

The Flawed Hope of Sufi Promotion in North Africa

by [Vish Sakthivel \(/experts/vish-sakthivel\)](#)

Dec 19, 2016

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Vish Sakthivel \(/experts/vish-sakthivel\)](#)

Vish Sakthivel was a 2013-14 Next Generation Fellow at The Washington Institute.



Articles & Testimony

Sufism has been repeatedly invoked in U.S. foreign policy circles as a possible ideological counterbalance to extremist ideologies in the Middle East and greater "Islamic world." On a superficial level, for those who view politics as a "battle of ideas," the imagery of pacifist whirling dervishes provides a compelling contrast to that of weapons- and black flag-wielding anti-American extremists. On a more profound level, such a strategy seems to build off centuries-old home-grown institutions with which states like Morocco and Algeria are eager to engage. But will it work?

Sufi orders have played a critical role in the intersection of politics and religion in North Africa for hundreds of years. Founded around wise and charismatic preachers seen to have special blessing, Sufi orders have functioned as groups of religious learning and practice which meet on occasion and pay respects to their patron saints (marabouts). Their political influence increased in both Morocco and Algeria during the colonial period as the French sought to politically marginalize more centralized religious infrastructure (Algeria) and extend control over rural areas (Morocco). More recently, Morocco and Algeria have promoted Sufism in a top-down manner as a proposed counterweight to political Islam (whose many formal movements have a model, structure, and religious interpretation based to varying degrees on Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood) and to violent and/or Salafist ideologies...

To read the full paper, [download](#)

<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/opeds/Sakthivel20161219-FPRI.pdf> the PDF. ❖

Foreign Policy Research Institute

RECOMMENDED



BRIEF ANALYSIS

Tracking Anti-U.S. Strikes in Iraq and Syria During the Gaza Crisis

May 4, 2024



Michael Knights,
Amir al-Kaabi,
Hamdi Malik

(/policy-analysis/tracking-anti-us-strikes-iraq-and-syria-during-gaza-crisis)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

Is Kataib Hezbollah Behind the Saraya al-Ashtar Claimed Attack on Israel?

May 4, 2024



Michael Knights,
Amir al-Kaabi,
Hamdi Malik

(/policy-analysis/kataib-hezbollah-behind-saraya-al-ashtar-claimed-attack-israel)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

Nuclear Agency Chief Visits Iran: Expectations and Next Steps

May 3, 2024



Simon Henderson

(/policy-analysis/nuclear-agency-chief-visits-iran-expectations-and-next-steps)

TOPICS

Democracy & Reform (/policy-analysis/democracy-reform)

Terrorism (/policy-analysis/terrorism)

REGIONS & COUNTRIES

