American Foreign Policy Council

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

In the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, the United Arab Emirates has come to be identified as significantly, if indirectly, involved in Islamic terrorism. Two of the nineteen 9/11 hijackers were residents of the UAE, while another resided there.[1] More than a decade after those attacks, much of the Arab world remains in a state of upheaval, and the governments of two of the UAE's Arabian Peninsula neighbors, Bahrain and Yemen, have faced significant challenges to their authority. Yet the UAE, to all appearances, remains calm. This is due in large part to the cultural setting in which the interpretation and practice of Islam have evolved in the UAE, as well as to the nature of the country's leadership since its independence in 1971. The "father" of the UAE (and its president from the country's founding in 1971 until his death in 2004), Zayid bin Sultan Al Nahyan, promoted and personified a conservative but moderate interpretation of Islam, which helped to legitimate government efforts to check and contain Islamic extremism. Since 9/11, the UAE has devoted serious efforts to

countering Islamic terrorism, the extreme forms of belief that promote it, and the financial support that facilitates it.

Yet while these efforts have been overwhelmingly successful, international concerns remain that terrorist plots could be carried out from or through the UAE, and that some terrorist financing taking place within the country remains hidden or unacknowledged. At various times between December 2011 and June 2013, considerable numbers of Islamists were arrested. They were described in government statements as belonging to an "al-Qaeda cell," and threatening militant attacks. A trial of 94 suspects begun in March 2013 led to the conviction of 69 (eight in absentia). On July 2, 61 received prison sentences of seven to 10 years and eight of those tried in absentia were given 15 years. The individuals sentenced included academics, lawyers, and members of leading UAE families. Among them were prominent human rights lawyer Mohammed al-Roken and Shaikh Sultan bin Kayed Al Qassimi, the chairman of al-Islah and a cousin of the ruler of the Emirate of Ras al-Khaimah. The various charges were alleged violations of Article 180 of the UAE's penal code, which prohibits "establishing, instituting, founding, organizing, administering or joining an association or any branch thereof, with the aim of overthrowing the regime of the State."[2] It seems clear that the arrests and convictions stemmed more from the government's fear of the popular attraction of political Islam in the wake of the Arab Spring than from evidence of an explicit plot to overthrow the government.[3]

ISLAMIST ACTIVITY

The activity of Islamists in the UAE has been constrained by several factors, among them the generally moderate and non-political nature of the religion there, and the government's close monitoring of Muslim organizations, especially those with political agendas. Moreover, the largest cohort of Muslims in the country are South Asian expatriates, who have been drawn there for job opportunities and are subject to expulsion for any behavior deemed threatening to state security. Finally, astute government distribution of the country's vast hydrocarbon wealth has been effective in blunting the kind of discontent which might promote grassroots adherence to Islamism that challenges the writ of the state.

The Muslim Brotherhood
The Muslim Brotherhood (MB) had an Emirati presence before the UAE's independence in 1971. In the 1950s and 1960s, educated, professional MB members fleeing Gamal Abdel Nasser's repression in Egypt filled many public and private positions, especially in educational and judicial institutions, gaining significant influence in the UAE in subsequent years.[4] By the 1990s, however, whatever influence the organization exercised had largely dissipated.

The UAE government sought to curb the MB's influence in education by forcing its members employed by the Ministry of Education to renounce the Brotherhood or find employment elsewhere. Since 1994, hundreds of expatriate MB members or sympathizers in the country's education system have been deported. In 2003, Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, currently crown prince of Abu Dhabi, and senior MB leaders failed in an attempt to strike a deal to permit the MB to operate in the UAE in exchange for renouncing allegiance to the MB's supreme guide and agreeing to halt political activities.[5] The 2008 defeat of the Brotherhood's candidates in the Kuwaiti parliamentary elections reflected a general setback for the group in its attempts to gain a foothold in the Gulf, even as it continued to be ineffectual in the UAE. An Islamist commentator lamenting negative developments for the Brotherhood recently observed that, in the UAE, "despite some interesting developments among the cadres and the youth of the MB, intense security obstacles prevented them from doing much by way of renewing their thought or engaging in popular actions."[6] Indeed, indications are that the UAE government views the Brotherhood as a political entity whose true aim is to establish a theocracy; thus, the organization is outlawed.[7] The MB caused alarm because of the perceived attempt of the parent organization in Egypt to incite Islamist activity in the UAE, something that created strained relations with Egypt when Morsi Abdullah was president. His overthrow in July 2013 was cause for relief and satisfaction in the UAE.[8]

Al-Islah
Al-Islah, also known as the Reform and Social Guidance Association, is currently the largest and best organized opposition group in the UAE, but was founded in 1974 as an non-governmental organization (NGO) dedicated to promoting sports and cultural activity as well as charitable work. However, over the next two decades it adopted a political reform agenda and, in recent years, the government has moved to curb its influence by prohibiting al-Islah members from holding public office and other prominent positions. The government now views al-Islah as a security threat.[9] The organization was recently estimated to have as many as 20,000 UAE residents affiliated with it.[10] From December 2011 through 2012, UAE officials, convinced that al-Islah was actively working with the MB, especially in Egypt, to challenge the country's political system, arrested a number of the group's members.[11] The crackdown culminated in arrests at the end of 2012 of members of an alleged MB "spy ring" alleged to be collecting secret defense information and contemplating actions calculated to lead to regime change in the UAE. The forceful reaction of the government against al-Islah reflected its fear that Egypt's MB-dominated government was seeking to destabilize the Gulf monarchies by spreading its populist form of political Islam.[12]

It remains to be seen whether the demise of the Morsi government and the arrest and conviction of many of its leaders will reduce real or perceived threat from al-Islah. Complicating an assessment of the threat is lack of agreement as to al-Islah's identity. It is variously seen as forming a chapter of the MB, embracing a similar ideology but without organizational links, and being influenced by the MB.[13] While it is probably accurate to characterize the organization as non-revolutionary and focused on reform and restructuring of government, that appears to the UAE government to be a likely analog to the MB's rise to power in Egypt. Al-Islah's base is in Ras al-Khaimah and the other northern emirates, where resentment of the much greater wealth and opportunities in Abu Dhabi and Dubai can fuel Islamist impulses.[14]

Al-Qaeda
The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 highlighted links between the UAE and the group responsible, al-Qaeda. Two of the operatives who carried out the attacks were Emiratis, another had resided there during the planning for the attacks, and the planners of the operation had frequently transited the UAE. A further connection stems from the UAE being one of only three countries to recognize the Taliban regime in Afghanistan (the others were Pakistan and Saudi Arabia).

Since 9/11, there have been no attacks carried out in the UAE or launched from its soil by al-Qaeda, but fairly numerous and credible threats have been discovered, although not always with a high level of certainty. The presence of al-Qaeda operatives has, however, been established conclusively. In November 2002, the suspected ringleader of the team that had attacked the USS Cole two years earlier in Aden, Yemen was captured in Dubai. The same year, credible reports claimed that a considerable number of al-Qaeda fighters captured in Afghanistan were UAE nationals, and that welfare associations in Dubai and Fujairah had been encouraging young men to join terrorist groups. These associations were also accused of sending money to radical groups in Afghanistan and South Asia. Arrests occurring in 2004 suggested that Dubai continued to be a waypoint for al-Qaeda operatives.[15] Then, in July 2005, a new group calling itself "The al-Qaeda Organization in the Emirates and Oman" issued a strong threat against rulers in the UAE if U.S. military installations in the country were not dismantled immediately.[16]

Three years later, the British government issued warnings of the risk of terrorist attacks in the UAE, likely connected to threats from al-Qaeda. The warnings prompted discussions in *jihadi* internet forums, which speculated about a possible secret understanding between al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations with the UAE, whereby the latter would turn a blind eye to those organizations maintaining contacts and raising money there.[17] In

2009, American officials confirmed a report that UAE authorities had broken up a major terrorist ring in Ras al-Khaimah that spring, which had been plotting to blow up targets in Dubai. In September of the same year, a Saudi tip led to interception in Dubai of explosives which operatives of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) claimed to have placed on UPS and FedEx flights.[18] In 2010, there were reports that a network of "semi-legal" mosques dominated by Salafi preachers posed a *jihadi* threat, and a purported threat from al-Qaeda. The reports, though coming from backers of Shaikh Khalid bin Saqr Al Qassimi, who is contesting the succession as ruler of Ras al-Khaimah, appeared credible, and fit a pattern of al-Qaeda linkage with the emirate initiated by Marwan al-Shehhi, the 9/11 hijacker, and continued with the 2009 incitement noted above. Despite some initial press speculation that members of an alleged MB spy ring arrested in December 2012 had al-Qaeda links, no subsequent reports, official or otherwise, have given any credence to that idea.[19]

Despite these plots and threats, no terrorist group has succeeded in carrying out an operation in the UAE. Interestingly, some *jihadi* internet forum discussants have suggested that al-Qaeda's failure to strike the UAE reflects lack of support for the organization, owing in part to the non-militant nature of Emirati fundamentalists, which in turn constrains al-Qaeda's ability to recruit locals.[20] The government, for its part, has taken measures to counter extremism, including a public awareness campaign conducted by religious authorities about the dangers of violent extremism.[21] On December 15, 2012, in Abu Dhabi, UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan opened the International Center for Excellence in Countering Violent Extremism (ICECVE), also called the Hedayah (Guidance) Center. The center's creation was an outgrowth of the Global Counter Terrorism Forum (GCTF) created by the U.S. Department of State in September 2011, which comprises some 30 countries and seeks to help its members develop research and training in counter-terrorism. The center will promote cooperation among members of the GCTF on issues relating to violent extremism, perform research and issue studies on the subject, and offer assistance in capacity building to counter threats. Deputy Under Secretary of State William Burns represented the U.S. at the center's launch.[22]

While the threats from militant Islamist groups on UAE soil appear remote at present, the activities of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and of both Sunni and Shia extremists in Syria alarm the country's rulers. U.S. failure to take strong action against the Assad regime in Syria has heightened UAE and other Gulf Arab country fears of the Shia challenge, especially as embodied by Iran, Assad's principal ally and supporter.[23]

The Taliban and Haqqani Network

Islamist activity involving South Asian residents in the UAE is significant, and reportedly has included support of terrorist groups operating in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. In October 2008, for example, a plot involving several individuals, including an Afghan, to provide funds to the Taliban was uncovered by national authorities. The U.S. government believes that the Taliban and the affiliated Haqqani Network are funded in part by donors in the UAE, drawing their support from the large Pashtun community there. The Taliban is also known to extort money from Afghan businessmen based in the UAE.[24] However, neither the size of voluntary contributions to the Taliban nor the scope of forced aid extorted by them is publicly known.

Lashkar-e-Taiba

The Pakistan-based Islamist terrorist group Lashkar-e-Taiba reportedly received large amounts of money from Gulf-based networks, including funders in the UAE.[25] There likewise appears to be a linkage between the UAE and terrorist activities carried out by the group against India; an investigation of the August 2003 bombings in Mumbai revealed a Dubai link, through which Lashkar-e-Taiba operatives in that emirate colluded with cells in India. Other urban terrorist attacks in India revealed a similar linkage. An important part of the equation is the set of operational ties between the Student Islamic Movement of India and militant student groups in the UAE, as well as elsewhere in the Gulf. Lashkar-e-Taiba developed out of the *Ahl-e-Hadith* movement, which has roots in both the Middle East and the Indian Subcontinent.[26]

ISLAMISM AND SOCIETY

Of the UAE's estimated population of just over 5 million, less than a fifth is made up of native Emiratis. Citizens are overwhelmingly Muslim, approximately 78 percent of them Sunni and 16 percent Shi'a, with a small Ahmadiyya Muslim community as well. About four percent of the total population is non-Muslim, made up of about 250,000 Christians and smaller numbers of Hindus, Buddhists, and others.[27] The country's constitution allows for freedom of religious practice "in accordance with established customs, provided that it does not conflict with public policy or violate public morals." The State Department has reported that "There were some reports of abuses and restrictions of religious freedom, including reports of imprisonment and detention. However, the government generally followed a policy of religious tolerance, and adherents of most major religions in the country worshiped without government interference.[28] Sunni Emiratis adhere to the Maliki school of Islamic law, which is officially recognized in Abu Dhabi and Dubai, and the Hanbali school that predominates elsewhere (except in Fujairah, where the Shafi'i school holds sway).[29]

Attitudes toward Islamic groups in the UAE are difficult to discern since there is no significant direct popular participation in government by these elements. While the constitution mandates freedom of speech, public assembly and association are still subject to government approval. Although the press is among the freest in the Arab world, it exercises self-censorship on sensitive issues, and the broadcast media are government-owned. Thus, attitudes concerning Islamic groups and their activities can be assessed mainly by inference rather than by consideration of explicit expressions of opinion.[30]

Moreover, the identification of Islamist groups is itself somewhat problematic, because there is considerable overlap in the missions of organizations, notably in the areas of philanthropic and religious concern. Curiously, the government identifies fewer than three percent of associations in the UAE as religious.[31] Many of the groups placed under the headings "cultural," "folklore," and "human services" are to one degree or another Islamic in orientation. 16.5 percent of associations are defined as "foreign."

The sampling of Islamic groups examined below is broadly representative of those that are active in the UAE. This stratum includes both organizations that are part of native Emirati society and those that belong to various expatriate Muslim communities. To the extent that UAE organizations are identified with the promotion of Islamic objectives, they generally reflect the conservative nature of Islam in the country. However, differences exist; organizations in Dubai tend to reflect the cosmopolitanism of that emirate, with its very large expatriate population, including more than 150,000 from Europe and the United States, while in Abu Dhabi they exhibit a generally more conservative nature in keeping with its character, and in Sharjah they reflect the ruler's commitment to upholding the strong Islamic norms of that emirate.

Emirati Islamic groups

The Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Foundation was launched in 2007 by the prime minister and ruler of Dubai, who also serves as vice president of the UAE, with his personal donation of a $10 billion endowment (one of the largest charitable donations in history). In keeping with Dubai's personality, the mission of the foundation is expansive—to be a knowledge hub in the Arab world with the ultimate aim of bridging the gap between the Arab region and the developed world, thereby promoting job creation and economic development. The Islamic component of the foundation's mission is not explicit, but it is nonetheless significant. In the speech that launched the foundation, Sheikh Mohammed called for governments, business lead-

ers, educators and others to promote an understanding of Islam's tolerance and commitment to intellectual debate.[32] In addition, a central element of the foundation is the Bayt ul-Hikma, designed to disseminate knowledge in the Arab world and named for the House of Knowledge that represented the apogee of Islamic science and learning in the Abbasid Empire of the Middle Ages.[33]

In Abu Dhabi, the more modestly funded Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan Charitable and Humanitarian Foundation was established in 1992 with a $100 million endowment. Its mission is more overtly aimed at advancing Islamic goals than that of the Al Maktoum Foundation, including the support of mosques, educational and cultural institutions, and the financing of both Emiratis and other Muslims in performing the *Hajj*. The foundation supports humanitarian projects, including a camp and hospital for Syrian refugees in Jordan, and assists low income Emiratis and others in building, refurbishing, and maintaining housing. The foundation's largest recent project was the provision of food and other assistance to 26,000 Yemeni families, for which $183 million was allocated.[34] (This foundation is not to be confused with the Zayed Center for Coordination and Follow-Up, created in 1999 as the think tank of the Arab League, and closed by Sheikh Zayed in 2003 after an international outcry over revelations that it had provided a platform for the expression of anti-Semitic and extreme anti-Israeli views).

The Tabah Foundation is a non-profit institution established in 2005 in Abu Dhabi that seeks to promote a more effective contemporary Islamic discourse to advance Islamic values and counter negative images of Islam. Funded by various institutions and individuals in the UAE, Tabah has recently entered into an agreement with the *Diwan* (Council of State) of the crown prince of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed, to develop the Zayed House for Islamic Culture. Its most significant initiative would appear to be the work of its media department, comprising both a television and documentary film division.[35] It also provides advice and consultation to other organizations. In 2010, the foundation published "Beyond Flak Attack," a sophisticated essay directed at Muslim activists and scholars who seek to engage the mass media to try to balance its "predominantly negative" reporting on Islam and Muslims.[36]

In Sharjah, promotion of Islamic activities extends beyond the philanthropic to the commercial sector. Citing the importance of Islamic banking institutions, the chairman of the Sharjah Chamber of Commerce and Industry remarked that "It is important to reinforce Islamic trade all over the world and introduce diversified commercial products, Islamic funding and banking, and halal foodstuff. These all comply with sharia, which has gained

greater global prominence.[37]

Islamic groups serving the Indian and Pakistani communities in the UAE
The very large Indian and Pakistani communities in the UAE are served by numerous organizations, each associated with varying degrees of Islamic activity. Estimates of the number of Indians in the UAE vary; the State Department has estimated as much as 1.75 million,[38] although this seems quite high. A recent report indicated that there are some 60 social and voluntary organizations serving the predominantly Muslim Indian community. Reflecting the challenge of securing funding for the support of Indian organizations, the UAE Indian Islamic Centre, founded in 1971, was unable to initiate construction of a building until 2008 (it was dedicated in 2011). Despite the center's name and predominantly Muslim membership, it involves all religious communities in its activities.[39] By contrast, the Dubai Indian Islamic Centre, located in the emirate with the greatest number of Indian residents, while committed to promoting a wide range of non-religious goals, is more narrowly focused on its Islamic mission. Its members are exclusively Indian Muslims, and an important part of its mission is to "promote and propagate the ideal teachings of Islam," apolitically and free of sectarian bias, through religious teaching centers, where modern subjects are included with religious education. Lacking an endowment, the center provides services through the financial support of sponsors who adopt specific projects.[40] Finally, the Indian Islahi Centre in the Emirate of Ajman, established in 1979, is still more explicitly dedicated to advancing the cause of Islam. It is an "Islamic *Da'wa* (Call)" organization, working particularly among Indians from Kerala, conducting a range of activities designed to spread the message of Islam among both Muslims and non-Muslims.[41]

By contrast, there are few Islamic organizations in the Pakistani community in the UAE. Most Pakistani organizations in the country are business or financial associations or are devoted to providing aid to earthquake and flood victims in Pakistan. However, there is an Ismaili Centre in Dubai, dedicated in 2003 by the Aga Khan, spiritual leader of the Ismaili community, whose followers in the UAE are Pakistani and Indian expatriates. The site for the center was a gift of Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, ruler of Dubai. The Ismaili Centre, which opened in 2008, is meant to serve, in the tradition of Muslim piety, by promoting enlightenment and mutual understanding among the various elements of the Muslim world community. To that end, it carries out a program of cultural and educational activities.[42]

As the above descriptions suggest, there is little if any political aspect to the missions and activities of the Islamic organizations in the UAE, both those serving the Emirati community and those serving the large expatriate Mus-

lim communities. None could be characterized as extreme in any sense. All would appear to fit well within the mainstream of moderate Islamic activity.

Sporadic signs of extremist activity do exist, however. In April 2010, the Federal Supreme Court sentenced five UAE nationals and an Afghan on charges of funding the Taliban, and government officials indicated that those individuals had also planned to establish an al-Qaeda network in the UAE. At the end of that year, two Pakistanis were put on trial, charged with collecting money and recruiting individuals for al-Qaeda.[43] However, the scope of terrorist linkage with South Asia would appear to be limited, and the threat posed by al-Qaeda in the Arabia Peninsula, while it cannot be dismissed, has failed to manifest itself as a credible danger to the state. As noted above, crackdowns on al-Islah in 2011 and 2012 and excited reports of discovery of a "terror cell" in December 2012 did not signal immediate terrorist threats from al-Qaeda or any other organizations.

ISLAMISM AND THE STATE

The government of the UAE funds or subsidizes nearly all Sunni mosques in the country, while about five percent are privately endowed. It employs all Sunni *imams*, and provides guidance to both Sunni and Shi'a clergy. Shi'a mosques are considered private, but may receive funds from the government upon request. The Shi'a community is largely concentrated in the emirates of Dubai and Sharjah, with the bulk of its members in the former.[44] A number of new mosques have been built, or are under construction throughout the country. Notable among them are mosques in Fujairah and Ajman. The Shaikh Zayed Mosque of Fujairah, completed in January 2013, although located in one of the smallest and poorest of the emirates in the UAE, is the second largest in the country. Funded by the Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan Charitable and Humanitarian Foundation of Abu Dhabi at a cost of $52.1 million, it follows in the mold of its namesake, the massive Shaikh Zayed Mosque in Abu Dhabi and the Grand Mosque in Dubai as an expression of local pride and the ruling family's commitment to Islam. By contrast, the much more modest mosque opened in Ajman in 2011 (designed to hold 1,500 worshippers, as compared to the Fujairah mosque's 28,000) is being funded by a donation from Mr. Hamad Ghanem Al Shamsi, member of a distinguished and wealthy Ajman family.[45]

In December 2010, plans for four new Shi'a mosques were unveiled by the Khoja Shi'a Ithna-Ashari Jamaat (KSIMC) of Dubai, a private Shi'a religious philanthropy, with the sites for the structures given by the government of Dubai. The members of the Shi'a community, through a Shi'a endowment fund, the Awqaf Al Jafferiah, raise the funds to construct the mosques.

While there is no evidence to suggest that Shi'a (or Sunni) mosques have any connection with political or extremist motives, in 2012 a Khoja Shi'a *madrasa* in Dubai was closed and Shi'a mosque activities were restricted. These events came in the wake of numerous deportations of Shi'as from the UAE, including long term Lebanese residents, who were forced to leave the country over fears of possible Hezbollah connections.[46]

From its birth in 1971, the UAE has been supportive of moderate, apolitical Islamic activities, while opposing those that might pose a threat to the government. Shaikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the father of the UAE and its president from inception until his death in 2004, embodied that philosophy both in his rule and in his personal life. He was generous in his support of religious leaders, thus arming himself and the state against attacks from secular or religious quarters.[47] It should be recalled that the chief threat to the UAE in the first years of its independence was secular radicalism in the region, especially as given expression by the Marxist government of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), or South Yemen, and the guerrilla movements supported by the PDRY in their efforts to overthrow the government of the Sultanate of Oman, the UAE's immediate neighbor. Because of Zayed's close and positive relations with the UAE religious leadership, and the lack of extremist Islamic activity in the UAE before the events of September 11, 2001, the UAE's connections with those events was shocking and deeply embarrassing to Zayed and the UAE government.

Post-September 11th, the government reacted promptly (albeit cautiously) to the threat posed by al-Qaeda. While the generally moderate nature of Islamic belief and practice in the Gulf and the UAE precluded broad support for the ideology of al-Qaeda and other extremist groups, popular antipathy for some U.S. government actions in the Middle East has somewhat complicated the government's cooperation with the United States against Islamic terrorism.[48] In 2002, under Zayed's leadership, a contingent of UAE troops was deployed to Afghanistan to help in the struggle to unseat the Taliban, whose government the UAE had recognized before 9/11. Also in 2002, UAE authorities announced that they had arrested Abd al-Rahim al-Nashri, the apparent mastermind behind the October 12, 2000 attack on the USS Cole in Aden.[49]

Following these early actions, in the past few years the UAE has taken significant steps to counter Islamic terrorism, generally winning praise from the U.S. government for its efforts. The State Department noted that the UAE's preferred approach to the problem of Islamic extremism was to deny them a foothold rather than permit their participation in the political process.[50] Abu

Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed also cited a threat from Islamic extremism to the country's educational system, and sought to counter this by devoting considerable resources to modernizing curricula. Following the electoral victory of Hamas in 2006, the UAE informed the U.S. that it considered Hamas a terrorist organization and would not fund it unless Hamas renounced violence. In the continued absence of such a renunciation, the UAE has, nevertheless, funded housing construction in Gaza, which replaces buildings damaged in Israel-Gaza fighting in December 2008/January 2009 and in November 2012. Humanitarian assistance is provided through the Red Crescent Society of the UAE.[51] For some years, the UAE overlooked Hamas ties with Iran, and after Mohammed Morsi's June 2012 election as president of Egypt, Hamas, ideologically close to the MB, improved relations with Egypt, and significantly distanced itself from Iran. Morsi's fall in July 2013, led to a revival of Hamas's association with Iran. In September 2013, there were reports that the Egyptian government of General Abdel Fatteh al Sisi was planning with the UAE to overthrow the Hamas government and place Gaza under Egyptian or Palestinian Authority control.[52]

There is also concern that the UAE, while acting promptly when provided with evidence of a terrorist threat, does not have a proactive strategy for dealing with it.[53] The UAE has exhibited considerable concern over the threat of Shi'a extremism, prompted largely by fears of infiltration by Iranian agents and Iran-linked sleeper cells that could sabotage critical UAE sectors, including energy and transportation. The existence of both was reportedly revealed in 2007 by a former Iranian consul in Dubai. Actions were taken in 2009, not against Iranians but against Lebanese accused of links to Hezbollah, Lebanon's powerful Iranian-supported militia. The UAE deported 44 Lebanese men, who had worked both in the public and private sectors, for sending small amounts of cash to groups affiliated with Hezbollah. The UAE government denied that the action reflected anti-Shi'a discrimination, noting that it was denying government jobs to anyone with "ties to any suspect Islamic group", including those with links to "ideologically strident Sunni groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood." The UAE remains very concerned about a possible threat from resident Shi'as, especially those from Lebanon. This will continue to be the case as long as Hezbollah and Iran continue actively to support the Assad government in Syria, and as the Sunni-Shi'a divide grows more pronounced and dangerous in the Middle East.[54]

Another area of concern is the flow of money from private donors to support extremist Sunni groups, like the Islamic State of Iraq, Jabhat al-Nusra, and Ahrar al-Sham, fighting in Syria. While some of the funds are specifically targeted at assisting militias, much of the money is raised under the guise of humanitarian assistance. A Gulf-based organization, the Ummah Confer-

ence, recruits Muslim (Sunni) volunteers for Syria. Former senior military officers from the UAE head the UAE branch of the organization.[55]

The case of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI), which was infiltrated and used for criminal money laundering and terrorist financing before its collapse in 1991, foreshadowed the complex and difficult problems that gained prominence after 9/11, when the UAE, with U.S. support and urging, tackled the problem of the financing of Islamic terrorism. Al-Qaeda was able to use a correspondent banking network to transfer funds from the Dubai Islamic bank to accounts in the United States for use by the 9/11 hijackers.[56] After 9/11, the UAE Central Bank took steps to counter money laundering. While refusing to ban the traditional hawala system of money exchange in wide use between South Asian expatriates in the UAE and their home countries, it imposed strict regulations on it and, in 2004, the bank hosted the Second International Hawala Conference to discuss with delegates from around the world more effective monitoring of informal money flows.[57] While the UAE's efforts against money laundering and terrorist financing have been significant, cause for worry remains. Particular attention focuses on Dubai and its large Free Trade Zone, because of its potential facilitation of a variety of criminal and terrorist activities, including the use of front companies, fraud, and smuggling, as well as exploitation of the hawala and banking systems. In 2011, the UAE reported that there had been a significant increase in the number of suspicious activity reports submitted by companies to the central bank for 2010 as compared to 2009. While this very likely reflected an improvement in the monitoring of money-laundering practices, the volume itself was cause for concern.[58] In 2013, the U.S. continued to press the UAE on greater coordination of sanctions against illicit financial transactions. American concerns reflect the UAE's large financial services sector and its proximity to Iran. Thus, the U.S. has closely scrutinized the operations of UAE financial institutions and, in 2012, took strong actions against two financial service companies with ties to Iran, pursuing them for alleged sanctions violations.[59]

In the wake of the Arab Spring, it would appear that the Islamist threat to the UAE is less from possible terrorism than from populist forms of Islamism that the government perceives as aimed at overthrowing the Gulf monarchies. That is why the UAE government reacted so forcefully, at the end of 2012 and beginning of 2013, to what it saw as destabilizing activities engendered by the Egyptian MB. The government's harsh actions in 2011 and 2012 against al-Islah reflect its conviction that it is linked to the MB, despite its protestations to the contrary. Further, it believes that the MB, as the one popular, transnational, mass movement in the Arab world, seeks to gain control over the UAE or, at a minimum, to prevent the UAE from

neutralizing the MB's regional aims.[60] Thus, al-Islah's call for reforms that would create a real, national, elected legislature are seen as tantamount to working for regime change, and the government's sensitivity on this score led to its closing of the Abu Dhabi offices of two foreign NGOs working to promote democracy, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) of the United States and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung of Germany.[61] A popular uprising fomented by the MB is unlikely, but the government's concerns about the possible impact of Islamist political activism led to strained relations with Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi's MB-dominated government while it was in power.[62]

The UAE views the overthrow of the Morsi government in Egypt as a positive indication that political Islam will not prevail in Egypt or elsewhere. In a noteworthy article in a leading American journal, UAE Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Anwar Gargash urged that moderates in the Middle East seize the initiative in the wake of the MB's loss of political power in Egypt to advance moderate political agenda. He noted the need to act vigorously to prevent extremist groups from exploiting political vacuums, the importance of promoting religious tolerance and pluralism, and the necessity of redoubling the commitment to empowerment of women.[63]

In late 2013, the UAE did not appear to face a likely threat of Islamic terrorism, the hyperbole of some statements during the arrests and trials of al-Islah members notwithstanding. At the same time, the challenge of Islamic movements energized by the Arab Spring and its aftermath seem, at lest for now, to have clearly receded.

ENDNOTES

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