



SAUDI ARABIA

*and*

COUNTERTERRORISM

APRIL 2017 REPORT



Defeating terrorism requires sound policies, concerted government efforts and international cooperation. Saudi Arabia works closely with its allies to hunt down the men, cut off the money, and change the mindset that terror organizations create and rely on.

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“The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is determined, God willing, to strike with an iron fist those who target the minds and attitudes of our youth.”

Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques  
King Salman bin Abdulaziz  
July 5, 2016

01

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## Overview

### Capturing the Men; Cutting off the Money and Changing the Mindset

As the birthplace of Islam and home to the Two Holy Mosques, Saudi Arabia is an attractive strategic target of extremists who seek to redefine Islam for their own nihilistic purposes. To combat this threat, Saudi government officials and religious scholars have condemned terrorist acts and aggressively sought to combat deviant ideologies.

Defeating terrorism requires sound policies, concerted government efforts and international cooperation. Saudi Arabia is one of the leading nations in combatting terrorism and terror financing, and has been working closely with its allies to hunt down the men, cut off the money, and change the mindset that terror organizations create and rely on.

Terrorism is an enormous challenge to the global community, and the terrorist threat that directly faces Saudi Arabia is multifaceted – from Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) on its southern border to the rise of Daesh (also known as ISIS or ISIL) to its north, in Iraq and Syria, to the clandestine activities of Al-Qaeda and Daesh in the Kingdom itself. Saudi Arabia has responded by taking firm action against terrorism and its extremist roots and embracing the roles of regional leader and committed global partner to combat terrorism. The Kingdom uses all the tools at its disposal: military action to roll back the territorial gains of terrorist organizations, aggressive action to counter terrorist financing, innovative efforts to challenge and eventually overcome the ideology, theology and messages that underlie terror organizations.

The Kingdom has enthusiastically joined the U.S.-led fight against Daesh. In February 2017, Foreign Minister Adel bin Ahmed Al-Jubeir told a German newspaper that the Kingdom was “ready to send ground troops” to fight Daesh in Syria on the side of the United States, should the U.S. lead a coalition against the terrorism in that country. Saudi Arabia greatly values its strong alliance with Washington today. Few global partnerships are combating terrorism more effectively than the joint military and finance tasks forces operated by the two countries.

"Saudi Arabia is one of our closest partners on counterterrorism. I have worked very closely, especially [with] Crown Prince Mohammad bin Naif, over the last 15 years. And they are truly a good example of how foreign intelligence services can work against these terrorist organizations. And Saudi Arabia faces a very serious threat from terrorism."

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Former CIA Director John Brennan  
Face the Nation  
September 11, 2016

Saudi Arabia's multifaceted approach to fighting terrorism is reflected in the Kingdom's:

- Membership in the 68-nation strong Global Coalition to Counter ISIS; making 341 sorties in support of coalition airstrikes in Syria.
- Creating in December 2015 a multi-nation Islamic Military Alliance against Terror;
- Co-chairmanship of the Counter ISIL Finance Group, along with the United States and Italy;
- Agreement with the UN in 2011 to launch the United Nations Counterterrorism Center; Saudi Arabia has pledged \$110 million to the center;
- Imposition of sanctions on entities that assist in terror financing, including joint designations with the U.S Treasury Department;
- International intelligence sharing by the Saudi Ministries of Defense and Interior;
- Strengthening of local banking laws;
- Far-ranging investigations into terror-funding networks;

- Crackdowns on local money-exchange operations;
- Military-technology transfers from the U.S. that contribute to joint counterterrorism efforts;
- Army and Special Forces training with the American and British militaries, as well as security-technology research and development between Saudi Arabia's scientific institutes and their international equivalents.
- Implementation of aggressive public education campaigns by official clerics in the Kingdom to discredit terror groups and condemn their activities;
- Monitoring its mosques to prevent political and religious incitement.

The Kingdom's commitment to fighting terrorism stems from its history as a target of terrorist violence, but also from its recognition that terrorism is a serious threat to order, stability and human development in the world today.

In 2016, Saudi Arabia suffered 34 attacks on its soil from a variety of extremist groups, including a trio of simultaneous attacks against U.S. targets on July 2016. In total, the country has faced more than 60 known attacks by Al-Qaeda and Daesh, some two dozen of them in the last two years. The self-proclaimed leader of Daesh called for the extermination of the Saudi royal family in three formal decrees, or "fatwas," issued between 2014 and 2016. Confronted with such threats, Saudi security forces continue to bolster their resources and capabilities.

The international situation today demands ongoing and close cooperation between nations allied against terror. Although successful in the design and implementation of its counterterrorism programs, Saudi Arabia continues to build on its initiatives, because terrorism remains a threat

**"This is the highest level of terrorism Saudi Arabia has experienced since at least 2000. There were more people killed from terrorism in 2015 in Saudi Arabia than in the previous 11 years combined."**

GLOBAL TERRORISM INDEX 2016.

THE INSTITUTE FOR ECONOMICS AND PEACE,  
WASHINGTON DC

to the safety and security of its citizenry and the global community. The effort must continue to be a collective one wholly dedicated to eradicating terrorist violence, extremism and radicalization in all its forms: cultural, political and religious.



"From assisting the refugees who are being thrown out of Syria by the fighting there, supporting Jordan in taking care of those refugees; the energy supplies and other support they are giving to Egypt as they work through some really tough financial times ... It's very clear that Saudi Arabia is stepping up to its regional leadership role out here right now at a key time in terms of trying to restore stability in this key region of the world."

U.S. SECRETARY OF DEFENSE JIM MATTIS

APRIL 19, 2017



"I believe that no two countries are working as closely in fighting terrorism, and in particular ISIS, as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United States. This has been the case for a number of years. We are intensifying our efforts."

FOREIGN MINISTER ADEL BIN AHMED AL-JUBEIR

MARCH 23, 2017

"There is great unanimity around the effort to defeat ISIS – not just on the battlefield, but also off the battlefield and around the world."

U.S. SECRETARY OF STATE REX TILLERSON

MARCH 23, 2017



A photograph of two Saudi Special Forces soldiers in full combat gear, including helmets and rifles, running on a wooden deck. The background shows a large, blurred emblem of the Saudi National Guard. A blue semi-transparent box is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing text.

Saudi security forces have arrested more than 300 foreign nationals in the last two years for involvement in terrorist activities with Daesh.

Saudi Special Forces during a training demonstration, May 2015

## 02

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# The Men

## Updates on Combating Terrorism

During the last decade, the Saudi government has fundamentally restructured operations and coordination to better address national security threats and to prevent terrorist attacks. Much of this activity has been aimed at dismantling the physical presence of terrorists and the ability of militants to operate within the Kingdom.

To do so effectively, Saudi security forces maintain rigorous security standards and undertake continuous training on the latest best practices for combating terrorist threats. Security professionals regularly participate in joint programs throughout the world, including in Europe and the United States.

Saudi security agents also work with their international counterparts to conduct missions and exchange information. Saudi Arabia and the United States have established two joint task forces—one that pursues leads to terrorist activities and another that tracks terror financing. These efforts to enhance the sophistication of Saudi Arabia's human resources have been complemented by the deployment of new technologies that assist in safeguarding the Kingdom.

In addition to adopting enhanced tactics to patrol the county's desolate borderlands, the Saudi government has also implemented counterterrorism measures designed to confront threats in the Kingdom's dense urban areas. Neighborhood police units engage and work directly with community members, encouraging citizens to provide tips and leads about suspicious activity. This approach has led to arrests of most-wanted terrorists and to the discovery of safe houses where terrorists were meeting, plotting and staging attacks.



“We are tremendously pleased with the work and sacrifice of our brave security men who operate out of loyalty for their nation and religion, guided by their belief in God while facing the dark terrorist groups that have violated the Qur’an and the Sunnah of the Prophet, peace be upon him, and follow the ways of Satan in shedding blood. Their crimes and harm extend near and far, sparing no father, brother, friend or relative their heinous acts through their actions, they revealed that they are a scourge that poses harm to the society, but their efforts are constantly thwarted, thanks to God, first, and then to the efforts of our heroic security men.”

THE CUSTODIAN OF THE TWO HOLY MOSQUES KING SALMAN BIN ABDULAZIZ  
IN A LETTER TO CROWN PRINCE MOHAMMAD BIN NAIF,  
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER OF INTERIOR  
JANUARY 27, 2017

These activities - training, education, the inclusion of technology and community outreach - have allowed Saudi security forces to foil many terrorist plots within the Kingdom and to dismantle Al-Qaeda's operations. They have also created an unwelcome environment to terrorists and extremists.

Despite their effectiveness, these activities have not come without sacrifice. In combating terrorist-related events, many Saudi security officers have died and hundreds have been wounded carrying out their duties. Casualty rates have decreased in recent years, as a result of improved training, experience and preventative activities—including increased efforts to combat the financing of terrorism and to eradicate the influence of extremist ideologies.

In addition to training courses for combating terrorists, Saudi Arabia has led numerous international counterterrorism conferences on subjects ranging from combating extremists ideology to combating terror financing. International conferences such as these give nations and international organizations an opportunity to meet and discuss best practices for combating terrorism. These conferences are critical to ending the threat of terrorism on global community.

### **Saudi Internal Security, Special Forces, and International Collaboration**

Recent Actions by Saudi Arabia's Special Operational Forces (SOF) and its sub-agencies: the Saudi Emergency Force (SEF) and Special Security Forces (SSF).

In early January 2017, the Ministry of Interior announced that Security Forces had arrested more than 300 foreign nationals from nine different nations in the last two years for involvement in terrorist activities with Daesh. In addition to these arrests, preemptive security operations by SSF that foiled terrorist plots throughout 2016 have included: thwarting planned attacks at a) the Prophet's Mosque in Medina during the Pilgrimage season (September 2016); b) the U.S. consulate in Jeddah during Ramadan (July 2016); c) an international football match at the al Jawahara Stadium, also in Jeddah; d) a checkpoint in Damman in early August; and e) the tourist areas of the island of Tarout on the Arabian Gulf. They also prevented seven suicide attacks targeting a number of mosques in the region of Eastern Province.

In early 2017, Saudi Security Forces continued to disrupt planned attacks and to capture extremists. On January 7, Daesh-linked extremists Tayea Salem Yaslam Al-Sayari - known as a "suicide belt" maker for Daesh - and Talal Samran A-Saadi were killed during a shootout with police forces in the Riyadh neighborhood of Yasmeeen. Two weeks later, two extremists blew themselves up after security forces cornered them in the Harazat residential area of Jeddah.

Throughout 2016 and into early 2017, Saudi security forces dismantled several terrorist cells and arrested dozens of individuals connected to terrorism. Pakistani national Abdullah Gulzar Khan was arrested for plotting the Ramadan suicide attack on the U.S. consulate in Jeddah. Yemeni national Omar Saeed Mahdi Bahdaissami was arrested for the murder of a Saudi corporal as he was leaving early morning prayer at a local mosque. Six other Yemeni nationals were arrested in connection with that attack. A Syrian national, Nasser Mohammed Shafiq Al-Barazi, and an accomplice were arrested for manufacturing explosive belts and preparing explosive materials for Daesh to use in the Kingdom. In addition, Egyptian national Hisham Mohammed Abdo was caught before attempting a suicide attack on a mosque in Al-Ahsa.

## TERROR PLOTS FOILED BY SAUDI SPECIAL FORCES IN 2016

- Thwarting planned attacks at the Prophet's Mosque in Medina during the Pilgrimage season
- Thwarted attack on the U.S. consulate in Jeddah during Ramadan
- Foiled a planned terror attack on an international football match at the al Jawahara Stadium, Jeddah
- Thwarted a terrorist attack at a checkpoint in Damman
- Foiled a terrorist attack on tourist areas of the island of Tarout on the Arabian Gulf
- Prevented seven suicide attacks targeting a number of mosques in Eastern Province

On September 19, 2016, Saudi Special Forces arrested 17 members of Daesh terror cells. Saudi authorities seized pipe bombs, weapons, ammunition, suicide vests and bomb-making materials in the raids. In a press conference, Ministry of Interior spokesman Major General Mansour Al-Turki said the terrorist cells had a list of targets that included civilians, religious scholars and security officers as well as the locations of military installations and economic targets.

In February, Daesh claimed responsibility for the murder of retired Brigadier General Ahmad Faya Asiri in the city of Jizan. On August 21, 2016, Ministry of Interior spokesperson Major General Mansour Al-Turki announced that security forces arrested Osama Ahmed Mohammed Al-Rajhi, a Yemeni national; Muwaffaq Saleh Sunaid Al-Harbi, a Saudi national; and Mohammad Ahmed Mohamed Al-Rajhi, another Yemeni national.

In addition, on June 3, 2016, security forces announced the arrests of three individuals, among them an imam at a mosque in Medina, suspected of supporting Daesh. These arrests highlighted the fact that there has been a marked increase in the presence of known individual terrorists and their related networks in the southwestern provinces of the country, and Saudi security operations have intensified there. For example, on May 5, 2016, security forces conducted two operations in Jeddah and the Taif provinces; the larger of these operations took place in Wadi Noman and involved sustained exchanges of gunfire with security forces and two suicide-bomb attacks.

### Counterterrorism Operations and Exercises

On November 4, 2016, Saudi Special Security Forces simulated an attempt by a terrorist group to free a prisoner during his transfer from prison. The simulation was part of the tenth day of the Arab Gulf Security-1 exercises hosted by Bahrain. Saudi Special Security Forces carried out

## THE BLACK LEOPARDS

As Saudi Arabia prepared to receive nearly 2 million pilgrims from all over the world for the annual Hajj in September 2016, the Kingdom put a new security plan in place to engage a number of highly equipped government agencies. One of the most important measures taken was the deployment, for the first time, of the SSF unit known as the “Black Leopards,” an elite force trained in rapid-intervention operations.

Black Leopards were positioned in Security Control Centers, specifically at the entrances of holy sites. They are trained and equipped to respond to emergency events and were given the authority to deal directly with any terrorist attacks or other incident that would have put the pilgrims’ safety at risk.

several operations during the exercise, which entailed dividing special operations forces and armored security forces, defusing and removing explosives, and coordinating with the air force. The security forces worked according to detailed plans to respond to a large number of possible scenarios.

In March 2016, the Special Forces took part in a 20-nation counterterrorism exercise called “North Thunder.” The three-week exercise took place along Saudi Arabia’s border region with Iraq and Kuwait, using conventional and unconventional warfare techniques as part of a wider strategy to develop a counterterrorism alliance of Islamic nations in the Middle East.



## NORTHERN THUNDER MILITARY EXERCISES FEBRUARY – MARCH 2016

Special forces train during the North Thunder military exercises in Hafar Al-Batin, 500 kilometers northeast of the Riyadh on March 10, 2016. Armed forces from 20 countries conducted maneuvers in north-eastern Saudi Arabia, participating in one of the world’s biggest military exercises. North Thunder involved 350,000 soldiers, 20,000 tanks and 2,500 warplanes.

The Special Forces continue to conduct regular training with partner nations in the Middle East, including NATO allies such as the French Special Forces Command (Commandement des Opérations Spéciales). These training programs focus particularly on interoperability.



In October 2015, the SSF took part in a joint training exercise with Pakistan's Special Services Group aimed at improving interoperability in counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations and developing associated tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) in rugged environments.

## Collaboration with the United States

Saudi Arabia and the United States have a longstanding relationship dating back to the 1930s, when American businessmen first traveled to the Kingdom to help develop the country's natural resources. Today, the Saudi-U.S. relationship is stronger than ever. A major reason for the strength of this vital partnership has been the cooperation between the two countries on matters related to security and intelligence. Both nations are committed to rooting out the sources of terrorism.

On February 10, 2017, Central Intelligence Agency Director Mike Pompeo presented Crown Prince Mohammed bin Naif, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior, with the George Tenet Medal in recognition of his efforts in the fight against terrorism. The award reflects the close cooperation between the CIA and the Ministry of Interior, particularly over the past decade-and-a-half.

### NSA-MOD

The U.S. National Security Agency (NSA) collaborates with the Kingdom's Ministry of Defense, focusing on internal security and terrorist activity on the Arabian Peninsula. This partnership has been conducted within the framework of the CIA's relationship with the Kingdom's Ministry of Interior—specifically, the Mabathith, or General Directorate for Investigations (GDI—roughly analogous to parts of the FBI). While structured in distinct divisions, the GDI works alongside the Special Security Forces (under the Assistant Minister for Security Affairs) and the Special Emergency Forces, which report directly to the Minister of the Interior.

### U.S. SWAT TEAM MODEL

The Saudi Special Security Forces (SSF) is modeled after the special weapons and tactics (SWAT) teams employed by U.S. law enforcement and comprises



“We, God willing, continue to confront terrorism and extremism everywhere, and with thanks to God we have managed to thwart many terrorist plots. We are surrounded by areas of conflict, and we were the first [nation] affected by terrorism from various sources, but we are equipped to combat terror in any place and under any circumstances.”

CROWN PRINCE MOHAMMAD BIN NAIF

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER OF INTERIOR, ON THE OCCASION  
OF BEING AWARDED THE CIA ‘GEORGE TENET MEDAL’ BY AGENCY

DIRECTOR MIKE POMPEO

FEBRUARY 10, 2017

some 500 operatives across 13 centers throughout the country. The SSF is the counterterrorism unit of Saudi Arabian General Security within the MOI and is funded through allocations within the Defense budget. The operations of the SSF include: a) counterterrorism operations “in all forms and methods,” b) VIP protection at home and abroad, c) aviation protection for local and international flight; d) to guard and protect country embassies abroad in coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs e) Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) and Counter-Improvised Explosive Devices (C-IED) f) protection of critical installations and facilities, g) supporting other security sectors and helping to maintain security during the Hajj in cases of disasters and crises.

## U.S.-Built Military Bases

U.S. Army and Air Force engineers designed and constructed Saudi military bases in Taif, Khamis Mushait and Hafar Al-Batin. The latter, King Khalid Military City in Hafar Al-Batin, was built to defend the Kingdom's northeastern border and was used to house thousands of American and other coalition soldiers during the Gulf War.

In February 2016, the base played host to a large-scale military maneuver, North Thunder. Approximately 150,000 soldiers, 2,540 warplanes, 20,000 tanks, and 460 helicopters participated in the largest military exercise in the history of the region. Twenty Arab and Muslim countries and the GCC-formed Peninsula Shield took part in the drill, led by Saudi Arabia.

## The United States Military Training Mission

(USMTM) to Saudi Arabia is a special Security Assistance and Security Cooperation organization under the authority of the chief of the U.S. diplomatic mission. From March 30 to April 19, 2016, U.S. Army Special Forces teams conducted combined training with the Royal Saudi Land Forces 1st Airborne Brigade in Tabuk, in the northwestern part of the Kingdom. Training included small-arms marksmanship; machine-gun, mortar and anti-tank weapons training; land navigation; and counter-IED. The training culminated in a maneuvered live-fire raid coordinated by U.S. Special Forces team leadership.

## Collaboration with International Organizations

### INTERPOL

In mid-2016, Saudi Interpol announced plans to link internal sections of its databases to the General Secretariat of Interpol based in Lyon, France, in order to ensure a more effective and efficient method of investigation.

In February 2016, Saudi Interpol detained an Indian doctor, Sabeel Ahmed, for his involvement in a 2012 plot to recruit people for the terror group Lashkar-e-Taiba.



“I can tell you even to this day there are plots directly targeting the U.S. homeland that would not have been disrupted without the assistance of Saudi Arabia. I can’t think of another ally that plays a more important role than Saudi Arabia does in our counterterrorism fight and our ability secure our own homeland.”

FRANCES TOWNSEND

FORMER HOMELAND SECURITY AND COUNTERTERRORISM ADVISOR  
TO PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH

JULY 20, 2016

On December 15, 2016, Interpol’s Director for Saudi Arabia Major General Mohammed bin Ali Al-Zabin concluded a new cooperation agreement with Saudi Arabian Airlines in which Interpol and the airline would coordinate the transfer of wanted and convicted persons.

On September 17, 2015, the Kingdom chaired a meeting of the heads of Interpol’s National Central Bureaus in the Middle East and North Africa. Interpol member states agreed to double the exchange of information that is recorded in the Interpol database, particularly with regard to terrorist offenses and foreign terrorist fighters. The meeting also resulted in 18 new initiatives on Interpol capacity-building to prevent the infiltration of terrorist elements and improve border security.

In January 2014, Interpol and Saudi Arabia strengthened fugitive investigations, in-

cluding electronic surveillance. Interpol-Riyadh arranged for its frontline police officers across the country to have direct access to Interpol's global databases.

In March 2011, the first Arabic Interpol mobile police training program took place at the Naif Arab University for Security Sciences in Riyadh with participation by investigative units from Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Sudan and Yemen.

### **United Nations Counter Terrorism Center**

In September 2011, Saudi Arabia signed an agreement with the United Nations to create the United Nations Counter Terrorism Center (UNCCT) and donated \$10 million to its establishment. The initiative for this center was conceived in 2005, when the late King Abdullah held the "Counter-Terrorism International Conference" in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

The UNCCT was established within the international body's Counterterrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF) to promote international cooperation on counterterrorism through the implementation of the UN's Global Counterterrorism Strategy.

In 2014, King Abdullah provided the Center with a donation of \$100 million to enhance its capabilities and effectiveness in helping countries combat terrorism. Other donors include the U.S., the U.K., Norway and Germany. The Center consists of an Advisory Board of 21 member states including the U.S., the U.K., Russia, China, Germany, France, Switzerland and numerous Arab and Muslim States.

To date, the UNCCT has initiated more than 30 non-military counterterrorism projects around the world at the global, regional and national levels. Working alongside the Security Council Counterterrorism Committee, the Saudi-funded program initiated two programs in the latter half of 2016:

- The Counter Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTF) Program targets FTFs in Syria and Iraq and prevents their radicalization and their recruitment by Daesh, the Al-Nusra Front and groups affiliated with Al-Qaeda, as well as inhibiting

## Interpol Red Notices

In January 2011, Interpol released “Red Notices” – international notices for wanted-individuals that amount to arrests warrants for all member countries of Interpol (save for the United Kingdom) – for 47 terror suspects wanted by the Kingdom. Interpol’s General Secretariat Headquarters in Lyon issued the notices at the request of its National Central Bureau (NCB) in Riyadh; the Interpol NCB for Saudi Arabia is part of the Ministry of the Interior and partners with the Kingdom’s General Directorate of Investigation.

In March 2009, Saudi Arabia and Interpol published the largest-ever issue of Red Notices for more than 80 suspected terrorists with links to Al-Qaeda in Iraq and in Afghanistan.

A ‘Red Notice’ can be requested by any Interpol member country. It is placed in the central database and added to foreign law enforcement databases and is sent to all 187 member countries with details of terror suspects to help those enforcement officials world-wide in their search. The notice remains in effect until the wanted fugitive is extradited. (Interpol does not have authority to arrest individuals who are the subject of a Red Notice. Only the law enforcement authorities of the Interpol member country where the individual is located have the legal authority to make an arrest). Of the Red Notices issued by Saudi Arabia since 2011, thirteen arrests have been made, while three Notices--those of a Jordanian man, a citizen of the United Kingdom, and a Saudi citizen--have been dismissed . The Kingdom has also stepped up efforts to cooperate regionally: In June 2016, Jordan’s Interpol office in Amman received a wanted suspect from Saudi Arabia, authorized under an order issued by Jordan’s Public Security Department.

their travel to and from these areas.

- The Advance Passenger Information Program is based on U.S. Customs and Border Protection’s system for collecting personal information on air travelers when they book their flights to prevent terrorists from boarding aircraft.

"Combating terrorism is an international obligation that requires global cooperation in efforts, at all levels, to confront it—in security, intellectually, in the media and militarily—remembering that such cooperation shall be in accordance with the rules of international law and the founding principles of the UN, the first of which is equality of sovereignty."

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Crown Prince Mohammad bin Naif

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister Interior, on the occasion of being awarded the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency's George Tenet Medal by CIA Director Mike Pompeo, February 10, 2017



In order to combat terror financing, Saudi Arabia has put in place one of the strictest financial control systems in the world.

Saudi delegation attends the Counter-ISIL Finance Group, October 24, 2016



## 03

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# The Money

## Combating Terror Financing

Illicit funding allows terrorist networks to thrive. In order to combat the threat posed by terrorist financing, Saudi Arabia has worked diligently to put in place one of the strictest financial control systems in the world. Saudi Arabia works very closely with its allies on all fronts to destroy terror groups' access to financial systems. In recent years, the Kingdom has undertaken a number of measures to combat money laundering and realized a number of accomplishments in preventing terrorist financing.

According to the U.S. Department of State's 2015 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR), published in December 2016, Saudi Arabia has enacted legislation in all of the following areas critical to cutting off funds for terrorist organizations:

- 1) the criminalization of drug-money laundering;
- 2) the criminalization of money laundering beyond drugs;
- 3) 'Know-Your-Customer' provisions;
- 4) the reporting of large banking transactions;
- 5) the reporting of suspicious banking transactions;
- 6) the maintenance of banking records over time;
- 7) disclosure protection;
- 8) the official criminalization of terrorist financing;
- 9) the reporting of suspected terrorist financing;
- 10) cross-border transportation of currency;
- 11) the establishment of financial intelligence units;
- 12) an international law enforcement cooperation system for identification;
- 13) the ability to freeze terrorist activity without delay;
- 14) as a state party to the 1988 UN Drug Convention;
- 15) as a state party to United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).



“[Saudi Arabia is] the target of extremists. We have suffered in terms of terrorist attacks, we have suffered in terms of loss of security personnel trying to defend the innocent, we are the forefront of fighting extremism and terrorism in the region and in the world. And so for somebody to say the Saudis are funding extremism or [that] their ideology is funding extremism is preposterous.”

HIS EXCELLENCY ADEL BIN AHMED AL-JUBEIR  
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
PRESS CONFERENCE, JULY 21, 2016

Furthermore, in response to the efforts of terrorist organizations to exploit the sympathies of Saudi citizens, the Kingdom has established new laws or considerably strengthened laws in place designed to ensure that charitable contributions are not diverted from authentic humanitarian organizations. Riyadh has issued instructions to a number of agencies prohibiting the transfer of funds by charitable organizations to recipients outside Saudi Arabia, except with Foreign Ministry approval and subject to stringent reporting requirements. The Kingdom reformed its banking laws in order to require that charitable organizations have single-disbursement bank accounts, as well as an approved official with signatory authority, in order to maintain tighter controls over these accounts.

Parallel to this, new rules have been codified concerning the opening of bank accounts by charities, including requiring one single account for each charity, with sub-accounts permitted only for the purpose of receiving deposits. Particularly stringent in this regard is the fact that no ATM or credit cards can be issued for these accounts and that all payments may be made only by checks payable to the first beneficiary for deposit in a Saudi bank.

Across Saudi Arabia, all unlicensed money-exchange houses have been shut down, while the Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency, the financial oversight authority founded in 2003, conducts tight supervision of so-called “informal” money-transfer houses used to send funds abroad. The establishment of a financial intelligence unit (the Saudi Arabian Financial Intelligence Unit, or SAFIU), in compliance with the standards of the G7’s Financial Action Task Force (FATF), provided for the collection and sharing of information on suspicious financial transactions. In 2015, Saudi Arabia intensified its campaign against money laundering by requiring financial institutions to verify customers’ identities and by placing restrictions on non-residents’ ability to open accounts in the country.

Saudi Arabia has also worked to target individuals and entities providing assistance to terrorist organizations. The U.S. Department of the Treasury noted in March 2016 that Saudi security forces killed a number of high-profile Al-Qaeda financiers, including Yousif Salih Fahad Al-Ayeeri and Khaled Ali Al-Hajj, central facilitators of the organization. In addition to these operations, the Kingdom has placed sanctions on entities that assist in terror financing, including joint designations with the U.S. against the Al Ayeeri Foundation, Al-Hajj and others.

## Financial Counterterrorism Efforts

Saudi Arabia has implemented a number of financial regimes and institutions to effectively regulate the financial sector. These include:

- The Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency (SAMA) requires all financial institutions within the Kingdom’s jurisdiction to implement all recommendations for combating money laundering and the financing of terrorism issued by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).
- Saudi Arabia established money-laundering units in SAMA and all local banks to ensure the banking system is not exploited by money laundering

operations. These units are responsible for reporting dubious transactions to the authorities.

- Saudi Arabia established a money intelligence department to monitor and investigate any suspicious financial transactions. Investigations are typically done in coordination with the SAMA and Saudi banks.
- Saudi authorities have closed down unlicensed money-exchange or money-transfer centers.
- Saudi Arabia established a financial intelligence unit (FIU) and is a member of the Egmont Group, a Toronto-based international body consisting of 152 national Financial Intelligence Units (FIUs) formed in 1995 to exchange information on money laundering and terror-financing.
- Saudi Arabia earned observer status in the FATF in 2015 and anticipates full membership in 2018.

### **Preventing the Misuse of Saudi Charitable Contributions**

Terror networks often gain access to funds by hiding behind charitable organizations, preying on the sympathies of Saudi citizens seeking to support philanthropic causes. The Saudi government has put into place a variety of rules and regulations to prevent the manipulation of good-will and charity.

- Saudi charities are prohibited from transferring money abroad.
- Saudi charities cannot operate abroad except through the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center or the Saudi Red Crescent, a quasi-government entity.
- The collection of cash contributions in mosques and public places is prohibited. The Kingdom has instituted a thorough vetting of religious clerics to ensure charitable giving is not misdirected. The government suspended more than 1,000 clerics in 2013 and 900 clerics in 2014 on the grounds of negligence with regard to this requirement.
- Saudi Arabia monitors all appeals for charitable funds via television, the internet and social media, and operates a hotline for private citizens to contact authorities to report suspected activity related to terrorism or terror finance.
- In February 2016, SAMA announced that bank accounts for collecting donations solicited on social media and SMS messages would be frozen. The new

regulation follows a decree that all citizens and NGOs wishing to establish a charitable project in another country must receive permission from the Saudi Ministry of the Interior before setting up operations in that country.

## International Cooperation in Combating Terrorist Financing

The globalization of financial and banking networks necessitates effective coordination between governments to ensure that funds are not falling into the wrong hands. Terrorist financing has required the formulation and implementation of international regimes aimed to stem the flow of illicit money and cut organizations off from resources.

Saudi Arabia currently has Financial Action Task Force Observer status. This status requires a full endorsement of FATF practices. Saudi Arabia is currently a member of that body's sub-set organization, the Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force (MENAFATF). Throughout 2016, the Kingdom continued to implement compliance standards and undergo "mutual assessment" procedures for full membership in the FATF, set for June 2018.

Abdulaziz Saleh Al-Furaih, Vice Governor of SAMA, stated: "We cannot discuss compliance and combating money laundering apart from terrorist financing. If money laundering is a crime, terrorist financing is a much graver crime." The statement was made during the Eighth Forum on Compliance and Combating Money Laundering held in Riyadh on May 9, 2016, one of many such conferences the Kingdom has held since earning FATF observer status. At the conference, the Kingdom reiterated its commitment to:

- Establish money laundering units in SAMA and in all local banks to ensure the banking system is not exploited and to report any dubious transactions to the authorities;
- Issue any necessary new rules and regulations for combating money laundering and terror financing as these may arise;
- Implement Know-Your-Customer rules in financial and non-financial institutions;
- Establish a permanent intergovernmental agency committee to oversee all issues pertaining to terror financing;

- Circulate lists issued by the UN to freeze financial assets of suspected terrorist individuals or groups;
- Continue to strengthen the country's Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU).

### **THE UNITED NATIONS**

On August 23, 2007, the Kingdom ratified the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism (adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 1999). This convention, ratified by 187 countries as of 2015, mandates the identification, detection and freezing or seizure of funds used or allocated with the purpose of committing terrorist offenses; the forfeiture of funds used or allocated for the purpose of committing acts of terrorism and any proceeds derived therefrom; and requires of signatories "the greatest measure of assistance" in connection with criminal investigations or criminal or extradition proceedings in respect of terrorist acts. State parties commit themselves not to use bank secrecy as a justification for refusing to cooperate in the suppression of terrorist financing.

### **UNITED NATIONS RESOLUTIONS 1267, 1333, 1373**

The Kingdom supported the following requirements of various UN Resolutions related to combating terrorism:

- Freezing of funds and other financial assets of terrorist regimes based on UN Security Council Resolution 1267.
- Freezing of funds of listed individuals related to terrorist activity based on UN Security Council Resolution 1333.
- The signing of the International Convention for Suppression and Financing of Terrorism based on UN Resolution 1373.
- Reporting to the UN Security Council the implementation of Resolution 1390.

### **Recent Cooperation**

Saudi Arabia works in tandem with its international partners to place sanctions on entities that assist in terror financing. Since 2004, the Kingdom has worked with the U.S. Department of the Treasury to identify and publicize terror-finance

related individuals and front-groups, while the Kingdom has legally formalized such designations. Many of these individuals are included on the UN Sanctions list pursuant to that body's counterterrorism legal regime.

On October 20, 2016, Saudi Arabia designated two individuals and one business as supporters of terrorism over their links to Hezbollah, the international terror group closely tied to the Iranian Revolutionary Guards. Those sanctioned are Lebanese nationals Muhammad Al-Mukhtar Falah Kallas and Hasan Jamal-al-Din, and the Iraq-and Lebanon-based Global Cleaners S.A.R.L. The individuals and business sanctioned were designated under the Saudi Law of Terrorism Crimes and Financing and Royal Decree A/44. Under the law, any assets connected to the sanctioned entities under Saudi jurisdiction are frozen, and Saudi citizens or residents are generally prohibited from engaging in any transactions with the individuals or entities.

In March 2016, the U.S. and Saudi Arabia took joint action to disrupt the fundraising and support networks of various terrorist groups by imposing sanctions on several individuals and organizations with ties across the Middle East, Pakistan and Afghanistan. This follows the designation in 2015 of 17 individuals identified as Daesh officials and financial facilitators.

The U.S. State Department's Bureau of Counterterrorism and Countering Violent Extremism in its Country Reports on Terrorism 2015, released June 2, 2016, reported that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is cooperating with U.S. requests for access to certified bank records. It said the action was "based on reciprocity and increased cooperation on identification of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) traveling to Syria and Iraq." The move was a breakthrough in U.S-Saudi cooperation given the absence of a formal mutual legal assistance treaty between the two countries. The agreement was negotiated between the Department of Justice's Office of International Affairs and the Saudi Ministry of the Interior's (MOI) Department of Legal Affairs and International Cooperation. The International Center for Counterterrorism in The Hague estimated in October 2016 that there were 35,000 FTFs in Syria and Iraq with Daesh.

Saudi Arabia is also working with its allies to deploy new and effective financing-tracking methods to prevent travel and support for foreign terrorist fighters

(FTFs). For instance, Saudi Arabia and the U.S. are working directly with banks to determine the whereabouts, activities and intentions of their account and card holders. Enhanced cooperation in recent years has assisted in identifying and capturing foreign fighters.

### Counter-ISIL Finance Group

Saudi Arabia serves as a co-chair of the Counter ISIL Finance Group (CIFG), alongside the U.S. and Italy. The CIFG was established in 2015 to disrupt ISIL's sources of revenue and its ability to move and use funds to wage its campaign of terror.

The group most recently met in October 2016, hosted by the U.S. Department of the Treasury, to pursue the following objectives: 1) to prevent Daesh from accessing the international financial system; 2) to counter the extortion and exploitation of assets and resources that transit, enter, or originate from Daesh-held territory; 3) to deny Daesh funding from abroad; and 4) to prevent Daesh from providing financial or material support to foreign affiliates.

#### **BACKGROUND ON THE ELIMINATION OF MONEY-TRANSFER CENTER NETWORKS**

As of 2015, Saudi Arabia had effectively eliminated the nationwide network of money-transfer centers that were used for many years as terrorist-financing vehicles under the guise of "charities." After the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the U.S. Department of the Treasury initiated the Terrorist Finance Tracking Program (TFTP) to identify, track and pursue terrorists and their networks. The United States has worked closely with the Kingdom to track and close down illicit money-transfer centers.

As part of this cooperation, Saudi Arabia established its Anti-Money Laundering/Combating the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT) regime, providing a statutory basis for criminalizing money laundering and terrorist financing activities. Article II of this law created the Saudi Arabian Financial Intelligence Unit (SAFIU), which is responsible for receiving and analyzing reports on suspicious transactions, and comprises 130 officers. By February 2016, some 196 suspected terrorist financiers had been arrested by that body.



Article X of the Anti-Money Laundering Statute requires Saudi financial institutions to continue to develop their AML/CTF training programs which, in turn, are reviewed annually for adequacy.

Saudi Arabia's comprehensive crackdown on illicit money transfers - developed in earnest since 2004 through the present day - was later praised by an official of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), who remarked that the Kingdom's new regulations to control suspicious financial transactions "probably go further than any country in the world."

### **Saudi Legal Regimes and Compliance**

The Saudi government has worked aggressively to pass and implement laws on terror financing that stem the flow of financial resources to terrorist organizations.

Originally approved in December 2013 and subsequently updated in 2015, the Saudi Council of Ministers passed its Penal Law Concerning Crimes of Terrorism and Its Financing, signed into law by the late King Abdullah in February 2014. This legislation added 41 new laws to the country's existing counterterrorism laws. Among its provisions, this law:

- Gives the Minister of the Interior the power to issue arrest warrants against those suspected of having committed terrorist crimes and to delegate this power as he sees fit "according to guidelines he prescribes," and;
- Defines terrorist crime as: "Any act undertaken by the offender directly or indirectly in pursuance of an individual or collective criminal enterprise intended to disturb the public order, destabilize the security of society or the stability of the state, expose its national unity to danger, obstruct the implementation of the organic law or some of its provisions, harm the reputation of the state or its standing, endanger any of the state facilities or its natural resources, force any of its authorities to do or abstain from doing something, or threaten to carry out actions leading to any of the aforementioned objectives or encourage their accomplishment."

In addition, Royal Order A/44 (Article IV) Against Terrorism of March 2014 formally declared Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, Al-Qaeda in Iraq, Al-Nusra Front (Syria), Hezbollah in the Kingdom (also known as Hezbollah in the Hijaz), the Muslim Brotherhood and the Houthis as terrorist organizations.

Furthermore, the Order authorized the formation of a committee that includes members from across the government to file a list of factions affiliated with the fore mentioned organizations.

Additionally, the Order criminalizes the following:

- Providing financial or material donations to or funding of extremist and terroristic organizations, factions and groups, or sheltering their members or their promoters inside or outside the Kingdom;
- Contacting or communicating with groups or factions or individuals who harbor enmity for the Kingdom;
- Being loyal to, in liaison with, or communicating with another country with the intention of exploiting the secure unity and stability of the Kingdom and its people;
- Committing offenses against other countries and/or their leaders;
- Soliciting the help of States, international organizations or bodies against the Kingdom;
- Taking part in, calling for, or promoting fighting in conflicts in other countries, or issuing fatwas that encourage cross-border foreign terrorist fighting.

“We have faced more than 63 terror attacks by Al Qaeda and ISIL, 26 of them just in the last two years. More than 200 citizens and policemen were killed in terrorist attacks. More than 2800 suspects have been arrested since 2015. We have assured and enforced laws which criminalize all sorts of terrorist-related activities, including involvement in conflicts or financing terrorist or extremist groups. We have classified and announced a list of terrorist organizations, we have taken major actions to prevent radicalization and protect the community in Saudi Arabia with a private phone number to report suspicious activity. We have established a major intelligence department to monitor and investigate any suspected financial transactions. This is usually done in coordination with the Saudi Monetary Agency and the banks. This led to convicting more than 226 persons in terrorist financing activities, prosecuting more than 240 suspects, freezing and investigating more than 117 suspected accounts, closing all unlicensed charity collection locations. Also, in the international effort we have contributed to international community efforts to combat terrorism and its finance through exchanging information and some of that information has helped in saving lives in other countries. ”

GENERAL MANSOUR AL-TURKI

SPOKESMAN OF THE MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR

PRESS BRIEFING WITH U.S. JOURNALISTS

JUNE 8, 2016





## 04

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# The Mindset

## Combating Extremism

Attacking extremism at its psychological and ideological roots—and not merely cracking down militarily on its manifestations—is a critical component of Saudi Arabia’s strategy to defeat terrorism. From public awareness campaigns to establishing counter-radicalization and rehabilitation programs, Saudi Arabia’s “war of ideas” works to instill the concepts of moderation and tolerance, and undermine any intellectual or religious justifications for extremism and terrorism. The multi-faceted campaign aims to protect vulnerable groups, such as the youth, among other potentially disenfranchised members of society.

Fighting radical religious beliefs in the Kingdom is an immense challenge. The Kingdom’s counterterrorism-education measures focus on communicating the distinguishing aspects of the true Islamic faith in contrast to those individuals and entities whose actions are centered on the intentional misrepresentation or the degradation of its teachings.

These measures include, but are not limited to, counseling and conferences led by the Riyadh-based King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue (KACND) and the Vienna-based King Abdullah International Center for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID); and a Sakinah “Tranquility” campaign that is run by an independent NGO with support from the Ministry of Islamic Affairs.

The following reflects initiatives the Kingdom has implemented to counter extremist mentality and promote moderation and tolerance among its citizenry. More detail on these programs are provided in the sections that follow.

- **Public Awareness Campaign:** This ongoing public awareness campaign reinforces Islam's true values and educates Saudi citizens about the dangers of extremism and terrorism. The campaign includes advertisements on television, radio, billboards and online, as well as programs on television, in schools and mosques, and at sporting events.

A public service announcement produced in Saudi Arabia provides an example of efforts to curb online extremism, in particular. This public service announcement, released by the King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue in June 2015, generated more than 150,000 views in the first 48 hours after its release.

The text of the public service announcement ran as follows:

*"What is the greatest destroyer of nations and peoples? Disease? Natural disasters? Famine? Perhaps. But there is a hidden killer worse than all of them. A killer many of us don't know, but who has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives – children, women, the elderly. And it doesn't stop at killing people. It destroys states. It bleeds their resources, wrecks economies, and stifles knowledge. It brings states back to zero – to less than zero.*

*Shall I surprise you some more? The killer lives among us. Right now, at this very moment, he walks around free and loose. He might be near you, in the same building. He might be right beside you. He might be your dearest friend, or your closest relative. Shall I shock you even more? The hidden killer might be... YOU. You think you are innocent? Think again. Go over your convictions and ideas. Think back on the grudges you bear. Lots of people like you thought they were innocent, but became wild animals. They ruined their own states, destroying them with enormity. Hundreds of thousands of dead and wounded.*

*This killer, sleeping inside you, wakes up the moment you give up on the value of coexistence. You transform into a killer, because the fire of hate has been ignited. Dividing people into categories. Insularity. When you fail to live together with people who are different than you, you grow wild. The result? A devastating war. Its soldiers are you and thousands like you, all from a single country. Then come years of conflict. No one*

*wins except for death. The country falls behind the rest of the world. Resources are wasted that could have been invested for everyone to make a better life, to build a solid economy, to strengthen security, to support teaching and knowledge. It might have been possible for everyone together to avoid this disaster if everyone thought about coexistence and rowed on both sides of the lifeboat, rather than vanish into a whirlpool.*

*On your way to work, or when you enter your home and are among your family, always ask yourself – is a dispute worth losing all of this? Coexistence. Let's talk to each other, let's live together.*

- **Public and Religious Education:** The program audits curriculum material to vet and eliminate extremist-related material, as well as introduce enhanced teaching methods and provide better training for educators. Imams have been prohibited from incitement and talk of intolerance, and the Ministry of Islamic Affairs is conducting a program to educate imams and monitor mosques and religious education to purge extremism and intolerance.
- **Global Interfaith Dialogue Initiative:** Launched an international effort to promote interfaith dialogue. In early 2008, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz launched the interfaith dialogue as a way to underscore the commonalities among the world's religions. To initiate this endeavor, King Abdullah convened a meeting on June 4, 2008 of more than 500 Muslim scholars from around the world. The conference highlighted the importance of dialogue and emphasized the need for the faiths and cultures of the world to combat extremism and intolerance. This was followed by the World Conference on Dialogue in Spain on July 16, 2008. The conference, hosted by King Abdullah and King Juan Carlos I of Spain, brought together 300 delegates from around the world representing Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Judaism and Shintoism. The culmination of this dialogue initiative was a special session of the United Nations General Assembly on November 12, 2008, attended by more than 25 world leaders.
- **United Nations Counterterrorism Center:** The Kingdom is the founder and primary funder of the United Nations Counterterrorism Center, with more

than \$100 million in donations from the Kingdom to date and more than 30 non-military counterterrorism projects around the world at the global, regional and national levels aimed at fighting the twin evils of terrorism financing and terrorist indoctrination.

- **Counter-Radicalization and Rehabilitation:** In addition to public awareness campaigns to prevent the spread of terrorist ideologies, Saudi Arabia has taken direct, focused steps to neutralize sources of extremism. For example, the Ministry of the Interior has been working in conjunction with King Fahd Security College and Naif Arab University for Security Sciences to develop and refine training for public security professionals. The rehabilitation program for detainees is the longest continually functioning program in the world, and several countries are establishing similar programs based on the Kingdom's model.

Saudi counter-radicalization efforts are a model for other nations around the world. The Government of Malaysia, for example, announced in November 2016 that it would send 10 senior security specialists to Saudi Arabia to study at the Prince Mohammad bin Naif Center for Security Studies. "We want to benefit from the experience of the Kingdom in counseling and countering extremist ideology with moderation, argument and proof," said Zainol Rahim Zainuddin, the Malaysian Ambassador to Saudi Arabia. Malaysian Prime Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said that he had discussed with King Salman solutions to protect Southeast Asian countries from the threat of terrorism carried out by Daesh, which has recruited individuals from these countries.

In the discussion, an understanding was reached that Saudi Arabia and Malaysia would continue to exchange knowledge on experiences with combating terrorism and extremist ideology. In addition, Prime Minister Hamidi praised the counseling practices applied by Saudi Arabia, pointing to the Prince Mohammad bin Naif Center for Counseling and Care as a "unique model to counter extremist ideology with moderate ideology." Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Yemen, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the United States military through "Task Force 134" in Iraq have also modeled their counter-radicalization programs after Saudi Arabia's approach.



On November 23, 2016, Ben Emmerson, the UN Special Envoy on Counterterrorism and Human Rights, praised prison conditions of those accused of terrorism in the Kingdom as humane and focused on rehabilitation. He expressed admiration for humanitarian aid and psychological support provided by the Mohammad bin Naif Center to those accused of terrorism and their families, and allowing these families to become involved directly in the rehabilitation programs of detainees. After attending a trial session of those accused of plotting to assassinate the late King Abdullah, Emmerson said the condition of detainees or those accused of terrorism should be considered an example to be followed at the international level. He cited as well the level of professionalism and respect for human rights in Saudi prisons.

“The counseling center’s continuous support program does a great job at rehabilitating extremist young men and integrating them as efficient members in their societies through a series of programs and activities,” Emmerson said.

### **Overview: Recent Activity**

The Kingdom’s religious establishment is fully engaged with the Saudi government in countering the mindset sustaining radical extremism.

Following the three simultaneous terror attacks of July 4, 2016, the imams of the Grand Mosque in Makkah and the Prophet’s Mosque in Medina vehemently condemned terrorism and urged waging a tough fight against the “evil goals” behind extremist organizations. On July 5, 2016, on the celebration of the Eid Al-Fitr, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz said in an address to all Muslims that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will “strike with an iron fist” the terror groups that seek to recruit youths to “extremism and violence,” and pledged efforts to “distance them from masterminds of misleading ideas.” King Salman urged Muslims to unite, and condemned terrorism and extremism, stressing their contradiction to Islam.

On June 3, 2016, Saudi security services announced the arrest of terror suspects, including an imam at the Prophet’s Mosque in Medina suspected of supporting Daesh.

In his sermon of July 8, 2016, Sheikh Khalid Ali Al-Ghamedi, the Imam of the Grand Mosque in Makkah, described terrorism as “an outlandish phenomenon for Islam and in particular for Saudi Arabia, home to the two holiest mosques.”

On June 9, 2016, the Kingdom announced that it would install surveillance cameras inside and outside all mosques throughout the country. The long-term plan, announced by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, includes setting up an operations room with links to 95,000 mosques.

In July 2016, at a conference of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, King Salman made a series of remarks about the widespread phenomenon of online terrorist recruitment and incitement. He called on Saudi youth to take the initiative to counter extremists' online activity with their own responses by arguing against strident interpretations of Islam and advancing their own, tolerant understanding of the religion instead. He also called on people of good conscience throughout the world - including state and non-state entities - to play their part in fighting extremism across the Internet and on social media.

In August 2016, the Deputy Minister of Islamic Affairs for Call and Guidance Tawfiq Al-Sudairi told Arab media that there are specific regulations and controls in place in the Kingdom to monitor religious activities and preaching. That ministry also monitors any preaching or writing in the guise of religious guidance that may lead to the spread of deviant ideologies.

**The 19th International Conference on Processes of Radicalization and Deradicalization (ICPRD) Jan. 30-31 2017, Jeddah** – The ICPRD convened leading scientists, researchers and scholars to exchange views, share their experiences and research all aspects of the processes of radicalization and deradicalization. The conference provided researchers, practitioners and educators an interdisciplinary forum to review the most recent innovations, trends, concerns and practical challenges encountered in the following areas: 1) “Processes of Radicalization and Deradicalization,” 2) “Analyzing the Positions of Terrorists,” 3) “Assessing Countering Violent Extremism Programs,” 4) “Assessing the Effectiveness of Deradicalization,” 5) “Beyond Terrorism: Deradicalization and Disengagement from Violent Extremism,” 6) “Care Rehabilitation,” 7) “Challenges in Assessing the Effectiveness of Deradicalization Programs,” 8) “Challenges in

“The Kingdom has been keen to combat terrorism based on its conviction that terrorism has no identity and no religion, and from its belief that the terrorists are committing these acts stemming from their deviant ideologies and evil thought. All negative religious, political and social ideologies that use religion as a tool, throughout human history, do not reflect the absolute truth about religion.”

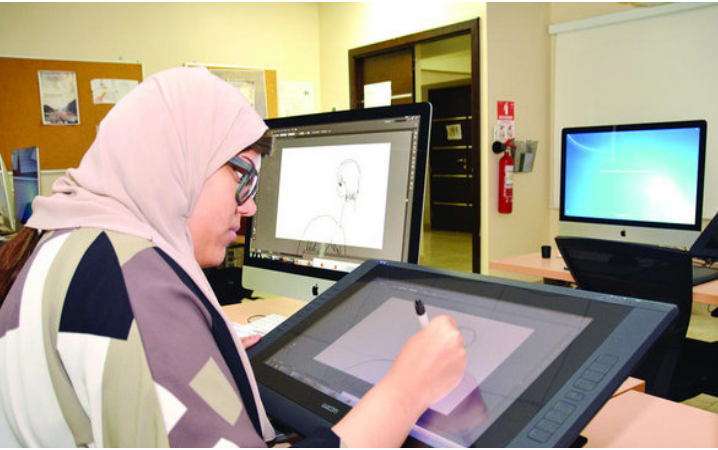
CROWN PRINCE MOHAMMAD BIN NAIF  
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER OF INTERIOR  
FEBRUARY 10, 2017



Terrorist Rehabilitation,” 9) “Civilian Victims of Terrorism,” 10) “Combating Violent Extremism and Radicalization in the Digital Era.”

The Kingdom has undertaken the modernization of its educational system, reviewing curriculum materials and removing any teachers or professors who profess and inculcate extremist beliefs. The country promotes cultural exchange, sending and paying for tens of thousands of students to attend American universities not only to acquire scholarly and technical know-how and expertise, but to gain exposure to Western belief systems and world views.

In fall 2016, several prominent Saudi religious scholars, who had gathered at a conference on extremism, drew attention to the critical importance of the role



Effat University Student Pursuing a Degree in Filmmaking. (Photo Credit: Arab News)

## MODERNIZATION OF SAUDI EDUCATION

- Remove Teachers and Professors Who Profess Extremist Beliefs
- Replace Textbooks with Tablet Computers in Classroom Teaching
- De-Emphasize Rote Learning, Stimulate Critical Thinking
- Emphasize the Role of Modernization in the Outlook of Young Students
- Prepare Students to Compete in a Global Economy

played by scholars in disseminating factual information and revealing the unethical tactics of terrorists in trying to lure people away from the rightful path of Islam. Sheikh Abdullah bin Sulaiman Al-Manea, Member of the Council and Adviser to the Royal Court, highlighted the role of the authorities at the Ministry of Interior in ensuring the safety of Saudi Arabia in light of this trend.

As pointed out by Education Minister Dr. Ahmed Al-Issa, much effort has been made in the last decade to improve textbooks and make the education system respond to nation's need to defeat and eventually eliminate extremism. Part of the challenge at hand is to move students away from rote learning and to stimulate critical thinking. The Kingdom also wants to better prepare young Saudis to compete in a global economy, as the government seeks to diversify its economy with new, non-petroleum sources of revenue and investment.

## National Campaigns

To further combat radical ideology, government officials adopted a series of counterterrorism education measures aimed at undermining extremist views and at disrupting the activities of those who promote violent extremism. Led by the King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue (KACND) and the King Abdullah International Center for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID), these measures include, but are not limited to, a counseling program, a religious “Tranquility” campaign, public education campaigns, and a “Religious Authority” campaign.

### **KING ABDULAZIZ CENTER FOR NATIONAL DIALOGUE (KACND)**

The National Dialogue Forum of the King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue (KACND) was instituted in June 2003 to debate reform and suggest remedies following the Al-Qaeda terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. Each of these meetings takes place in a different city in the Kingdom. As a forum, KACND has been described as “an independent national institution which seeks to strengthen channels of communication and dialogue between Saudi citizens and the different elements and institutions of Saudi society.”

The Center’s objective “is to combat extremism and foster a pure atmosphere that give[s] rise to wise positions and illuminating ideas that reject terrorism and terrorist thought.”

KACND has intensified its efforts to boost national cohesion through societal engagement to combat extremism and deviant ideology. On Oct. 6, 2016, the center announced a new initiative, dubbed “Talahom,” to promote meetings that

“The greatest and most appalling of all sins is for anyone to deliberately and premeditatedly shed the blood of innocent people...wreak chaos and havoc and undermine security and stability in order to achieve the evil goals of criminal gangs and sectarian terrorist organizations.”

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Sheikh Khalid Ali Al-Ghamedi  
Imam of the Grand Mosque in Makkah  
July 8, 2016



“The sedition witnessed in the Islamic world today requires all of us to exert the utmost effort to unify our voice, close ranks and work together to solve the problems of the Islamic nation, and achieve victory for its issues. However, the biggest challenge facing our Islamic nation is how to keep our youth, the real wealth and hope of the future, away from the dangers facing them – particularly extremism and violence – and distance them from masterminds of misleading ideas that force them to behave in extraordinary ways that contradict the principles of our Islamic religion and the pillars and values of our Islamic societies.”

CUSTODIAN OF THE TWO HOLY MOSQUES

KING SALMAN BIN ABDULAZIZ

JULY 5, 2016

put into practice the principles of co-existence and national unity. Faisal Al-Muammar, the secretary general of KACND, stressed the initiative’s importance as the first step in multiple projects run by the center in the coming year. He added that these types of projects preserve and enhance the Kingdom’s security and strengthen national unity based on shared values.

Similar messages stressing the need of those radicalized or at risk of radicalization have been broadcast on Saudi television and radio and at sporting events. Schools, mosques and even the screens of automated teller machines feature such messages. Ministries and government bodies have participated in this campaign by organizing symposiums, exhibitions and lectures, as well as by distributing materials to combat extremism and promote balanced, centrist views and moderation.

### **MONITORING OF RELIGIOUS PREACHING**

Imams who preach intolerance or hate toward others are dismissed, punished or retrained. To date, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs has fired over 400 imams, 'khateeb'— those who deliver religious sermons— and muezzin—those who call Muslims to prayer. The ministry has additionally suspended approximately 1500 others who were ordered to join a multi-year "enlightenment program" devoted to educating imams and monitoring religious preaching. In recurring legislation since 2007, the Kingdom's civil service first announced, and now regularly implements, the dismissal of teachers who espouse extremist views. In 2015, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs intensified an earlier initiative to impose electronic monitoring of all mosques in Saudi Arabia using the Geographic Information Systems (GIS). The project allows the Ministry to monitor day-to-day activities in any mosque, including prayers and ceremonies.

Saudi government and religious leaders have publicly and routinely condemned terrorism and extremism. In May 2009, the Second Deputy Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia organized the first national conference on "intellectual security," which was to address the "intellectual abnormality" that, according to the Saudi government, is "the main reason for terrorism." These conferences have since been ongoing, the declaration of which is the moderate nature of Islam and warnings against "the dangers of embracing deviant ideologies." The National Dialogue campaigns against extremism have been ongoing in various cities in Saudi Arabia since 2003, most recently on Feb. 7, 2017.

Related to this campaign, The King Abdullah International Center for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID) convened the second annual meeting of the Board of Directors' Advisory Forum on Feb. 6-7, 2017, at KAICIID headquarters in Vienna.

“The most dangerous thing is not the textbook itself but the way the textbooks are translated by the teachers to the students. What we are trying to do—opening the system—will help us make students participate and become active learners, which is a very powerful tool to eliminate and reduce any extreme views.”

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Dr. Ahmed Al-Issa,  
Minister of Education,  
the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia  
February 16, 2017

rapprochement that began with the official visit to Saudi Arabia by the President of Lebanon Michel Aoun in January.

Supported by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, the Sakinah “Tranquility” Campaign partners with Islamic scholars who engage potential radicalized online users seeking religious knowledge. These scholars work to direct their focus away from extremists source. The campaign has received praise by American and British officials, and has inspired other nations, including the United Arab Emirates and

KAICIID Secretary General Faisal bin Abdulrahman bin Muaammar described the session as a milestone in which the Advisory Forum laid “the foundation for the Forum’s development in the coming decades. In particular, the Forum’s task forces are vehicles to focus on creating change in four thematic areas: “Interreligious Dialogue Training,” “Governance and Common Citizenship,” “Reconciliation” and “Capacity Building.” The Center is particularly focused on Iraq and Syria as part of its anti-extremism goals.

In early January 2017, the Saudi Embassy in Beirut sponsored an interfaith meeting on the topic “Lebanon unites us” in order to strengthen Saudi-Lebanese relations and to promote Christian-Muslim understanding. Saudi Chargé d’Affaires Walid Bukhari organized the national interfaith meeting at the Saudi diplomatic mission following a



Kuwait, to model their own efforts to combat internet radicalization after Saudi Arabia's Sakinah campaign.

### **PUBLIC EDUCATION CAMPAIGNS**

The Ministry of Education regularly audits school textbooks and curricula to ensure that teachers do not espouse intolerance and extremism, and a government-sponsored program requires the removal any curriculum element that is radical and inconsistent with Islam. Also in place is a special training program to promote religious tolerance for male and female Islamic Studies teachers. Teachers are periodically dismissed or subjected to punitive action for failure to abide by government instructions to avoid inciting hatred against other religions.

As a result of the institution of the National Dialogues, the Saudi government launched the 'King Abdullah Project for the Development of Public Education' in February 2007.

This project approved a \$2.4 billion, six-year project to transform the Kingdom's public education system. The effort, which has been ongoing since its launch, focuses on teacher training and development; curriculum development with an emphasis on critical thinking; improving the educational environment through technology (i.e., Smart Boards in classrooms); and extracurricular activities. In October 2016, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs launched a program identified as a "Shielding Campaign Against Terrorism." While previous efforts focused on dealing with a problem after it occurred, the current campaign aims at safeguarding youth against radical ideology by using every source available to the ministry, such as sermons and mosque activities and general education curricula and advocacy.

The ministry also has been working on issuing a series of books called the "Shielding Series." The department issued its first release, a work that includes the transcript of the meeting and the dialogue that took place between the late Interior Minister Prince Nayef bin Abdulaziz and Saudi imams and preachers. The dialogue provided a detailed outline of "how to address a radical ideology and deviant thinking."

**CYBER-SECURITY, SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE INTERNET**

The Saudis are the most active Twitter users in the Arab world, according to a 2014 report, with 4.8 million users producing 40 percent of all tweets in Arab countries. This unfortunately raises concerns in the Kingdom about the penetration of radicalized recruitment through social media and Internet-based communications.

In February 2013, the International Data Corporation (IDC) reported that Saudi Arabia invested the most of any country in the Middle East on technology, underscoring the growing importance with which the Kingdom sees cyber-security and countering extremism on the Internet. The Kingdom has tasked the Ministry of Defense to work with the private sector to defend the Kingdom against those threats.

While the Ministry of Defense works to develop the military aspect of cyber-security as it pertains to the protection of Saudi industry and border surveillance, the Ministry of Interior is focused on the internal and domestic dimension of monitoring extremist communications, applying cyber-security technologies to track radicalized messaging throughout Arab/Muslim social media and the Internet in general.

The Ministry of Interior has significantly developed its technological capabilities in recent years, particularly its computer network. Known as the "National Data Center," this network links the Ministry's centers throughout the Kingdom via terminals for entering and retrieving security, administrative and service data.

The main focus of this project involves investing in building its capacity to monitor online communications and intervene as necessary. To date, there are 1,000 terminal systems in more than 250 centers for capturing and accessing this data.

Article 4 of the January 2014 Anti-terrorism Law prohibits support for banned groups "circulating their contents in any form, or using slogans of these groups and currents [of thought], or any symbols which point to support or sympathy with them through audio, visual, or written format, including websites and social media." On March 24, 2007, the Saudi government decreed, and the MOI put into practice, the Anti-Cyber Crime Law, which criminalizes the production

and spread of materials online that damage “public order, religious values, [and] public morals.” This law establishes penalties for offenses such as hacking into websites and heavy penalties for anyone who assists a terrorist group build or operate a website, or who uses a website to disseminate information such as instructions on how to build an explosive device. In 2008, the Saudi government established the Specialized Criminal Court (SCC) to try terrorism-related cases. This includes those involving violations of the cyber-crime law, such as using social media to incite international organizations against the Kingdom or the founding unlicensed and/or prohibited organizations, online or otherwise.

There are two regulatory agencies concerned with Internet usage in the Kingdom: The Communications and Information Technology Commission (CITC) and the Internet Services Unit (ISU). Since 2006, the CITC has blocked access to thousands of websites with the aim of destroying the ability of extremist organizations to spread their message and reach potential recruits. The ISU is a department of the King Abdullah Center for Science and Technology (KACST) and registers all blocking requests for content deemed offensive and/or radicalizing.

According to Prince Abdulaziz bin Bandar bin Abdulaziz, the assistant to the head of the Saudi National Intelligence Agency (SNIA), there are nearly 17,000 extremist Internet sites carrying radical ideologies, with an annual increase of 9,000 websites that “move away from original Islam in order to legitimize violence.” Prince Muqrin bin Abdulaziz, the head of SNIA, has launched outreach to 14 Western website hosting companies to reduce the activities of more than 5,400 websites used by terrorist groups.

As terrorists traditionally have used the Internet for recruiting and training, the Saudi Council of Ministers approved on April 13, 2007 the Anti-Cybercrime Law. Article 7 (1) of the cyber-crime law imposes a maximum of ten years’ imprisonment and/or a maximum fine of \$1.3 million for anyone who creates a website for a terrorist organization, promotes the organizations’ radicalism, or propagates information on how to make explosives. In March 2017, the SCC delivered a 27-year sentence to a Saudi found guilty of joining a terrorist group and sending content intended to undermine public order via the social platform WhatsApp. Part of the 27 year-sentence was based on Article 6 of the Anti-Cybercrime Law.



Saudi Arabia has flown 341 sorties against Daesh in Syria, the second largest number of sorties, after the United States.

An F-15 fighter in the Royal Saudi Air Force

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## Fighting and Defeating Daesh

Saudi Arabia is the main target of Daesh and other terror groups because it is the birthplace of Islam and home to the Two Holy Mosques. Saudi Arabia continues to expand and intensify its counterterrorism initiatives, as terrorism remains a major threat to the safety and security of our citizenry and the global community.

Saudi Arabia is one of the leading nations combating terrorism and terrorist financing, and has been working closely with its allies on all fronts. Saudi Arabia is hunting down the men, cutting off the money and destroying the mindset that Daesh and other terror organizations create and rely on.

On February 21, 2017, Foreign Minister Al-Jubeir told a German newspaper that the Kingdom was “ready to send ground troops” to fight Daesh in Syria. Minister Al-Jubeir noted that not only Saudi Arabia, but other Gulf nations were willing to send special forces troops as part as a U.S.-led coalition against Daesh. Since the rise of that terror group in 2014, all exercises and training of Saudi conventional and special forces have focused on countering and combatting non-state insurgents. Daesh and the emergence of similarly aligned militant Islamists pose the most immediate threat to the Kingdom. Daesh has carried out deadly attacks in the Kingdom and Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, Daesh’s leader, has declared his intention to destroy the Saudi state. In view of this, the Foreign Minister has said Saudi Arabia is ready to participate with the its own forces if the U.S.-led coalition against Daesh is prepared to engage in ground operations—a comment the Foreign Minister had first said in February 2016.

In 2014, Saudi Arabia condemned Daesh and Jabhat al-Nusra, the Syrian affiliate of Al-Qaeda. Hundreds of alleged Daesh supporters were arrested in 2015 and 2016. The fight has not been limited to military. In June 2016, Saudi Security Services

announced the arrest of several terror suspects, among whom was an imam at the Prophet's Mosque in Medina suspected of supporting Daesh. The Kingdom will not tolerate any religious figure or scholar who uses his position of authority to spread false beliefs and encourage violent actions that are a degradation of the spirit and meaning of Islam. However, it is the geopolitical threat of this terror group that is the most immediate, and to this end, the Kingdom has been working closely with its allied partners through two major military coalitions—one international and one specifically Muslim-nation based—to eradicate the territorial growth and logistical basis of Daesh.

### **International Cooperation**

Saudi Arabia is a founding member of the Global Coalition to Counter Daesh, beginning airstrikes against Daesh targets in Syria in September 2014. As of March 2017, Saudi Arabia has flown 341 sorties against Daesh in Syria, the second largest number of sorties, after the United States.

In January 2017, Saudi Arabia hosted the general staff chiefs of fourteen countries of the Global Coalition Against Daesh. Representatives from Saudi Arabia, U.S., Jordan, UAE, Bahrain, Turkey, Tunisia, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, Lebanon, Malaysia, Morocco and Nigeria discussed their approaches to enhance the efforts of the coalition to paralyze and destroy Daesh capabilities.

On March 22, 2017, Saudi Foreign Minister Adel bin Ahmed bin Al-Jubeir and foreign ministers of the other Global Coalition member nations met in Washington at the invitation of U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson to review and accelerate the campaign for the lasting defeat of Daesh.

### **The Islamic Military Alliance to Fight Terrorism**

On December 15, 2015, Saudi Arabia announced the formation of the Islamic Military Alliance to Fight Terrorism. At the time of the Alliance's original organization, the Kingdom announced that the initial group of 34 states had "decided on the formation of a military alliance led by Saudi Arabia to fight terrorism, coordinate military efforts, exchange information, and train Alliance personnel through a joint operations center based in Riyadh to coordinate and support military operations." This Alliance has been subsequently grown to 41 nations.

The “North Thunder” military drill was launched in northern Saudi Arabia on February 28, 2016 with the participation of forces representing the Kingdom, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Bahrain, Senegal, Sudan, Kuwait, Maldives, Morocco, Pakistan, Chad, Turkey, Tunisia, Comoros, Djibouti, Oman, Qatar, Malaysia, Egypt and Mauritania, in addition to the GCC’s Peninsula Shield Forces. “North Thunder” received regional and international attention as the largest ever military drill in the Middle East in terms of the number of participating forces.

On March 27, 2016, the Chiefs of Staff of the armed forces of the Alliance member countries issued the Riyadh Declaration, a final statement of their joint commitment to fight terrorism.

## The Peninsula Shield Force

The Peninsula Shield Force is the military side of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) for the Arab States of the Gulf region and is intended to deter and respond to military aggression against any of the GCC member countries: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

The Shield Force recently expanded its mandate to combat the emergence of Daesh, alongside its regular activity of monitoring and containing: instability in the Mideast region, regional neighbors’ ambitions for nuclear weapons, political instability in Iraq, and the upheaval in Syria. These factors have given the GCC clear incentives to strengthen its collective defense and security systems.

## The Royal Saudi Air Force (RSAF)

The Royal Saudi Air Force is the centerpiece of the Kingdom’s defense structure and has been highly effective in combating Daesh in Syria, such as during airstrikes with U.S. coalition forces in early February 2016. Saudi fighter aircraft have carried out 341 strikes against Daesh targets in Syria since the beginning of the international campaign against Daesh. These attacks included the destruction of or damage to Daesh fighters, training bases, compounds, headquarters, command and control facilities, a finance center, supply trucks and armed vehicles.

A full-page photograph of a Saudi special police officer in camouflage uniform, standing guard during a military parade. The officer is wearing a cap and has a rifle slung over his shoulder. A semi-transparent dark grey box is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing text.

In 2016, Saudi authorities foiled multiple terrorist plots targeting mosques, sporting events, tourist attractions and the U.S. Consulate in Jeddah.

Member of the Saudi special police unit stands guard during a military parade, September 2015



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# Chronology of Terrorism Against the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

## 2015 through February 2017

### Domestic Terror Attacks: 2015-2017

#### 2017

On January 21, two extremists blew themselves up after security forces cornered them in the Harazat area of Jeddah.

On January 7, two terrorists were killed by police in the Al-Yasmin suburb of Riyadh. The two men were named as Tayeh Salem bin Yaslam Al-Sayari, an Daesh “suicide bomb” expert, wanted for previous acts of terrorism, and Talal bin Samran Al-Saedi.

#### 2016

On August 18, an exchange of gunfire occurred in Qatif, resulting in the death of one person.

On August 15, an exchange of gunfire in Qatif resulted in the death of one person.

On July 4, 2016, four suicide bombs exploded in three locations in Saudi Arabia. One of them exploded in the parking lot of the Nabawi Mosque (the Prophet’s Mosque in Medina). The second and third suicide bombers targeted a mosque in Qatif, but they failed to harm anyone but themselves. A fourth militant blew himself up in Jeddah.

On June 27, an exchange of gunfire in the eastern city of Qatif resulted in the death of one person.

On April 30, an explosive device detonated in Al-Ahsa.

On April 16, an exchange of gunfire occurred in Qatif.

On April 6, shootings took place in the city of Riyadh, resulting in the death of one person.

On April 4, a detonation of an explosive device in Al-Kharj resulted in the death of one person.

On February 27, an exchange of gunfire in Qassim resulted in the death of one person.

On February 8, a car bomb exploded in Riyadh without causing injuries. Daesh claimed responsibility.

On January 29, a suicide bombing in the Ridha mosque in Al-Ahsa, in the eastern region of the country, resulted in the deaths of four people, including two security personnel, and the injury of 18 individuals.

On January 5, four armed men set fire to a Saudi Aramco bus in the city of Qatif.

## **2015**

On October 26, a suicide bomber murdered two people and wounded 26 in a mosque in the southern city of Najran. The bomber, a Saudi national who recently returned from fighting for Daesh in Syria, was blocked from entering the center of the mosque by a 95-year-old man, which limited the death toll.

On September 4, at the Aramco Abqaiq Community, Sgt. Ali Al-Habeeb was killed during a confrontation with a terrorist attacker. Saudi security forces pursued and killed the attacker, who was reported to have been wearing an explosives-laden belt.

On August 6, the Abha Mosque bombing was carried out by a suicide bomber, killing 17 people at a mosque in the south-western Saudi city of Abha. The mosque was inside a military installation controlled by Saudi Special Forces engaged in the war in nearby Yemen.

On July 29, a policeman was killed in a drive-by shooting in the village on Al-Jish in Qatif Province.

On July 16, a suicide attacker detonated his car bomb at a police checkpoint near a prison in Riyadh, killing himself and injuring two others.

On July 3, a policeman was killed during a counter-terror operation Taif, in the southwestern province of the country.

On May 29, a suicide bomber attacked a mosque in Dammam, killing 4 people and injuring 4 others.

On May 22, a suicide bomber attacked the Imam Ali mosque in the village of Al-Qadeeh, in Qatif governorate, during Friday prayers. The Saudi health minister told state television that at least 21 people had been killed and more than 80 injured in the blast. Daesh later claimed responsibility for the attack.

On January 5, a pair of suicide bombers attacked a border patrol unit near Arar, killing three border officers.

# Addendum: Op-Eds

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## **Saudi general: My country supports America's tough stance against ISIS, terror and Iran**

**Major General Ahmed Hassan Mohammad Asseri**  
**Adviser to Saudi Arabia's Defense Minister**



| MARCH 26, 2017

Leaders from 68 countries gathered in Washington for a meeting of the Global Coalition to Counter Daesh (ISIL) hosted by President Trump's administration this past week.

Saudi Arabia welcomes the new administration's attention to the Middle East and its support for America's friends who are fighting back against transnational terrorists such as Daesh and pushing back against Iranian interference in countries such as Yemen.

As Americans would say, "You've got our back." And America's support is indispensable as we stand together against a host of threats to regional stability.

While meeting with Saudi Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman – an architect of our country's economic, social, and governmental reforms – at the White House recently, President Trump enthusiastically endorsed the modernization drive that will make our country an even more valuable strategic partner. Similarly, our government welcomes the United States' long-standing support of the Saudi defense forces.

The new administration is also tough minded about the Iranian threat to regional stability, which was magnified by the recent nuclear deal between Iran and six world powers, including the United States.

Defense Secretary James Mattis and CIA Director Mike Pompeo each describe Iran as the world's largest state sponsor of terrorism, while Vice President Mike Pence has called the nuclear agreement "a terrible deal."

Saudi Arabia is prepared to work with the United States and its allies to restrain Iranian conduct, just as we have helped to stabilize the Arabian Gulf and its energy supplies since World War II. While the U.S.-Saudi partnership is time-tested, reaffirming this relationship is a matter of strategy, not sentiment. Since the Global Coalition's founding three years ago, Saudi Arabia has been an active partner from Day One, including sending fighter jets to the Incirlik airbase in southern Turkey to join the US-led air campaign against Daesh in Syria.

On the financial front, Saudi Arabia works closely with the United States to cut off funding for Daesh and Al Qaeda. Through real-time information-sharing, we cooperate with the United States to shut down the flow of funds from western banks to Middle Eastern extremists.

To ensure that charitable contributions don't subsidize terrorism, we prohibit Saudi mosques and aid organizations from transferring money outside our country.

We have also taken strong steps to stop unauthorized shipments of military equipment from leaving Saudi Arabia and to prevent people from crossing our borders to join Daesh in Iraq or Syria.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia is mobilizing the Muslim world against the extremist threat to our religion. Under Saudi leadership, the 41-nation Islamic Coalition is equipping our countries to fight violent extremists by training our security forces and sharing information and intelligence.

Last March, in the largest joint military exercise ever in the Middle East, some 350,000 soldiers, 20,000 tanks and 2,500 warplanes from 20 countries joined together in "war games" in the Saudi desert to jointly train our security forces for operations against non-state armed groups.

Turning from the battlefields to the battle of ideas, the Islamic Coalition is encouraging educators and scholars as well as religious and political leaders to raise their voices against those who preach violence. Moreover, Saudi Arabia has created a center which operates 24/7 to analyze social media to identify and track terrorist efforts to recruit and activate new followers.

But non-state armed groups and radical preachers aren't the only threats. By conducting ballistic missile tests last month and meddling in Yemen, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, the Sinai Peninsula and even the Gulf States, Iran is imperiling the stability of our region. Even more disturbingly, Iran is sharing ballistic missile technology with the extremist Houthi militia in Yemen and similar groups in other countries, thereby imperiling the security of the entire region.

In Yemen, which shares a 1,100-mile border with Saudi Arabia, Iran is supporting and arming the Houthi militia, modeled on the terrorist Hezbollah movement that has destabilized Lebanon. While making Yemen ungovernable, the Houthis are attacking Saudi Arabia, having fired more than 40,000 mortars, rockets and other projectiles at our towns, killing at least 375 civilians, closing more than 500 schools and displacing 24 villages and over 17,000 people.

In January, three Houthi suicide boats rammed a Saudi frigate off the western coast, killing two crew members and injuring three others.

Responding to this threat, Saudi Arabia leads a coalition of 12 countries fighting to reinstate Yemen's legitimate, internationally recognized government and restore peace and security to the country.

To be sure, Saudi Arabia prefers to promote stability through peaceful means, as we do by providing much-needed diplomatic and economic support to strategic allies such as Egypt and Jordan. But aggression, active destabilization and acts of terrorism, including Iran's infringements in Yemen, demand a military response.

From the Cold War through the War on Terror, the U.S. has helped Saudi Arabia strengthen our defenses through joint military training exercise and ballistic defensive weapons sales, making our country the largest customer of U.S. military equipment.

Today, we're working with the United States and its allies to defeat Daesh, Al Qaeda and Iranian-sponsored extremism and expansionism.

We stand shoulder-to-shoulder for a secure and stable Middle East in a peaceful and prosperous world.

# The Saudis are Fighting Terrorism, Don't Believe Otherwise

**Saudi Foreign Minister Adel bin Ahmed Al-Jubeir**

**Newsweek** | FEBRUARY 3, 2016

Those who accuse Saudi Arabia of supporting violent extremism not only fail to acknowledge the Kingdom's leadership in combating terrorism around the world but also do not see that it is illogical and irrational for Saudi Arabia to be anything less than at the forefront of nations combatting this scourge.

Multiple actors—each with their own motives—have targeted the Kingdom, seeking to destabilize the country and terrorize the Saudi people. So it is in our national interest to defeat terrorism—and a national priority.

Whether non-state actors like Al-Qaeda or the Islamic State militant group (ISIS), or state-sponsored extremism from Iran and its proxies, Saudi Arabia has, as much as any other country, a national security incentive to stop the men, the money and the mindset that foments terrorism and violent extremism.

Some try to malign Saudi Arabia by reciting that “15 of the 19” 9/11 hijackers were Saudi. They should know that the mastermind of the 9/11 attacks, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, told U.S. interrogators that the initial plan was to have 20 hijackers from different nationalities, but late in the planning Osama bin Laden directed him to use as many Saudis as possible to give the attack a Saudi face.

This was likely designed to drive a wedge between the Kingdom and the U.S. If this was Osama bin Laden's plan, it almost succeeded, as we saw from the wave of criticism the Kingdom experienced after 9/11.

## **Al-Qaeda**

In 2003, the Saudi capital was targeted with simultaneous suicide bombings at three residential compounds. These bombings killed more than 30 persons,



including Saudis, Lebanese, Americans, British and Australians. Other attacks followed, seeking to destabilize the Kingdom and shake the confidence of expatriates to cause them to leave. It did not succeed. Faris al-Zahrani, a top Al-Qaeda strategist whose death sentence was recently carried out, along with other convicted terrorists, masterminded a 2004 attack on the U.S. Consulate in Jeddah, killing four security guards and five staff members.

## ISIS

The murderers of ISIS have publicly proclaimed the taking of the Saudi state as one of their goals. Throughout 2015, ISIS militants struck four mosques in Dammam, Qatif, Abha and Najran, killing 38 and wounding 148. In August 2015, Saudi authorities arrested 421 suspects from four different extremist cells in connection with these crimes. Another 15 suspects were arrested while planning a suicide operation against the U.S. Embassy in Riyadh using a truck loaded with explosives. ISIS operatives in Saudi Arabia have been caught trying to free terrorists from prison, recruit young people to their cause and spread ISIS propaganda.

## Iran

Iran has used terrorism as an instrument of its foreign policy since the 1979 Revolution. Saudi Arabia has long been a target of terrorism perpetrated by Iranian proxies. In 1987, the Iranian sponsored Hezbollah al-Hejaz set fire to an oil facility in Ras Tanura in eastern Saudi Arabia. That same year, Saudi authorities foiled a plot by Iranian pilgrims to smuggle explosives into the kingdom. In 1988, Hezbollah al-Hejaz attacked a petrochemical company facility in Jubail. Most despicable was Iran's involvement in the 1996 Khobar bombings, which resulted in the deaths of 120 people, including 19 Americans.

Faced with such diverse and dangerous adversaries, Saudi Arabia has spared no effort or expense to combat terrorism. The Kingdom is committed to uprooting extremism at the source and draining militant groups of resources.

Saudi Arabia has arrested extremists within its borders, tried them before specialized courts and imposed the ultimate penalties on those convicted. The Kingdom has implemented one of the world's strictest financial control systems to combat terrorism financing.

Donations in mosques and public places are prohibited, and Saudi charities are prohibited from transferring money outside the country to ensure that charitable funds do not find their way to violent extremists.

In 2005, the Kingdom launched a national public awareness campaign against extremism that is still ongoing to counter the extremist narrative and educate our public about the dangers of violent extremism. In 2008, it launched a global interfaith dialogue to promote harmony among the world's religions and cultures. A global center was established in Vienna to continue this effort.

In addition to actions, Saudi Arabia has worked with other nations to combat terrorism—both diplomatically and militarily. Through a \$110 million grant, Saudi Arabia helped establish the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Center to combat terrorism, address the mindset of extremism that foments terrorism and build the capacity of UN member states to fight against terrorism.

Saudi Arabia has established “fusion cells” where law enforcement and intelligence officials from Saudi Arabia, the United States and other partners work closely together to investigate and interdict terrorism plots and finances.

Saudi Air Force planes were one of the first to fly sorties over Syria as part of the military actions against ISIS, and Saudi Arabia is leading a coalition of 38 Islamic countries to fight terrorism and extremism.

Terrorism is a global scourge. Many countries have known the grief and pain it causes. It makes no sense for Saudi Arabia to support or condone those who have as their goal the destruction of Saudi Arabia. It is against our values, our faith and our national character.

That is why the Kingdom has responded with strength, persistence and resolve. To accuse the Kingdom of being lax, much less complicit, when it comes to combatting terrorism and its financing is not only irresponsible but also flies against the face of reality.



# Saudi Arabia does not support Islamic State terrorists – or any others

## Mohammed bin Nawaf Al-Saud, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the UK

**theguardian** | AUGUST 17, 2014

Richard Norton-Taylor suggests that Saudi Arabia has been “funding the most intolerant brand of Islam” in his blog (UK weapons trump human rights in Israel and Saudi Arabia, August 11, 2014).

He suggests this is “Wahhabi absolutism.” Hearsay and a little knowledge is a dangerous thing. He supports his argument with information gleaned from the column of a fellow journalist from another newspaper.

As stated, Wahhabism is not a sect of Islam. What is being referred to is the interpretation of Muhammad Abd al-Wahhab, who saw his fellow Muslims being diverted from the path of Islam as it had been delivered by the prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Saudis do not accept to be labelled “Wahhabis”. We are Muslims. In 2011, HRH Prince Salman bin Abdulaziz (now the crown prince) said: “Some people use the word Wahhabism to describe the message of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab in order to isolate Saudi Muslims from the rest of the Muslim world.”

This word is a convenient label dreamed up by some governments, political analysts and the media to describe the major “Islamic threat” facing western civilization. It is described as extremist and radical, accused of inspiring movements ranging from the Taliban in Afghanistan to the al-Qaida network and now Daesh in Iraq. This was likely designed to drive a wedge between the kingdom and the U.S. If this was Osama bin Laden’s plan, it almost succeeded, as

we saw from the wave of criticism the kingdom experienced after 9/11.

But this view does not even faintly correspond with the teachings of Muhammad Ibn Abd al Wahhab, who was a well-travelled, learned, scholarly jurist of the 18th century. He insisted on adherence to Qur'anic values and the teachings of the prophet Muhammad (PBUH) which includes the maximum preservation of human life, even in the midst of jihad. He taught tolerance and supported the rights of both men and women.

Let me make it perfectly clear. The government of Saudi Arabia does not support or fund the murderers who have collected under the banner of the Islamic State. Their ideology is not one that Saudi Arabia recognizes, or that would be recognized by the vast majority of Muslims around the world – whether Sunni or Shia.

Under the leadership of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah, Saudi Arabia launched an initiative for dialogue between all religions and cultures in 2008 with the establishment of the King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue in Vienna.

Following an international counterterrorism conference held in Riyadh in 2005, the UN counterterrorism center was established with financial support from Saudi Arabia. The Kingdom has been and will continue to fight extremism within the nation's own borders daily, indeed hourly.

Firm action is taken against any imam who is found to hold extremist views and who tries to incite their followers to violence. Saudi Arabia has passed laws and warned its citizens that they will be arrested and prosecuted if they attempt to join Daesh or any other international terrorist group, or to take part in any of the conflicts raging in any region. Saudi Arabia has done and will do everything it can to stop the spread of this corrosive poison in the country and region and encourage all other governments to do the same.

# Don't Blame 'Wahhabism' for Terrorism

**Mohammed Alyahya, Nonresident Fellow,  
Atlantic Council**

**The New York Times** | OCTOBER 19, 2016

The word "Wahhabism" has become a boogeyman in the West, deemed responsible for the radicalization of Muslims around the world. And since Wahhabism is a strain of Islam that has its origins in the Arabian Peninsula and is the dominant religious doctrine of Saudi Arabia that country is often viewed as the prime culprit in the propagation of violent extremism.

But blaming Wahhabism and Saudi Arabia for Islamist radicalism is a dangerous red herring.

This single-cause explanation distracts from the complex political, economic and psychological reasons people join terrorist groups. In doing so, it impedes Saudi Arabia's ability to effectively fight terrorism.

Wahhabism is, in fact, a loaded, anti-Saudi synonym for Salafism, a puritanical strain of Islam that encourages emulating the "salaf," or predecessors, the first followers of the Prophet Muhammad. Salafism has historically been apolitical and the overwhelming majority of Salafis are not violent.

Most Islamist militants have nothing to do with Saudi Wahhabism. The Taliban for example, are Deobandis, a revivalist, anti-imperialist strain of Islam that emerged as a reaction to British colonialism in South Asia. Most members of Al Qaeda follow a radical current that emerged from the Muslim Brotherhood, a movement that defined itself largely in relation and opposition to the West

and its values. While some terrorists do identify as Salafi, Islamic sects that are ideologically opposed to Salafism – Naqshbandi Sufis and Shiites, among others – have engaged in violent jihad in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria.

And yet much of the Western news media and far too many pundits put forward a different picture entirely, pinning the blame for terrorism on Wahhabi ideology emanating from Saudi Arabia. These arguments lead one to imagine that European terrorists end up joining the Islamic State by wandering the streets of Paris or Brussels and stumbling upon a Saudi-funded mosque. In this mosque, they read a single book, “The Book of Monotheism,” by Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhab, the 18th-century sheikh who founded Wahhabism. A week later, the book’s fundamentalist message inspires them to travel to Syria’s front lines or to plot terrorist attacks in Europe.

The reality is much more complex. Most of the perpetrators of terrorist attacks in Europe have been petty criminals who were known to drink alcohol and take drugs. Their radicalization has little to do with theology. Some European Muslims reportedly purchased books like “Islam for Dummies” before embarking on journeys to take part in jihad in Syria. What they all have in common is a belief that the Muslim world and the West are locked in an irreconcilable clash of civilizations.

It is similarly inaccurate to condemn Wahhabism or Saudi Salafism for the jihadist groups that have emerged in the Arab world in recent years. Tunisians account for the largest foreign population in the Islamic State. The group’s top ranks emerged from Iraq. Syria, of course, is a hotbed of jihadists of all stripes. And yet, these countries until recently were ruled by secular dictators, who banned Saudi missionary activities and, in the case of Iraq and Syria, viewed Saudi Arabia as an adversary.

On the other hand, Saudi Arabia has been engaged in missionary activities in India, building mosques, schools and social service centers. And yet barely any jihadists have emerged from among India’s population of more than 170 million Muslims.

The revival of a politicized form of radical Islam, which has been taking place in the Arab world since the 1970s, is not driven just by ideology, but by the failure of Arab governments to meet the expectations of their own populations and the brutal reprisals they have employed to quell demands for better, more transparent governance. Like the social and psychological alienation that drives some European Muslims to join extremist groups, this root cause must be addressed in order to truly fight terrorism. There is no doubt that while certain strains of Salafism are intolerant, intolerance does not necessarily lead to terrorism. Ideological intolerance is a problem in its own right, one that carries risks and dangers and requires its own treatments. But conflating its dangers with the causes of violent extremism can diminish the effectiveness of serious counterterrorism efforts.

It is Saudi Arabia – the country accused of promoting ideas that lead to violent extremism – that has effectively harnessed religion to fight radicalism. Saudi Arabia has fought Al-Qaeda not only operationally, but also by countering its ideology with religious arguments. Scholars have mobilized to condemn both terrorist acts and rhetoric. Salafi scholars have been instrumental in the success of the rehabilitation programs for those convicted of aiding and abetting terrorism.

In the 1990s, Saudi Arabia's grand mufti, Abdul Aziz ibn Baz, issued a fatwa condemning suicide operations. The current grand mufti, Abdul Aziz bin Abdullah al-Sheikh, is also on record advocating against Saudis' joining groups fighting overseas and, in keeping with traditional Salafi teachings, has called on all Muslims to remain obedient to the legitimate leader's dictates and avoid any form of organized political activism.

Blaming Wahhabism or Salafism for violent radicalism is not merely an intellectual slip or an injustice to Salafis, it is a distortion that stands to obstruct fighting violent radicalism and understanding its causes. Any religious ideology adopted by radicals is often a mask for other issues. Blaming or even destroying an ideology like Salafism will not end radicalism.





