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American ideals. Universal values.

BLUEPRINT

How to Build a More Sustainable and Mutually Beneficial Relationship with Saudi Arabia

BLUEPRINT FOR U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

MARCH 2015

Human Rights First

American ideals. Universal values.

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"Too often, we have failed to enforce international norms when it's inconvenient to do so. And we have not confronted forcefully enough the intolerance, sectarianism, and hopelessness that feeds violent extremism."

"There should be no more tolerance of so-called clerics who call upon people to harm innocents because they're Jewish, or because they're Christian, or because they're Muslim."

"It's time to end the hypocrisy of those who accumulate wealth through the global economy and then siphon funds to those who teach children to tear it down."

President Barack Obama,
United Nations General Assembly,
September 24, 2014

"My argument to any partner that we have is that you are better off if you've got a strong civil society and you've got democratic legitimacy and you are respectful of human rights."

President Barack Obama,
The Vox Conversation,
February 9, 2015

David Weinberg, Foundation for Defense of Democracies,
was the principal author of this Blueprint

Introduction

The United States is not taking Saudi Arabia's outsized responsibility for human rights abuses within or beyond the kingdom's borders seriously enough. President Barack Obama did not raise the issue in his meeting last year with the late King Abdullah.[1] On his way to meet the new Saudi monarch, King Salman, in January 2015 the President remarked, "Sometimes we have to balance our need to speak to them about human rights issues with immediate concerns that we have in terms of countering terrorism or dealing with regional stability."[2] He did not mention that Saudi Arabia's policies (denying rights and freedoms at home while leading a vigorous, region-wide effort to push back against popular calls for better governance) have themselves contributed to regional instability and undermined counterterrorism efforts. Such policies harm U.S. interests and those of the people of Saudi Arabia and the region as a whole.

Non-violent Saudi government critics and human rights defenders believe that America has abandoned them during a particularly "dark period" of abuses by Riyadh.[3]

Even as recently as 2011, Saudi Arabia was more open to public discourse and debate about its domestic policies. The kingdom is now experiencing an authoritarian winter at home and encouraging one abroad while enabling radical clerics to promote sectarian violence throughout the region. These are serious challenges which impede the United States from achieving the objectives of its military campaign against the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and which work against American interests in many parts of the region.

Saudi Arabia is not alone in being a problematic ally in the fight against ISIL. Other key allies such as Egypt, Bahrain, or the UAE also have troubling human rights records, but Saudi Arabia's wealth and unique influence among the world's Muslims make the force of its example especially important to regional events.

The accession to the throne of King Salman, succeeding his half-brother Abdullah who died on January 23 at the estimated age of ninety, is unlikely to change the course of Saudi policy.[4] Since the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011 overturned the authoritarian regional order, long supported by Riyadh, the kingdom has used its influence to restore authoritarian rule in Egypt and Bahrain and to roll back the electoral gains of Muslim Brotherhood associated political movements. Saudi Arabia's more repressive policies have largely been the responsibility of its Minister of the Interior, Mohammed bin Nayef, who was recently selected by Salman to be his Deputy Crown Prince, second in line to the throne. Bin Nayef has also been promoted by the new ruler to run the country's new Council of Political and Security Affairs.[5]

Mohammed bin Nayef is a leader in Saudi Arabia's counterterrorism efforts and has been a trusted interlocutor of the United States and other western governments in developing a multilateral response to the threat from the rise of ISIL in Syria and Iraq. However, he is also the Saudi official with the most direct authority over human rights abuses at home and in Bahrain. As such, U.S. officials should do more to ensure their valued ties with Bin Nayef do not deter them from addressing Saudi rights abuses.

Riyadh has taken advantage of this new security environment to implement draconian

regulations on countering terrorism that criminalize and deter peaceful dissent. These new laws seem tailored to obstruct the legitimate activities of independent human rights activists and have been used accordingly.[6] Meanwhile, hardline clerics are granted impunity by the state to propagate the sorts of hatred against other sects and religions that encourage Sunni sectarian extremism and legitimize terrorism by ISIL, al Qaeda, and other such groups.

Clamping down on peaceful dissent while giving free rein to extremist incitement is not unique in the region, but it is particularly worrisome in Saudi Arabia. As the birthplace of Islam, Saudi Arabia portrays itself as the leader of the world's Muslims. It has enormous resources to amplify the messages it sends, including the world's largest conventional oil reserves. It therefore has considerable geopolitical influence.

If these trends persist, they will also make it more difficult for the kingdom to navigate its own domestic challenges, potentially causing significant harm to the United States and the global economy in the medium to long term.[7]

If the United States fails to address the underlying sources of radicalization that emerge from Saudi Arabia, it could eventually win the battle against ISIL but lose the broader war against violent extremism.

The Challenges

Saudi Arabia currently perpetrates and facilitates human rights abuses that should worry American policy makers in three broad areas. First, Riyadh's policies at home are destroying the domestic constituencies required to achieve a stable future with the rule of law and economic inclusion. For example, the kingdom is systematically destroying its nascent community of human rights defenders.

Second, Riyadh is continuing to promote extremist ideologies that underpin recruitment for terrorist organizations such as al Qaeda and ISIL on regional and global levels. Dealing with this problem requires the urgent removal of hateful content from state textbooks and putting an end to clerics engaging in speech that incites violence and dehumanizes members of other religious groups, particularly Shi'ites. Further, Saudi Arabia has spent tens of billions of dollars exporting this brand of Salafist Islam around the world, with one Saudi magazine estimating that the government's efforts wholly or partially financed the construction of 210 Islamic centers; 1,500 mosques; 202 colleges; and nearly 2,000 religious schools for children in "every corner of the world."[8]

Third, Saudi authorities are promoting a renewed wave of authoritarianism and intolerance in numerous parts of the Middle East. Saudi Arabia has been in the lead of a group of "counter-revolutionary powers" who have "rolled back the electoral and participatory gains of the Arab Spring in Egypt just as they clamped down on protest movements within the Gulf itself."[9] Although it stands opposed to Bashar al-Assad's dictatorship in Syria, it has engaged in the Syrian conflict as part of its rivalry with Iran in a manner that has contributed to the elevation of sectarianism between Sunni and Shi'ite Islam. The ruinous influence of heightened sectarianism has been a major contributor to mounting instability in the Gulf, the Levant, and South Asia. In addition, Riyadh has been enabling authoritarian abuses in Egypt and Bahrain—and to a lesser extent in Oman, Jordan, and Morocco.

AT-RISK CONSTITUENCIES FOR MODERATION, RULE OF LAW, AND ECONOMIC INCLUSION

Saudi Arabia is facing an unavoidable test of its stability in the coming decades. Skyrocketing domestic oil consumption is expected to dramatically reduce state revenue, while the government struggles to keep pace with women and youth entering the job market. Its population increasingly expects good governance. Saudi Arabia is already expected to run a $38.6 billion deficit in 2015, its largest shortfall ever.[10]

In order to overcome these challenges, Saudi Arabia needs to encourage and enable its citizens to organize for better governance, and to permit more open discussion of the challenges the country faces. It needs a state bounded by the rule of law and a functioning labor market in which youth, women, and foreign workers are encouraged to use their talents to foster economic growth and diversification away from oil-based sources of income. And Riyadh needs to provide a more palatable alternative than the vision of society offered to Saudi youth by violent extremist groups.

Yet Saudi Arabia is currently inhibiting or destroying the constituencies required to achieve such necessary reforms. For example, it is engaged in a systematic campaign against human rights defenders. Nonviolent activists who challenge the kingdom's practices of intolerance toward women and other religious traditions are systematically persecuted by the state, particularly the Interior Ministry and religious police.

Eleven human rights activists who helped found and lead the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA) starting in 2009 are either behind bars or facing lengthy prison sentences on vague charges such as "breaking allegiance" to the ruler or "questioning the integrity of officials."[11] The founders of a Saudi website for fostering political debate, Ra'if Badawi and Suad al-Shammari, have both been jailed for offending Saudi religious authorities.[12] Badawi has been sentenced to 10 years in jail and 1,000 lashes for purportedly "insulting Islam," the first 50 of which were publicly administered on January 9th.[13] A former imam of Saudi Arabia's state-controlled Grand Mosque reportedly helped instigate the campaign for al-Shammari to be punished for exercising her right to freedom of speech.[14] She was released from jail at the end of January 2015 after signing a pledge "to reduce her activities."[15]

Women's rights defenders Fawzia al-Oyouni and Wajeha al-Huwaider were sentenced to prison on charges of "inciting a woman against her husband" for trying to protect an individual they believed was being beaten and starved by her spouse.[16] Women's rights activists Loujain al-Hathloul and Maysa al-Amoudi were arrested in early December and referred to a special tribunal for trying terrorism offenses simply for trying to drive to their homes in Saudi Arabia from the UAE border.[17] They were released from prison after 73 days, but there is no indication the case against them was dropped.[18]

Sunni and Shi'ite advocates of equal rights for Shi'ite citizens of Saudi Arabia, such as Mikhlif al-Shammari and Fadhel al-Manasif, have been convicted and jailed.[19] In the last six months, at least four prominent lawyers who called for greater accountability by the Ministry of Justice have been convicted on questionable charges for their activism.[20]

Like Hathloul and Amoudi, many of these activists have had their trials sent to Saudi Arabia's terrorism-focused Specialized Criminal Court, where they receive even harsher

sentences for nonviolent activities than they would have before ordinary criminal courts.[21] New laws are having a chilling effect upon peaceful dissent and stifling much-needed civil society mobilization.

This is a serious problem for Saudi Arabia because it undermines prospects for the emergence of an accountable, responsive and ultimately stable government. Saudi Arabia needs much clearer guidelines to protect the rights to freedom of association. When such rights are suppressed, as President Obama has observed, "it fuels grievances and a sense of injustice that over time can fuel instability or extremism."[22] Saudi citizens must be more fully included in the coming challenges. To make that possible, advancing human rights protections within the kingdom is a necessity.

The State Department reports that restrictions on freedom of assembly and association in Saudi Arabia are "pervasive,"[23] and new counterterror regulations threaten to treat any sort of unwelcome interaction with foreign governments, however peaceful, as a form of terrorism.[24] Citizens who seek to post shared views on the internet run the risk of jail time on charges of forming an unlicensed organization.

The United States has tended to ignore the fact that Saudi Arabia's conduct in many ways resembles that of the extremist organizations which the two states are supposed to be fighting together. The kingdom continues to carry out public beheadings, and thought crimes such as blasphemy, conversion from Islam, and perceived acts of sorcery all formally warrant the death penalty. For instance, in February 2015 a Saudi court in Hafar al-Batin sentenced a young man to death on charges of apostasy.[25]

The criminalization of such offenses has empowered religious extremists who claim the power to judge and enforce religious orthodoxy. Additionally, Saudi Arabia has recently jailed religious prisoners and continues to demolish non-Wahhabi religious shrines, including those with great religious significance to many Muslims.[26]

Saudi Arabia has one of the world's largest gender gaps in terms of economic and political opportunities.[27] Only 13 percent of Saudi citizens in the workforce are women.[28] Abuse rates are stunning, with an estimated 45 percent of Saudi children having experienced physical abuse.[29] Government estimates of female spousal abuse range between 16 and 50 percent.[30] Saudi Arabia is the only country in the world where adult women are not permitted to drive, and the country's guardianship system constrains women's opportunities in numerous other spheres of life. The Saudi government has slowly been encouraging women to engage in economic activity outside the home, but remaining restrictions still keep women from contributing to the country's economic life and helping to address its medium-term demographic reckoning.

ENABLING AND EXPORTING SECTARIAN INCITEMENT

On the evening of November 3, 2014, gunmen targeted Shi'ite worshippers in the al-Ahsa region of Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province, killing eight and wounding thirteen. Many commentators have held up the event—which took place during Ashoura, a major Shi'ite religious festival of mourning—as a turning point for the kingdom's stance on sectarian relations.[31] Saudi Arabia swiftly rounded up the attackers and made some statements condemning the attacks.

However, the kingdom faces an entrenched culture of institutionalized discrimination and incitement against its Shi'ite minority. In a

country as influential as Saudi Arabia, religious incitement at home inevitably contributes to intolerance and human rights abuses abroad.

1. Sectarianism and the State

Shi'ite citizens of Saudi Arabia regularly report pervasive discrimination and have a long history of exclusion from administrative or political posts of authority.[32]

Like all Shi'ite worshippers in al-Ahsa, the victims in the November 2014 attack were forbidden from observing the holiday according to custom with a public procession.[33] Instead, they practiced their observance at a Shi'ite gathering hall called a *husseiniya*. Yet according to the *Wall Street Journal*, "when referring to the location of the attack, official [Saudi] statements avoided any mention of the word "husseiniya" out of a traditional reluctance to recognize Shi'ite places of worship."[34] The same day as the shootings, Saudi authorities sentenced a Sunni activist, Mikhlif al-Shammari, to two years in jail and 200 lashes for engaging in interfaith dialogue activities with Saudi Shi'a (it was not Shammari's first conviction of this sort).

The previous month, Saudi Arabia had sentenced to death Nimr al-Nimr—a cleric who emerged as the most prominent leader of the kingdom's Shi'ite protest movement as part of the Arab Spring—on vague, catch-all charges. Nimr has been careful to discourage violence, but his conviction validated the narrative of radical Shi'ite groups, which reacted to the cleric's sentencing by claiming credit for revenge attacks in Bahrain and Iraq.[35]

Saudi rehabilitation programs for reformed terrorists focus on dissuading jihadists from challenging the state while leaving unchallenged their *takfiri* beliefs about excommunicating Muslims whose practices they reject and hatred toward other religious groups.[36] The insufficiency of these programs is underscored by the news that a high proportion of individuals in a recent round-up of alleged ISIL agents earlier this year were graduates of these programs, as were 47 of the 77 individuals arrested in the immediate aftermath of the attack at al-Ahsa.[37]

Such results are relatively unsurprising given that the kingdom's religious affairs minister at the time had recently proclaimed that Islam is under attack from a "dangerous triad" of Christians, Jews, and "polytheists," a common derogatory term in the kingdom for Shi'ite Muslims.[38] This religious affairs minister was dismissed by Abdullah in December but reappointed by Salman in January.[39]

Saudi authorities continue to indoctrinate the country's youth with hateful ideas that dehumanize and encourage violence against other religious groups as well as Sunni Muslims who deviate from orthodox religious teaching. Official government textbooks from the 2013-2014 school year teach that LGBT individuals and converts from Islam should be executed and that women shaking hands with men or traveling unsupervised causes adultery and spreads moral corruption. Jews are depicted as inherently treacherous, and Christians as waging a modern-day crusade against Islam.[40]

Saudi Arabia has a consistent record of misleading U.S. officials on the state of its efforts to address the harmful, derogatory content of these textbooks.[41] In 2005 a broad range of top Saudi officials claimed that passages inciting hatred toward other religious groups had already been completely removed from school textbooks. When confronted with evidence to the contrary, they gave the United States a promise to remove such elements by 2008, information that was cited as part of the basis for granting the kingdom its first waiver

from penalties under the International Religious Freedom Act in 2006.[42] Saudi Arabia subsequently violated that assurance without penalties from Washington, and in 2013 it assured American officials again that the books would be completely fixed by 2014.[43]

Yet according to State Department reporting, even books that the Saudi Education Ministry claims have been fully revised include intolerant language, calling for the killing of apostates and the shunning of infidels, as well as promoting misinformation about the religious practices of Jews and Christians, as well as Shi'ite and Sufi Muslims.[44]

Books with hateful passages toward Christians and Jews from last school year have been found still in use by at least one Saudi-administered school in Europe.[45] Both Shi'ite citizens of Saudi Arabia and the kingdom's United Nations Ambassador in New York have indicated that this year's textbooks still contain passages that encourage sectarian divisiveness at the expense of Shi'ite Muslims.[46]

When it suits their purposes, Saudi authorities have demonstrated a capacity to swiftly revise official textbooks. In the fall of 2014, after complaints from some parents, the Education Ministry swiftly recalled the cover of one textbook when it discovered that it mistakenly featured stock footage of a cleric who turned out to be Shi'ite.[47] Unfortunately, the message conveyed by this episode was that ending religious chauvinism is not a priority for Saudi Arabia or its Ministry of Education.

This problem reverberates outside Saudi Arabia. International reporters have found that ISIL "circulates images of Wahhabi religious textbooks from Saudi Arabia in the schools it controls."[48] Further, Saudi Arabia is one of the top sources of extremist foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq, with their numbers estimated to be in the thousands.[49]

Western officials and intelligence sources indicated that before the removal of Prince Bandar from the kingdom's intelligence agency, the Saudi government let almost 1,000 individuals leave the country to join al Qaeda and ISIL in Syria. These included individuals who had been recently arrested or were facing travel bans, yet they flew out of Riyadh's main airport.[50] Sources in ISIL's stronghold of Raqqa have reported that all twelve judges who run the group's draconian court system there are Saudi nationals (and presumably graduates of Saudi Arabia's state-controlled education system).[51]

Another major faction in Syria, Jaish al-Islam, was reported in 2013 to be backed by the Saudi government.[52] Its leader explicitly advocated ethnic cleansing against Alawites and Shi'ite Muslims.[53] Additionally, a Saudi cleric in Syria who is closely aligned with al Qaeda, Abdullah al-Muhaysini, claims he was allowed to leave the kingdom for Syria in the fall of 2013 despite officially being subject to a Saudi travel ban.[54]

2. Facilitating Clerical Incitement

In testimony before Congress, Secretary of State Kerry praised a September declaration by the Saudi government's state-appointed Senior Ulema Council as a "vital" and "key part of th[e] strategy" against ISIL.[55] But in doing so, Secretary Kerry glossed over the statement's more problematic elements, which included an uncritical endorsement of Saudi educational curricula.[56]

Similarly, after Saudi Arabia's state-appointed Grand Mufti denounced ISIL, Kerry's deputy spokesperson described him as an example of "moderate Muslim voices,"[57] ignoring that he had previously called for demolishing every last

church in Arabia and for girls to be married as young as age ten.[58]

While Riyadh has aggressively pursued non-violent human rights defenders for what they post online, comparable scrutiny has not been applied to Saudi religious leaders who encourage intolerance or violence using the same media. The Saudi government reserves the right to dismiss radical clerics from the pulpit but typically does not use it with preachers who stop short of endorsing al Qaeda or targeting the state.[59] In fact, it often grants them special privileges, such as senior government posts, officially-endorsed speaking opportunities, or state-sanctioned access to the airwaves.

Within hours of the al-Ahsa attacks, the Saudi Minister of Culture and Information, Abdulaziz Khoja, announced that he was closing down *al-Wesal*, a Saudi-based Salafist television station noted for providing a platform to clerics who incite hatred against the region's Shi'a.[60] But instead of praising and helping to implement Khoja's initiative, the King announced the following day that Khoja had been relieved of his position at the ministry. The channel is still broadcasting throughout the region, including inside the kingdom.[61] Other Saudi-owned outlets notorious for promoting sectarian intolerance, such as the television station *al-Majd* and the news website *Lojainiat,* have also been permitted by the state to keep operating.[62]

In another prominent example, the head of Saudi Arabia's state-controlled Grand Mosque, which houses the holiest site in Islam, previously delivered a sermon there calling for God to "terminate" Jews, whom he called "the scum of humanity, the rats of the world, prophet killers, pigs, and monkeys."[63] Despite this background, he was appointed to his current position with the rank of minister by King Abdullah in 2012.[64]

On the day President Obama visited the kingdom to meet with Abdullah in 2014, another preacher at the Grand Mosque, Salah bin Humeid, delivered a hateful diatribe calling homosexuality an affliction that "seeks to strip man of his humanity," "violates the sanctity of Allah," and makes human beings "lower than a beast."[65] Bin Humeid was appointed as a personal adviser to King Abdullah with the rank of minister in 2012 and previously served in royally-appointed posts as chairman of the state's Supreme Judicial Council and president of its appointed legislature.[66] His sermon was internationally promoted as a multi-part news item by the kingdom's official news wire.

In recent years, some of the most influential Saudi clerics on social media have been Mohammed al-Arefe, Salman al-Oudah, Saleh al-Moghamsy, Saleh al-Fawzan, Safar al-Hawali, Saleh al-Luhaidan, and Aidh al-Qarni.[67] The state has done little to deter them from open support for extremism or sectarian intolerance at home and abroad. These individuals exemplify how the Saudi regime enables and even gives an official imprimatur to clerics who advocate for human rights abuses.

Arefe, who now has more than ten million followers on Twitter, has called Osama bin Laden a "sheikh... may his soul rest in peace" and insisted that "al Qaeda members... do not tolerate bloodshed."[68] He has been banned from Britain for encouraging extremism.[69] According to Human Rights Watch, on a 2013 visit to Cairo he described Shi'a as "non-believers who must be killed."[70] In a video broadcast on Egyptian television in 2010 and 2012, Arefe preached that "the desire to shed blood, to smash skulls, and to sever limbs for the sake of Allah and in defense of His religion, is, undoubtedly, an honor for the believer."[71]

Arefe was reportedly detained for several weeks this autumn, but evidently not for his religious incitement. Instead, CNN and other outlets suggested that he was taken in by Saudi authorities over statements posted on Twitter criticizing their poor handling of rail infrastructure for the *hajj* pilgrimage.[72]

Salman al-Oudah, who has more than five million Twitter followers, partnered with Arefe early on during Syria's civil war to promote relief fundraising through a Kuwaiti organization called the Revival of Islamic Heritage Society (RIHS), which has been blacklisted by the United States and United Nations on charges of providing material support to al Qaeda.[73] Oudah has also claimed on Gulf television that "the role of the Jews is... to practice deception and extortion" and that they use human blood for Passover *matzah* because it "brings them close to their false god."[74]

Saleh al-Fawzan and Saleh bin Mohammed al-Luhaidan were both appointed to four-year terms on the state's Senior Ulema Council in 2013.[75] *Reuters* reported in December 2014 that the council "is dominated by older conservatives such as Saleh al-Fawzan and Saleh al-Luhaidan, who once called for Muslim media owners who broadcast "depravity" to be executed."[76] Yet when King Salman restructured the Saudi government in January, the only member dismissed from the Ulema Council was a different individual considered a relative reformer.[77]

In comparison, Fawzan advocates slavery, insists that the sun revolves around the earth, and calls ISIL a creation of "Zionists, Crusaders, and Safavids."[78] For his part, Luhaidan allegedly also encouraged Muslim youth in a 2004 sermon to join the "jihad" in Iraq while he was serving as the chief justice of Saudi Arabia's Supreme Judicial Council.[79]

Saleh al-Moghamsy is a Saudi cleric with more than three and a half million followers on Twitter.[80] According to his website, he was appointed six years ago "as an official mufti on Channel One," a state-run Saudi channel on which he still hosts a yearly, multi-part special on interpreting the Quran.[81] In 2014 he told viewers that "the hatred of Jews toward Muslims is an eternal hatred," after which his Twitter account stated "Allah only gathered Jews in the land of Palestine to destroy them."[82] In 2012, he declared in an interview broadcasted by a state-owned Qatari channel that Osama bin Laden died with more "sanctity and honor in the eyes of Allah" than any non-Muslim.[83] King Salman previously led the board at a research center in Medina run by Moghamsy and even sponsored and attended a cultural festival Moghamsy organized after he made his controversial remarks about bin Laden.[84]

Another Saudi cleric with a prominent online presence, Safar al-Hawali, has reportedly urged holy war in Iraq and Israel, claiming that Jews were "transformed into pigs and apes."[85] Hawali has argued that non-Muslims should be expelled from the kingdom and generally shunned.[86] He also co-founded an anti-Western "resistance" group with a Qatari national who was recently blacklisted by the United States on charges of funding al Qaeda for more than a decade.

Aidh Abdullah al-Qarni, a Saudi preacher whose Facebook page has five million likes, has called the founders of Hamas holy warriors and called Jews in Israel "the brothers of apes and pigs, the murderers of the prophets."[87] After making these statements, he was appointed to the board of a foundation headed by Saudi Arabia's now-King Salman.[88] On January 10, 2015, al-Qarni thanked the Saudi ambassador to Indonesia for sponsoring his lecture at the

Istiqlal Mosque in Jakarta, the largest mosque in Southeast Asia.[89]

Several other top Saudi preachers are also worth noting in this regard:

Saad al-Buraik encouraged fundraising for Syria through RIHS and has more than one million followers on Twitter.[90] Buraik has reportedly called for "smashing the skulls" of those who take part in Arab Spring demonstrations, claimed that discrimination against Shi'a is their own fault, admonished Muslims not to cooperate with Christians or Jews, and called for kidnapping Israeli Jewish women as slaves.[91] According to his website, Buraik has lectured extensively internationally, served on the board of the World Association of Muslim Youth (a Salafist missionary organization close to Riyadh), and previously advised Saudi Arabia's late Crown Prince Sultan.[92]

Nasser al-Omar has more than one million followers on Twitter and has "accused Shi'ites of sowing 'strife, corruption and destruction among Muslims'."[93] Yet when he expressed such views via a petition in 2008, rather than punish him the Saudi government arrested a Shi'ite cleric who objected to al-Omar's hateful speech instead.[94] Omar has reportedly called for Sunnis to fight Shi'a in Iraq and endorsed the "holy warriors" of the Islamic Front (IF) in Syria to confront "two projects against the Umma: the Zionist-American project and the Safavid-Rejectionist project."[95] By this point in time it had already emerged that top leaders of IF had apparently engaged in war crimes in Syria and advocated ethnic cleansing against Alawites and Shi'a.[96]

Abdulaziz al-Fawzan is a Saudi preacher with more than one million Twitter followers who has accused the West of being behind the 9/11 attacks and plotting world domination.[97] He also called on Muslims to "hate" Christians as infidels and polytheists, and justified the 2004 Southeast Asia tsunami as divine punishment for allowing resorts where "especially at Christmas, fornication and sexual perversion of all kinds are rampant."[98]King Abdullah subsequently appointed him as a full-time member of the board of the kingdom's Human Rights Commission.[99]

Another prominent Saudi cleric with more than one million followers on Twitter, Awad Mohammed al-Qarni, offered $100,000 to "any Palestinian who will jail an Israeli soldier."[100] A prominent nephew of King Salman, Prince Khaled bin Talal, offered to match Qarni's proposal nine-fold, bringing the full proposed reward to $1 million.[101]

Khalid al-Ghamdi, a cleric and presenter on the Saudi-based international television station *al-Wesal*, set off a firestorm of controversy in Yemen in October 2014 when he posted a message on Twitter. In it, he declared "God is great. Enjoy watching," along with pictures of burnt and mangled bodies of Yemeni Shi'ite demonstrators who had been murdered in an al Qaeda suicide bombing.[102] He also reportedly posted pictures of beheaded Iraqi soldiers—whom he characterized as Iranian agents—calling the images "one of the most beautiful things my eyes have seen."[103]

In February 2015 the Riyadh branch of Saudi Arabia's Islamic Affairs ministry sponsored a series of lectures at a mosque in the capital named for King Salman's mother. Speakers included such clerics as Arefe, Buraik, Aidh al-Qarni, and a preacher who recently called on Gulf television for Allah to "destroy" Shi'a, Christians, Alawites, and Jews.[104]

ENABLING RESURGENT AUTHORITARIANISM ABROAD

Saudi Arabia is also using its influence to push for the restoration of authoritarian rule in several

states in the Middle East, pushing back the regional demands for more inclusive and participatory governance that characterized the Arab Spring protests of 2011. Egypt and Bahrain provide two clear examples of governments backed by Saudi Arabia that have restricted basic rights and freedoms, turning back protests for political reforms.

1. Egypt

These are dangerous times in Egypt, and the United States cannot afford to have its allies undermining efforts to encourage the Cairo government to cease its widespread violations of human rights. Nonetheless, the Saudis have been making common cause with Cairo in stamping out progress towards more inclusive, participatory government in Egypt. Unconditional financial support and robust political backing have helped the government of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi avoid meeting the conditions for human rights and political inclusiveness attached to U.S. foreign aid. The Saudis have also used their influence to pursue political objectives, such as dealing a blow to the Muslim Brotherhood and pressing for the release of former president and staunch Saudi ally Hosni Mubarak from prison.[105]

Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah was the first Arab leader to embrace President Mohammed Morsi's overthrow, just hours after it happened.[106] Then, two days after the most serious incident of mass unlawful killings in modern Egyptian history on August 14, 2013,[107] Abdullah stridently backed Egypt's new leaders, condemning international reactions as "fanning the fire of sedition" and "promoting... terrorism."[108] Within a week, Saudi Arabia's foreign minister explicitly threatened to replace any cuts in Western aid to Egypt.[109] By the end of August, the Saudi ambassador announced that his government was studying a comprehensive plan for private investment in Egypt to complement state aid.[110]

Following the U.S. suspension of some military aid and weapons transfers to Egypt in the fall of 2013, Abdullah's "main concern" in a meeting with Secretary Kerry was pushing the United States to change its Egypt policy.[111] One week later, Kerry participated in a trilateral meeting with Saudi and Emirati officials in which he agreed on "specific joint efforts" to back Egypt's economy.[112]

In the lead up to President Obama visiting Saudi Arabia in March 2014, it emerged that Riyadh hoped to persuade Washington to release its hold on sending Apache helicopters to Egypt.[113] Egypt figured prominently in the King's consultations with President Obama, and in less than a month the United States released the Apaches, even though Secretary of Defense Hagel admitted "we are not yet able to certify that Egypt is taking steps to support a democratic transition."[114] Another development that may have "help[ed] force Washington's hand" was the possibility of Egypt purchasing alternative equipment as part of a multibillion dollar weapons sale from Russia to be financed by Riyadh and Abu Dhabi.[115]

During a period of increased exchanges between the two countries' religious and political leaders,[116] Egypt has pursued measures at home that are strikingly similar to religious practices in Riyadh, such as demonizing atheism as part of a new media campaign to discourage extremist thinking and religious authorities trying to forbid gender mixing in online forums.[117] Saudi Arabia agreed to renovate Egypt's al-Azhar Mosque after a meeting between Sisi and Saudi Arabia's intelligence director.[118]

When the U.N. Human Rights Council reviewed Egypt's case in March 2014, Saudi Arabia's

representative spoke on behalf of a bloc of 54 countries to whitewash Cairo's record on human rights. He stated, "we salute in this context the continued commitment of the Government of Egypt [to] confront robustly violations of human rights."[119]

When Sisi ran for president in mid-2014, it was in part on the basis of financial support to Egypt from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states. His Gulf allies pledged $12 billion in the immediate aftermath of Morsi's overthrow, followed by $8 billion in new pledges in early 2014.[120] Evidently this included $4 or $5 billion in additional Saudi support.[121] Egyptian financial planners indicated that this aid enabled them to announce a new economic stimulus package in time for the presidential elections.[122]

On the campaign trail, Sisi cited those pledges as part of his political narrative, praising Abdullah and declaring that Gulf aid had exceeded $20 billion to his government in less than a year.[123] Riyadh also remained quiet as Egyptian officials told the press before the vote that Saudi Arabia planned more aid provided that Sisi was elected.[124] When the King bestowed a medal on Sisi in August 2014, the *Associated Press* estimated Egypt had received at least $12 billion from Riyadh alone.[125]

Immediately after Sisi's victory, Abdullah called for a donor conference to support the new Egyptian government and warned that any who declined to participate "will have no place among us tomorrow" if ever they should need Saudi Arabia's help.[126] As crown prince, Salman attended Sisi's inauguration in Cairo, congratulating and kissing the new Egyptian leader. He has hosted Sisi in Riyadh three times in 2015 and recently pledged that Saudi support for Egypt's security "is firm and never changes."[127]

The upcoming Egypt donor conference is expected to take place this month. Unless the United States and Egypt's Gulf allies press Cairo to make political reforms or improve its egregious human rights record, they run the risk of wasting funds in support of a repressive and unstable dictatorship. As one commentator has noted, support for the Sisi government from Saudi Arabia and its Gulf allies has "worsened the prospects for legitimate political authority and sustainable economic development and, thus, for a consensual approach to attaining human security for all."[128]

2. Bahrain

Similarly, Saudi Arabia has played an active role in significant authoritarian regression in Bahrain. The United States has a substantial stake in ensuring stability in Bahrain, which provides a base for the U.S. Fifth Naval Fleet.

When President Obama expressed "deep concern" over the killing of protesters in Bahrain in February of 2011, Saudi Arabia vented its frustration by turning down requests from Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates to visit Riyadh.[129] Later that month, Riyadh encouraged its allies in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to pledge $10 billion in development aid, allowing Manama's government to stay afloat while cracking down on demonstrators, rights defenders, and opposition leaders.[130]

Soon after, Saudi armed forces entered Bahrain on March 14th as the first wave of a Gulf military intervention to prop up the island's monarchy.[131] Reports indicate that Saudi Arabia "compelled other GCC nations to send military forces to demonstrate a unified front against pro-democracy activists" in Bahrain, even causing Kuwait's government to collapse over the small naval detachment it sent to patrol Bahraini waters.[132]

The deployment of Saudi and Emirati troops contributed to the failure of a high-level State Department mission to mediate between protesters and the regime in Bahrain.[133] Additionally, Saudi troops arrived two days after a visit by Defense Secretary Gates, who told Bahrain's rulers that they needed to consider meaningful concessions to protesters or risk greater instability. Saudi officials told the press that their country's military intervention was partly intended as a "signal" in response to Gates's statements because the Saudi government took umbrage at the defense secretary "flying into Bahrain and saying the whole region has to change."[134]

Since 2011, Riyadh has not forcefully weighed in with Bahraini officials to encourage their reconciliation with moderate members of the political opposition or to promote accountability for past rights abuses. Saudi Arabia regularly engages with Bahraini hardliners and seems to give free rein to their efforts to incite sectarian violence and anti-Americanism as well as to perpetrate rights abuses. In 2012 the two countries even discussed the possibility of a Bahrain-Saudi political and military union to forestall greater instability.[135]

When Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Nayef passed away in 2012, it caused some observers to speculate that the kingdom might turn over a new leaf on Bahrain since Nayef held the Bahrain file and had been closely allied with hardliners in Manama.[136] Within several months, Nayef's son Mohammed reportedly took charge of the Bahrain file as well as Saudi Arabia's interior ministry, and some analysts saw his handiwork in the March 2013 promotion of Bahrain's moderate crown prince to the post of first deputy prime minister.[137]

There is as yet no tangible evidence to back up speculation that Mohammed bin Nayef might be more amenable to political compromise with the Shi'a opposition.[138] Indeed, in March of 2014 a bipartisan group of 27 foreign policy experts concluded that Saudi Arabia had not been using its influence to achieve tolerance, accountability, or political reform in Bahrain.[139] Saudi Arabia has urged the United States to lift its remaining restrictions on arms sales to Bahrain, including bans on weapons that were used by security forces against civilian crowds.

Meanwhile, in addition to GCC aid, Saudi Arabia continues to provide the bulk of the Bahraini regime's revenue. Under a 1958 arrangement, Bahrain relinquished its territorial claim to Saudi Arabia's Abu Safah oil field in exchange for Aramco sending it half of the field's production.[140] Although at times Saudi Arabia has deviated from a precise 50/50 split, in recent years the oil revenue has flowed generously. Petroleum from Abu Safah accounted for 71 percent of Bahraini government revenue in 2013, up from 67 percent the previous year.[141]

Saudi Arabia has also helped Bahrain recruit Sunni manpower from Pakistan to help with the repression of Bahrain's Shi'ite majority.[142] In late March 2011, the head of Saudi Arabia's National Security Council, Prince Bandar, visited Islamabad in order to rally support for his country's military intervention in Bahrain.[143] While there, he met with Pakistan's military and civilian leaders, urging them to consider the deployment of Pakistani security personnel to the Gulf, particularly Bahrain.[144]

Reports also suggest that Prince Bandar offered Saudi support to boost Pakistan's economy and meet its energy needs in exchange for help in Bahrain.[145] By the time Bahrain's foreign minister arrived the following evening, Pakistan's prime minister already had a proposal in hand to assist Manama through the

recruitment of retired Pakistani service members for military jobs.[146]

During the course of early 2011, two government-established foundations in Pakistan run by the defense minister and military service chiefs engaged in a rushed effort to recruit veterans for security sector jobs in Bahrain. Certain advertisements described an "urgent" need for "manpower for Bahrain National Guard" (BNG), citing the desirability of prior experience such as anti-riot expertise.[147] In August, roughly a week after Pakistan's prime minister talked regional issues with the Saudi King in Jeddah, Pakistani President Asif Zardari visited Bahrain, where he and Bahrain's King Hamad discussed the issue of recruiting more veterans for security sector jobs.[148]

More than 2,500 individuals were reportedly hired through these channels in 2011 alone, up to doubling the size of the BNG and swelling the numbers of Pakistani nationals in the Bahraini police and special forces.[149] Estimates at the time suggested that Pakistanis made up roughly 30 percent of Bahrain's police, 18 percent of its air force, and numbered as many as 10,000 people in administrative or operational roles in Bahrain's security sector overall.[150]

Many of these individuals remain in Bahrain, and recruiting from Pakistan with Saudi support apparently continues. Pakistani members of Bahrain's police have made headlines as victims of recent bombing attacks in March and July of 2014.[151] In February 2014 Saudi Arabia's then-Crown Prince Salman traveled to Pakistan; observers claimed that on this visit Salman sought to promote continued recruitment of retired officers by Bahrain.[152] As he was departing, local officials announced that Riyadh had provided $1.5 billion in loans to shore up Islamabad's currency and foreign exchange reserves, and that another $1.5 billion was on the way.[153] Pakistani press interpreted the loans as a possible reward for supporting Saudi requests to send weapons into Syria and unofficial military manpower to Bahrain.[154]

Bahrain's King Hamad visited Pakistan several weeks later in the first state visit by a Bahraini ruler in four decades. By that point, one of the military-linked Pakistani foundations active in 2011 (the Bahria Foundation) was again posting new advertisements aimed at veterans for security jobs in Bahrain.[155] In advance of Hamad's arrival, officials predicted agreement upon new manpower for Bahrain's security services, and during his visit the two sides announced plans to increase the "export of Pakistani manpower to Bahrain."[156] They also "vowed to further enhance military cooperation."[157] The King brought with him his top defense and internal security chiefs and made an unusual state visit to the Joint Services Headquarters in Rawalpindi. While there, he met all three Pakistani service chiefs, one of whom serves as Chairman of the Bahria Foundation.[158]

The legacy of these developments will stay with Bahrain for years. The Bahria Foundation still lists Bahrain as one of "our client[s]" on its webpage.[159] Meanwhile Shi'ite citizens of Bahrain continue to report being excluded from important jobs in the security sector,[160] yet Manama's government is looking abroad to pack its security ranks and even its voter roles with Sunni Muslims. Several of the law enforcement and military bodies to which these Sunni foreign nationals have been recruited are implicated in rights abuses against Bahraini civilians, and still not one senior officer in Bahrain has been held accountable for the killing, injury, or torture of protesters.

On a 2015 visit by the Pakistani premier to Manama, leaders from both governments

lauded the role of Pakistani officials in Bahrain's security and defense services.[161] Such individuals are considered prime candidates for "fast-tracked" naturalization to become Bahraini citizens, and reports suggest over a quarter of the roughly 100,000 Pakistani nationals in Bahrain now hold Bahraini passports.[162] During Bahrain's most recent elections, one candidate was filmed appealing to naturalized voters using an Urdu-language translator.[163]

The recent elections in Bahrain witnessed the marginalization of Sunni and Shi'ite organized political societies alike, along with the decreased legitimacy of the regime due to a massive opposition boycott.[164] Anti-Americanism is rife, both in parliament and the state-controlled press. The sustainability of America's military presence in Bahrain is increasingly under threat as a result of the continuing instability and repression fostered by Saudi policies.

Upon the death of Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah, Bahrain announced a remarkable 40-day period of mourning.[165] That week, the Bahrain Center for Human Rights indicated that nine individuals were arrested for social media posts believed to have been critical of Abdullah's legacy.[166] Days later, Saudi Arabia's new ruler Salman warmly welcomed Bahrain's King Hamad to his personal ranch in Dir'iyah.[167]

Saudi support for repression in Bahrain has an added cost to American interests because it undermines the military effort against ISIL and other violent extremist movements. Saudi Arabia is enabling the Bahraini regime to foment and exacerbate sectarian divisions, which in turn validates ISIL's narrative and serves its aims of promoting a broader regional war between Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims.[168]

3. Broader Trends

Saudi Arabia's support for authoritarianism has also discouraged political reforms by other regimes that systematically abuse human rights in the Arab world. Like Bahrain, Oman was the beneficiary of a $10 billion GCC aid pledge announced in 2011 at a summit in Riyadh.[169] The Omani package was reportedly the result of Saudi pressure within the bloc.[170]

Thanks in large part to GCC aid, Oman boosted public expenditures by almost 30 percent in 2011, more than any other country in the Gulf, jumpstarting social spending while ignoring the demands of its Arab Spring protesters for their full civil rights.[171] Instead, security forces in Oman "routinely harass, detain, and imprison rights defenders, social media users, and others critical of government policies."[172]

Saudi Arabia has also taken steps to forestall change in Jordan and Morocco. In May of 2011, "at Saudi urging" the GCC invited Jordan and Morocco to apply for membership.[173] Observers attributed this step to a desire to keep "the kings on the reservation" and to "keep them from falling or reforming."[174]

With Saudi encouragement, Jordan and Morocco also received pledges for $5 billion in development aid from the four wealthiest GCC states in December of 2011.[175] Earlier that year, Jordan received $1.4 billion in budgetary support from Saudi Arabia alone.[176]

More recently, Jordan and Morocco were invited in 2014 to join a military alliance with the GCC.[177] According to the State Department, restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly persist in both Morocco and Jordan, and reports of torture by security forces continue to emerge.[178] Like Bahrain, Jordan declared a remarkable 40-day mourning period after the death of Saudi King Abdullah.[179]

Recommendations for U.S. Policy

Human rights abuses facilitated by Saudi Arabia at home and across the region pose serious threats to America's security interests and run counter to its values. But after decades of condoning and ignoring Saudi human rights violations, motivating Riyadh to change course will not be easy. The Saudis point to mounting regional turmoil to explain away many of their problematic practices and to justify indefinitely postponing meaningful action on human rights concerns, even though rights abuses by Saudi Arabia and other authoritarian regimes played a major role in setting the stage for such widespread upheavals. Effective engagement on rights issues will require U.S. leadership across various branches of government to more effectively wield influence with Riyadh.

THE ADMINISTRATION

President Obama's decision not to raise human rights abuses with King Abdullah in March 2014 was a glaring omission, a red flag that the relationship needs to be significantly restructured in order to ensure that human rights issues receive sustained, high-level attention. Press reports indicated that human rights were on the agenda of President Obama's first meeting with King Salman on January 27, 2015.[180] But on the flight to Saudi Arabia President Obama undercut his own message, stating, "Sometimes we have to balance our need to speak to them about human rights issues with immediate concerns that we have in terms of countering terrorism or dealing with regional stability."[181]

The use of this balancing language signals that human rights are secondary to "immediate concerns," sending the message that the United States cares less about human rights than it does about most other items on the agenda. This unfortunate and all too common formulation ignores the reality pointed out in other forums by President Obama that human rights violations and the denial of rights and freedoms contribute to the problems of regional instability and violent extremism with which the United States and Saudi Arabia are now confronted. Human rights are not secondary in any strategy to promote stability and counter violent extremism; they are essential to its success. The president should:

1) **Commit to personally raising human rights issues during future communications with Saudi leaders** on a sustained and substantive basis, including during regular communications by phone. The president should make clear that denying basic rights and freedoms contributes to insecurity and instability and undermines the struggle against terrorism and violent extremism. Saudi Arabia should not be exempted from universal human rights standards. The president should instruct the State Department to ensure that human rights abuses are a central and consistent component of America's political communications with Saudi Arabia.

2) **Order a review of U.S. strategy for confronting human rights abuses by Saudi Arabia**, starting with a campaign to roll back abusive elements of Riyadh's restrictive terrorism and cybercrime rules. Making this a whole-of-government effort is essential for ensuring that the State Department receives added leverage for dealing with Riyadh. Pushing back on Saudi Arabia's draconian regulations is important because these measures discourage and

punish peaceful dissent—if left unchecked, they are likely to fuel extremism, contributing to persistent instability in the longer term.

3) **Leverage future White House engagement with Saudi Interior Minister Mohammed bin Nayef Al Saud** to encourage his ministry to take concrete steps to end abuses under his purview, including Saudi Arabia's campaign against peaceful human rights defenders. Bin Nayef's extensive meetings with cabinet officials whenever he visits Washington represent an opportunity, which to date has been missed, to promote a more tolerant, more sustainable future for Saudi Arabia and the region. Instead, such meetings create the impression that his ministry's record of severe human rights abuses has America's implicit seal of approval. His promotion to Deputy Crown Prince and head of Saudi Arabia's Council of Political and Security Affairs may mean that Bin Nayef's influence is unavoidable. But America should withhold indicators of its favor so long as his ministry's record is littered with blatant abuses of human rights.

4) **Instruct the Central Intelligence Agency that its close partnership with Saudi Arabia's Interior Ministry must emphasize adherence to human rights standards.** Partnership with the Interior Ministry is no doubt helpful on immediate counterterrorism concerns, but any overlooking of violations under current circumstances also contributes to repression and will fuel violent extremism.

5) **Instruct U.S. officials across various agencies to publicly raise the frequency and volume of condemnations regarding obvious Saudi rights abuses** at home, including sham cases against human rights defenders, severe restrictions against women, and harmful religious invective. The recent U.S. condemnation in advance of Ra'if Badawi's public flogging was a step in the right direction,[182] but even Finland has raised more public concern about Badawi's case than Washington has since then.[183] Such criticism must be applied to a range of comparable cases and sustained until his and other similar sentences are lifted.

6) **Ensure that the new Presidential Memorandum on U.S. support for civil society is actively applied in Saudi Arabia**. Senior U.S. officials should publicly urge the immediate release of all jailed human rights defenders and call for the lifting of restrictions on legitimate, non-violent human rights advocacy. Since the president has characterized support for civil society a "matter of national security," and announced that support for civil society will be a "mission across the U.S. government," objections to restrictions on independent non-violent civil society activists should be on the agenda of every bilateral meeting until Saudi Arabia's crackdown on human rights defenders is ended.[184]

7) **Encourage Saudi leaders at the highest level to take the lead in combating sectarian incitement**, urging them to withhold state privileges from senior clerics who engage in hate speech, purge religious incitement from the Saudi education system, release prisoners of conscience, and publicly recognize Saudi Shi'a as equal citizens. The president should put the kingdom on notice that it could be subject to penalties if Congress insists on revoking its indefinite waiver under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998.

8) **Consider restarting the U.S.-Saudi strategic dialogue, launched in 2005, with human rights included as one of the tracks for regular, senior discussion**.[185] President Obama's March 2014 visit to the kingdom confirms that the challenges that motivated the creation of those dialogues are still with us today. Too often, senior U.S. officials decline to raise the full spectrum of their concerns with Saudi counterparts because these contacts are constrained by the centralization of power in the hands of elderly Saudi leaders, who are typically unavailable for extended dialogues.

THE STATE DEPARTMENT

The State Department needs more backing from other entities of the U.S. government if it is to exert greater leverage to discourage and to show U.S. disapproval for Saudi human rights abuses. But the department itself also needs to take on a more assertive role, ending current practices whereby Saudi Arabia receives a virtual free pass from Washington on contentious issues of human rights.

As American diplomats know all too well, this state of affairs comes at a heavy cost not least from the harm that such perceived hypocrisy imposes on U.S. public diplomacy around the globe. Iranian officials, for example, ridicule U.S. criticisms of the lack of women's rights and the denial of religious freedoms in the Islamic Republic by pointing to egregious violations taking place in Saudi Arabia, America's close regional ally. Neither regime should be permitted the opportunity to deflect attention away from its human rights abuses.

The State Department can and should do more in each of the main areas where Saudi Arabia plays a major role in human rights abuses inside and outside of its territory. Specifically, the State Department should:

Support human rights progress inside Saudi Arabia:

1) **Publicly and privately raise the cases of Saudi rights defenders in jail or under other restrictions as a top U.S. concern.** This should be done as a general rule except when activists or their representatives have explicitly urged the United States not to do so. Additionally, since Saudi Arabia agreed in 2013 to allow foreign missions to conduct independent trial monitoring in cases that do not involve their citizens, the State Department should formalize recent U.S. practices of sending embassy or consulate officials to attend rights defenders' trials and do so consistently. The State Department should coordinate with E.U. diplomats to ensure information sharing in advance of major cases and speak out together if possible when court proceedings violate defendants' right to fair trial. The State Department should raise serious concerns about Saudi rights abuses consistently and with urgency at multilateral forums, such as the United Nations Human Rights Council.

2) **Work to address unjust practices in the Saudi legal system** in partnership with the U.S. Department of Justice and whenever engaging in judicial dialogues or exchanges. The State Department should encourage the abolition of the Specialized Criminal Court in Saudi Arabia and insist that rights activists should under no circumstances be tried in such exceptional counterterrorism courts for nonviolent offenses. The State Department should raise concerns about vaguely worded charges such as disrupting public order,

breaking allegiance to the King, or insulting public institutions. Also, the State Department should condemn harsh punishments such as floggings or executions for acts of speech or identity such as blasphemy, conversion away from Islam, or perceived acts of sorcery, explaining why these sorts of punishments are harmful to Saudi Arabia's social fabric, future trajectory, and international reputation. The State Department should remind Saudi authorities of the late King Abdullah's admonition that the Quran teaches: "let there be no compulsion in religion."[186]

3) **Help Saudi Arabia meet its impending demographic and economic challenges, tapping into society's latent power via civil society organizations, women's empowerment, and fostering a more competitive labor market for citizens and foreigners alike.** The State Department should urge Saudi Arabia to allow broader licensing of civil society organizations so as to channel constructive feedback from citizens for improving governance. The State Department should call for the creation of a civil society law that protects freedom of association, and then stay engaged throughout the drafting process to ensure such a law does not authorize undue state interference in group activities, including private human rights groups.

4) **Encourage Saudi Arabia in bilateral dialogues on education to roll back the guardianship system's requirement that women receive the signature of their male guardians to pursue higher education, including in the United States.** The State Department should raise concerns that such stipulations could endanger ongoing student exchanges as a possible violation of U.S. discrimination law and insist that women should be permitted to obtain a passport and travel to the United States without prior approval of a male guardian. The State Department should leverage existing exchanges and awareness campaigns to tap into American expertise for helping Saudi Arabia combat high rates of physical abuse against women and children, promoting a more peaceful Saudi society.

5) **Make Saudi Arabia's treatment of LGBT individuals a regular point of discussion in bilateral dialogues**, providing substance to the Obama administration's 2011 declaration that "gay rights are human rights."[187] Recent indications from the State Department suggest that senior U.S. officials are not urgently raising concerns with Saudi officials about the harsh legal restrictions, mass arrests, harsh sentences including death, and official incitement that they continue to perpetrate against LGBT individuals.[188]

Combat Religious Chauvinism and Incitement:

1) **Suspend Saudi Arabia's indefinite waiver under the International Religious Freedom Act** (IRFA) and replace it with a non-renewable, 180-day waiver instead. During this period, the State Department should work with Saudi authorities to better implement the list of concrete Saudi commitments on religious freedom conveyed to U.S. officials in 2006.

2) **Make public a review of Saudi textbooks from the current school year** to evaluate whether or not Riyadh has broken yet another pledge as to when it would end the

indoctrination of young people with hateful teachings in books that it continues to print. The State Department should do so regularly and in a timely fashion for future school years as well so U.S. diplomats have up-to-date information on the state of these books that they can raise with Saudi officials.

3) **Immediately release full results of the extensive studies that the Department commissioned using taxpayer money** on intolerance in Saudi textbooks (finished in 2012) and on Saudi exportation of extremism (finished in 2013) that have been withheld from the public.[189]

4) **Raise concerns with Saudi Arabia that continued sectarian discrimination and incitement encourage violence throughout the region and increase opportunities for Iranian subversion inside and outside the kingdom.** The State Department should urge Saudi Arabia to implement institutional reforms that demonstrate the acceptance of Saudi Shi'a as full, equal citizens. The State Department should urge Saudi Arabia to appoint Shi'ite members to the Senior Ulema Council in proportion to demographics, adopt measures designed to redress discrimination experienced by Saudi Shi'a, create a commission to investigate abuses by security forces at flashpoints such as al-Awamiya, and take stronger steps at the highest level to visibly embrace Saudi Shi'a as equal citizens.[190]

5) **Consistently voice concerns about Saudi law enforcement and religious police conducting raids on house churches**—including when the worshippers at such gatherings are not U.S. citizens—since such actions violate assurances given to the U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom in 2006. The State Department should remind Saudi officials that they committed to resolve this matter by issuing blanket permission for non-Muslim private group worship and agreed not to confiscate personal religious materials at customs points of entry.[191]

6) **Publicly highlight the discrepancy between Saudi words and deeds** embodied by religious dialogues conducted in Vienna at the King Abdullah International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue. Such dialogues should also be regularly conducted inside Saudi territory with a broad range of Muslim and non-Muslim religious leaders and transmitted in full to the Saudi public.

7) **If U.S. officials comment on clerical statements by Saudi religious leaders, be an accurate umpire**, noting areas where Saudi statements conflict with the regime's obligations under international human rights law. Failing to do so gives an implicit U.S. stamp of approval to radical viewpoints and allows Saudi clerics to continue propagating intolerance.

8) **Promote exchanges between religious leaders in the United States and Saudi Arabia**, but ensure that such exchanges do not legitimate proponents of religious intolerance.

Promote Saudi Foreign Policy that is not Antagonistic to Human Rights:

1) **Starting with the upcoming Egypt donor conference, convey publicly and privately to Saudi Arabia the depth of U.S. concern about human rights abuses in Egypt**. The State Department should explain why the event should address

political inclusiveness—not just economic development planning and job creation—since donations will not promote economic growth if Egypt remains subject to violence, political instability, and polarization.

2) **Caution Saudi Arabia that U.S. diplomacy on Bahrain will have to be recalibrated in the wake of Manama's boycotted elections in 2014.** The State Department should convey why the Khalifa regime is responsible for extensive human rights abuses—such as torture, harassment, and the lack of due process—as well as the crackdown on Shi'ite political parties and the failure to reach a political compact in advance of recent balloting. The State Department should explain that the United States also expects Saudi Arabia to keep Bahraini hardliners in check and to forcefully weigh in to help bring about tolerance, political reconciliation, and accountability for past abuses.

3) **Encourage Saudi Arabia to help promote peace in Syria and Iraq.** The State Department should support Saudi Arabia's plan to send an ambassador to Baghdad and encourage Riyadh to host a visit by Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi. The State Department should partner with Riyadh on documenting war crimes by the Assad regime in Syria and promoting international criminal accountability for such abuses. The State Department should engage with Saudi officials on their concerns about instability in Syria and Iraq but also highlight how progress within Saudi Arabia on Sunni-Shi'ite relations can help mitigate sectarian violence and polarization in the region.

4) **Call on Saudi Arabia to use its donor relationship with other monarchies in the region** in a manner that advances rather than sets back the rights and freedoms of citizens.

SECURITY AGENCIES

It is essential for America's military and intelligence agencies to recognize that the human rights abuses emerging from Saudi Arabia pose a fundamental threat to their Middle East mission. Stability in Egypt, Bahrain, Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Oman, Morocco, and even the kingdom itself are at risk if the United States continues to turn a blind eye to human rights abuses that feed civil conflict and the sources of terrorism.

Saudi Arabia's rulers are rich, proud, and feeling under considerable threat in the region. Thus, the State Department needs backing from U.S. security agencies to provide Riyadh with the necessary motivation and security assurances to pursue a more constructive course on human rights that poses less danger to regional stability. U.S. security agencies should:

1) **Persuade Saudi officials to revise draconian terror regulations without delay**. U.S. security agencies should convey that statutes criminalizing peaceful dissent hobble our joint effort against terrorism and destabilize the Gulf.

2) **Raise concerns with Saudi officials, particularly Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, that Riyadh's campaign against human rights defenders is fostering long-term instability**. U.S. security agencies should raise concerns that security training and advising could be subject to congressional or executive branch restrictions and note that the United States will not remain silent while abuses continue.

3) **Devote more intelligence resources to tracking the international flow of Saudi textbooks and other religious resources, clerical messages, and public and private funding** in order to understand when and how they contribute to human rights abuses abroad. U.S. security agencies should regularly update the administration, Congress, and American public about the state of Saudi policies in this regard, using transparency as a way to build leverage over Saudi policy for reducing religious incitement and associated abuses of human rights.

4) **Specifically monitor public and private Saudi support for combatants in conflict zones such as Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen** to help ensure that aid does not flow to violent extremists responsible for rights abuses such as ethnic cleansing, abductions, or terrorist attacks. To the greatest extent feasible, U.S. security agencies should regularly share such information with Congress and the American public.

5) **Explain why sectarian incitement provides an easy recruiting tool for Sunni terrorist groups** and why treating Saudi Shi'a as second-class citizens provides an opening for subversion by Iran. U.S. security agencies should highlight how sectarian violence in Bahrain, Yemen, Syria, and Iraq poses risks of spillover into Saudi Arabia and vice versa. The Director of National Intelligence should prepare a study to be presented to Saudi officials and to Congress on the harmful impact of sectarian incitement on regional security.

6) **On Bahrain, convey with renewed concern to Saudi Arabia that the U.S. military presence in Bahrain cannot be sustained if Riyadh continues to enable Bahraini hardliners**. Such hardliners are ruining the country's social fabric, sponsoring anti-Americanism, alienating the country's Shi'ite citizens, and blocking a political compact and accountability for past abuses. American forces are committed to opposing Iranian intervention in Bahrain, but the sustainability of U.S. deployments is threatened by Bahrain's continued shift toward repression and Sunni extremism. Similarly, U.S. security agencies should convey that the partial ban on U.S. weapons sales to Bahrain will not be lifted until human rights conditions on the island markedly improve.

7) **On Egypt, place greater emphasis on explaining to Saudi officials that Washington will firmly oppose full, normalized relations with Egypt in the military or economic spheres until Cairo ends its widespread violations of human rights.** The United States will stand with Egypt against terrorist groups, but it will not embrace Cairo fully until it ends the current crackdown on peaceful political opposition and restrictions on basic freedoms.

8) **Conduct a comprehensive assessment of American sales of military and law enforcement equipment** to Saudi Arabia in order to ensure that U.S. technology is not enabling the repression of civilians. U.S. security agencies should consider instructing the heads of appropriate U.S. agencies, pursuant to section 405(a)(13) of IRFA and other relevant legislation, to withhold licenses for the export of items on the U.S. Munitions List or U.S. Commerce Control List to any agency or instrumentality of the government of Saudi Arabia that is

responsible for committing particularly severe violations of human rights.

9) **Update America's extensive military and military contractor training programs** with Saudi security officers to instill respect for human rights, transparency, pluralism, and the rule of law.[192] U.S. security agencies should encourage the establishment of dedicated entities within Saudi security services that are responsible for investigating complaints of abuses and for ensuring compliance with the rule of law.[193]

10) **Engage in sustained, meaningful consultations with fellow U.S. officials who specialize in human rights conditions in the Middle East** to ensure that American security policy reflects a long-term, comprehensive understanding of how Saudi support for human rights abuses at home and abroad undermine regional stability—as well as to exchange insights on the most recent Saudi practices and policies in this regard.

11) **Explain to Saudi officials why terrorist rehabilitation programs are bound to fail if they do not teach tolerance** toward other religious groups and civilizations (including the West) and instead simply continue to focus more narrowly on discouraging dissent.

12) **Urge Saudi security officials to allow regular access for international monitors to jails and detention centers** in order to independently assess ongoing reports of torture and mistreatment in Saudi custody.

CONGRESS

When it comes to confronting Saudi Arabia's role in human rights abuses at home and abroad, the executive branch needs Congress. On the one hand, Congress can help bolster the administration's hand with Riyadh by playing the role of "bad cop," underlining administration condemnations of rights abuses and threatening specific statutory penalties. On the other hand, legislators also have an important role to play in motivating U.S. agencies to act, ensuring that Saudi Arabia is held accountable for its actions even when turning a blind eye might be more immediately convenient for the executive branch. Congress should:

1) **Hold hearings to draw attention to the plight of Saudi human rights defenders under siege and insist on public oversight of U.S. capacity building with Saudi Arabia's security services**, especially the Interior Ministry. Congress should convey American concerns that these same Saudi organizations are simultaneously receiving support from the United States while orchestrating a severe crackdown on peaceful dissent and religious worship.

2) **Mandate that the State Department release in full the 2012/2013 unpublished studies on Saudi policy that it commissioned with taxpayer money** on intolerance in Saudi textbooks and exportation of religious incitement. Congress should task the executive branch with conducting an expedited update on each of these studies with input from the intelligence community and insist on making public all of its findings other than those that would expose intelligence sources and methods.

3) **Encourage the executive branch to replace Saudi Arabia's indefinite waiver under the International Religious Freedom Act with a non-renewable, 180-day waiver instead,** utilizing legislation if

appropriate. Congress should task the State Department with analyzing Saudi textbooks in-house in a timely fashion for all new annual editions until the Saudi government's indoctrination of children with religious incitement stops once and for all.

4) **Regularly convey through private conversations and public action that the United States believes Saudi policies in Egypt and Bahrain set the stage for continued instability.** Congress should caution that U.S. aid and weapons sales to these countries will depend upon progress toward inclusiveness and reform.

5) **Provide funding for Saudi clerics free from direct associations with religious incitement to participate in increased U.S. visitor programs**, supporting their engagement with American officials and religious leaders to foster tolerance and discourage incitement in the long term.

Conclusion

Unless it stops turning a blind eye to Saudi Arabia's violations of human rights, the United States may win the battle against ISIL but lose the war against violent extremism. Devising a comprehensive and effective strategy for addressing these challenges will require revisiting old bargains with Riyadh in order to stem the tide of religious incitement. It will also require confronting Saudi Arabia on its campaign against non-violent human rights defenders as well as its support for dictatorial policies in Egypt, Bahrain, and beyond.

The United States is accused—too often, rightfully—of hypocrisy in its dealings with Riyadh. Yet the lesson of the Arab Spring is that, however tempting it may be to give Arab allies a free pass on repression when faced with other regional crises, such short-term stability is a mirage, setting the stage for more dangerous—and anti-American—upheavals in due time. Saudi Arabia weathered that storm in 2011 thanks to its recent economic surpluses, but the kingdom's demographic trend lines, and recent energy price volatility, suggest history is unlikely to repeat itself in this regard.

Unless Saudi Arabia is persuaded to open more space for civil society organizations and stop its counterproductive crackdown on human rights defenders, the country will lack important constituencies for peaceful debate, a robust economy, and accountable governance.

Giving a free hand to hateful invective by hardline clerics makes the region a more dangerous place, threatening Saudi Arabia's future and core American interests.

The United States faces multiple interconnected challenges in the Middle East region. Current Saudi policies exacerbate many of them. It is imperative that the U.S. government devise and implement policies that will push back against harmful Saudi influence beyond its borders, and violations inside the kingdom. Such an approach offers the best hope for restoring peace and stability to the region that ultimately would serve the best interests of both countries.

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