers would carry out a suicide attack in order to guarantee wealth for future generations by sacrificing themselves today. Research concerning suicide attacks indicated that many failed or fragile states produced a significant number of suicide bombers, and those adopters are highly motivated to carry out such attacks if the benefits outweighed their economic opportunities. The misconception that suicide bombers came from lower socioeconomic classes was debunked, as some of the prevalent research within the field indicated otherwise. Another motivational factor considered was exploitation of religious differences, as means to “inflamm” religious and nationalist sentiments. The “club” mentality and the “fear of losing out” phenomenon were also key motivational factors for terrorist organization members to carry out suicide attacks. There were also ideological and personal psychological motivations for adopting suicide bombings.

The 9/11 attacks galvanized research into suicide attacks. Several organizations developed their own specific indices to gauge suicide and terrorist attacks. Many of these indices agreed that suicide bombings rates peaked by 2014 and have declined in numbers since then. Suicide attack targets were mainly civilians, followed by domestic government targets, foreign military and other non-state armed groups respectively. The work also referenced causes for the decline of suicide attacks, such as enhanced military campaigns targeting territorial-centric terrorist organizations such as Daesh

and Boko Haram. Another factor was the improved cooperation and efficiency of counter-intelligence efforts and policing tactics. Additionally, the Saudi model of “soft” counter-terrorism strategy that consisted of rehabilitation and reintegration of terrorist detainees, was a critical success that garnered international praise and emulation.

Furthermore, a correlation has been made between the decline in suicide attacks and how it can benefit Arab Gulf interests. Recent statistical findings noted a steep decline in suicide attack rates in the Middle East, where deflating conflicts in Iraq and Syria, helped foster increased engagements between Arab Gulf states and the two noted countries. The Kingdom of Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates have taken initiatives to reestablish their diplomatic missions in Damascus, while Saudi Arabia and Kuwait increased engagement with Iraq. Therefore, it can be inferred that a more stable security situation in the Middle East will likely enhance political engagement among its regional members. Lastly, a decline in suicide attacks will create a secure and stable environment that will facilitate the Arab Gulf states to implement economic reform policies, as they attempt to diversify their economies respectively.

2. Background

2.1. Defining Suicide Bombings

One of the persistent challenges scholars face when studying suicide bombing is its definition. The subject has been referred to in a variety of titles including, but not limited to, suicide missions, suicide terrorism, suicide bombings and suicide attacks. This study will use the terms “suicide bombings” and “suicide attacks” interchangeably. The two terms emphasize the act itself, which can be used by both state and non-state actors, which are usually categorized as terrorist acts. The definition of terrorism will not be considered during the study because it remains a polarizing and difficult term to define, but the study aims to analyze suiciding bombings and why their rates are declining. Hodgson and Tadros (2013) analyzed the legal and political difficulties in defining terrorism, as they argued that the term is often used over-inclusively, creating disparities within political and criminal law fields.¹ Therefore, the study will rely on the definition of a suicide bombing as an attack where the death of the instigator is the means to accomplish said attack.² Most research efforts on suicide attacks agree that the death of the attacker is a requirement for classification and disregard other forms of attacks whereby the perpetrator lives.³

¹ Hodgson, Jacqueline S., and Victor Tadros. 2013. "The Impossibility of Defining Terrorism." *New Criminal Law Review: An International and Interdisciplinary Journal* 16 (3): 494-526.

² Horowitz, Michael C. 2015. "The Rise and Spread of Suicide Bombing." *Annual Review of Political Science* 71.

³ Crenshaw, Martha. 2007. "Explaining Suicide Terrorism: A Review Essay." *Security Studies* 133-162.

2.2. Data Sources

The September 11 attacks on New York and Washington DC stimulated research on suicide bombing. In fact, some institutions have crafted indices and specialized analyses specifically to gauge and disseminate statistics concerning suicide attacks.

The Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) produce the Global Terrorism Index (GTI), which is comprised of data found within the Global Terrorism Database (GTD).⁴ The GTI is a report summarizing key global terrorism trends for over 20 years, beginning in 1998. The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses provides the bulk of data found within the GTD, which comprises over 170,000 terrorist incidents between 1970 and 2017, despite not all of them being suicide bombings.⁵ Another benchmark in suicide bombing statistics is the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), established a year after 9/11. The ACLED described itself as a disaggregated conflict collection, analysis and crisis mapping effort, spanning across the world and encompassing a multitude of crises and different forms of political violence.

2.3. A Brief History of Suicide Bombings

Throughout history, both states and non-state actors have utilized suicide attacks to further their interests. The ACLED estimates count more than 1,600 suicide bombing incidents across the world, since it began recording such attacks in 2002. Iraq topped the list with 340 suicide attacks, followed by Pakistan (280), then Nigeria (250), Afghanistan (130) and Syria recorded 120 suicide bombings.

During the Second World War, Imperial Japan was famous for its use of Kamikaze attacks, where the attacker, often flying an airplane, would crash into its target purposefully as means of an unconventional attack, coupled with the psychological impact that would mentally distress enemies.⁶ Kamikaze attacks were heavily influenced by historical Japanese society and culture since 1281.⁷ The ethos of samurai; bushido, enlightened honor, obedience, a sense of duty, loyalty and self-discipline; are hallmarks of the Kamikaze myth,⁸ which perpetuated its usage during Japan's conflict with the Allied Forces in World War II. These foundations were critical motivational factors to compel young Japanese

⁴ Institute for Economics & Peace. 2018. Global Terror Index 2018: Measuring the impact of terrorism. Sydney: Institute for Economics & Peace.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Tanaka, Yuki. 2005. "Japan's Kamikaze Pilots and Contemporary Suicide Bombers: War and Terror." *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 3 (7).

⁷ Keçeci, Orçun. n.d. *The Kamikaze Pilots and Japanese Political Culture*. Academia.edu.

⁸ Ibid.

soldiers to partake in suicide missions known culturally as Kamikaze. At the end of the 20th century, we see more modern implementations of suicide attacks compared to the Great War theatre.

The Iran-Iraq war, was one of the Middle East's most protracted conflicts (from 1980 to 1988) between state actors. Suicide attacks were commonly utilized during the war. Iran would regularly rely on child soldiers to clear minefields.⁹ Children aged between 12 to 17 years, wore red headbands written with 'Sar Allah' in Farsi (Warriors of God) and small metal keys that Ayatollah Khomeini declared were keys to Paradise if they were killed during their mission.¹⁰ Many of these child soldiers were deployed against Iraqi tanks with little protection and bound by ropes to avoid desertion. They were often employed as the first wave, to clear minefields and clear paths for Iranian tanks.¹¹ This level of fanaticism not only continues to reverberate today, but was also transferred to Iran's regional proxies.

In 1983, Hezbollah conducted an infamous attack against US military personnel, when it bombed the US Marine Corps Barracks in Lebanon via truck bombers. The attack resulted in the deaths of 241 US personnel and 58 French soldiers.¹² It was one of the first modern uses of suicide bombing as the world currently knows it.¹³

While Al Qaeda is infamous for its September 11 attacks, a previous attack also foreshadowed its strategy to target the United States. On October 12, 2000, the US Navy destroyer, the USS Cole, was refueling at a port in Aden, Yemen. The ship was attacked by two suicide bombers on a small motorboat filled with explosives. The attack killed 17 crew members and wounded 39 others.¹⁴ The Central Intelligence Agency later confirmed that the attack was perpetrated by the Al-Qaeda network.

The fragile state of Iraq following the 2003 US-led invasion, provided an optimal environment for Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). The delicate security situation in the country meant that Al-Qaeda could operate with impunity. However, as the number of AQI attacks burgeoned, it necessitated a drastic change in US and Iraqi counterterrorism efforts. This resulted in a counterterrorism campaign known as the "Iraqi Surge" and was conducted throughout 2007. The Surge entailed tactical readjustment of US counterterrorism efforts with support of local Iraqi enclaves to defeat AQI. The terrorist

⁹ New York Times Archives. 1984. Iran: Five Years of Fanaticism. February 12. Accessed June 17, 2019.

<https://www.nytimes.com/1984/02/12/magazine/iran-five-years-of-fanaticism.html>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project. n.d. About ACLED. Accessed June 19, 2019. <https://www.acleddata.com/about-acled/>.

¹² CNN Library. 2019. Beirut Marine Barracks Bombing Fast Facts. March 21. Accessed June 17, 2019.

<https://edition.cnn.com/2013/06/13/world/meast/beirut-marine-barracks-bombing-fast-facts/index.html>.

¹³ Harmon, Vanessa, Edin Mujkic, Catherine Kaukinen, and Henriikka Weir. 2018. Causes & Explanations of Suicide Terrorism: A Systematic Review. December. Accessed June 17, 2019. <https://www.hsaj.org/articles/14749>.

¹⁴ 9/11 Museum & Memorial. n.d. USS Cole Bombing. Accessed October 8, 2019. <https://www.911memorial.org/uss-cole-bombing>.

organization carried out a large-scale suicide attack nearly every month in 2007, but by far the most devastating was the 18th of April Baghdad bombings. The attacks were highly coordinated and involved five car bombers detonating themselves across the Iraqi capital, killing nearly 200 people and wounding 150 others.¹⁵ Recently, other regions too have suffered tremendously from suicide bombings.

Sri Lanka was recently a target of a coordinated suicide bombing attack. In April 2019, Daesh suicide attackers detonated eight explosions at churches and hotels on Easter Day across the capital Colombo. Initially, reports indicated that the series of attacks killed over 200 people, including 36 foreign nationals.¹⁶ Later figures revealed that the death toll rose to nearly 300 and Daesh was quick to take responsibility for the bombings. Some experts believed that the attack was a response to the Christchurch terrorist attack that occurred earlier in the same year.¹⁷

2.4. Motivation for Suicide Bombings

Suicide bombing research is distinctly interested in its motivation. One of the initial reactions to suiciding bombings by scholars is that those who willingly choose to carry out a suicide attack must be making an irrational decision.¹⁸ Eventually, this outlook lost favor with most, arguing that there are various reasons for someone to decide to engage in a suicide bombing, including social, organizational, financial, religious and other reasons.¹⁹ This notion allowed Azam (2005) to conclude that suicide attacks have become integral to wealth transfer, where the suicide bomber attempts to guarantee wealth for future generations by sacrificing themselves today.²⁰ From a religious standpoint, acts of terror are rational to uphold the overarching values of a group.²¹

The role of religion continues to be the most discussed factor in suicide attack adoption. Following the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, media and academic commentators immediately related the fact that the 19 hijackers were Al-Qaeda members. One of the most meaningful findings within suicide bomber research is a positive correlation between

¹⁵ Yates, Dean, and Ibon Villelabeiti. 2007. Suspected Qaeda bombs kill nearly 200 in Baghdad. April 18. Accessed October 8, 2019.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iraq/suspected-qaeda-bombs-kill-nearly-200-in-baghdad-idUSPAR34073020070418>.

¹⁶ BBC. 2019. Sri Lanka attacks: More than 200 killed as churches and hotels targeted. April 21. Accessed October 8, 2019.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-48001720>.

¹⁷ Greenfield, Patrick. 2019. Isis claims responsibility for Easter Sunday attacks – as it happened. April 23. Accessed October 8, 2019.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2019/apr/23/sri-lanka-bombings-attacks-live-news>.

¹⁸ Harmon et al, 2018.

¹⁹ Gambetta, Diego. 2005. "Can We Make Sense of Suicide Missions?" *Oxford Scholarship Online* 259-299.

²⁰ Azam, Jean-Paul. 2005. "Suicide-Bombing as Inter-Generational Investment." *Public Choice (Public Choice)* 122: 177-198.

²¹ Bernholz, Peter. 2004. "Supreme values as the basis for terror." *European Journal of Political Economy* 20 (2): 317-333.

religion and suicide attack adoption, while the underlying reasoning is varied.²² For instance, Pape (2005; Pape & Feldman 2010) argued that religion, as a system of beliefs and core values, is unrelated to motivate suicide bombing adoption, but it is rather that religious differences between a group and the target, increases the likelihood of adoption, as a means to “inflame” religious and nationalist sentiments.²³ Berman and Laitin (Berman 2009, Berman & Laitin 2008), expanded upon the association between religion and suicide attack adoption. They argued that extremist groups are more likely to partake in suicide bombings due to intragroup dynamics and extended the “club” model of religious groups and sociology to terrorism.²⁴ Extremist religious groups, like Hezbollah, that provide social services both have a deep hold on their members and create a risk factor of potentially losing out on the distribution of resources if “softer” members remain within the “club”.

Socioeconomic factors also play a role in suicide bombing motivation. Initially, researchers in the field appeared to agree that the backgrounds of many suicide bombers are from the less affluent portions of society, and therefore, are less invested in the status quo.²⁵ Rosendorff & Sandler (2010) illustrated that would-be suicide attackers are more likely to join terrorist organizations when the benefits outweigh their economic opportunities.²⁶ Additionally, some research initially concluded that failed or fragile states are more likely to produce suicide bombers. However, the notion that suicide attackers often came from poor socioeconomic classes was challenged, when it was noted that suicide bombers have a tendency to come from slightly higher levels of socioeconomic status within their society.²⁷ There are also deep individual and psychological motivation for suicide attackers that warrant explanation.

Individual motivation contrasts significantly from region to region. For instance, the Black Tigers in Sri Lanka, which is a highly trained group of operatives, attract specific suicide bombers for certain attacks. Different motivations are applied to inspire suicide attackers. Black Tigers’ appeals usually come in the form of religious motives, nationalistic motives, a desire for revenge, and via social networks.²⁸ Today, researchers have come to the conclusion that suicide bombers are

²² Horowitz, 2015.

²³ Pape, Robert A. 2005. *The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*. New York: Random House.; Pape, Robert A., and James K. Feldman. 2010. *The Explosion of Global Suicide Terrorism and How to Stop it*. Chicago: University of Chicago.

²⁴ Berman, Eli. 2009. *Radical, Religious, and Violent: The New Economics of Terrorism*. Cambridge: MIT Press; Berman, Eli, and David D. Laitin. 2008. "Religion, terrorism and public goods: Testing the club model." *Journal of Public Economics* 92 (10-11): 1942-1967.

²⁵ Horowitz, 2015.

²⁶ Rosendorff, B. Peter, and Todd Sandler. 2010. "Suicide Terrorism and the Backlash Effect." *Defence and Peace Economics* 21 (5-6): 443-457.

²⁷ Krueger, Alan B. 2007. *What Makes a Terrorist: Economics and the Roots of Terrorism - 10th Anniversary Edition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press; Krueger, Alan B., and Jitka Malečková. 2003. "Education, Poverty and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection?" *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 17 (4): 119-144.

²⁸ Crenshaw, 2007.

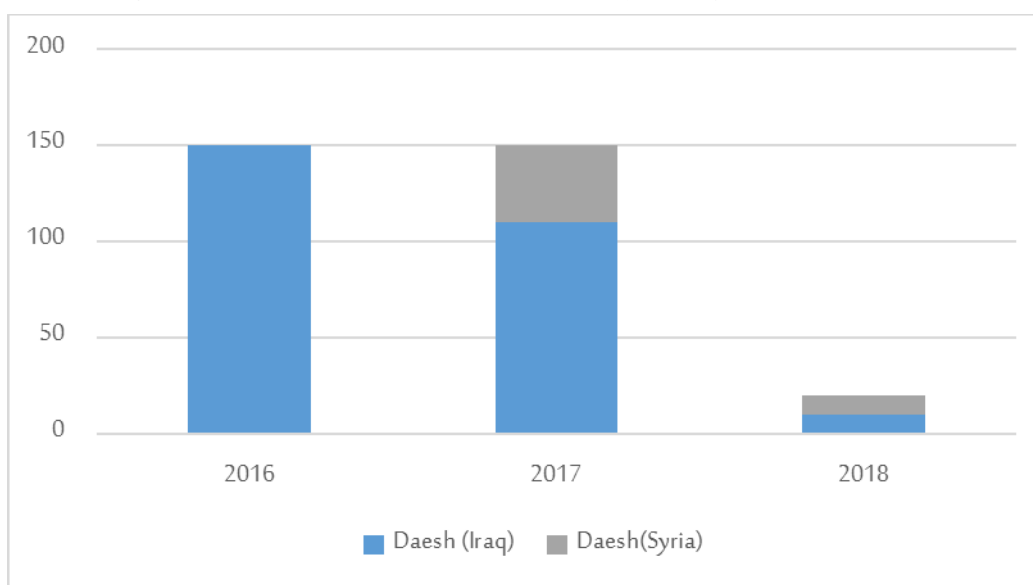
diverse in their reasoning as they originate from different types of communities, and that as a result, there is a high degree of context-specificity in explaining the decision to undertake suicide attacks.

3. Suicide Bombings Since 2016

3.1. Statistical Overview

According to the ACLED, the number of suicide bombings peaked in 2017 with 470 incidents recorded in that year. Boko Haram recorded 98 suicide attacks, while Daesh’s sustained level of violence saw 150 suicide bombings occur between the Syrian and Iraqi theatres during 2017. Figure 1 illustrates the clear decline in Daesh suicide bombings in Iraq and Syria.

Figure 1: Daesh Suicide Attacks in Iraq and Syria (2016-2018)



Source: ACLED

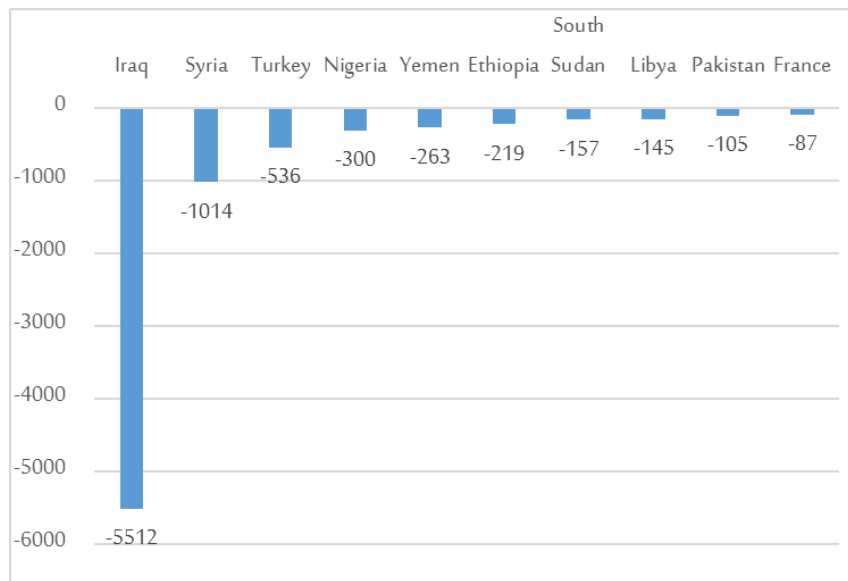
It is worth noting that both these terrorist organizations were facing intensive military offensives in both countries, resulting in territorial losses for both terrorist organizations.²⁹ Further explanations for the decline in suicide bombings will be discussed in sub-section 3.2.

²⁹ Burke, Jason. 2017. Rise and fall of Isis: its dream of a caliphate is over, so what now? October 21. Accessed June 19, 2019.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/21/isis-caliphate-islamic-state-raqqa-iraq-islamist>.

Suicide attacks are commonly used as a terror tactic to stoke fear in civilian populations. It is no surprise then, that more than 47% of suicide bombings are aimed at civilian targets.³⁰ Statistics from 2016 reveal that approximately 41% of suicide bombings are deployed against domestic government targets, while 3% attack foreign militaries. Moreover, 8% constituted suicide bombings between conflicting non-state armed groups.³¹ Suicide bombings targeting civilian populations have also increased in lethality, averaging 14 reported deaths, in comparison to nine reported deaths of domestic government targets, around six deaths of foreign military targets and 10 fatalities of other non-state armed groups.³²

Figure II: Largest Decreases in Deaths from Terrorism (2016-2017)



Source: Global Terrorism Index 2018

With the war on terrorism winding down, so too are the rates of suicide bombings. The 2018 iteration of the GTI revealed that terrorism-related deaths fell for the third consecutive year, after peaking in 2014, when the total number of deaths decreased by 27% between 2016 and 2017.³³ Another notable fact is that 94 countries reported a decline in terrorism's impact, compared to 46 countries that reported their situation exasperated.³⁴ Most notably, Iraq and Syria showed the

³⁰ Matfess, Hilary. 2019. Suicide Bombings Against Civilians and Government Targets in Africa, the Middle East, and Southern Asia. ACLED Analysis, Armed Conflict Location & Event Project.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

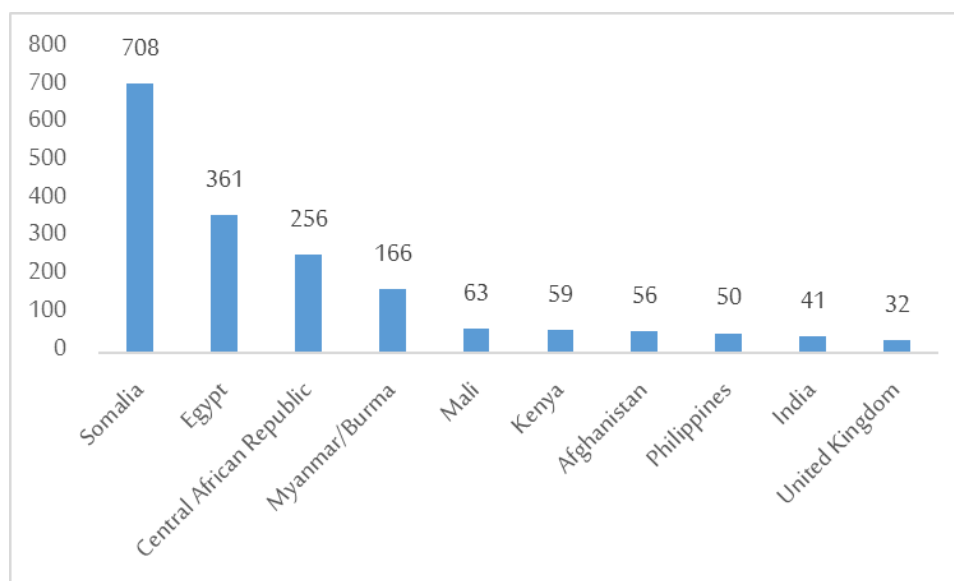
³³ Institute for Economics & Peace, 2018.

³⁴ Dudley, Dominic. 2018. Terrorism In Decline: Number Of Deaths By Terrorist Groups Falls For Third Year In A Row. December 5. Accessed June 19, 2019. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/dominicdudley/2018/12/05/terrorism-in-decline/#407f2732203c>.

greatest improvement, where the number of deaths declined by 5,512 and 1,014 respectively.³⁵ Figure II depicts notable decreases from terrorism-related deaths in specific countries.

Overall, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region witnessed a significant decline in terrorism-related deaths. Conversely, Egypt and Somalia recorded the largest increase in terrorism-related deaths in the MENA region.³⁶ Figure III depicts the largest increase in terrorism-related deaths.

Figure III: Largest Increases in Terrorism-Related Deaths (2016-2017)



Source: Global Terrorism Index 2018

In Europe, terrorism-related fatalities decreased by 75%, where France, Belgium and Germany reporting significant improvements, while Spanish figures worsened.³⁷ Although figures of European terrorism-related statistics declined, the number of terrorist incidents, which includes non-suicide bombing attacks, increased to 282, up from 253 in 2017.³⁸

3.2. Causes of the Decline

The decline in suicide bombings can be attributed to multiple factors. First and foremost, heightened military campaigns to fight territorially motivated terrorist organizations directly led to a decline in suicide attack rates. Efforts by the Global Coalition to Defeat Daesh resulted in the group's decline in terrorist attacks by 23%, leading to a decline in deaths caused

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Institute for Economics & Peace, 2018.

³⁷ Dudley, 2018.

³⁸ Institute for Economics & Peace, 2018.

by Daesh by 53% in 2017.³⁹ According to the White House, all but one percent of its territories have been liberated, while 34 out of 42 of its leaders have been killed and unable to increase the terrorist organization's recruitment.⁴⁰ The Coalition's success in reclaiming Daesh controlled territories resulted in the terrorist organization resorting to sporadic guerilla tactics globally, with less intensity and lethality than previously witnessed. The death of Daesh's self-proclaimed Caliph, Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi, is indeed a psychological blow to the terrorist group. It will likely hinder Daesh's ambitions to reconstitute its territorial control in Iraq and Syria, however Baghdadi's death will not deter localized efforts of its global affiliates and sympathizers.⁴¹ Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Center, in its annual Global Attack Index, corroborated this decline citing a decrease in attacks by 33% and the lowest fatality rates in 2018, falling to a 10-year low.⁴² The Coalition assisted local Iraqi and Syrian forces in liberating areas once held by Daesh, including Mosul and Raqqa, two major strongholds of the terrorist organization.⁴³ Domestic European efforts have also decreased terrorist attacks in the continent.

In general, death rates resulting from armed conflicts are declining. ACLED data reported that the overall number of deaths witnessed a substantial decrease from 2017 to 2018, declining by over 22%, despite increasing global disorder rates. This was attributed to lowering intensity levels from major conflicts such as the Syrian Civil War.⁴⁴ The Global United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) reported a 76% decrease in civilian deaths in acts of violence since the first five months of 2018 following the defeat of Daesh in the country compared to the same period in 2017. A total of 477 Iraqis were killed in acts of violence during the noted year, compared with 2,014 killed in the first five months of 2017,⁴⁵ signifying the effectiveness of the anti-Daesh coalition efforts. Furthermore, the RAND Corporation argued that armed conflicts, generally, have declined in both intensity and number since the end of the Cold War. This is especially true for inter-state conflicts, but it is also applicable to the rates of intra-state conflicts. The RAND Corporation attributes this decline in conflict intensity to gradual strengthening of state institutions associated with economic growth, rising

³⁹ Kajjo, Sirwan. 2018. Study: Terrorism Deaths Declining Globally. December 7. Accessed June 20, 2019. <https://www.voanews.com/extremism-watch/study-terrorism-deaths-declining-globally>.

⁴⁰ Callimachi, Rukmini. 2019. Described as Defeated, Islamic State Punches Back with Guerilla Tactics. January 21. Accessed July 29, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/21/world/middleeast/isis-syria-attack-iraq.html>.

⁴¹ Simcox, Robin. 2019. Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi Is Dead (but ISIS Is Very Much Alive). November 5. Accessed November 6, 2019. <https://www.heritage.org/terrorism/commentary/abu-bakr-al-baghdadi-dead-isis-very-much-alive>.

⁴² Voice of America News. 2019. Study: Global Terror Attacks Down 33 Percent. January 23. Accessed June 20, 2019. <https://www.voanews.com/world-news/middle-east-dont-use/study-global-terror-attacks-down-33-percent>.

⁴³ Kajjo, 2018.

⁴⁴ Armed Conflict Location and Events Project. 2019. ACLED 2018: The Year in Review. January 11. Accessed July 29, 2019. <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/acled-2018-year-review>.

⁴⁵ AFP. 2018. Iraq's civilian death toll declines by almost 80 percent after defeat of Islamic State. June 9. Accessed October 8, 2019. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/iraqs-civilian-death-toll-declines-almost-80-percent-after-defeat-islamic-state>.

wealth levels, spread of democratic forms of government and the rise of effective international conflict mediation mechanisms.⁴⁶ This notion was also corroborated among scholars studying conflicts. For instance, Szayna et al. (2017) attributed several factors that led to a decrease in overall violent conflicts. Some of the factors included: the military predominance of the United States and its international position; the rise of international consensus and norms against forceful military transgressions; the rise of effective international conflict mediation mechanisms, particularly UN peace-keeping operations; and the de-incentivization of territory annexation for developed states that are actively engaged in the global economy.⁴⁷

Counter-terrorism tactics and methods have witnessed significant developments since the emergence of Daesh. One of the methods used to counter Daesh social media propaganda is strategic communication. Güler (2012) referred to the term as a systematic series of sustained and coherent activities, conducted across the strategic, operational and tactical levels, which aims to enable an upstanding of target audiences, identify effective channels, and develop and promote ideas and opinions through said channels to promote and sustain certain forms of behavior.⁴⁸ The Coalition implemented strategic communication concepts in order to counter Daesh narratives across several social media outlets. As a result, by October 2017, the terrorist group's propaganda outlet decreased by 85% compared to the period of August 2015,⁴⁹ when Daesh propaganda levels were significantly higher. Furthermore, the Coalition worked with various technology firms to reduce Daesh's online presence and continues to support the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism, an industry-led international organization aiming to remove terrorist and extremist content from social media platforms that also cooperates with governments and civil society.⁵⁰

Counter-terrorism efforts also include financial elements as well. The most notable organization within countering terrorist financing is the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). It is an inter-governmental organization established in 1989, which sets international standards and promotes implementation of legal, regulatory and operational measures for combating money laundering, terrorist financing and other related threats within the international financial system.⁵¹ In other words, FATF is the main international "policy-making body" to facilitate national legislative and regulatory

⁴⁶ Szayna, Thomas S., Angela O'Mahony, Jennifer Kavanagh, Stephen Watts, Bryan Frederick, Tova C. Norlen, and Phoenix Voorhies. 2017. *Conflict Trends and Conflict Drivers: An Empirical Assessment of Historical Conflict Patterns and Future Conflict Projections*. Research Report, Santa Monica: RAND Corporation.

⁴⁷ Szayna, Thomas S., Stephen Watts, Angela O'Mahony, Bryan Frederick, and Jennifer Kavanagh. 2017. *What Are the Trends in Armed Conflicts, and What Do They Mean for U.S. Defense Policy?* RAND Arroyo Center Report, Santa Monica: RAND Corporation.

⁴⁸ Güler, Rıza. 2012. "The Role and Place of Strategic Communication in Countering Terrorism." *The Journal of Defense Sciences* 11 (2): 1-31.

⁴⁹ Global Coalition to Defeat Daesh. n.d. *Countering Daesh's Propaganda*. Accessed July 29, 2019.

<https://theglobalcoalition.org/en/mission/countering-daeshs-propaganda/>.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Financial Action Task Force. n.d. *Who we are*. Accessed July 29, 2019. <https://www.fatf-gafi.org/about/>.

reforms within these specific areas, according to the FATF itself. As of 2019, FATF included 39 members, with two regional organizations, including the Arab Gulf states, representing most major global financial centers.⁵²

Surveillance continues to be an effective method of counter-terrorism. Situational awareness is one of the key components of counter-terrorism. Police and security services across the world rely on reconnaissance and intelligence surveillance to facilitate their security functions. Counter-terrorism experts rely on closed circuit television (CCTV) technology to identify potential terrorist targets, which typically prefer crowded, busy and confined areas such as shopping malls, train stations, airports and stadiums,⁵³ in order to maximize the lethality of the terrorist attack. Various Western security apparatuses usually monitor predictable areas via CCTVs in order to detect routines and patterns of terrorist suspects trying to remain incognito and ensure maximum media attention, since media attention is a critical component of terrorist propaganda dissemination.⁵⁴

For instance, in the United Kingdom, the country considers itself relatively fortunate that CCTV and surveillance monitoring by security forces restricted the 7/7 attacks to “backpacker” bombers, which are far less lethal compared to truck bombers witnessed in areas such as the Middle East. However, the effectiveness of CCTVs as a counter-terrorism tool is dependent on its design and operation strategy. In other words, CCTV is only as efficient in its design and implementation for monitoring, surveillance and intelligence gathering capacity in order to facilitate assessment of potential terrorist incidents. Post-event, CCTVs use helps in evidence gathering, forensic analysis, public awareness or preparedness drills.⁵⁵

European counter-terrorism efforts are paying dividends. Although this particular region witnessed a slight increase in the number of attacks in 2017, the number of fatalities decreased by 65%. It could be attributed to policing and counterintelligence efforts.⁵⁶ Former British Prime Minister, Theresa May, stated that the United Kingdom foiled 13 plots since March 2017, which marks the attack near the Houses of Parliament.⁵⁷ Conversely, in the Arabian Gulf region, counter-terrorism efforts are incorporating novel methods that are also proving effective.

⁵² Financial Action Task Force. n.d. FATF Members and Observers. Accessed July 29, 2019. <https://www.fatf-gafi.org/about/membersandobservers/#d.en.3147>.

⁵³ International Fire and Security Exhibition and Conference. 2011. CCTV and its role in the counter-terror agenda. August 4. Accessed July 29, 2019. <https://www.ifsecglobal.com/video-surveillance/cctv-and-its-role-in-the-counter-terror-agenda/>.

⁵⁴ Stutzer, Alois, and Michael Zehnder. 2011. Is Camera Surveillance an Effective Measure of Counterterrorism? Basel: Defence and Peace Economics.

⁵⁵ RAND Corporation. n.d. Predicting Suicide Attacks: Characteristics of Bombings in Israel. Research Brief, Santa Monica: RAND Corporation.

⁵⁶ Taylor, Adam. 2018. Terrorist attacks are quietly declining around the world. August 15. Accessed June 20, 2019. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2018/08/15/terrorist-attacks-are-quietly-declining-around-world/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.d3a91f66cc96.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

In 2003, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia witnessed a wave of deadly terrorist attacks, which instigated a comprehensive counter-terrorism campaign. A key aspect of this campaign was the use of unconventional “soft” processes designed to counter intellectual and ideological justifications for violent extremism.⁵⁸ The main objective of Saudi Arabia’s strategy is to expose and counter radical ideology that is based on a corrupted and deviant interpretation of Islam.⁵⁹ The Kingdom’s “soft” methodology incorporates three interconnected programs aimed at prevention, rehabilitation and post-release care; the strategy’s motivation is that the hard security approach is insufficient in countering radical ideologies.⁶⁰ So far, the strategy has been well received.

Since the strategy’s implementation, approximately 3,000 detainees participated in different stages of the rehabilitation program, where 1,400 participants renounced their former beliefs and have been released, and none of those released have been involved in terrorist violence within the Kingdom.⁶¹ The strategy garnered international acclaim as well. The US State Department, in its 2019 Global Terrorism report, commended Saudi Arabia’s efforts to counter extremist ideologies and messaging, both domestically and internationally.⁶² When Singapore, developed its own program, it was based in part on the Saudi model. Additionally, the US incorporated aspects from Singapore’s model into its own Task Force 134 of the US Marine Corps.⁶³ Local US law enforcement is also developing models of community policing with counter-terrorism intentions.

The Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) experimented with community policing tenets that serve counter-terrorism efforts and anti-radicalization efforts. The LAPD identified five key practices, and was adamant this effort goes beyond “feel-good” activities and can strengthen community resilience against violent extremism.⁶⁴ The first key practice is engagement, which involves establishing relationships and partnerships with key individual community leaders and organizations that open communication channels. Second, is to build trust, where community outreach officers work to establish honest and open dialogue with community leaders and members on sensitive issues such as terrorism, hate crime and discrimination. The third key practice is education, where community outreach officers educate communities

⁵⁸ Meijer, Roel. 2012. Saudi Arabia’s Religious Counter-Terrorist Discourse. February 15. Accessed June 20, 2019.

<https://www.mei.edu/publications/saudi-arabias-religious-counter-terrorist-discourse>.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Boucek, Christopher. 2008. Saudi Arabia’s “Soft” Counterterrorism Strategy: Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Aftercare. Carnegie Papers, Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² United States Department of State. October. Country Reports on Terrorism 2018. Counterterrorism, Washington DC: United States Department of State Publication.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Weine, Stevan. 2017. How Local Law Enforcement Uses Community Policing to Combat Terrorism. February 19. Accessed October 8, 2019.

<https://www.lawfareblog.com/how-local-law-enforcement-uses-community-policing-combat-terrorism>.

about crime, police work and community resources to combat criminal activity. Fourth, problem solving, community outreach officers aim to help communities and individuals to respond to their current problems, including Islamophobia, discrimination, hate speech and crimes. Community outreach officers will also provide community members with access to resources pertaining to social, legal, mental and physical health concerns, while also providing assistance to immigrants and refugees in promoting their integration and addressing their security concerns. Lastly, mobilization was also identified as a key practice. Community outreach officers will promote the civic engagement of community members, including promoting women and youth advocacy on civic and public safety issues. Officers will also provide community-based organizations with consultation, materials, information and support regarding how their organization can build resilience to violent extremism.

4. Regional Decline in Suicide Attacks and Arab Gulf Interests

4.1 Regional Benefits of Decreased Suicide Attacks

Generally speaking, the decline in suicide attacks is a favorable development from the perspective of Arab Gulf interests, for a variety of reasons.

First, a more stable Middle East offers more opportunities for traditional regional engagement. Seeing that Iraq and Syria witnessed declines in suicide bombings creates secure political space for Arab Gulf policy-makers to engage in regional normalization efforts. This is true particularly in Iraq, where Arab Gulf states have revamped diplomatic efforts with Iraq. This also notes a change in policies in Gulf Arab capitals, but a more stable environment within Iraq may facilitate diplomatic engagement, as less political will is needed for security matters. Saudi Arabia stepped up its efforts to re-engage with Iraq. Both states established the Saudi-Iraqi Coordination Council (SICC) in October 2017,⁶⁵ as the official mechanism tasked with normalizing bilateral cooperation and relations. Progress for renormalization is under way, as the SICC met for a second time in April 2019,⁶⁶ suggesting that there is mutual political will to advance economic relations. As the Global Coalition to Defeat Daesh essentially defeated the organization and liberated areas once under its control, international efforts have focused on those areas' reconstruction. From 12 to 14 February, 2018, the State of Kuwait hosted the Kuwait International Conference for the Reconstruction of Iraq, in raising US\$30 billion from states

⁶⁵ Al Arabiya English. 2017. Saudi-Iraqi Coordination Council releases statement after first meeting. October 22. Accessed June 20, 2019.

<https://english.alarabiya.net/en/features/2017/10/22/Saudi-Iraqi-Coordination-Council-releases-statement-on-first-meeting.html>.

⁶⁶ Saudi Arabian Ministry of Commerce and Investment. 2019. The Second Session of the Saudi-Iraqi Coordination Council has been Concluded in Baghdad. April 4. Accessed June 20, 2019. <https://mci.gov.sa/en/mediacenter/News/Pages/04-04-19-02.aspx>.

and international organizations alike.⁶⁷ In June 2019, the Kuwaiti Amir, Shaikh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al Sabah, visited Iraq to discuss escalating tensions in the region.⁶⁸ The same rationale is also applicable in Syria.

With the civil war winding down in Syria, efforts for political reengagement have emerged. The UAE and the Kingdom of Bahrain both pledged to reopen their diplomatic missions in Damascus,⁶⁹ and it is expected that other Gulf states will follow suit. The move is likely to coincide with Gulf Arab concerns of Iran's increased influence in the country, but given that suicide bombings have relatively subsided in Syria, it creates safer conditions for political reengagement. On another note, the Saudi model of counter terrorism is significant on the international stage.

The success of Saudi Arabia's counter-terrorism strategy is globally significant. The fact that other states, such as Singapore and the United States, have been influenced by Riyadh's "soft" considerations in counter-terrorism confirms its effectiveness. It could create an opportunity for Saudi Arabia to further develop soft power influence on the international stage and could help evolve global counter-terrorism mechanisms.

4.2 Domestic Benefits of Decreased Suicide Terrorism

The Arab Gulf states have all set out economic visions to reform their economies respectively. One of the main objectives is to diversify their economies to be less reliant on the energy sector, where the price per barrel has dramatically decreased compared to the previous decade. This includes developing sectors such as financial services, tourism, construction, and manufacturing, among other key sectors. Due to the tumultuous nature of the Middle East, the Arab Gulf states often prioritized defense and security spending to safeguard their countries. However, with the phenomena of international terrorist organizations targeting domestic locations in the Gulf, Saudi Arabia was particularly affected by this trend.

From 2015 to 2017, Daesh and Al-Qaeda were directly or suspected to have been involved in over 25 attacks on the Kingdom,⁷⁰ the worst of which were the May 2015 Dammam mosque bombings, killing 26 and injuring 106

⁶⁷ Chmaytelli, Maher, and Ahmed Hagagy. 2018. Allies promise Iraq \$30 billion, falling short of Baghdad's appeal. February 14. Accessed June 20, 2019. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-reconstruction-ku/allies-promise-iraq-30-billion-falling-short-of-baghdads-appeal-idUSKCN1FY0TX>.

⁶⁸ The Arab Weekly. 2019. Iraq, Kuwait wary of effects of US-Iran tensions. June 23. Accessed June 24, 2019. <https://theArabweekly.com/iraq-kuwait-wary-effects-us-iran-tensions>.

⁶⁹ Reuters. 2018. Bahrain says no interruption to diplomatic ties with Syria. December 28. Accessed June 20, 2019. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-bahrain/bahrain-says-no-interruption-to-diplomatic-ties-with-syria-idUSKCN1OR0FI>.

⁷⁰ Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. 2019. Saudi Arabia and Counterterrorism. Washington D.C.: Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

worshippers,⁷¹ and the coordinated suicide attack across three Saudi cities in July 2016, targeting Grand Mosque in the holy city of Medina, a mosque in Qatif and the US consulate in Jeddah.⁷² Both waves of attacks were carried out by Daesh. This caused decision-makers in Saudi Arabia to increase security precautions by installing new CCTV systems, and increase patrols within and surrounding mosques and commercial centers,⁷³ which did increase defense and security spending, albeit not only from these specific measures, from 12.51% of its GDP in 2015 to 12.61% in 2016, and 11.3% in 2017, according to the International Institute for Strategic Studies.⁷⁴ This represents an extraordinary effort for a country attempting to reform its economy. While it can be argued that Saudi Arabia's counter terrorism efforts have slightly reduced its security spending, it can be inferred that a sound internal security situation will improve foreign investor's confidence, while defense and security spending will prove to be a challenge when attempting to reform its economy in a period of relatively low oil prices. Internal security is paramount to tourism.

Terrorism has an adverse effect on tourism. Countries such as Tunisia and Egypt can attest to the negative correlation of terrorism targeting tourist hotspots on a country's economy. The proceeding political and security instability caused by the 2011 Arab Upheavals and terrorist attacks resulted in a drop of tourism revenues by a rate of 41% in Tunisia and 55% in Egypt, where the latter realized US\$ 24.5 billion in tourism revenue in 2010 compared to US\$11 billion in 2014.⁷⁵ In the case of the Arab Gulf states, all of them identified tourism as a key component to diversify their economies, with Saudi Arabia, particularly, attempting to reform its entire tourism sector beyond religious pilgrimage.

Tourism was outlined as a key component in Saudi Arabia's Economic Vision 2030. The vision outlined how the Kingdom is determined to increase tourism revenue from its current 3% to 10% of GDP by 2030, by attracting 100 million international and domestic visitors by the same year.⁷⁶ In September 2019, Saudi Arabia altered its visa policies to allow tourists from all over the world to visit the Kingdom.⁷⁷ Currently, the World Economic Forum's Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index ranked the kingdom as 69th overall, while the UAE, was the only Arab Gulf state ranked

⁷¹ Donaghy, Rori. 2015. Four killed in fresh suicide attack on Shia mosque in Saudi Arabia's Dammam. May 29. Accessed October 17, 2019.

<https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/four-killed-fresh-suicide-attack-shia-mosque-saudi-arabias-dammam>.

⁷² Dowall, Angus. 2016. Suicide bombers strike 3 cities across Saudi Arabia in coordinated attacks. July 4. Accessed October 17, 2019.

<https://www.businessinsider.com/suicide-bombers-strike-3-cities-across-saudi-arabia-in-coordinated-attacks-2016-7>.

⁷³ Arabian Business. 2015. Saudi Arabia increases security at mosques, malls. July 12. Accessed October 17, 2019.

<https://www.arabianbusiness.com/saudi-arabia-increases-security-at-mosques-malls-599317.html>.

⁷⁴ Cordesman, Anthony H. 2018. Military Spending: The Other Side of Saudi Security. Washington D.C.: Center for Strategic & International Studies.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Kalin, Stephen. 2019. Saudi Arabia opens to foreign holidaymakers, chases tourism investment. September 27. Accessed October 20, 2019.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-tourism/saudi-arabia-opens-to-foreign-holidaymakers-chases-tourism-investment-idUSKBN1WB2VV>.

⁷⁷ PricewaterhouseCoopers. 2019. Saudi Arabia: KSA tourist visas. October. Accessed October 20, 2019.

<https://www.pwc.com/m1/en/services/tax/me-tax-legal-news/2019/ksa-saudi-arabia-tourist-visas.html>.

in the top 50 placing it 33rd respectively.⁷⁸ The changes in Saudi Arabia's visa policies came in the limelight following the drone terrorist attack that struck Abqaiq oil processing facilities, which is often noted as the world's most critical facility.⁷⁹ Irrespectively, Saudi Arabia is hedging that by further stabilizing internally, via counterterrorism and other measures, it will likely help attract international and domestic tourism to the Kingdom and develop the nascent sector.

5. Conclusion

The term suicide bombing was defined as the death of an instigator as the means to carry out an attack, where the attacker's death is paramount to its definitions. Throughout the twentieth century, there were numerous forms and uses of suicide attacks, including Japanese Kamikaze attacks during the Second World War and Iranian human minesweepers during the Iran-Iraq War.

The paper concludes that there were a multitude of motivational factors for suicide attack adoption. One of the identified sources of motivation was socioeconomic reasons, where the suicide bomber attempts to guarantee wealth for future generations of relatives by sacrificing themselves today. Prevalent suicide attack research indicated that many failed or fragile states produced a significant amount of suicide bombers, and those attackers are highly motivated to carry out such attacks if the benefits outweighed their economic opportunities. The misconception that suicide bombers came from lower socioeconomic classes was debunked, as some of the prevalent research within the field indicated otherwise. Religion was also identified as a motivational source. However, it is important to note that religion, as a system of beliefs and core values, is unrelated to motivating suicide bombing adoption, but it is rather the religious differences between a group and the target that increase the likelihood of adoption, as means to "inflare" religious and nationalist sentiments. The "club" mentality and fear of losing out were also key motivational factors for terrorist organization members to carry out suicide attacks. There were also ideological and personal psychological motivations for adopting suicide bombings.

⁷⁸ Uppink, Lauren, and Maksim Soshkin. 2019. The Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report 2019: Travel and Tourism at a Tipping Point. Insight Report, Geneva: World Economic Forum.

⁷⁹ Kalin, Stephen, Rania El Gamal, and Dmitry Zhdannikov. 2019. Attacks on Saudi oil facilities knock out half the kingdom's supply. September 14. Accessed October 20, 2019. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-aramco-fire/attacks-on-saudi-oil-facilities-knock-out-half-the-kingdoms-supply-idUSKCN1VZ01N>.

The consequences of the 9/11 attacks resulted in many institutions specialized in studying the field. Organizations develop specific indices to gauge suicide and terrorist attacks, which agreed that suicide bombing rates peaked by 2014 and have since declined in numbers. A vast majority of targets were civilians, followed by domestic government targets, foreign military and other non-state armed groups respectively. The work also identified the causes for the decline of suicide attacks. These causes included enhanced military campaigns targeting territorial-centric terrorist organizations such as Daesh and Boko Haram. Another factor was improved cooperation and efficiency of counter-intelligence efforts and policing tactics. Additionally, the Saudi model of “soft” counter-terrorism strategy, which includes rehabilitation and reintegration of terrorist detainees, was a critical success that garnered international praise and emulation.

Lastly, the work concerned itself with correlating how the decline in suicide attacks is beneficial for Arab Gulf interests. Recent statistical findings noted a steep decline in suicide attack rates in the Middle East, where deflating conflicts in Iraq and Syria, helped foster increased engagements between Arab Gulf states and the two noted countries. The Kingdom of Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates have taken initiatives to reestablish their diplomatic missions in Damascus, while Saudi Arabia and Kuwait increased efforts to engage with Iraq. Therefore, it can be inferred that a more stable security situation in the Middle East will enhance political engagement among its regional members, and help achieve the economic visions of the Arab Gulf states that are pursuing their own economic diversification policies.