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Saudi Sentencing of Women's Activist Sets Up Riyadh for a Clash with Biden

by [Simon Henderson](#)

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Articles & Testimony

The topic of human rights has become a red line for Saudi leaders, who seem to perceive it as a purely domestic matter on which they will not countenance any foreign pressure.

Although Loujain al-Hathloul's case had been heard in a criminal court at one time, today's verdict was in a national security court and her crimes were categorized as being against the anti-terrorism law. They were reported as "seeking to change the country's political system" and supporting a "foreign agenda inside the kingdom using the internet." Earlier reports of what this might mean include that she visited British and Dutch embassies and applied for a job with the UN. She has now been formally sentenced to nearly six years in prison, though will likely be conditionally released in March. But if Riyadh thinks this will make her case a non-issue for the incoming Biden administration, it is almost certainly wrong...

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