

Saudi Arabia in Focus

Counter-terrorism update
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Adel Al-Jubeir, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia, at the UN General Assembly in New York, September 2017

Combating the terrorist threat is our top priority

The threat of terrorism is among the most serious challenges facing the international community, Adel Al-Jubeir, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia, stressed at the annual meeting of United Nations General Assembly last September. He underlined that it is impossible to defeat terrorism unless all the countries are committed to combating it and Saudi Arabia will continue to work to counter the scourge, as well as extremism, in all forms and manifestations.

The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz vowed on several occasions that he would spare no effort to crush extremists that use misleading messages to entice impressionable young people to join them. Recently he recommitted the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to "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."

In a message to the people of Saudi Arabia and all the world's Muslims on the occasion of the Eid Al-Fitr, King Salman urged Muslims to unite and condemned terrorism and extremism, stressing their contradiction to Islam.

"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."

From the ambassador

The scourge of terrorism, radicalism and hate speech have no place under the banner of Islam, a religion of peace and tolerance.

Saudi Arabia has long taken steps to counter misguided extremist thought and has set up de-radicalisation programmes that have been widely recognised for their effectiveness. We shall continue to strengthen our cooperation efforts with our many partners across the globe to overcome a plight that affects us all.

The last cowardly terroristic attack in New York, making so many innocent victims, also affecting our friendly Belgian community, shows us again that we must continue to work together at the international level if we want to defeat terrorism and those promoting its ideology.



Ambassador Abdulrahman S. Alahmed



Saudi Arabia's Counter-terrorism Strategy Reinforced



Saudi Arabia's strategy to fight terrorism and extremism has been widely recognised by the intelligence and security departments of all our partners, notably by the US and EU authorities. Our comprehensive strategy is founded upon three areas of concern: **security** (the men); **financial controls** (the money) and **"de-radicalization"** (the mindset).

Today, the Kingdom is one of the leading nations in combatting terrorism and terror-financing, and has been working closely with its allies on all fronts. This global collaboration has included: military intelligence cooperation with the Defense and the Interior ministries of the Saudi government; coalition air-strikes against "Daesh"/ISIL in Syria; "fusion-centre" cooperation with the U.S. military and U.S. military technology transfers; multi-national terror-financing investigations, strengthened international banking money-exchange and money-transfer controls; and cyber-security and information-exchange. This international cooperation has resulted in the prevention of terrorist attacks.

Combatting Terrorism

After devastating terrorist bombings in the Kingdom galvanized the Saudi people against terrorism in May 2003 and May 2004, the Kingdom devoted its full resources to combatting Islamist militancy, and the resources were substantial: the total security budget for 2004, 2005, and 2006 increased from USD 8.5 to 10 to 12 billion, respectively. Ten years later, the 2016 budget has allocated USD 56.8 billion to counterterrorism and military spending, which includes the Saudi-led coalition war against Iran-backed rebels in Yemen. The training of the Kingdom's Special Forces military units has been intensified with assistance from the US and the UK.

Combating Extremism

As part of the combat against radical ideology, Saudi government and religious leaders routinely and vehemently condemn all forms of terrorism and extremism in the strongest terms. In his remarks at the UN's Culture of Peace Conference in November 2008, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, the late King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz, noted that "terrorism and criminality are the enemies of every religion and every culture." In May 2009, the Second Deputy Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia organized the first national conference on "intellectual security" to address the "intellectual abnormality" that, according to the Saudi government, is "the main reason for terrorism." The declaration issued at this conference described the moderate nature of Islam and warned against "the dangers of embracing deviant ideologies."

Equally, in February 2014, the Ministry of Education formally prohibited schools from working with lecturers who were thought to be prone to ideological extremism in order to protect students intellectually. The Ministry of Education banned schools from coordinating with any "inflammatory preacher" who might indoctrinate students. This measure was accompanied by a series of educational counterterrorism measures aimed at undermining extremist views and disrupting the activities of those who promote violent extremism. In May 2017, world leaders, including Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz and US President Donald Trump, inaugurated in Riyadh the Global Center for Combating Extremism with a view to reinforce international cooperation in facing the extreme ideology leading to terrorism.

Fighting And Defeating Daesh

The Kingdom has unequivocally stated that its counterterrorism and counter-extremism efforts are directed at Daesh/ISIL. The Kingdom is part of the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL, notably taking military action in support of coalition airstrikes in Syria and Iraq.

The 39-state all-Muslim military coalition set up in December 2015, under a joint command centre in Riyadh, aims to protect the Islamic nations from all terrorist groups and terrorist organizations "irrespective of sect and name." It is fighting terrorists in "Iraq, Syria, Libya, Egypt, and Afghanistan", in line with United Nations and Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) provisions on terrorism.



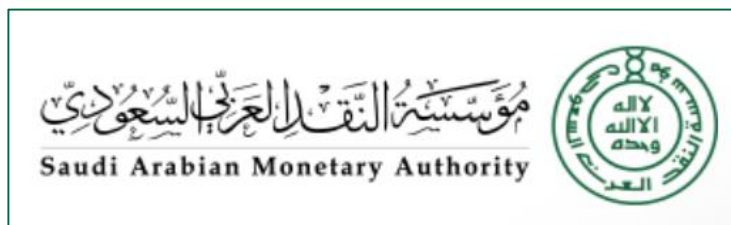
Stopping Terror-Financing

In 2003, Saudi Arabia founded the Saudi Arabia Financial Intelligence Unit (SAFIU), established by the country's "Anti-Money Laundering Law" of August 23, 2003, and comprising 130 officers. By February 2010, SAFIU arrested some 96 suspected terrorist financiers.

Furthermore, in 2007, the Kingdom ratified the UN's 'International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism'. This convention, itself 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 (as defined in Article 2 of this convention)

and the forfeiture of funds used or allocated for the purpose of committing acts of terrorism and any proceeds derived there from. State parties commit themselves not to use bank secrecy as a justification for refusing to cooperate in the suppression of terrorist financing.

In response to criticism and allegations of terror-financing that are directed at Saudi Arabian charitable organisations, the Kingdom has taken a series of steps to provide greater oversight of charitable giving. Today, the King Salman Centre for Relief and Humanitarian Aid is responsible for external charitable contributions from Saudi Arabia or Saudi citizens.



The Ninth Forum on Compliance and Combating Money Laundering, held in Riyadh last May, focused on best practices in accordance with international standards. Abdulaziz Saleh Al Furaih, Vice Governor of the Saudi Arabian Monetary Authority (SAMA), noted: "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 Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency (SAMA) forum on combating money laundering and terror-financing has gained prominence in recent years for its rigorous conference work to promote the advancement of efforts to implement international compliance standards. The latest of these standards to be put into practice by Saudi Arabia include FATF standards on interaction between correspondent banks and money transfer services; FATF customer

due diligence; and FATF standards on money transfers, particularly in developing controls in order to prevent the risks of illegal transactions.

Fundraising without permit is unlawful in Saudi Arabia

The Ministry of Interior announced last June that all charity fundraising without a permit represents a violation of the Kingdom's laws. The Ministry stressed that anyone who calls for or collects donations without a license will be arrested and subjected to the laws of the Kingdom. Furthermore, bank accounts for collecting donations announced on social media and SMS messages will be frozen.

The new regulation follows a decree issued in February 2016 that all citizens and NGOs that wish 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.

Saudi Milestones in Overcoming Terrorist Financing

Over the last few years, the scope and nature of terrorist threats globally intensified considerably, with terrorist attacks in many cities across the world, and the terrorist threat posed by the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh), and by Al-Qaeda and their affiliated terrorist organisations. It is clear that further concerted action is urgently needed to strengthen global counter-terrorist financing regimes, to combat the financing of these serious terrorist threats, and contribute to strengthening the financial and economic system, and security. Below is an outline of the concrete steps taken by the Kingdom in the joint fight against terror financing.

- ❑ Earned observer status in the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) in 2015; aiming for full membership in 2018.
- ❑ Money laundering units established in Saudi Arabian Money Agency and banks to make the banking system resistant to money laundering operations.
- ❑ Closed down unlicensed money-exchange or money-transfer centres.
- ❑ Issued new rules & regulations for combatting money laundering and terror financing.
- ❑ Implemented Know-Your-Customer rules in both financial and non-financial institutions.
- ❑ Established a permanent intergovernmental agency committee to oversee all issues pertaining to terror financing.
- ❑ Established a Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU).
- ❑ Circulated lists issued by the UN to freeze financial assets of suspected terrorist individuals or groups.
- ❑ Saudi Arabia – United States agreement in 2017 for the establishment of the Terrorist Financing Targeting Center (TFTC).



“Over the last 15 years, the Saudis have become among our best counterterrorism partners.”

John O. Brennan
Director of CIA until January 2017,
serving under several US presidents including
Obama, Clinton and Bush.



“The Saudis have an impressive success rate. We can draw inspiration from their experiences. We want to and do cooperate with Saudi Arabia on many fronts.

Let us explore with our partner countries in the Arab world how together we can connect our thoughts in the fight against this perversion of Islam and Daesh.”

Gilles De Kerchove - EU Counter-terrorism Coordinator since 2007

