



After Mideast, will the Saudi-Wahhabi nexus destabilize East Asia?

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Abstract

Southeast Asia's youths are getting radicalized as Saudi Arabia is pouring money for the spread Wahhabism, a fundamental Sunni school of Islam, in the region. If the U.S. is serious about counter-terrorism, it should break the Saudi-Wahhabi nexus by dismantling the religious-industrial complex of Saudi-funded mosques and madrassas that serve as jihad factories producing suicide bombers from Africa to Europe and now Asia.

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Analysis

Professor Brahma Chellaney from India's Center for Policy Research has sound advice for the next American president regarding US militarized approach to fighting terrorism.

In a December 2015 article entitled "Saudi Arabia's Phony War on Terror", Chellaney pointed to the Wahhabi ideology, "a messianic, jihad-extolling form of Sunni fundamentalism" as the root cause of global terrorism.

He warned that unless expansion of Wahhabism is arrested, the global war on terror is ineffective. 'No matter how many bombs the US and its allies drop, the Saudi-financed *madrassas* will continue to indoctrinate tomorrow's jihadists.'¹

After two years of bombing campaign, Pentagon officials reveal US is now running out of bombs to drop on Islamic State (IS).² And the Saudi-Wahhabi nexus continues to indoctrinate new jihadists — now in East Asia.

Southeast Asia next jihadi battleground

In May, Malaysia shocked the world when Prime Minister Najib Razak's government threw its support behind hudud, the 7th century shaira law that includes amputations and stonings, threatening the hitherto democratic and multi-ethnic country.³ Razak received a \$681 million gift from Saudi Arabia in April.⁴

Calling it the "Saudiization of Southeast Asia", retired Malaysian diplomat Dennis Ignatius back in March 2015 had warned the Saudi-Wahhabi nexus "is the greatest single threat to peace and stability in the world today."⁵

Ignatius noted how over the years, Riyadh built up a significant cadre of Wahhabi-trained academics, preachers and teachers across the region. They act as "lobby groups agitating for greater Islamization, demanding the imposition of Shaira law, pushing for stricter controls of other faiths, and working behind the scenes to influence official policy and shape public opinion."

As a result, this "culture of intolerance, hate and violence" that permeates so much of the Middle East is now manifesting in Southeast Asia, with young Muslims from Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Philippines gravitating to Syrian jihad. In the face of Saudi-sponsored proliferation of extremism, Ignatius predicts Southeast Asia would be the next jihadi battleground.

Indeed Jakarta has already suffered IS and Al Qaeda attacks, and various Wahhabi sect jihadi groups now plague Southeast Asia.⁶

¹ Brahma Chellaney, "Saudi Arabia's Phony War on Terror", *Project Syndicate*, 25 December 2015, <https://chellaney.net/2015/12/25/saudi-arabias-phony-war-on-terror/>; "How to shut down the 'jihad factories'", *Indian Defense News*, 2 May 2016, <http://www.indiandefensenews.in/2016/05/how-to-shut-down-jihad-factories.html>

² "US Air Force running out of bombs to fight ISIS", *Military Times*, 6 December 2015, <http://www.military.com/daily-news/2015/12/06/us-air-force-running-out-of-bombs-to-fight-isis.html>

³ "Outrage in multi-ethnic Malaysia as government backs Islamic law", *Reuters*, 28 May 2016, <http://blogs.reuters.com/faithworld/2016/05/28/outrage-in-multi-ethnic-malaysia-as-government-backs-islamic-law/>

⁴ Saudi Arabia's foreign minister has said \$681 million banked into the Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak's bank accounts was a 'genuine donation', *US News & World Report*, 15 April 2016, <http://www.usnews.com/news/business/articles/2016-04-15/saudi-confirms-genuine-681m-donation-to-malaysian-pm>

⁵ Dennis Ignatius, "Wahhabism in Southeast Asia", *Asia Sentinel*, 27 March 2015, <http://www.asiasentinel.com/society/wahhabism-in-southeast-asia/>

⁶ Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, "ISIS in Southeast Asia: Internalized Wahhabism is a Major Factor", Middle East Institute, 18 May 2016, <http://www.mei.edu/content/map/isis-southeast-asia-internalized-wahhabism-major-factor>; Song Ningyu and Nadiya, "Jakarta terror attacks: Will parts of Southeast Asia become ISIS satellite cities", *Asia Times*, 22 January 2016, <http://atimes.com/2016/01/jakarta-terror-attacks-will-parts-of-southeast-asia-become-isis-satellite-cities/>; Khairuldeen Al



Will US continue to shelter the Saudi-Wahhabi nexus?

Ironically, the Saudi-Wahhabi nexus is enabled and shielded by the US security umbrella with Washington purporting to be a leader of global counter-terrorism efforts.

However, from the Asian perspective, Wahhabism is the root cause of terrorism in the West and now in Asia. With Washington's support for the Saudi-Wahhabi nexus being partly accountable for this scourge, it has severely downgraded the legitimacy of US as a leader in counter-terrorism.⁷

As Chellaney admonished in "Western Roots of anti-Western Terror", America's use of radical Islam as a weapon to topple regimes it dislikes in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and now Syria has introduced global jihad into the international community.⁸ While a recent *New York Times* article discusses how "the world reaps what the Saudis sow" in violent jihad, US is also culpable in its support for the Saudi-Wahhabi nexus.⁹

Singapore's late Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew likewise criticized Washington's half-baked counter-terrorism efforts of mainly using military force. "In killing the terrorists, you will only kill the worker bees. The queen bees are the preachers, who teach a deviant form of Islam in schools and Islamic centers, who capture and twist the minds of the young."¹⁰

In the meantime, Democratic Presidential candidate Hillary Clinton who ironically has lobbied to take guns away from American citizens, wants to increase arms supply to Saudi-backed jihadists in Syria and had sold a \$29.4 billion arms package to Saudi Arabia in 2011 when she was Secretary of State.¹¹ This trend will likely continue if she becomes the next American president.¹²

Makhzoomi, "Terrorism in Southeast Asia and the Role of Ideology", *Huffington Post*, 10 March 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/khairuldeen-al-makhzoomi/terrorism-in-southeast-as_b_9396942.html; Jane Perlez,

"Saudis Quietly Promote Strict Islam in Indonesia", *New York Times*, 6 July 2003, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/07/05/international/asia/05INDO.html>

⁷ K. Gajendra Singh, "The US-Saudi-Wahabi Nexus", *Information Clearing House*, 1 January 2007, <http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article16041.htm>

⁸ Brahma Chellaney, "The Western Roots of Anti-Western Terror", *Project Syndicate*, 16 November 2016, <https://chellaney.net/2015/11/16/the-western-roots-of-anti-western-terror/>

⁹ "The World Reaps what the Saudis Sow", *New York Times*, 27 May 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/28/opinion/the-world-reaps-what-the-saudis-sow.html?_r=0

¹⁰ Fareed Zakaria, "We need to get the Queen Bees", *Newsweek*, 30 November 2003, <http://www.newsweek.com/we-need-get-queen-bees-133219>

¹¹ Saudi Arabia is the largest U.S. Foreign Military Sales customer at \$97 billion. The US is now resorting to weapons sales especially to its Gulf allies to offset military spending cuts, and Saudi Arabia is an indispensable arms export market. Nick J. Rahall, "Saudi-US relationship is indispensable for American interests", *Roll Call*, 13 October



Tragically, the Saudis have used its fighter jets and bombs to destroy Yemen the past year, killing more than 6,000 people, with 3,000 being civilians, displaced 2.4 million, and created a vacuum that has enabled Al Qaeda to establish a statelet in the war-torn country. Much of Saudi weapons have also ended up in the arms cache of Al Qaeda and IS.¹³

When it was discovered the US sold thousands of cluster bombs to Saudis that are banned in most of Europe and other countries, the embarrassed Obama administration put a halt to the sale.¹⁴ In November 2015, US sold a new \$1.29 billion arms package to Riyadh, including smart bombs such as the Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAM) kits so the Saudis can continue to bomb Yemeni civilians in a way that is perhaps more politically correct and palatable.

In contrast to the US, EU is now pushing for an arms embargo on Saudi Arabia.¹⁵

Moreover, US is supporting the Saudis' agenda of turning Syria into an Islamic emirate—arming and funding groups such as Ahrar al Sham and Jaish al Islam that are basically the Syrian Taliban—just as it backed Afghanistan's Taliban.

Now that US is getting into the business of toppling secular and pluralistic governments and replacing them with Islamic emirates, Washington's constant touting that Uncle Sam is the defender of democracy and freedom in a liberal world order no longer holds water.

Reset of US anti-terror approach

Asian states are now reaping the consequences of this reckless US policy. If Washington proclaims it is a leader of a rule-based liberal order, then it needs to demonstrate this by deeds and not words.

To that end, US needs a reset in its counter-terrorism approach to target proliferation of Wahhabism rather than just dropping bombs. As Brahma Chellaney argued in "How to shut down the 'jihad factories'", if America is really serious about counter-terrorism, then it should stop enabling the Saudi-Wahhabi nexus, and dismantle the religious-industrial complex of Saudi-funded mosques and madrassas that serve as jihad factories producing suicide bombers from Africa to Europe and now Asia.¹⁶

Moreover, Washington's political establishment needs to come clean and declassify the 28 pages of the 9/11 Report. They also need to understand American soldiers are not cannon fodder for endless no-fly zones and regime change/nation-building adventurisms abroad, nor are they a mercenary force for the highest bidder

2015, http://www.rollcall.com/news/saudi_us_relationship_is_indispensable_for_american_interests_commentary-244180-1.html

¹² Rori Donaghy, "Deleted official report says Saudi key funder Hillary Clinton campaign," *Middle East Eye*, 13 June 2016, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/deleted-official-report-says-saudi-key-funder-hillary-clinton-presidential-campaign-223282807>

¹³ Jeremy Binnie, "IS seizes Saudi weapons from Syrian rebels", *IHS Jane's Defence Weekly*, 7 June 2016, <http://www.janes.com/article/61038/is-seizes-saudi-weapons-from-syrian-rebels>; Daniella Peled, "ISIS and Saudi Arabia: A Dangerous Double Game", *Ha'aretz*, 25 December 2015, <http://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/isis/1.693831>

¹⁴ John Reed, Noah Shachtman, "U.S. Shipping Thousands of Cluster Bombs to Saudi Arabia Despite Global Ban", *Foreign Policy*, 23 August 2013, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/08/23/u-s-shipping-thousands-of-cluster-bombs-to-saudis-despite-global-ban/>

¹⁵ Jennifer Rankin, "EU parliament votes for embargo on weapons sales to Saudi Arabia", *The Guardian*, 25 February 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/25/eu-parliament-votes-for-embargo-on-arms-sales-to-saudi-arabia>

¹⁶ Brahma Chellaney, "How to shut down the 'jihad factories'", *Indian Defence Review*, 2 May 2016, <http://www.indiandefensenews.in/2016/05/how-to-shut-down-jihad-factories.html>



from wealthy Arab Gulf donors to their non-profit organization.¹⁷ A true leader **leads** by example, not just **dominate** with military force. Hopefully, the next American president would know the difference.

Remarks: Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author. This article was first published by *Asia Times* on June 15, 2016.

¹⁷ David Sirota and Andrew Perez, "Clinton Foundation Donors Got Weapons Deals from Hillary Clinton's State Department", *International Business Times*, 26 May 2015, <http://www.ibtimes.com/clinton-foundation-donors-got-weapons-deals-hillary-clintons-state-department-1934187>; Adam Kredo, "Members of Wealthy Saudi Family Emerge as Clinton Foundation, Dem Donors", *Washington Free Beacon*, 20 May 2016, <http://freebeacon.com/politics/wealthy-saudi-family-history-violence-emerge-top-clinton-foundation-dem-donors/>; "Saudi Arabia Among Biggest Donors to Clinton Foundation", *Fox News*, 18 December 2008, <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2008/12/18/saudi-arabia-biggest-donors-clinton-foundation.html>