Saudi Arabia and 9/11: Establishing the Truth Behind the Release of the 28 Pages and the “Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act”

By Anthony H. Cordesman

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Please provide comments to acordesman@gmail.com
**Saudi Arabia and the Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act**

President Obama has made it clear that he intends to veto the legislation the House passed on September 9, 2016 that would allow families of those killed in the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks to sue Saudi Arabia for any role its officials played in the terrorist attack. He should veto the bill and the Congress should pause and not override that veto.

It is all too easy to understand anger the families and survivors of those who were victims on 9/11 feel, and the desire they have to find someone to punish and blame and for some compensation for their losses. It is equally easy to understand the mixed motives of a Congress caught up in the politics of fifteenth anniversary of the attack, an election year, and the desire not to seem soft on terrorism.

Saudi Arabia is also one of America’s most difficult strategic partners for Americans to understand, and its progress, reforms, and strategic importance are often badly understated. It is easier to focus on the fact it is an Islamic state at a time when extremist threats like ISIS, Al Qaida, and the Taliban, than deal with the complicated security issues in the Gulf region and the fact the U.S. is critically dependent on it both in dealing with Iran and in fight terrorism in the region from which it draws most of its strength.

This may help explain why the Congress passed a bill based so loosely on some 28 pages in a report that does not find the Saudi government to be guilty of anything, ignored the extent to which the legislation raised major issues international law and potentially opened the U.S up to suits again America, and did so without ever debating the bill on the floor of the Senate – which originally passed the bill in May, and in the House which passed it on September 9th.

It is also why the Congress is also considering blocking major arms transfers to Saudi Arabia at the U.S. had already made Saudi Arabia both the key regional military power and key U.S. strategic partner in the Gulf by selling it over $152 billion worth of advanced U.S. arms between 2001 and 2015.

There may well be a good reason for the Congress and the Administration to publically reexamine U.S. strategy in the Gulf and the Middle East. The strategic value of the region is changing. The nuclear agreement with Iran has not moderated the threat it poses in the Gulf; its growing missile forces pose to the entire region, or the growth of its military influence in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen and the region.

The “war” against ISIS may win some important victories in Iraq and Syria, but it is all too clear that the threat posed by violent Islamic extremism and terrorism will continue and grow in spite of such victories. We need clearer strategies, we need more transparency, we need clear plans to deal with our strategic partners, and we need a bipartisan consensus our regional allies can trust.

These efforts cannot, however, based on empty conspiracy theories, domestic political posturing, and a failure to honestly establish the facts. They cannot be based on making the worst-case interpretation of the suspicions set forth in 28 pages of redacted Congressional reporting provided in the *Congressional Joint Inquiry into Intelligence*
Activities Before and After the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001 – a report issued in December 2002 with only limited staff resources and long before the full facts were available.

- The growing dependence of the global and U.S. economies on the stable flow of petroleum exports from the Gulf, their impact on key U.S. trading partner in Asia, and their impact on the U.S. economy in spite of the steady reductions in direct U.S. petroleum imports.
- The full historical record of what happen in 9/11 and the fact that later FBI and U.S. intelligence investigations never found any meaningful Saudi official participation in 9/11.
- The emergence of Saudi Arabia and other Arab allies as key partners in the broader struggle against terrorism and Islamic extremism.
- The role Saudi Arabia plays in leading the Gulf Cooperation Council and regional security effort in the Gulf and the Muddle East, and in deterring and countering Iran.

This scarcely means that the U.S. should not encourage reform in Saudi Arabia – reforms which its government has already begun to undertake. It does not mean the U.S. should not ask Saudi Arabia and its other regional allies to do more to fight violent extremism and provide for their own defense where this is possible. The last thing on earth the U.S. needs, however, is to “fight” terrorism by alienating a key partner in that fight as well as the equally important effort to contain and deter Iran.


The U.S. does need to take a much harder look at its overall strategic commitments in the Gulf. It needs to realistically assess the limits to the nuclear agreement with Iran, Iran’s efforts to build-up a major missile forces with conventional precision strike capabilities, to create an asymmetric naval-missile-air threat to Gulf shipping, and win influence over state and non-state actors and an axis that extends from its border with Afghanistan and Pakistan through Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. Iran is no longer just a threat to the Gulf. It is a potential threat to every major U.S. ally in the region – Arab, Israel, and possibly even Turkey.

America’s strategic interests are also no longer shaped by direct dependence on petroleum imports to the U.S. The U.S. is still a long way from total energy independence in the sense it no longer needs any petroleum imports, but it is indirect dependence on Gulf oil exports that now dominate U.S. strategic interests.

OPEC estimates that Gulf nations exported some 16.8 million barrels of crude oil per day and 3.9 million barrels a day of product in 2014, and Iraq, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia all increased their exports of crude and product crude significantly in 2015 and 2016. They now account for over 43% of world crude oil exports and 15% of world product exports. They feed the global economy with some 21 million barrels a day of crude and product, and the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) reports that more than 17 million
barrels a day of that flow must got through the shipping channels in the Gulf and pass through the narrow Strait of Hormuz at the southeastern end of the Gulf.

The entire global economy is dependent on the security of that flow of exports, and the U.S. is becoming steady more dependent on the global economy. This dependence—not direct U.S imports of petroleum—is the key measure of U.S. strategic interest in the Gulf region. Having the flow of such exports guarded by U.S. forces—and by U.S. strategic partners like Saudi Arabia—is a vital U.S. strategic interest. It affects the growth and stability of every aspect of the U.S. economy and U.S. employment levels as well.

Even if one only looks at U.S. trade, the CIA reports that the U.S. now has an economy with an annual GDP of $17.95 trillion. U.S. exports make up $1.6 trillion of that total — equal to 9% of the GDP. U.S. imports make up some $2.3 trillion, — equal to 13% of the GDP and including critical components of both U.S. consumer demand and high technology parts and supplies.

The EIA estimates that the share of total U.S. petroleum and other liquids met by net imports fell from 60% in 2005 to an average of 32% in 2013. EIA expected the net import share to decline to 21% in 2015, which would have been the lowest level since 1968, but lower oil prices have increases U.S. petroleum imports. The 2016 total seems somewhere close to 6.8% of U.S. imports vs. 8.2% in 2008. This compares with some 87% of U.S. imports that are manufactured goods and industrial supplies.

This is scarcely zero petroleum dependence but it scarcely compares with U.S. dependence on key trading partners that are absolutely dependent on the flow of petroleum out of the Gulf. If one uses U.S. Census Bureau trade figures -- and only looks at the four largest U.S. Asian trading partners that are most dependent on Gulf petroleum exports -- China alone accounted for 21.5% of U.S. imports in 2015. Japan accounted for 5.8%. South Korea accounted for 3.2%, and Taiwan accounted for 1.8%.

This is a total of 32.3% or roughly one-third of all U.S. trade, and most of this stream of imports consists of manufactured goods and technology for which there are no immediate substitute sources of imports. Direct petroleum imports still matter, but indirect imports matter far more and no amount of U.S increases in energy production will change U.S. strategic dependence on the stable flow of global exports.

This makes the role of Saudi Arabia both in helping to secure the Gulf and provide the bulk of Gulf exports absolutely critical to U.S. strategic interests. According to OPEC data, Saudi Arabia alone produced 42% of all Middle Eastern crude oil exports in 2015, and 17% of world exports. Saudi Arabia also produced 27% of all Middle Eastern product exports, and 4% of world exports.

**The Evidence – or Lack of it – Since the Original 9/11 Commission Report**

Now that most of the formerly classified 28 pages from *Congressional Joint Inquiry into Intelligence Activities Before and After the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001* have been released, it is clear that even a worst-case interpretation focuses on a few low level Saudi employees and their contact with the terrorists actually involved in the attacks. (See [https://28pages.org/the-declassified-28-pages/](https://28pages.org/the-declassified-28-pages/) ) It does not provide any indication that the
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Saudi government was involved, that any senior figure was involved, or that the worst case interpretation is any different from assuming that a few radicalized minor U.S. civil servant’s that support some militia attack would be a indication of the guilt of the entire U.S. government. It is also important to stress that the 28 pages do not come from the 9/11 Commission report, but a staff report written early in the examination of the attacks and conducted with limited data and resources.

While the Senate and House never seem to have examined the 28 pages in public hearings before voting, there are other official sources that help put them in context. These include an FBI report issued in March 2015, and the final Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States or “9/11 Commission Report” (http://www.9-11commission.gov/report/) issued on July 22, 2004

The FBI Report of March 2015


It notes that the FBI never ceased its PENTTBOM and sub-file investigations into the 9/11 attacks. It also has a chapter on “New Information Related to the 9/11 Attack.” Like the 9/11 Commission Report, the FBI report cannot cite much of the evidence involved because of its classification and sensitivity. It does, however, sum up the impact of the evidence gathered since the 9/11 Commission Report as follows (p. 101):

- Based on the available information obtained and considered, the Review Commission concludes that there is no new information to date that would alter the original findings of the 9/11 Commission regarding the individuals responsible for the 9/11 attacks or for supporting those responsible for the attacks.
- There is new evidence, however, that confirms and strengthens the cases against previously known co-conspirators who are awaiting trial.
- The Review Commission also concludes that media reports regarding a possible FBI source with access to UBL in the early 1990s or suspicions regarding a Saudi family resident in Sarasota before the 9/11 attacks did not hold up under scrutiny.
- The Review Commission commends the FBI for continuing its active investigation into the 9/11 attacks.

It is striking that the FBI report does not name any member of the Saudi royal family or senior Saudi official. It does not name any Saudi official at all—except for Fahad al-Thumairy, the Imam at the King Fahad mosque near Los Angeles. al-Thumairy was not a Saudi official in the classic sense, but he was an accredited diplomat at the Saudi consulate in Los Angeles.

As the original Commission Report indicated, al-Thumairy met two of the 9/11 hijackers on Flight 77—Nawaf al-Hazmi and Khalid al-Mihdhar—when they spent time in San
Diego in 2000 (See pages 218-224 of the original Commission Report). The new FBI report goes on to note, however, that, “Based on the evidence available at the time, the 9/11 Commission concluded that there was no evidence that al-Thumairy provided assistance to al-Hazmi and al-Mihdhar.”

It is clear from pages 102-103 of the FBI report that some internal debates do still exist within the FBI over some aspects of the evidence that has surfaced since the 9/11 Commission Report. It also is clear, however, that none of this evidence relates to Fahad al-Thumairy or any other Saudi official, and the new report does not mention any other Saudi official, any member of the Saudi Royal Family, or the bin Laden family.

These points are of particular importance because the current debate over the 28 pages has triggered an inevitable round of new reports and conspiracy theories. For example, an article by Phillip Shenon in the *Guardian* on May 12, 2016, mentions al-Thumairy as if he were a career diplomat, and “five Saudi government officials who were strongly suspected of involvement in the terrorists’ support network” who are not named. Other reports refer to Saudis who “may” have had ties to Saudi intelligence.

Given this background, voting on a bill and using the release of the 28 pages as an excuse, is scarcely a proper exercise of legislative responsibility. Moreover, the U.S./ has been the victim of more than enough false conspiracy theories

**The Need to Put the Release of the 28 Pages in the Proper Context**

The fact the FBI found no new evidence, however, is only part of the need to have put the 28 pages in the proper context before passing such legislation. Saudi Arabia has been a key ally to the United States on many occasions.

Saudi and U.S. forces have cooperated closely since the British withdrawal from East of Suez, and Saudi Arabia and the United States have cooperated in checking and deterring Iran ever since the fall of the Shah in 1979. They have also cooperated in dealing with the threats posed by the Iran-Iraq War during 1980-1988, and Saudi and US troops fought together against Saddam Hussein in 1991.

While many Americans are not aware of this, Saudi Arabia experienced its own “9/11” in the form of al Qaeda attacks on Saudi soil in 2003. As the annual U.S. State Department Reports on terrorism make clear, Saudi Arabia has become a key partner in counterterrorism. Moreover, Saudi Arabia has long been a key partner in both Gulf and regional security, as Department of Defense factsheets issued in July 2016 make clear.

Now that the U.S. government has released the 28 pages, it needs to address the overall support Saudi Arabia has given the United States as a strategic partner in both counterterrorism and military terms. It should also probably do more than rely on a Presidential veto. But, this scarcely means that Saudi Arabia did not begin to treat bin Laden and al Qaeda as serious threats nearly a decade before 9/11.

The U.S. government should update the information involved, and establish the full chronology of events that shaped Saudi government dealing with bin Laden and al Qaeda. Moreover some key facts in this chronology are very public and very clear.
The Saudi royal family and government came to see bin Laden as a threat long before 9/11. The Saudi government first had to openly confront bin Laden when he objected to the Saudi partnership that allowed U.S. military forces to enter Saudi territory in 1990 in preparation for the liberation of Kuwait. Its efforts to control bin Laden forced him to leave Saudi Arabia in 1991 – a decade before 9/11.

As a result, bin Laden had to shift his operations to the Sudan and went to live there in 1992. In the process, he expanded the focus of his operations to cover Bosnia and created a broad network of extremist efforts focused on a wide range of countries.

At the same time, bin Laden also stepped up his attacks on the Saudi royal family. This led King Fahd to revoke his citizenship in March 1994, and demanded that the Sudan seized bin Laden's passport so that he no longer could travel. The Saudi government also pushed the bin Laden family into cutting off a stipend that some sources report was worth up to $7 million a year.

This effort failed, and bin Laden began to focus heavily on Egypt, as well as Saudi Arabia, and became directly involved with the Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ). Bin Laden also became involved in attacks and attempted attacks in Algeria and Yemen. His ties to extremist movements went far beyond Saudi Arabia and his anger against the United States. As a result, a number of reports suggest that Egypt and the United States cooperated with Saudi Arabia in pressuring the Sudan to the point where bin Laden had to leave for Afghanistan in 1996.

It was at this point bin Laden went to Afghanistan, first to Kabul and then to the center of Mullah Omar and the Taliban’s operations in Kandahar in 1997. He again broadened his targets, with one key change of major possible relevance to 9/11. He set up camps that trained a variety of militants, including the training of Pakistani militants to fight in Kashmir, evidently with the direct support of the Pakistani ISI.

At the same time, bin Laden sharpened his focus on the United States. As virtually every history of bin Laden notes, bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, (a leader of Egyptian Islamic Jihad), co-signed a fatwa (religious edict) declaring:

> [t]he ruling to kill the Americans and their allies civilians and military—is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it, in order to liberate the al-Aqsa Mosque (in Jerusalem) and the holy mosque (in Makka) from their grip, and in order for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim. This is in accordance with the words of Almighty Allah, ‘and fight the pagans all together as they fight you all together,’ and 'fight them until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in Allah.'

Osama bin Laden also gave the United States all too clear a tangible level of strategic warning as to how serious his attacks could be when al Qaeda carried out truck bomb attacks on the United States Embassies in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and Nairobi, Kenya. The United States responded by trying to have his assets seized, offering a $5 million reward, sanctioning his execution, and launching cruise missiles against his training facility. Bin Laden and key al Qaeda operatives and coordinators also seem to have had responsibility for the attack on the USS Cole in Yemen in 2000 (See the 9/11 Commission Report, pp. 152-153, 190-197).
There is no detailed public record of U.S. efforts to work with Saudi Arabia and other states to deal with bin Laden during this period, but it scarcely seems possible that such efforts did not occur well before 9/11. This is why providing an official record of the full chronology of such U.S. and Saudi cooperation from the first reports of possible bin Laden attacks on U.S. troop targets in the Gulf in 1992 to the actual 9/11 attack is so relevant in putting Saudi government efforts in context.

Certainly, focusing on the fact that Saudi Arabia did not want a potentially charismatic political prisoner back in the Kingdom in 1996, or focusing on later efforts like those of Prince Turki—then head of Saudi Intelligence—to have the Taliban bring bin Laden under control in the period before 9/11 is not enough. It can only tell only part of the story, can only provide a limited window into bin Laden’s ability to sponsor the 9/11 attacks, and can only provide part of the picture of any given government’s responsibility for the attacks.

The 9/11 Commission Report, for example, describes Saudi efforts to bring bin Laden under control after the August 1998 U.S. missile strikes on al Qaeda targets in Afghanistan following the al Qaeda attacks on the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania strikes as follows,

For a brief moment, it had seemed as if the August strikes might have shocked the Taliban into thinking of giving up bin Laden. On August 22, the reclusive Mullah Omar told a working-level State Department official that the strikes were counterproductive but added that he would be open to a dialogue with the United States on bin Laden’s presence in Afghanistan. Meeting in Islamabad with William Milam, the U.S. ambassador to Pakistan, Taliban delegates said it was against their culture to expel someone seeking sanctuary but asked what would happen to bin Laden should he be sent to Saudi Arabia.

Yet in September 1998, when the Saudi emissary, Prince Turki, asked Mullah Omar whether he would keep his earlier promise to expel bin Laden, the Taliban leader said no. Both sides shouted at each other, with Mullah Omar denouncing the Saudi government. Riyadh then suspended its diplomatic relations with the Taliban regime (Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and the United Arab Emirates were the only countries that recognized the Taliban as the legitimate government of Afghanistan). Crown Prince Abdullah told President Clinton and Vice President Gore about this when he visited Washington in late September. His account confirmed reports that the U.S. government had received independently. (9/11 Commission Report, pp. 121-122)

The 9/11 Commission Report does go on to note a lack of Saudi government cooperation of allowing U.S. experts to directly interrogate prisoners in Saudi custody in 1997-1998, but does not put this in the full context of the tensions in U.S. and Saudi security relations at the time.

Furthermore, it later notes that, “The Saudi government, which had a long and close relationship with Pakistan and provided it oil on generous terms, was already pressing Sharif with regard to the Taliban and bin Laden. A senior State Department official concluded that Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah put “a tremendous amount of heat” on the Pakistani prime minister during the prince’s October 1998 visit to Pakistan” (p. 123). It also does not identify the source of other aid given by “friendly government” for security reasons (p.128-129).
The Limits to the Coverage of the Original 9/11 Commission Report

More broadly, it is critical to remember that the 9/11 Commission Report focused on the chain of events that led to 9/11. It did not address the connection between U.S. support of Afghan rebels against the former Soviet Union, the full nature of the role Pakistan played in implementing that support, or the extent to which the U.S. government ignored the fact that Pakistan deliberately used these U.S. resources to support Islamist extremists that it felt would give Pakistan influence over Afghanistan (see the 9/11 Commission Report, pp. 122-126, 182-184, 206-207). The 9/11 report never addressed the role of Pakistan’s ISI in supporting extremist movements and terrorists before or after 9/11—a role that has been a critical problem for the United States during the entire war in Afghanistan.

More arguably, it is unclear that the original report fully examined all the links that Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, “the principal architect of the 9/11 attacks” and other key figures had to other organizations and countries in what the report describes as his “rather tortuous path to eventual membership in al Qaeda” (9/11 Commission Report, pp. 145-153)

The narrow focus of the 9/11 Commission Report also ensured that it did not address the overall patterns of support for bin Laden, al Qaeda, and other violent Islamist extremist movements from other regional states, their officials, members of their large royal families, and private individuals.

There is also enough official and media reporting on the broader efforts of the U.S. intelligence community, and the financial counterterrorism efforts of agencies like the U.S. Treasury, to indicate that some unofficial support for bin Laden and al Qaeda came from a broad range of regional countries—some of which made fewer and/or slower efforts to control these efforts than Saudi Arabia.

Saudi efforts need to be in this broader context. It is also particularly important to have a declassified summary of the current knowledge of the ties between bin Laden’s operatives in Saudi Arabia that are not fully developed in the 9/11 Commission Report and its sections that partly address the issues evidently laid out in the 28 pages. Sections like: “Dissent Within the al Qaeda Leadership (pp. 250-252.); the flights of Saudi nationals (pp. 329-330); and the role of Iraq, which does not address the role of other countries (pp. 334-336).

The Congress and Executive Branch should work together to provide a full update of the portions of the 9/11 Commission Report that deal with Saudi efforts to control bin Laden, and deal with the problems raised by al Qaeda, before 9/11.

Saudi Arabia’s Role as An Ally

It is equally critical to provide an evaluation of the role Saudi Arabia has played as an ally and strategic partner. Focusing on 9/11 alone is not enough. The U.S. also needs to focus on the extent to which the Saudi government has been a strategic partner to the United States, has fought its own fight in counterterrorism, and been a partner with the United States in counterterrorism. Once again, it is absurd to try to hold an entire government liable for the actions of few individuals—somewhat equivalent to saying that
the U.S. government should be liable for the various Islamist extremist attacks on its own soil.

**U.S. Government Statements Describing the U.S.-Saudi Strategic Partnership**

A U.S. State Department “Factsheet”—issued on March 1, 2016—highlights this partnership. It is entitled “U.S. Security Cooperation With Saudi Arabia,” and its states that,

Saudi Arabia plays a crucial role in maintaining security in the Middle East, due to its economic, political, and cultural importance and its strategic location. Given the complex and dynamic security challenges facing the region, including countering violent extremism from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant as well as other extremist groups, the United States will continue to work with Saudi Arabia to support counterterrorism efforts and a shared interest in regional stability. In addition, building on the May 14, 2015 Camp David Summit, we are working with the Gulf Cooperation Council to increase cooperation on maritime security, military preparedness, arms transfers, cybersecurity, and counterterrorism. Toward that end, the United States will continue to collaborate with Saudi Arabia to improve training for special operations and counterterrorism forces, integrate air and missile defense systems, strengthen cyber defenses, and bolster maritime security.

Through foreign military sales, the United States has supported three key security assistance organizations in the Kingdom. The U.S. Military Training Mission provides training and advisory services and administers the U.S. military cooperation program with the Saudi Ministry of Defense. The Office of the Program Management-Saudi Arabian National Guard assists in the modernization of the Ministry of the National Guard. The Office of Program Management-Ministry of Interior supports critical infrastructure protection and public security. Since the 1950s, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has also played a vital role in military and civilian construction in Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia is the United States’ largest FMS customer, with nearly $100 billion in active FMS cases.

- In November 2015, the United States approved a possible FMS case to Saudi Arabia for air-to-ground munitions and associated equipment, parts and logistical support for an estimated cost of $1.29 billion.
- In October 2015, the United States approved a possible FMS to Saudi Arabia for Multi-Mission Surface Combatant ships and associated equipment, parts and logistical support for an estimated cost of $11.25 billion.
- In December 2011, the United States finalized our largest international defense sale in history — worth approximately $29.4 billion — to Saudi Arabia. This sale included 84 advanced F-15SA fighter aircraft and updates to the Kingdom’s existing 70 F-15S aircraft.
- Other large programs include 36 AH-64D Block III Apache helicopters, as well as ammunition for the Royal Saudi Land Forces; 24 AH-64D Block III Apache helicopters and 72 UH-60M Blackhawk helicopters for the Ministry of the National Guard; and numerous PATRIOT air defense systems and upgrades. These sales promote our commitment to stability in the region and to Saudi Arabia’s defense development.
- Most recently, the U.S. Government has made plans to sell Saudi Arabia 10 MH-60R multi-mission helicopters, 600 Patriot Advanced Capability-3 missiles, and more than $500 million in air-dropped munitions and ammunition.

As a result of U.S. security assistance, the Kingdom has foiled numerous terrorist attempts against Saudi and foreign targets, and contributed to coalition operations against ISIL in Syria. The United States remains committed to providing the Saudi armed forces with the equipment, training, and
follow-on support necessary to protect Saudi Arabia, and the region, from the destabilizing effects of terrorism and other threats.


**U.S. Government Statements Describing the U.S.-Saudi Partnership in Counterterrorism**

Similarly, the latest U.S. State Department Country Report on Terrorism describes the Saudi role in counterterrorism and its partnership with the U.S. as follows:

**Overview:** For the first time in several years, al-Qa’ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), based in Yemen, was able to conduct a successful attack on Saudi soil with a July raid on the Wudayyah Border Crossing and Ministry of the Interior (MOI) General Investigation Directorate (Mabahith) office in Sharurah (near the Saudi-Yemeni border), which resulted in the death of four Saudi security officers. AQAP continued efforts to inspire sympathizers to support, finance, or engage in conflicts outside of Saudi Arabia and encouraged individual acts of terrorism within the Kingdom.

In addition to facing the enduring threat from AQAP, Saudi counterterrorism efforts were increasingly focused on the threat posed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), as well as Saudi citizens returning from fighting in Syria. The Saudi government continued domestic and bilateral efforts to build, augment, and refine its capacity to counter terrorism and extremist ideologies in the Kingdom while increasing participation in international counterterrorism conferences and engagements. Saudi Arabia continued to maintain a robust counterterrorism relationship with the United States and supported enhanced bilateral cooperation to ensure the safety of both U.S. and Saudi citizens within Saudi territories and abroad. Saudi Arabia stood as a member of the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL, taking military action in support of coalition efforts.

The Saudi government took a zero-tolerance stance on ISIL by condemning the organization’s activities and participating in Global Coalition military action to counter the group in Syria and Iraq. Its external action against ISIL was complemented by an aggressive campaign by both official clerics and Saudi King Abdullah to discredit the group and condemn their activities as acts of terrorism. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia welcomed UN Security Council Resolutions 2170 and 2178, expanding existing counterterrorism programs and rhetoric to address the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters, and leveraged terrorist finance provisions of its Law for Crimes of Terrorism and Terrorist-Financing (CT Law) to combat funding of violent extremist groups in Iraq and Syria.

**2014 Terrorist Incidents:** Several attacks on both Saudi nationals and Westerners occurred, despite Saudi efforts to detect and disrupt terrorist activity.

- On July 4, the most organized of the incidents, carried out by AQAP, targeted a Saudi border checkpoint in Sharurah near the Yemeni border, which resulted in the death of four Saudi security officers and five AQAP assailants.
- On October 14, there were two shooting events involving Western targets, including one targeting two American contractors working in Saudi Arabia who were shot at a gas station in Riyadh by a dual Saudi/U.S. national. There were indications that extremist propaganda influenced the attacker, a former employee of the victim’s organization.
- On November 3, a group of gunmen killed five Saudi nationals and wounded nine others in the town of al-Dalwah in Saudi Arabia’s Eastern Province. The Saudi government has alleged that the gunmen had ties to ISIL.
On November 22, a Danish national survived being shot three times by three assailants who were arrested by Saudi authorities on December 11. Initial Saudi investigations determined that the three Saudi attackers had unspecified links to ISIL.

In all cases, the Saudi government worked closely with the United States to clarify the circumstances regarding these attacks and responded quickly to ensure proper security measures were in place to better secure U.S. installations and interests.

**Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security:** In February, Saudi Arabia’s robust legal counterterrorism apparatus was bolstered by the introduction of a new counterterrorism law containing 41 articles that further refined existing counterterrorism laws. Human rights activists have criticized the counterterrorism law, claiming that an overly-broad definition of terrorism greatly inhibits freedom of expression and association. Saudi Arabia has a specialized criminal court for handling counterterrorism cases; it was also used in 2014 to try human rights defenders.

Throughout 2014, Saudi Arabia continued its efforts to disrupt terrorist activities in the Kingdom by tracking, arresting, and prosecuting terrorist suspects. The Saudi General Investigations Directorate, also known as the Mabahith, is responsible for conducting counterterrorism investigations in the Kingdom and, upon its discretion, will cooperate with other elements of the Saudi government to further investigations into specific cases. Once the investigation is complete, the case is transferred to the Special Investigations and Public Prosecutions Office in the Saudi Ministry of Justice for the duration of the trial. The Saudi government continued its programs to improve physical border security through the employment of biometric systems, aerial reconnaissance, thermal imaging, and remote unattended sensors along the border region, especially considering the deteriorating security situation with neighbors Yemen and Iraq. Saudi Arabia’s MOI hosted the 17th Annual International Conference and Exhibition for Industrial Security, Fire, and Occupational Safety and Health in Riyadh in early November, which focused on strengthening industrial security practices and coordination between the government and private sectors to protect key infrastructure from terrorist attacks.

Neighborhood police units engaged and worked directly with community members in Saudi Arabia, encouraging citizens to provide tips and information about suspected terrorist activity. The government offered rewards for information on terrorists, and Saudi security services made several announcements throughout the year pertaining to the arrest of AQAP militants and supporters, as well as the successful disruption of a more than 70-member ISIL cell active in Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia continued to cooperate with the United States to prevent acts of terrorism both through engagement in bilateral programs and through information exchange agreements with the United States. Despite the absence of a bilateral mutual legal assistance treaty, Post’s Legal Attaché office brokered and enhanced direct engagement between Department of Justice Office of International Affairs and MOI’s Department of Legal Affairs and International Cooperation. This year witnessed the first case in which Saudi Arabia produced certified bank records in response to a mutual legal assistance request.

**Countering the Financing of Terrorism:** Saudi Arabia is a member of the Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force, a Financial Action Task Force (FATF)-style regional body, and its financial intelligence unit is a member of the Egmont Group of Financial Intelligence Units. The Saudi government affirmed its commitment to combating terrorist fundraising and sought to further establish itself as a regional leader in disrupting terrorist finance efforts in the Kingdom. It continued to provide specialized training programs for bankers, prosecutors, judges, customs officers, and other officials from government departments and agencies as part of its efforts to maintain financial programs designed to combat terror financing. The Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency (SAMA) has standing requirements to all Saudi financial institutions to implement all the FATF Recommendations regarding money laundering and terrorist finance. The February 2014 counterterrorism law further outlined the Saudi government’s ability to combat terrorist financing. Despite these efforts, however, foreign charities with suspected links to terrorist groups continued to leverage social media to solicit funds from Saudi donors, a trend the Saudi government worked to combat. In 2014, the FATF decided to enable a small expansion of
membership, and the Kingdom was selected as a candidate for potential membership. For further information on money laundering and financial crimes, see the 2014 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR), Volume 2, Money Laundering and Financial Crimes: [http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/index.htm](http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/index.htm).

**Regional and International Cooperation:** Saudi Arabia cooperated regionally and internationally on counterterrorism issues, including by participating in the Global Counterterrorism Forum. Saudi Arabia has been a member of the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism and the Proliferation Security Initiative since 2008; Saudi Arabia is also a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which itself is a member of the FATF. Saudi officials issued statements encouraging enhanced cooperation among GCC and Arab League states on counterterrorism issues, and the Saudi government hosted international counterterrorism conferences on subjects including countering violent extremist ideology and combating terrorist financing. In April 2014, the Saudi government participated in the U.S.-GCC Strategic Cooperation Forum Task Force on Counterterrorism and Border Security.

**Countering Radicalization to Violence and Violent Extremism:** As part of its strategy to counter violent extremism, the Saudi government focused on increasing public awareness campaigns and conducting outreach, counter-radicalization, and rehabilitation programs. Some of these efforts involved seminars that refuted radical Islamic interpretation and ideology. Public awareness campaigns aimed at reinforcing the values of the Islamic faith and educating Saudi citizens about the dangers of extremism and terrorism. Methods used included advertisements and programs on television, in schools and mosques, and at sporting events. The Saudi government expanded these programs to address the rising threat to youth from recruitment efforts from groups like ISIL and to dissuade its citizens from engaging as foreign fighters in Syria.

The Ministry of Interior continued to operate its flagship de-radicalization program (the Sakina Campaign for Dialogue), as well as its extensive prison rehabilitation program to reduce recidivism among former inmates. The Saudi government also continued its ongoing program to modernize the educational curriculum, including textbooks used in religious training criticized for intolerance of other religious traditions. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs continued to re-educate imams, prohibiting them from incitement of violence, and continued to monitor mosques and religious education.


**Saudi Government Statements Describing the Saudi Role in Counterterrorism**

It also seems relevant to evaluate the Saudi government’s side of the story, and its claims. If we are to release any report with unsubstantiated claims about senior officials or members of the royal family, they should be matched by an official and substantiated discussion of the role Saudi Arabia has played in counterterrorism—before and after 9/11—by senior officials from the King down to the Ministers of the Interior, the heads of Saudi intelligence, and within the Saudi security services.

There should be some evaluation of the repeated Saudi government claims that it has been a key partner in the fight against terrorism from the period before 9/11 to the present. One illustration is the claims made by in a recent Saudi Embassy fact sheet:

International terrorism threatens the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, its allies and the global community. Defeating the terrorist enemy requires sound policies, concerted government efforts and international cooperation.

**Combating Terrorism:** The late King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz called for the
establishment of an international center to combat terrorism more than 10 years ago out of his firm belief that terrorism can be most effectively fought when nations work closely together in all areas, including the sharing of information.

- In 2005, Saudi Arabia hosted the historic Counter-Terrorism International Conference in Riyadh where more than 55 countries participated and during which the proposal for the establishment of the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCCT) was unanimously adopted. In 2008, King Abdullah pledged $10 million to the United Nations to establish the Centre and, in 2011, Saudi Arabia signed an agreement with the U.N. to launch the UNCCT. In 2014, King Abdullah provided the Centre with a donation of $100 million to enhance its capabilities and effectiveness in helping countries combat terrorism.

- In 2014, a royal decree on counterterrorism was issued. The decree reinforced that acts of terrorism, including membership in terrorist organizations, and participation in hostilities outside Saudi Arabia, will not be tolerated.

- In late 2015, Saudi Arabia announced the formation of a multi-state Islamic military coalition to combat terrorism, with a joint operations center based in Riyadh.

- Saudi Arabia continues to undertake effective initiatives in support of countries combating terrorism around the world. Examples include:
  - Yemen – Saudi Arabia is the largest donor of aid to Yemen. In 2015, Saudi Arabia responded to an appeal for assistance from Yemeni President Hadi by forming an international coalition and launching military operations in support of the people of Yemen and the legitimate government of Yemen.
  - Syria – Saudi Arabia is among the coalition nations of Operation Inherent Resolve conducting airstrikes against Daesh (ISIL) in Syria.
  - Iraq – Saudi Arabia has contributed $500 million to the Iraqi people, regardless of religion or ethnicity, in order to help the Iraqi people overcome the hardships they have endured and to help thwart the spread of extremism.
  - Saudi Arabia has also provided financial support to other countries, including Egypt, Jordan, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Mauritania to help enhance counter-terrorism capabilities.

**Combating Terror Financing:** Terror networks thrive on illicit funding, often hiding behind charitable organizations. To combat this threat, Saudi Arabia has put in place one of the world’s strictest financial control systems to prevent funds going to support terrorism.

- Saudi Arabia, the United States and Italy are co-chairs of the Counter ISIL Finance Group (CIFG) The CIFG was established in 2015 with the aim of enhancing the sharing of information and developing coordinated countermeasures to disrupt ISIL’s financing.

- All Saudi financial institutions have implemented the 40 recommendations of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) of the G-8 regarding money laundering and the eight recommendations regarding terror financing.

- Saudi charities are prohibited from transferring money abroad. The collection of
cash contributions in mosques and public places is prohibited.

- The Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency (SAMA) offers programs and has implemented a technical program to train judges and investigators on legal matters involving terrorism financing and money laundering methods, international requirements for financial secrecy, and methods exercised by criminals to exchange information.

- Saudi Arabia works closely with the United States, Britain, France, Italy, Canada, Australia and other allies to combat terror financing on a global scale.

**Overcoming Extremism:** As home of the Two Holy Mosques of Islam, Saudi Arabia will not tolerate extremists who have misused religion to advance perverted agendas. Saudi officials and religious scholars have publicly and unequivocally condemned terrorist acts, and have aggressively sought to discredit deviant terrorist ideologies.

- Saudi Arabia has launched a nationwide effort through the Kingdom’s Ministry of Islamic Affairs to ensure mosques have not been used as sources of extremism. The Senior Council of Ulema (religious scholars) has issued a fatwa (religious edict) prohibiting terrorism and declaring any support for terrorism is a violation of Islamic law.

- To combat the spread and appeal of extremist ideologies among the population, Saudi Arabia initiated a Counter-Radicalization Program. This effort educates at-risk groups about the dangers of violent extremism and provides positive, alternative outlets.

- 2011, The King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID) was founded in Vienna to promote mutual understanding among followers of different religions and cultures around the world.


**Establishing the Facts**

A veto is better than nothing, but it cannot build transparency and trust. Only the U.S. government can hope to gather enough evidence — including classified and sensitive data—and establish the facts. It is all too clear that releasing the 28 pages out of context did nothing to establish those facts.

A successful veto alone is likely to fuel more conspiracy theories, and a failed veto is likely to enrich a handful of lawyers and professional terrorism alarmists and leave the families of those who suffered or died from the attacks with a false sense of closure. A focus on the veto will also will leave broad doubts in the United States about the role Saudi Arabia plays as critical strategic partner while it creates create anger and hostility in Saudi Arabia against the United States. The end result will be to feed the kind of Al Qaeda and ISIS propaganda that tries to make the United States as the enemy of Islam and Muslims.
As Americans, we are often rightly critical of the rule of law in other nations, including Saudi Arabia. We also stress the goal of holding everyone innocent until proven guilty, and of surfacing all of the evidence in a given case.

At present, there seems to be all too great a risk that the Congress has acted on unsubstantiated charges in ways that assume the Saudis are guilty until proven innocent. This can only seem to prove that guilt to many regardless of the full truth, while it both threatens a key U.S. strategic partnership, and feeds extremist charges that the United States is intolerant of Islam and other cultures. It will both undermine U.S. strategic interest and do so in ways that actually add to the anger and distrust that feed extremism and terrorism.

The U.S. should not conceal the facts or any real element of guilt. At the same time, it has a clear obligation to establish all the facts that can establish innocence as well as guilt, and to put the history of one key part of the events of 9/11 into a full and proper perspective.