

Counterterrorism in North Africa: From Police State to Militia Rule and the Quagmire of “CVE”

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It has been ten years since protests in which demonstrators called for dignity and civil rights spread across North Africa and the political landscape there is diverse.

From a Western perspective, two security policy concerns are prevalent in foreign strategy deliberations about the North Africa region: first, there is the continuous apprehension about migration via these countries into Europe. Second, there is the fear of security threats, such as terrorism, spilling over into Europe or endangering foreigners in North Africa.

The purpose of this report is to summarise and synthesise the counterterrorism (CT) policies and practices of North African countries; the term “counterterrorism” will cover various aspects, from military responses to attempts at prevention as well as deradicalization. In addition, the report gives recommendations at the end of each case study.

Overall, the military approach has been favoured for recent North African CT policies. The region is defined by a security-heavy approach, with most countries relying on military means to fight terrorism (Algeria is the prime example). Simultaneously this means that community approaches of preventing radicalisation or the joining of terrorist groups are more scarcely represented.

Nonetheless this varies for the different countries. For instance, in Tunisia genuine civil society efforts have developed in this regard. Furthermore, the influx of international money bolstered society-based programmes for countering terrorism in the long term, but often these programmes are largely state-controlled, as in Morocco, for instance.

Overall, this report fills a gap as it provides a much needed, contemporary overview of CT policies as well as the institutional setup in which these policies are formulated and enacted by North African states.

For future analysis, the focus away from Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) policy towards human rights abuses highlighting the correlation between the two in each context could be expanded by local evidence on work that tackles issues which are presumably part of the root causes (and likely tackle radicalisation more efficiently).

