

**Conceptual Framework of Saudi Arabia's Efforts in  
Countering Terrorism: The Case of Intellectuals and  
Mass Media**

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## **Introduction**

Saudi Arabia had been shocked like any other country in the world with the September 11/ 2001 incident, and this also true for all terrorist act happened in the world since then. This could be a surprise for many, and contrary to what most of the international Media propagates about Saudi Arabia. The international media had set the agenda, and framed the incident as if Saudi Arabia were the attacker or behind any terrorist act worldwide.

When the incident happened, the first to deny it was Saudi Arabia. The Saudi official reaction was denial, and rejection. Denial not from the point that some Saudi citizens were part of the attackers, but rather rejecting the notion that those young Saudis represent what Saudis stand for and believe. Saudi Arabia was simply itself a victim of terrorist acts long before 9/11; putting in all efforts needed to combat it, and warning governments, and people in the region and worldwide of those "Extremist Cults" as the Saudi Minister of Foreign Affairs has described them lately<sup>(1)</sup>.

Saudi Arabia has been for the last 15 years bombarded from everywhere for its "presumed" nurturing of such extremist groups. It has been accused in its religious sects, educational system, monetary regulation, philanthropy, and even its cultural heritage. And for the Saudis, the surprise was that, those attacks were not only coming from western countries, but also from other Arab countries in the region, and Muslims as well. This situation complicated the matter for Saudi Arabia, not only in accepting the claim in the first place, but also mobilizing strategies to deal with it in the second place, especially since all sectors of the Saudi society were at risk. Saudi Arabia had to move very fast by putting in place a massive plan, that deals with all the claims. Although this plan was not comprehensive at the start, it has improved over time, especially after the May 2003 attack by Al-Qaida inside Saudi Arabia.

The Saudi efforts to counter terrorism took off as a broad perspective strategy; a plan with a multi-dimensional view. This was so, for two logical reasons: a phenomenon like this could not be interpreted through a single cause, and secondly it had to deal with different and various issues and topics, simultaneously.

This paper is trying to identify the path Saudi Arabia has taken to counter terrorism by developing a conceptual framework that encompasses the

dimensions of its anti-terrorism effort. Our conceptual framework identifies six factors: security, financial, legislative, executive, Judicial, and Intellectual and media, as the main elements of this effort. The framework we propose can be useful for understanding this case specifically, while it also applies to other simpler cases that are part of the direct efforts put in by Saudi Arabia to fight terrorism. But at the same time, it can be a helpful tool in any campaign to restore the image of Saudi Arabia.

The paper will present a summary of each element, and the strategies used to deal with each element. It also includes a description of the way the framework had been built, a situation analysis and the shaping of Saudi Public thought, and finally our conclusions.

### **The Conceptual Framework**

The purpose of this research paper is to define and explore areas of Saudi Arabia's effort to fight terrorism. Saudi efforts have moved in several directions. Though security was seen as the most prominent effort, there were many other areas the efforts targeted, that should be included in the analysis, and presented as elements in the proposed conceptual framework. A Conceptual framework has been defined as "the way ideas are organized to achieve a research project's purpose"<sup>(2)</sup>. But for the purposes of this study we use the definition of Yosef Jabareen (2009), where he defines a conceptual framework as "...a network or "plane" of interlinked concepts that together provide a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon or phenomena.

The concepts that constitute a conceptual framework support one another, articulate their respective phenomena, and establish a framework-specific philosophy."<sup>(3)</sup> And according to Jabareen the concepts should be; distinct, heterogeneous and, yet, not separable from one another<sup>(4)</sup>.

### **Shaping Public Thought**

For Saudi Arabia, terrorism is a huge national phenomenon, complex and linked to a multiple body of knowledge that requires effort in several directions at the same time; it is as if the whole society needs treatment. To pursue the understanding of the force(s) that built the Saudi Public Thought we need to look at the various sources that shape public thought. This

includes four major elements; the culture, the religious orientation, the education, and finally the government system.

## **Religious Orientation**

The Saudi Arabian society in summary can briefly be described as conservative. Religion is in the heart of every Saudi citizen not necessarily in practice but in faith. The majority of Saudi society is Muslim following the Sunni sect, though there are some Shiites (10%). The Sunni sect itself can also be divided into several shades. The Salafists or as some like to call them "Wahhabiyah" are the most dominant in Saudi Arabia.

Religious leaders in Saudi Arabia propagate "Wassatiyya" or moderation. All Religious sects reject any form of violence act against the ruler, and consider any act against him as an act of disruption of the whole Umma, they even considered those extremists as "Khawarij", or are not flower of the true Islam. However, with the rise of al-Qaida in Afghanistan to defend Islam against communist aggression in the eighties of the last century, some extremist fatwas (religious edicts) were used to justify the war against Russia.

Then, when the war in Afghanistan was over, young Muslim fighters came back to their respective countries and started campaigning against the west, and for change of government in their own countries, including Saudi Arabia. Matters got complicated when Al-Qaida leaders such as Abdullah Azzam, Aymen Zawahri, and Osama Bin Laden, convinced them that those governments could not survive without the support of the west, especially the USA. As a result we had the attacks of 9/11.

Meanwhile, this new interpretation of the Islamic faith (i.e. Extremism), was still drawing from some of the more classical concepts, such as the hatred of the Non-Muslims. And this mix is what finally led to 9/11.

Extremism has grown in response to internal and external forces. Part of the internal effect can be related to the competing views on some of the more contentious issues such as the role of women, the relationship with the west, and modernization.

The list of the outside forces can be exhaustive, but it mostly relates to issues such as; the situation on Iraq, Syria, and more importantly the Palestine

issue.

## **Culture**

Saudi culture can be seen as a mix of Islam and Arabian culture. Tribes are present, however, in some areas such as the western and eastern regions the influence of the tribe is limited. After the oil boom in the seventies of the last century, there has taken place significant evolution in the Saudi society; widespread change has swept the “traditionalist “ culture<sup>(5)</sup>. There is an ongoing trend, towards modernization according to the western model. The rhythm of the change has accelerated lately mainly due to the fact that around 60% of Saudis are young adults.

## **Education system**

The Saudi Arabian educational system resembles that of most other countries. It follows the twelve year system, before college or university. Education is both private and public. There are also vocational colleges, and Military institutes. Some experts believe that the problem with the educational system lies in its curricula. According to them, the system over invested in Religious and Arabic language subjects. However the curricula are currently been developed and updated constantly, to meet the changes taking place in the society, as well as the world in general. Of course, not everybody is happy with these changes

## **Government System**

Saudi Arabia is a monarchy, where the king is the head of state, as well as head of the cabinet of ministers. The Saudi people in general and for long have accepted this system, but this is not to say that there is no opposition. The opposition comes from different sections of the society and there is both religious and liberal opposition. Religious opposition is demanding more government restrictions, while the liberals want more public participation. The voice of the opposition has become more louder, now with the advent of new media.

## **Overall Strategies Goals and Objectives**

The overall Saudi strategies goals and objectives to fight against extremism

and terrorism took several tracks, the following points are the outlines of these strategies:

- The introduction of new legislation and regulations or develop the existing one would be legislatively to control the thought of extremism and terrorism.
- Overall review of exiting practice to insure its efficiency to fight thought of extremism and terrorism.
- Use of both soft power dialogue, and security (hard power) in the fight against extremism and terrorism.
- Develop security agencies and strengthen their effectiveness in the fight against groups of extremism and terrorism.
- Introduction of several public and privet programs and campaigns to raise the level of public awareness of the seriousness of the internal ideology of extremism and terrorism.
- Involve all public state institutions, private foundations and activist, in the fight against the thought of extremism and terrorism.
- Cooperation with regional and international organizations in all that would limit the spread of the ideology of extremism and terrorism.
- Taking regional and global initiatives in the thought of rooting for dialogue among civilizations.

## **Elements of the framework**

After reviewing a large bulk of literature and follow ups on the official and popular efforts to combat terrorism and extremism, we suggest that the following elements form the conceptual framework that represents the Kingdom's efforts in fighting terrorism, Figure (1). We have benefited from traditional structures that describe the government's role, and added to it the intellectual factor and the media's role. We have also separated Security from the Executive. The outside boarder denotes elements that shape public thought in Saudi society.

Figure (1)

Conceptual Framework of Saudi Arabia Fighting Terrorism

- **Legislative efforts to combat terrorism**

Saudi Arabia has emphasized that it has taken numerous effective,

regulatory and legislative steps that aim to fight terrorism, inside and outside the kingdom<sup>(6)</sup>. According to a prominent official, deputy minister of interior, these regulations and legislations are some of the most stringent anywhere in the world.

Worth noting is that in December 2013, Saudi Arabia issued its formal law for "combating terrorism and its financing". The law which was put into practice in February 2014, initially deals with terrorism related to financing and supporting it monetarily. In this respect it states that: "Any activity, including collecting, presenting, taking, specifying, transporting, or transferring, money that aids terrorist activity, inside or outside the Kingdom, is regarded illegal and punishable by law".

However, this law that consists of 40 articles, also deals with terrorism as a whole. It applies to all people living in the country, Saudi and expatriate, and covers terrorist crimes committed inside the country, as well as certain crimes committed outside of the country. Some of the more prominent articles include the following:

- \* The fifth article allows for detaining a suspect for a period not exceeding 6 months, but maybe extended if the investigation necessitates it.
- \* The ninth article allows for trial in absentia, if the accused was informed of his crime in a proper and legal manner. He has the right though, to fight the ruling legally.
- \* The tenth article stipulates that the accused has full right to an attorney to argue his case.

In March 2014, The authorities issued an official list of groups that it regarded as "officially' designated terrorist group. The list included ISIS, Hizbullah, and the Hautis of Yemen<sup>(7)</sup>. And very Recently, Saudi Arabia released new regulations giving the right to the authorities to detain anyone who expresses, publicly, his support or his sympathy for Hizbullah<sup>(8)</sup>. In addition, there are many other laws and regulations such as, the Anti e-Crime law, and the regulations that formally organize the appointment of Imams at mosques.

- **Judicial efforts**

In 2008, Saudi Arabia established the "Specialized Criminal Court". This

court is a judicial authority that undertakes the trying of those detained for, or accused of, terrorist crimes, as well as cases related to state security. It also looks into cases for annulment of previous court rulings, plus those related to compensation.

The court held its first hearings in June of 2011 when it looked into the case of 85 persons accused of having connections to Al-Qaeda, and participating in the bombings of a number of housing compounds in Riyadh, in 2003. According to a spokesman of the Ministry of Justice, under which the jurisdiction of the court falls, terrorist crimes are dangerous and complicated and require extremely delicate verification and examination of proofs and evidences, and for this reason this specialized court was set. The spokesman added<sup>(9)</sup>, that since its establishment it has looked into (2225) cases, and that the number of accused in these cases had reached (6122). He added that the court is still looking into the matters of another (179) accused.

He also added that the judicial system in Saudi Arabia was objective, and does not deal with persons or names, but rather deals with deeds and material evidence. As such, it does not look into the ethnic affiliations of any of the accused nor his sectarian background. The criteria used by the court, according to the spokesman, was purely legal and judicial, and that court rulings were stringently re-examined, so that the court would not reach a final verdict until it was fully convinced of the un-equivocal indications of the evidence. A point worth noting is that, every defendant has the right to bring a lawyer, and those who cannot afford these costs are assisted by the government. Plus, all court sessions were open to the local and international media and human rights associations, except meetings where the defendant specifically asked for them not to attend .

### **3- Executive efforts**

What is meant here is the executive efforts put in by the ministry of interior to curtail terrorism. According to the official statements of the ministry, it has the following strategic aims and objectives<sup>(10)</sup>:

- Achieve security and stability Kingdom-wide.
- Fight against all crime to ensure the safety of the Saudi society.
- Ensure safety of Pilgrims.
- Reinforce security relationships with neighboring Arab countries, as well as the broader Arab world to maintain safety in the Kingdom and

abroad, control crime, fight terrorism and drug smuggling, exchange security information, organize citizenship regulations and systems, and develop Arab security institutions.

The ministry has jurisdiction over many sectors; the following are the most relevant:

- \* Public security; which covers traffic control and police.
- \* Premises security; which has the duty of protecting government buildings and facilities, as well as manning check points.
- \* Civil Defense.
- \* Special forces; which basically is tasked with performing special and emergency security operations.
- \* National Center for Security Operations: The center is a hub for monitoring the security situation in Saudi Arabia through the gathering of information. It also gauges general public attitude towards the status of security, and provides consultation and recommendation on security, and on the necessary steps to be taken in the case of emergencies inside or outside the kingdom.
- \* Investigation office: Amongst other things it has the following tasks; aborting terrorist attacks and destructive activities, confronting extremist religious groups and protecting the society from their harm, exposing spies and aborting their activities, and exposing administrative corruption.
- \* Financial investigation Unit: The primary function of the Unit is to analyze and handle suspicious financial transactions. It has relevant databases and exchanges information with the appropriate agencies in Saudi Arabia and abroad to combat money laundering and the financing of terrorism.
- \* Saudi Interpol
- \* Border guard
- \* Crime Research; which in general is an academic facility that prepares studies and reports related to crime in general.
- \* Ideological Security: It deals with issues relating to religious extremism, and intellectually engages those individuals who have deviated from moderate Islamic values. In this regard it holds many meetings to discuss the issue, as well as carrying out campaigns and programs related to clarifying proper Islamic values.

- **Security Efforts to Fight Terrorism**

The security forces have achieved a lot in its efforts to face up to acts of violence and terrorism.

The ministry of interior's records show that it is totally bent on apprehending terrorists, and destroying all cells connected to terrorism in the Kingdom. Its forces have registered unprecedented success in direct engagement with these deviating elements, or apprehending them. This has been achieved with precision and decisiveness, but ensuring that the lives of the normal citizen is not compromised or endangered.

Until recently, the records show that the ministry's forces have been extremely successful in pre-emptive operations. These operations intended to stop any terrorist activity before it could start. In relation to this, it has achieved an overall success rate of 95%<sup>(11)</sup>. On the other hand it has also been successful in combating terrorism at its rudimentary level, specifically that of elements sympathizing with the ideas of these terrorists, or supporting them through logistical or financial support. A huge number of these cells have been apprehended and their supporting infrastructures dismantled.

In general, and up to 2013, the number of terrorist incidents that have taken place in the kingdom have reached 145. As a direct consequence of these events 140 people have been killed, including security personnel and innocent bystanders, besides 674 others who suffered injuries<sup>(12)</sup>.

The Ministry of Interior introduced in 2004, an official spokesman for the dissemination of information on terrorist operations and cooperation with local and international media as a source of such news. Also it has allocated a special phone number (990) to report any suspicion of security related terrorist operations.

- **Financial Efforts to Combat Terrorism**

Saudi Arabia's Economic system follows western standards, with some adaptation to Islamic principles. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has exerted much effort to curtail the financing of terrorism.

According to official sources<sup>(13)</sup>, this effort has included the following:

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

Saudi charities are prohibited from transferring money abroad. Also, cash contributions in mosques and public places have also been stopped.

The Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency has implemented technical programs to train judges and investigators on matters regarding terrorism financing, and money laundering. Besides training programs that educate them on the international requirements for financial secrecy.

Saudi Arabia works closely with the United States, Britain, France, Italy, Canada, Australia and other allies from the Gulf and Arab region in general, to combat terror financing globally.

- According to others<sup>(14)</sup>, the Kingdoms efforts to combat terrorism also include the following financial steps and regulations:
- Opening a channel of communication between the ministry of interior and the Saudi Monetary agency.
- Setting up a standing committee for combating money laundering that consists of a number of different government agencies.
- Setting up units for fighting money laundering, in the Saudi Monetary Agency, as well in all local banks.
- Setting up a unit for financial investigation (FIU) to deal with cases of terrorist financing and money laundering. This unit coordinates with the unit for money laundering in the Saudi Monetary Agency.

#### • **Media and Intellectual Efforts**

Since the first terrorist act in Saudi Arabia (**What has come to be known as the Olaya incident of November 1995**), it been admitted that security treatment of terrorism was not enough, and that intellectual and media efforts should be go hand in hand. Also that extremist thought should be addressed as part of the efforts.

To put intellectual efforts in perspective, we will look at both media and intellectual endeavors in Saudi Arabia.

## **Intellectual and Media Use, by Terrorist Groups**

Perhaps the most distinguishing feature of extremist and terrorist groups, is the wide use of classical and even new and social media, professionally and in a way that draws attention.

These forms of media appeal to the terrorists because of the following: It is easy to avoid tracking by security agencies especially as they can change the location (of the server) of the host country; It allows for the disrupting of public opinion, with minimal effort, by targeting certain countries and highlighting the negative aspects of the governments of those countries; They can penetrate web sites and hack official government accounts and media services and then disseminate their propaganda or disinformation; They can take advantage of widely used applications such as Twitter by penetrating the accounts of famous people in order to promote their terrorist ideas amongst those who follow these accounts; They can maximize their effectiveness through the re-broadcasting of their messages through social networking, thus continuously expanding their communication base; They can easily use this media to exploit events that have global appeal (such as what happened at the World Cup in Brazil the summer of 2014 and the European championships) by putting up their own links on the web sites that cover these events.

Interestingly here, is that traditional media has contributed to the growing strength of these groups by re-broadcasting shows that highlight terrorism and some of their deeds. The media itself considers this coverage mere news articles for their audiences, however the material is in fact indirect "propaganda" for their strength and brutality, and even part of an inadvertent form of psychological warfare, on behalf of the terrorists .

On the other hand, some of these terrorist groups have produced books and publications in which they misrepresent the religious views of senior religious scholars (Olama), of both classical and contemporary persuasion. By this, they are trying to convince followers of the legitimacy of their calls and practices.

### **• Saudi Media**

The Saudi media system is not different from other media systems in the region or some of the other developing countries. Until recently broadcast

media was owned and operated by the government, while print media was private, but under government supervision. In 2012 three new public authorities were established; the Saudi Broadcasting Corporation, to operate government radio and television services, the Saudi Press Agency (SPA), and the General Commission for Audiovisual Media to regulate private radio, and (and TV) services that are been introduced in Saudi Arabia for the first time. Up till now, six radio operators have been granted a license, their no TV channel operators as of now. The idea behind this move was to give some administration, and financial independency from direct government control. This move has been appreciated and seen as a step in the right direction to improve the service.

To complete describing the media scene in Saudi Arabia, one cannot escape writing about some Saudi businessmen investing in Arab media. There are five Saudi media conglomerates: the Saudi Research & Marketing Group (1972) that publishes Al Sharq Alawsat Arabic daily Newspaper (1978) and the Arab News(1980) English daily newspaper; Alhayyat that publishes Alhayyat Arabic Daily newspaper; Orbit Show Time Network (OSN) (2009), a joint venture with the Kuwaiti Investment House; ROTANA (1982), an entertainment TV network; and finally the MBC group that operates several radio and TV channels, the most prominent being the Alarabiya news channel, a TV channel competing with the Aljazeera New Channel.

Media in Saudi Arabia for long has been criticized for not keeping up with development in Saudi Arabia. Criticism has come from different social groups, but mainly the conservatives and the liberals. This criticism has intensified lately with the introduction of the new, and social media. The criticism can be seen as a reflection of each group's perception of the role of the media in society. The liberals define the media as a tool for modernization, while the conservatives see it as a tool for propagating the cause of Islam. This difference has led to confrontation between the two groups, a confrontation that can easily be seen in the continuing debate in print and social media.

Saudi media and those investing in it, have put in thousands of hours and pages of material related to fighting terrorism and extremism. These efforts include customized weekly programs on radio and television. As part of a public campaign, newspapers have devoted special pages daily, as well as weekly, to address the issue of extremism and terrorism. This is in addition

to the employment of TV drama, in efforts to fight terrorism. Worth noting, is that the Saudi efforts were not only restricted to traditional media, but have also extended to Social media.

Since the inception of social media, the Saudi society has been reported, in several surveys, to be one of the top users in the world, of this medium. Unfortunately, it is also reported to be a favorite for terrorist groups to recruit followers, and collect money.

## **B- Intellectual Effort**

Intellectual efforts have taken many routes, but essentially it has adopted the principle of "transparency" in its confrontation with these groups and their slide towards extremism and terrorism. These efforts include, holding many scientific conferences and symposiums at the local and international level to discuss the ideology of extremism and terrorism; this is in addition to publishing hundreds of books on the subject. But, among the most prominent of all these efforts was the establishment of a research chair in 11 different Saudi universities to study the phenomenon of extremism and its ideology, and the spread of terrorism.

At the international level, the Kingdom has taken several initiatives for cooperation with international institutions and organizations in this regard, and the most prominent of these was the call for a dialogue between civilizations, as well as the adoption of the King Abdullah Center for Dialogue of Civilizations in Vienna in 2009.

Extremely important also, regarding intellectual effort, was the establishment of two centers for what we can describe as soft power for dialogue. The first one is the King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue established in 2003, it is a forum to debate reform and suggest strategies and programs to fight extremism and terrorism. The second one is the Mohammed bin Nayef Center for Counseling and Care (Al-Munasaha) Established in 2006. This center has received much praise from several international organizations especially those related to human rights, for its continuous efforts to rehabilitate extremists who have not participated in criminal acts, but have shown sympathy for the cause.

## **Reservations regarding media and intellectual efforts**

There are numerous misgivings on this issue. Criticism of media and intellectual efforts include the following; it is seasonal, meaning it is active at the time of the event and after the event it abruptly stops until the next event; on the other hand most media efforts focus on the legal side and trying to refute the ideas of these groups, while there is actually disagreement and controversy surrounding these ideas; also the lack of studies and research in Arabic language that analyze the discourse of these extremist groups, while most of what is written about these groups is from western scholars alien to the religious, and cultural dimensions of these groups.

## **Obstacles**

Since the issue of terrorism is a multi dimensional phenomenon, it requires the effort of several government and private sectors. The mere multiplicity of parties who are interested in addressing terrorism, in itself makes it hard to deal with the matter. In other words, the main obstacle is that there is no "single" administrative unit to manage all the effort.

The different views and definitions on the matter, by the various social groups, is another obstacle. There is no single method agreed upon by these multitude of forces, to guide therapy.

There are also those who do not actually agree with these efforts; they are mainly hardliners. Hence, part of the effort to deal with terrorism, is unfortunately spent on convincing those who do not support the effort, to support it in the first place.

One final note is that these huge steps taken by the country, may be incommensurable; in other words have no "agreed" upon standard of measurement. There is no easy way to quantify and evaluate these efforts to decide whether they are successful or not. Saudi Arabia believes it is winning in its effort against terrorism, while others may not have the same opinion. Thus, Saudi Arabia may not see relief from many of the accusations leveled against it, in the near future.

## **Conclusion**

Although, the Saudi battle with terrorism is a security matter, it had been recognized from the beginning, that terrorist acts are an expression of a complex extremist ideology; a multi dimensional phenomenon . As a result the effort to fight terror can also be seen as complex and multi dimensional. In this study we tried to develop a conceptual framework to help identify the Saudi effort to fight terrorism. This framework encompasses six elements: Security, Executive, Legislative, Judicial, Media and Intellectual Efforts. The framework could be useful to understand this case specifically, but can also apply to other more simpler cases, i.e. more direct efforts to fight terrorism. At the same time, the framework may help in any campaign to enhance the Saudi "image".

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