

Drawing a Line in the Saudi Sand

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Articles & Testimony

With the Iraqi regime defeated and military victory near at hand, the United States and its allies are positioned to leverage greater cooperation in the war on terror from key Arab states, chief among them Saudi Arabia.

For all its rhetoric, and its limited actions, Saudi Arabia remains part of the problem of international terrorism, not the answer.

To be sure, Saudi Arabia has made several contributions to the war on terror -- albeit limited and intermittent. In one instance, Saudi agents reportedly infiltrated two domestic al Qaeda cells, leading to the arrest last June of over 75 al Qaeda members of several nationalities, including Saudis. Saudi security services have thwarted terror attacks targeting Western interests in the Kingdom.

Still, even those counterterror efforts in which the Saudis do engage are inconsistent. While limited operations have been conducted in the tactical realm of preventing near term attacks on Saudi soil, the Saudis have proved far less cooperative in critical strategic areas such as combating terror financing or assisting international terrorism investigations. The actions the Saudis claim to have already implemented amount to little more than window dressing, when what is needed is concrete and concerted action.

If the Saudis acted on the four following issues, they would make a significant contribution to the reinvigorated counterterror offensive to follow the removal of Saddam and liberation of Iraq. Critically, the only question is whether the Saudis are willing to take such action; they are certainly capable. These are actions the Saudi regime is capable of taking, and should therefore be expected and held accountable to implement.

Action in these areas is the yardstick by which the West should measure Saudi cooperation in the war on terror:

1. Assist International Terror Investigations. Saudi officials are not only insufficiently cooperative in terrorism investigations, they have obstructed several recent investigations into key terrorism suspects.

Violating a U.S. Grand Jury subpoena order and State Department regulations, Saudi diplomats in Washington secreted Maha Hafeez Marri out of the U.S. to Saudi Arabia in November 2002. Marri's husband, Ali Marri, is charged with lying to FBI officials about phone calls he made in the months following the 9/11 attacks to Mustapha al-Hawsawi, the money-man who financed the hijackers on behalf of, and was later captured with, Khaled Shaikh

Mohammad.

That same month, Saudi officials also granted a controversial visa to Christian Ganczarski, a Polish convert to Islam living in Germany. Ganczarski used the visa to elude German authorities investigating him for his role in the Djerba synagogue bombing. The Djerba suicide bomber called two people in the moments before the attack, Ganczarski and Khaled Shaikh Mohammad.

In another case, Saudi officials ignored repeated requests for assistance from German officials investigating convicted al Qaeda member Mounir Motasadeq. The Saudis refused to assist German investigators determine why the 9/11 accomplice had the business card of Muhammad Fakihi, the chief of the Saudi embassy's Islamic Affairs Branch. Fakihi has since been tied to the leader of another al Qaeda cell plotting attacks in Germany. Four days after the cell members were arrested, Fakihi left Germany and disappeared. Only now, almost a year after German officials first requested their cooperation, are Saudi officials seeking Fakihi for questioning.

2. Regulate charitable and humanitarian organizations. Despite promises to regulate charities, require foreign-ministry permits for charities operating internationally, and enforce standard accounting and auditing procedures, these promises remain unfulfilled.

Meanwhile, several Saudi charities -- including the al Haramain Islamic Foundation and the International Islamic Relief Organization, among others -- continue to finance international terrorism. For example, captured al Qaeda terrorist Omar al Farouq admitted to receiving funds for attacks in Southeast Asia via the al Haramain foundation, just one of several factors leading the Australian Parliament to call for an inquiry into possible Saudi links to the October 13 Bali bombings.

Similarly, the list of 20 Saudi al Qaeda financiers -- described by bin Laden as "the Golden Chain" -- must also be dealt with. Those members of the Saudi elite proactively financing international terrorism -- sometimes through charities, sometimes more directly -- must be reigned in.

While the Saudis have yet to take significant action to curb such activity, they certainly are capable of doing so. Indeed, Sheik Aqeel Abdul-Aziz Al-Aqeel, Director of al Haramain, admitted in a recent interview with the Australian Broadcasting Company that "the Saudi government asked us to stop supporting Chechnya fighters recently and we stopped that one year ago."

3. Establish a Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU). In a highly publicized Washington press conference on December 3, 2002, Saudi spokesman Adel al Jubeir committed Riyadh to setting up a Saudi FIU to collect real time intelligence on suspicious financial activity. FIU's share that information with both their own domestic law enforcement agencies as well as the other 69 FIU's around the world cooperating under the auspices of the Egmont Group. Additionally, Jubeir extended an invitation the Financial Action Task Force on Money Laundering (FATF) to come into Saudi Arabia and provide an "outside assessment" of Saudi initiatives. To date, the Saudi FIU -- if it indeed exists -- has yet to report suspicious financial activity to the international community. Nor have FATF experts been invited to the Kingdom to review Saudi efforts to block money laundering and terror financing.

4. Delegitimize terror. While the Saudis unveiled a "Saudi peace plan" at the Arab League summit in Beirut in March 2002, the regime has yet to denounce Palestinian terrorism or prevent Saudis from funding Palestinian terrorist groups. Indeed, government sponsored telethons have raised considerable sums for Palestinian terrorist groups opposed to peace. In the final analysis, the "main source of financing" for Hamas comes from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, according to terrorism scholar Magnus Ranstrop.

The Saudis can no longer be allowed to finance international terrorism on the one hand, and portray themselves as "victim[s] of terrorism for the last 40 years." They must now choose sides in the war on terror. By leveraging the momentum of victory in Iraq, the coalition can help the Saudis come to the right conclusion. Indeed, in liberating

Iraq the coalition demonstrated its ability to apply the same zero tolerance for terror to states as it has to individuals and groups.

If Riyadh is truly an ally in the war on terror, it should show it by acting on these four agenda items. ❖

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