**Forum:** Security Council

**Issue:** Mitigating the proliferation of religious extremist ideologies within governments

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Introduction

Over the past decades, there has been a rise in extremist religious ideologies within governments, affecting countries in different regions and across various religious affiliations. Factors contributing to this rise include socio-political grievances, economic disparities, geopolitical conflicts, and the spread of radical ideas through social media and online platforms. Religious extremist ideologies include political agendas against mainstream systems accepted by the majority. These ideologies can emerge within various religious traditions and their presence in governments may promote intolerance, discrimination, or acts of terrorism. One way religion can be understood is having different components as many scholars suggest: the ideological, intellectual, ritual, experiential, and consequential. Religious extremist ideologies within governments are seen to lean more to ideological and consequential when involved in politics.

This topic focuses on the extremist ideologies that are pursued by some governments or groups that run governments, instead of the mere religious extremist groups that are not part of the government itself, although nations under the latter condition are still subject to this topic as they are affected heavily by the issue and deal with similar religious extremism themselves. This issue as a whole is related to concerns of stability, security, and human rights. This is because certain ideologies often lead to marginalization and tension of minority groups, violation of human rights, and potential internal conflicts or international tensions. While governments should maintain their sovereignty, the right of the UN to protect those who are harmed by them stands. Mitigating the proliferation of religious extremist ideologies within governments requires a comprehensive and multifaceted approach that combines security measures, socio-economic development, the promotion of human rights, and international collaboration. The aim is to foster inclusive societies, strengthen governance, and prevent the radicalization and spread of extremist ideologies within the corridors of power.

While some governments will be labeled as pursuing religious extremist ideologies throughout this report, it should be noted that the specific actions they take are the identifiers of the extremism.

Definition of Key Terms

Religious extremist ideologies

Religious extremist ideologies are belief systems that advocate for radical changes in society based on religious beliefs. They are labeled “extremist” as they are belief systems not broadly accepted by the rest of society. Many of these ideologies exert significant influence on governments and how the country is governed.

**Theocracy**

Theocracy is a form of government in which religious leaders hold the governing authority of the nation. In a theocratic system, religious principles and teachings play a central role in shaping and guiding the government's policies and decision-making processes.

**Sharia law**

Sharia law is a religious law of the moral principles that are derived from Islamic beliefs. It serves as a social conduct for Muslims. Different interpretations of Sharia law may exist among Islamic state governments, resulting in variations in regulations and beliefs.

**Wahhabi movement**

Wahhabi movement is an Islamic reformation movement that happened in the 18th century. It’s a movement that advocated for a strict interpretation and applications of Qur’an, a religious text. Its start trace back to the 16th century.

**Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)**

Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) is a jihadist extremist group that emerged in the 2000s on a national scale. Its history and effects on the two nations are elaborated in the “Background” section.

**Modernity**

Modernity generally refers to the conditions of innovation in all if not most asepcts of societies. The changes that societies have seen may not align with several religious ideologies. Modernity is a factor of anxiety of many religiously extremist groups.

Background

Rise of religious extremist ideologies

While there are varying reasons for the development of extremist ideologies and radicalization in governments, geo-political factors and religious context play a significant role in many cases. There are several common themes of religious extremist ideologies that can be observed. Many have anxiety about modernity, globalization, and processes of secularization. These stem from marginalization, persecution, and social inequalities such as discrimination. The persistent denial of civil liberties, inadequate access to quality education, and other socio-economic grievances experienced by certain groups have contributed to the emergence and ongoing development of religious extremist ideologies. These ideologies stem from some governments and their actions, often resulting in human rights, security, and stability issues. Religious extremist ideologies being adopted by governments may happen through many processes such as through (religious) revolution, conflict, and the growth of the group pursuing such ideologies. There are causes for such ideology to spread to more people and to increase its influence on how governments govern. For instance, groups can grow by number; a well-organized violent extremist group that has effective programs for services, revenue, and employment in exchange for membership. Groups lure new members by providing outlets for grievances and emphasizing their ideology as a solution. Only some of the governments that pursue religious extremist ideologies will be addressed in this section but it should be noted that there are more beyond what the writing focused on. If considered appropriate, delegates should bring up additional ones and address related issues.

Taliban and Afghanistan

After the withdrawal of Soviet forces that ended the communist regime in Afghanistan in the 1990s, the Taliban emerged as an extremist conservative party to govern the country, seizing Kabul in 1996. Its first emergence traces back to the end of the Afghan War (1978-1992). Its ideology is a combination of Deobandi traditionalism and Wahhabi puritanism. With its Pashtun social code, the regime has an extremely conservative and oppressive nature. It aims to make Afghanistan an Islamic state. From 1996 to 2001, the Taliban had control of Afghanistan, until the bombing in the US.

The Afghanistan War started in September 2001 with the US following the terrorist attacks happening in the country. It came to an end in August 2021 with the US’s withdrawal. At the same time, the Taliban regained its power and ended attacks against the US. The party managed to overrun the central government and gain control of the country. Its extremist ideology violates human rights, especially those of women.

Women rights

Since the Taliban’s return, the human rights index of Afghan citizens has decreased. Despite the decades of progress starting from the 2000s, the rise of the Taliban has reverted the situation to when it was last in power. Oppression of women comes in a variety of forms. While the Taliban initially claimed the exercise of women's rights would be viable under Sharia law, women have been eliminated from education, work, politics, healthcare, and other public life. Identifying as a girl is a ‘crime’ in Afghanistan. In recent years, oppression has grown. Girls and women are banned from pursuing secondary and tertiary education and engaging in paid work. The former happened in September 2021 and the latter in December 2022. Discrimination is shown in and out of the house. They face extreme discrimination in employment. Women must leave the house with a male chaperone. Healthcare is only accessible when it is delivered by men. They are not allowed to speak publicly. Men’s violence against women is justified under the law. They are also not allowed to travel over 75km alone. With their independence denied, many left their homes and fled to other countries.

Destruction of the non-Islamic

Destructing non-Islamic artistic relics and oppressing other religious and ethnic minorities are some instances of the Taliban’s actions. While the Taliban claimed to protect religious minorities, their actions reflected the opposite. Religious minorities take up a large portion of the 40 million population in Afghanistan, with only Shia Muslims making up 15%. Actions of violating the right to freedom of religion were shown in instances when the Taliban restricted Shi’a from celebrating Eid al-Ghadir, a festival that is important to the religious group as it marks the day when Ali Muhammad was declared successor. Religious teachings have also been restricted at universities. Not only are many religious minorities forced to dress to hide their religious identity, but many such as Sikhs and Hindus have become unemployed and homeless because of discrimination and oppression. As N. Mohammed who is the director of policy and strategy at the Muslim Public Affairs Council, “this exodus of diverse religious groups has left a void in the country’s social fabric.”

Iran

Following the Islamic Revolution in 1979, Iran has been an Islamic republic, with laws and regulations based on Islamic beliefs. The government has had records of human rights abuse especially against religious minorities. The regime has actively utilized proxy militias and groups such as Hamas, Hezbollah, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad to expand the influence of the Islamic Revolution.

Government officials reportedly continued efforts to stop the growth of the Houthis' popularity by limiting the hours that mosques were permitted to be open to the public. The government claimed that they were enforcing the tradition of mosques used for prayers instead of political activities.

Violence has been shown many times throughout history and current events. Not only have many individuals been arrested, but many were killed because of reasons related to religion and protests. Many nationwide protests have occurred across 31 provinces, especially since the death of 22-year-old Jina Mahsa Amini on 16 September 2022. They grieved the discrimination against women rooted in law and other practices. An estimated 20,000 individuals were arrested during the 6 following months, where ill-treatment and torture took place. Further, at least 44 children were reported to have been killed by security forces.

Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)

Iraq and Syria were affected by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). It has controlled portions of the territory of Iraq and Syria, given rise to humanitarian crises and other ethnic tensions, weakened the governments themselves, and was met with counterterrorism measures such as those from military campaigns. With time and resources focused on addressing, both countries weren’t able to focus on other aspects of national development. ISIS sought to establish its self-declared caliphate based on its interpretation of Islamic law, Sharia. Strict enforcement and harsh punishments took place. Punishments such as public executions and other acts of violence were decisions based on perceived infractions. Prosecution of religious and ethnic minorities, destruction of cultural heritage, and propaganda to recruit individuals in ways such as promoting violence on social media also took place.

Major Parties Involved

In addition to the governments that are the main subjects of this issue, numerous nations are contending with the presence of religious extremist groups within their borders. It is often the case that these governments are affected by those who pursue religious extremist ideologies. In addition to the measures already taken, it is incumbent upon these governments to prioritize national security and safeguard political processes against the encroachment of religious extremist ideologies.

Nigeria

Nigeria is plagued by extremist groups including Boko Haram, primarily active in the northeast. They have carried out numerous attacks such as kidnappings and suicide bombings. While the government is not inherently extremist, there is a concern that individuals with such views have hindered counterterrorism efforts. This emphasizes the importance of implementing thorough vetting processes in countries like Nigeria.

India

While it can be said that there is no religious extremist ideology within the government, certain political or social movements in India have espoused ideologies that promote a Hindu nationalist agenda, which can be perceived as favoring a particular religious group over others. The country itself has shown some tendency toward Hindutva Extremism in the past. Some extremist groups associated with Hindutva have been involved in acts of violence against religious minorities, particularly targeting Muslims.

Saudi Arabia

While Saudi Arabia is not theocratic, the country has its official religion and its government monarchy reflects conservative interpretations of Sunni Islam. Extremist measures have been used by the government such as restricting the freedom of expression and religion; and women's rights abuses. Religious minorities do not have the right to practice their religion openly. Conversion from Islam to another religion is punishable by death as apostasy.

Pakistan

While religious parties in Pakistan initially opposed the creation of the nation, they soon aimed to establish an orthodox Islamic state. There have been instances of rights and freedom restrictions imposed on religious minorities, as well as instances of marginalization of secular forces. Nevertheless, the country has demonstrated a proactive approach to addressing the issue of religious extremism as a whole.

Yemen

There have been reports of religious discrimination especially between adherents of Shia and Sunni Islam. The government prohibits conversion from Islam and efforts to proselytize Muslims. Radicalization of the Zaydi-Shia Houthi rebels saw an increase in violence between different religious communities. AQAP, in particular, has exploited the power vacuum and weak governance structures to establish a presence in parts of Yemen, primarily in the southern regions. The group has carried out numerous attacks, targeting both security forces and civilians.

Sudan

When Sudan was under the rule of President Omar al-Bashir from 1989 to 2019, the country had a more conservative interpretation of Islam and implemented policies influenced by a rather extreme Islamist ideology. This period saw restrictions on religious minorities and the imposition of a strict interpretation of Islamic law.

Timeline of Events

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| Date | Description of event |
| 16th century | Start of the Wahhabi movement |
| 1928 | The Muslim Brotherhood is founded in Egypt, advocating for the establishment of Islamic governance based on conservative interpretations of Islam |
| January 7th  1978 - April 1st, 1979 | Islamic Revolution in Iran |
| September 1st, 1988 | Implementation of Sharia in Sudan |
| December 26th, 1991 | Algerian Civil War breaks out in 1992 between the Algerian government and Islamist groups. |
| 1996-2001 | Taliban gains control over Afghanistan |
| January 25th, 2006 | Hamas is elected as the Palestinian legislative and gains control. |
| 2009 | Bokoharam gains international attention |
| 2010-2021 | Arab Spring uprisings begin and some Islamist groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, gain power |
| 2013 | Military Coup in Egypt |
| 2013 | Rise of ISIS |
| June 24th, 2014 | The Islamic State declares a caliphate under its control, exerting influence beyond Iraq and Syria |
| August 15th, 2021 | Taliban regains control of Afghanistan |

Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

Highlighting the significance of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), the UN Security Council has adopted resolutions addressing the situation in Afghanistan, emphasizing the importance of human rights. These resolutions aim to achieve the objective of a peaceful Afghanistan that is in harmony with itself and its neighboring countries. However, seeing how the actions of the Taliban, including the “temporary delay in women's education” go against their statements, suggests that existing approaches may require greater assertiveness in addressing these concerns.

* Resolution 2593 (2021), August 30th, 2021 (S/RES/2593)
* Resolution 2615 (2021), December 22nd, 2021 (S/RES/2615)
* Resolution 2681 (2023), April 27th, 2023 (S/RES/2681)
* Resolution 2721 (2023), December 29th, 2023 (S/RES/2721)

The UN has also aimed to address discrimination, violence, terrorism, and stigmatization from religious extremism in general, both on governmental and national scales. UN has also made attempts to address human rights issues in Iran due to religious extremist ideologies. These resolutions as a whole highlight the significance of combating religious intolerance and promoting respect for diversity and human rights. However, the implementation of these resolutions has not been done effectively seeing the past events.

* Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, January 9th, 2023 (A/RES77/228)
* Resolution 1624 (2005), September 14th, 2005 (S/RES/1624)
* Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping and stigmatization of, and discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against, persons based on religion or belief, April 22nd, 2011 (A/HRC/RES/16/18)
* Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, December 24th, 2015 (A/70/674)

UN highlighted the importance of religious tolerance and respect. On a governmental level, it urged member states to take measures such as developing educational programs. Again, the implementation and following effects of these, however, vary in countries.

* Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, November 25th, 1981 (A/RES/36/55)
* Strengthening the role of the United Nations in enhancing the effectiveness of the principle of periodic and genuine elections and the promotion of democratization, Februrary 28th, 2006 (A/RES/60/162)
* Elimination of all forms of intolerance and of discrimination based on religion or belief, December 21st, 2010 (A/RES/65/211)

Possible Solutions

* In the context of addressing religious extremism, it is evident that despite previous resolutions and efforts, certain issues persist. Therefore, it is crucial for delegates to implement measures that effectively manage and counteract extremist tendencies within the political systems of countries. One example of this is the situation with the Taliban, where different perspectives may exist regarding the appropriate course of action. However, greater assertiveness in implementing already-crafted resolutions is necessary. This applies not only to the issue in Afghanistan but also to other countries, such as Iran, where enforcement should be carried out with improved effectiveness.
* To discourage governments that embrace religious extremist ideologies and engage in violent acts, various parties, including the United Nations and foreign countries, can exert diplomatic pressure through sanctions and appropriate condemnations. While directly altering the laws of another country may not be feasible, other governments have the option to discourage such behavior through these means. However, it is important to consider that these measures may have unintended consequences, such as political inactivity, which can impact the entire nation beyond the government in question. In other words, finding a solution that effectively manages religious extremism while simultaneously ensuring security and safeguarding human rights in all circumstances is both challenging and essential.
* In addition to addressing the immediate manifestations of religious extremism, it is crucial for delegates to tackle the root causes of the issue while also providing support to those who have been negatively affected by it. Understanding the unique situations faced by different countries and identifying commonalities that contribute to negative consequences is imperative. By analyzing and addressing factors such as socio-economic disparities, political grievances, ideological influences, and cultural dynamics, delegates can work towards long-term solutions that mitigate the growth of extremism.
* The UN or other countries can play a role in providing aid to support Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that defend human rights and assist individuals and communities affected by religious extremist regulations. This support can come in the form of funding, humanitarian aid, and assistance for refugees. It is essential to ensure that human rights are protected for all, regardless of their religious beliefs or cultural backgrounds.
* Former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon emphasized the underutilized role of religious actors and institutions in addressing religious extremism. Building strong and resilient governance institutions is paramount in mitigating the influence of extremist ideologies. This involves promoting transparency, accountability, and the rule of law, as well as establishing effective governance structures that are inclusive and representative. By engaging religious actors and institutions in dialogue and collaboration, delegates can harness their potential to promote peace, tolerance, and understanding within societies.

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Appendix or Appendices

1. [*https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G16/088/68/PDF/G1608868.pdf?OpenElement*](https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G16/088/68/PDF/G1608868.pdf?OpenElement)

*This document is useful when understanding the overall history of religious extremism.*

1. [*https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G16/162/55/PDF/G1616255.pdf?OpenElement*](https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G16/162/55/PDF/G1616255.pdf?OpenElement)

*This document is useful when understanding UN’s stage on methods counterterrorism and protecting human rights based on past solutions and evaluated effectiveness.*

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nAHpmd_XJpc&ab_channel=BerkleyCenter>

*This video is useful when understanding this issue’s causes and complexities in addressing it.*