

Saudi Arabia in Focus

Counterterrorism update from the Saudi mission to the European Union



Counterterrorism Special – July 2016

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From the ambassador

Let there be no doubt about it. The scourge of terrorism has no place under the banner of Islam, a religion of peace and tolerance.

The cowardly and unislamic attacks on Jeddah, Qatif and the holy city of Madinah during the holy month of Ramadan were deplorable and have been roundly condemned by the international community; just as we mourn the latest horrific and senseless taking of innocent lives in Nice on the French National Day.

Saudi Arabia has long taken steps to counter misguided extremist thought and has set up deradicalisation programmes that have been recognised as effective. We must now stand united and strengthen our cooperation efforts with our international partners to overcome a plight that affects us all.



Abdulrahman S. Alahmed
Ambassador and Head of the
Mission to the European Union



Combating the terrorist threat

King Salman Vows To Fight Terror With An "Iron Fist"

On 5 July, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz 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 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," said King Salman.

"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."

Solemn Vow To Strike Terror Groups

King Salman vowed that he would spare no effort to crush extremists that use misleading messages to entice impressionable young people to join them. "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," he said.



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Saudi Arabia's Comprehensive Counterterrorism Strategy

Tackling the men, the money and the mindset



It is in the Kingdom's national interest to defeat terrorism, and it is a national priority. Today, multiple actors, each with a respective ideological agenda, have targeted the Kingdom with the goal of destabilizing the country and terrorizing the Saudi people.

Saudi Arabia's strategy to fight terrorism and extremism 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.

Numbering 10,000, Saudi Arabia's Special Operations Forces go through a rigorous training program designed to prepare soldiers for every possible contingency, from attacks on convoys, hostage search-and-recovery, bomb clearance, the storming of militant hideouts, precision shooting, and border surveillance. Basic military training lasts three months, followed by another month of security training and an additional specialisation.

Combating 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, requiring 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.

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.

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 terms of media campaigns, Saudi Public TV and other sponsored channels have broadcast a five-part series titled "Jihad Experiences, the Deceit," which featured terrorists' confessions and repentant terrorists' testimonies of how terrorist groups organize, train and recruit.

The series also featured Muslim scholars rebutting terrorists' propaganda from an Islamic perspective.

Fighting And Defeating Daesh

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

In February 2016, the Kingdom announced that it was ready to send ground troops into Syria as part of military action against 'Daesh'/ISIL, if requested by the US-led coalition. By February 2016, the US and coalition forces had led 10,113 strikes (6,763 in Iraq; 3,350 in Syria) against ISIL in which Saudi Arabia participated in airstrikes. These resulted numerous ISIL casualties and destroyed or damaged training bases, compounds, headquarters, command and control facilities, a finance centre, supply trucks, and armed vehicles.

The establishment of a 39-state all-Muslim military coalition on December 15, 2015, was announced by Defence Minister Prince Mohammad bin Salman and is based at a joint command centre in Riyadh. The Alliance's primary objective is to protect the Islamic nations from all terrorist groups and terrorist organizations "irrespective of sect and name." It has announced that it will fight terrorists in "Iraq, Syria, Libya, Egypt, and Afghanistan", in line with United Nations and Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) provisions on terrorism.

Milestones in Overcoming Terrorist Financing

In 2015 & 2016, 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 Monetary 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.

Vice-Governor of SAMA Declares Terror Financing "A Graver Crime"



The Eighth Forum on Compliance and Combating Money Laundering was held in Riyadh on May 9. During the event, which focused on best practices in accordance with international standards, Abdulaziz Saleh Al Furaih 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.

They said...

>> "Over the last 15 years, the Saudis have become among our best counterterrorism partners."

John O. Brennan
Director, CIA

>> "[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."

Gilles De Kerchove
EU Counterterrorism Coordinator

In Brief

>> Installation of Surveillance Cameras in all Mosques

On June 9, Saudi Arabia 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.

>> Fundraising without permit is now against the Law

The Ministry of Interior announced 11 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.

>> KSA is leader in fight against ISIL US State Department, 2 June:

"The Saudi government took a zero-tolerance stance on ISIL, condemning its activities and participating in coalition military action to defeat the group in Syria and Iraq. Its external military action against ISIL in Syria as a part of the U.S.-led coalition was complemented by an aggressive campaign by both official clerics and King Salman to discredit the group and condemn its activities as acts of terrorism."

