

Saudi-American Forum



SAF Item of Interest

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Common Enemy: U.S. and Saudi Arabia Unite Against Terrorists

by John Duke Anthony

WASHINGTON--The tragic terrorist attacks in Saudi Arabia about a month ago let the world know that the war on terrorism is far from over. The talk of having al-Qaida "on the run" was clearly overly optimistic. Instead of self-destructing, al-Qaida appears to be morphing into something new and perhaps even more dangerous--and not only for America.

The Saudis, too, have clearly received a wake-up call. While their words and deeds in the war on terrorism have been constructive, the entire international coalition fighting terrorism needs to reassess, reorganize and come back at al-Qaida with innovative, forceful and effective strategies.

What al-Qaida wants most is to see the international community fight amongst themselves as they move through the shadows, stalking their next victims. Now is the time to band together--not point fingers.

Saudi Arabia was waging a war on terrorism long before that phrase entered the vocabulary of the U.S. media. Saudi Arabia was al-Qaida's first victim. It remains al-Qaida's top target.

The country's General Intelligence Directorate has been battling various terrorist groups for over 40 years. In 1994, Saudi Arabia froze all of Osama bin Laden's assets. In an unprecedented move, it also revoked his citizenship. In 1997, Saudi Arabia and the United States established a joint counterterrorism committee to exchange specific information about al-Qaida. And last year the U.S.-Saudi Joint Working Group on Terrorism was formed.

Since 9/11, Saudi Arabia has questioned over 2,000 people, made over 300 arrests, and sent more than 90 suspected al-Qaida members to trial. In fact, virtually every arrest to date of a major al-Qaida figure has been accomplished with Saudi Arabia's assistance.

It is tragic that, in the past, the generosity of Saudi Arabian charities has been abused. In meetings I had with Saudi Arabian Cabinet ministers soon after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, each official practically pleaded that, as an urgent matter, the U.S. government assist in helping to put into place as soon as possible an appropriate system that would enable the Saudi Arabian government to monitor effectively all charitable and other foreign financial exchanges that occur outside normal banking mechanisms and transactions.

The Saudi Arabian government set up a Financial Intelligence Unit linking its central bank with

banks in the kingdom to track suspected transactions. A high commission for oversight of charities was established.

As a result, all charities are now subject to monitoring and audits. Moreover, charitable activities that extend beyond the country's borders must now be coordinated with the Foreign Ministry.

While no country, neither Saudi Arabia nor ours, is bereft of blemish on a variety of fronts, much of what passes for considered opinion in the blame-the-Saudis game would seem by most standards, including American ones, to be unfair. What is worse, it also goes against the numerous consistent, and public, statements by senior U.S. government officials who have repeatedly commended the kingdom for its cooperation in the war against terrorism.

Accusatory voices in this country are apparently bent on alienating the strongest Arab ally we have. It is sad that at the very moment when Saudi Arabia embraces a multifaceted reform program and accelerated modernization, narrowing the ideological divide between East and West, its American antagonists direct their efforts to widen the gap and push it further away.

These divisive efforts are simultaneously being made in the Middle East by the very same terrorists that murdered American and Saudi citizens, along with many others.

To impugn the character and intent of the leaders of a country from which the United States has derived incalculable benefits for more than half a century, and which, among independent Arab countries since the 1930s, has been America's oldest and most consistent friend, is one thing. To do so in the face of its recent tragedy and all that it has been doing and accomplished to date in its efforts to right previous wrongs is hardly a fair return for the steps that Saudi Arabia has taken to combat terrorism.

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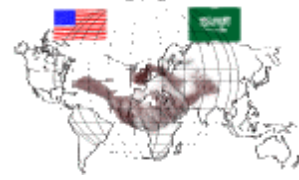
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. John Duke Anthony is Publisher, Saudi American Forum; Co-Founder and Vice-President of the Council for Saudi American Dialogue; President and CEO, National Council on U.S. Arab-Relations; Secretary, U.S.-GCC Corporate Cooperation Committee; Publisher of GulfWire. All are Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit and non-governmental organizations dedicated to educating Americans and others about the Arab countries, the Middle East, and the Islamic world.

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The Saudi-American Forum is an information service designed to provide you timely information -- background and current issues - - impacting the Saudi-U.S. relationship.



The Forum is a resource for Americans who value the relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia and who want to act in response to erroneous and misleading depictions of the relationship in the media and elsewhere. The Forum is a vehicle for stakeholders in the Saudi-U.S. relationship to contribute their experiences and their ideas and opinions on the issues of the day.

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