

BRITAIN AND SAUDI ARABIA



BRITAIN AND SAUDI ARABIA

© Labour Campaign for Human Rights

Editors

Josh Holmes
Matthew Turner
Alin Martin

Contributors

Ollie Lund
Eleanor Daniel
Corinne Linnecar
Sam Knights
Ruth Davis

Typeset & Cover Design

Owain Evans

CONTENTS

HISTORY AND POLITICS	4
<i>The history of the UK-Saudi relationship</i>	4
<i>Arms</i>	4
<i>Oil</i>	5
<i>Saudi Arabia's political system</i>	6
<i>Mohammed bin Salman</i>	8
DIPLOMACY AND INFLUENCE	10
<i>Diplomatic relationship</i>	10
<i>Lobbying</i>	11
<i>Intelligence sharing</i>	11
<i>Home Office and Ministry of Justice</i>	12
<i>UK-Saudi influence</i>	13
TRADE AND INVESTMENT	15
<i>The arms trade</i>	15
<i>UK personnel in Saudi Arabia</i>	16
<i>UK complicity</i>	16
<i>The economic relationship</i>	17
<i>International investigations</i>	18
<i>Saudi investment in the UK</i>	19
HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES	21
<i>Criminal justice system</i>	21
<i>Executions and torture</i>	21
<i>Freedom of speech, press freedom and extrajudicial killings</i>	23
<i>Women's rights</i>	25
<i>Guardianship</i>	25
<i>Violence against women and imprisonment of women's rights activists</i>	26
<i>Other minorities</i>	27
RELATIONS WITH OTHER STATES	31
<i>Saudi Arabia's foreign policy</i>	31
<i>Yemen</i>	32
<i>Qatar</i>	36
<i>Bahrain</i>	38
<i>Lebanon</i>	40
<i>Canada</i>	42
RECOMMENDATIONS	44

HISTORY AND POLITICS



The history of the UK-Saudi relationship

The United Kingdom's relationship with Saudi Arabia dates to the early 20th century, when the territory was part of the Ottoman Empire. In 1902, Ibn Saud, who later became the first King of Saudi Arabia, captured Riyadh and became the Amir of Nejd, the central plateau of the Arabian Peninsula.¹ He sought the support of the British Empire in his bid to become independent from the Ottomans, but the British feared exacerbating the already strained relationship between the two empires.

The Ottoman Empire's alliance with Germany during the First World War marked a decisive shift in British relations with the Saudis. Britain requested Ibn Saud's military support in return for protection from the Ottomans and a recognition of Saudi independence.² He rejected the offer, however, preferring to stay neutral. Nevertheless, on 26 December 1915 the United Kingdom signed the Treaty of Darin whereby Ibn Saud's lands became a British protectorate to which Britain agreed to supply arms and a subsidy of £5,000 a month. In 1922, Colonial Secretary Winston Churchill raised the subsidy to £100,000.³

After the First World War, Ibn Saud took control of the Hejaz (Mecca, Medina and Jeddah). The United Kingdom recognised him as the King of the Hejaz in January 1926 and in May 1927 signed the Treaty of Jeddah, which officially recognised the nation of Saudi Arabia. To cement the two countries' diplomatic relations, Saudi Arabia opened its second embassy in London in 1930.⁴



Arms

The 1915 Treaty of Darin committed the United Kingdom to supply Saudi Arabia with machine guns and rifles. This arrangement continued until 1924.⁵ Relations between the United Kingdom and Saudi Arabia weakened with the rise of the United States as a global superpower - after the Second World War, Saudi Arabia became a quasi-protectorate of the United States - and for a while broke off entirely after the 1956 Suez Crisis.

1- The Historical Journal 28(3), [The Origins of British-Saudi Relations: The 1915 Anglo-Saudi Treaty Revisited](#), 01/09/85

2 - ibid

3 - Mark Curtis, [How Britain Carved Up the Middle East and Helped Create Saudi Arabia](#), 02/11/16

4 - Mohammed Zaid Al-Khatani, [The Foreign Policy of King Ibn Saud](#), 01/10/04

5 - International Affairs, 56(4), [A Prospect of Saudi Arabia](#), 1980



Relations had resumed by the early 1960s and in 1965 the UK played a major role in the first large arms shipment to Saudi Arabia, supplying aircraft, radar and other equipment worth \$280 million.⁶ Competition between the UK and the US for Saudi Arabia's lucrative arms market increased, and in 1966 the British government appointed an arms salesman to Saudi Arabia. The UK secured new contracts for air defence equipment in 1970 and 1973.⁷

On 9 February 1986, Margaret Thatcher and Prince Bandar, a senior member of the House of Saud and Ambassador to the US, signed the al-Yamamah arms contract after a proposed F-15 deal between Saudi Arabia and the US broke down.⁸ Al-Yamamah was a barter deal – Britain supplied Tornado, Hawk and PC-9 aircrafts to the Royal Saudi Air Force and Saudi Arabia provided oil in return. This would have breached international trade rules had there not been an exception for military sales.⁹ Al-Yamamah II, which has been called 'the arms sale of the century', was signed on 5 July 1988. It was valued at around £10 billion.¹⁰

The al-Yamamah deals are the UK's largest ever arms sales, but it has subsequently been revealed that large bribes were paid to secure them. The police have calculated that over £6 billion may have been distributed in corrupt commissions, with millions going to Prince Bandar personally. To facilitate the deals, the arms firm provided him with "extravagant holidays, fleets of classic cars, planeloads of shopping and blond girlfriends."¹¹ In February 2010, BAE Systems accepted guilt and agreed to pay £258 million over al-Yamamah corruption claims.¹²



After conquering the Hejaz, Ibn Saud could generate income by taxing the port city of Jeddah and the Hajj pilgrims travelling to Mecca and Medina. However, the number of pilgrims fell significantly during the Great Depression of the 1930s.¹³ Saudi Arabia's economic situation became desperate, and despite the King's reluctance to let foreigners into the country, in 1933 he granted Standard Oil of California a \$250,000

6 - Campaign Against Arms Trade, [The Arabian Connection: The UK Arms Trade to Saudi Arabia](#), 2000

7 - ibid

8 - Kings College London, [Security cooperation with Saudi Arabia: Is it worth it for the UK?](#) 01/09/18

9 - Campaign Against Arms Trade, [The Arabian Connection: The UK Arms Trade to Saudi Arabia](#), 2000

10 - ibid

11 - The Guardian, [The secrets of al-Yamamah](#)

12 - The Guardian, [BAE pays fines of £285m over arms deal corruption claims](#), 05/02/10

13 - International Affairs, 56(4), [A Prospect of Saudi Arabia](#), 1980

oil concession and promised royalty payments of four gold shillings per tonne for any oil found and produced. By 1960 oil production exceeded 3.5 million barrels a day,¹⁴ and by 1981 Saudi oil revenues had reached \$116 billion.¹⁵



Saudi Arabia's political system

Saudi Arabia is one of only a small number of absolute monarchies in the world.¹⁶ The current King, Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud, who assumed power in January 2015, is the seventh King of Saudi Arabia and one of Ibn Saud's 45 sons.

The King is the head of state and the government. He exercises executive, legislative and judicial functions: there is no separation of powers or judicial independence. The government is run by a Council of Ministers, or Cabinet, which was established in 1953.¹⁷ It currently comprises 21 ministers representing different government departments and seven ministers of state. It is presided over by the Prime Minister (the King) and the Deputy Prime Minister (the Crown Prince). The current Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Salman, has amassed considerable personal power and is generally considered to be the country's de facto ruler.

The Council of Ministers is advised by a Consultative Council - the Majlis al-Shura - composed of 150 members appointed by the King.¹⁸ It is split into committees with portfolios including education, health and social affairs, foreign affairs, security, Islamic affairs, and even human rights. The Consultative Council has no legislative powers but can propose draft legislation to the King. In January 2013, the King issued a royal decree granting women 30 seats on the council and requiring that women hold at least one fifth of its seats.¹⁹

Islam is central to Saudi Arabian society, and religious leaders and jurists - the ulama - wield significant power.²⁰ In 1972, the King established the Council of Senior Scholars, which is formed of senior clerics. It is the country's highest religious body and advises the King on all religious matters.

14 - ibid

15 - Campaign Against Arms Trade, [The Arabian Connection: The UK Arms Trade to Saudi Arabia](#), 2000

16 - The Washington Post, [Meet the world's other 25 royal families](#), 22/07/18

17 - The Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, [About Saudi Arabia](#), 08/11/18

18 - ibid

19 - BBC News, [Saudi Arabia's king appoints women to Shura Council](#), 11/01/13

20 - World Policy, [King Salman and the Saudi Ulama](#), 18/05/16

The ulama have historically been led by the Al ash-Sheikh family, who are descendants of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, the 18th century founder of Wahhabism.²¹ They are the second most powerful family in Saudi Arabia after the al-Sauds. In 1744, the two families entered into a power-sharing agreement: the al-Sauds would help the Al ash-Sheikhs to promote Wahhabism, and the Al ash-Sheikhs would keep the al-Sauds in power. This pact still exists today.

Wahhabism is a fundamentalist, ultra-conservative form of Islam²² that advocates a return to the traditions of the 'salaf' – the first three generations of Muslims. It is a stricter, Saudi version of Salafism – the 19th century movement to revive Sunni Islam in response to European imperialism.

The Grand Mufti is the most senior Muslim scholar in Saudi Arabia, and head of the Permanent Committee for Islamic Research and Issuing Fatwas. His role is to issue opinions – fatwas – on legal and religious matters. The current Grand Mufti, Abdul-Aziz ibn Abdullah Al ash-Sheikh, was appointed in 1999. He has issued several controversial fatwas over the years, including that all churches on the Arabian Peninsula should be destroyed,²³ that Iranians are not Muslims,²⁴ and that young girls are ready for marriage by the age of 12.²⁵ However, he has also condemned suicide bombings,²⁶ and stated that fighting and killing Jews should be forbidden for Muslims.²⁷ In recent years, the Saudi royal family has attempted to limit the spread of extreme Salafism in the country.²⁸ In particular, it has taken steps to rein in the power of the ulama and to exert control over the issue of fatwas.

The legal system is based on Islamic law – Sharia – in both civil and criminal cases. Unlike in most common or civil law systems, the sources of law are all religious: the Koran, the Sunnah (the practices and sayings of Muhammad during his lifetime), Ijma' (the opinion of Muslim scholars) and Qias (analogy). Fatwas issued by the Grand Mufti also heavily influence the legal system.

In summarising the Saudi Arabian system of government, the website of the Saudi embassy in

21 - Al Jazeera, [Can Mohammed bin Salman break the Saudi-Wahhabi pact?](#), 07/01/18

22 - The Telegraph, [What is Wahhabism? The reactionary branch of Islam from Saudi Arabia said to be 'the main source of global terrorism'](#), 19/05/17

23 - Arabian Business, [Destroy all churches in Gulf, says Saudi Grand Mufti](#), 15/03/12

24 - The Independent, ['Iranians are not Muslims', says Saudi Arabia's Grand Mufti](#), 07/09/16

25 - Arabian Business, [Girls ready for marriage at 12 - Saudi Grand Mufti](#), 24/04/12

26 - Al Jazeera, [Saudi Grand Mufti condemns suicide attacks](#), 12/12/13

27 - Daily Sabah, [Israel welcomes Saudi mufti's pro-Israel remarks, invites him to visit the country](#), 14/11/17

28 - The Washington Post, [Saudi Arabia is trying to contain the spread of Salafism. It won't work](#), 20/12/17

Washington DC states that: *"In defining the relationship between the ruler and the people, the system emphasizes the equality of all Saudi citizens. All are equal before God and in their concern for the well-being, security, dignity and progress of their nation. All citizens are also equal before the law".*



Mohammed bin Salman

Prince Mohammed Bin Salman - MBS - is just 31, but since his appointment as Crown Prince on 21 June 2017 he has amassed immense political capital and become the most powerful man individual in Saudi Arabia. He has embarked on a major campaign of rebranding the country, and has toured the world in a bid to present himself as a liberal reformer. He has made some highly publicised reforms to domestic law, including legalising driving for women, reducing the power of the religious police and even setting up an entertainment authority.²⁹ But many see this simply as PR, and point to his aggressive foreign policy and continuing human rights abuses in the country.³⁰

Prince Mohammed, son of Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud, grew up in immense privilege in Riyadh. He entered politics in 2009 as special adviser to his father, then governor of Riyadh. When his father became King in 2015, he was appointed the world's youngest minister of defence.³¹ Over the next two years he accumulated vast personal power. He was named head of the Saudi economic planning council and given control of Saudi Aramco, the \$10 trillion national oil company.³²

Yet it was still a shock when it was announced that he had replaced Muhammad bin Nayef as Crown Prince, heir to the Saudi throne. It was presented as a peaceful handover, but accounts suggest that intimidation was used to remove bin Nayef.³³ His elevation shattered Saudi traditions of seniority, power-sharing and stability in government.³⁴ In the ensuing months, he began eliminating rivals, including Prince Miteb bin Abdullah, the head of the National Guard. On 4 November 2017, he arrested scores of influential figures across the country, including a dozen members of the royal family, and incarcerated them in the Ritz-Carlton in Riyadh.³⁵ He now controls the Army, the interior ministry and National Guard. As Jamal Khashoggi wrote *"He can do whatever he wants now. All the checks and balances*

29 - The Independent, [Prince Mohammed bin Salman: Naive, arrogant Saudi prince is playing with fire](#), 09/01/16

30 - The Independent, [We should welcome Mohammed bin Salman to the UK - his reforms in Saudi Arabia could benefit us all](#), 05/03/18; The Independent, [Prince Mohammed bin Salman: Naive, arrogant Saudi prince is playing with fire](#), 09/01/16

31 - The Guardian, [Mohammed bin Salman al-Saud: the hothead who would be king](#), 25/06/17

32 - The New Yorker, [A Saudi Prince's Quest to Remake the Middle East](#), 09/04/18

33 - ibid

34 - The New York Times, [Rise of Saudi Prince Shatters Decades of Royal Tradition](#), 15/10/16

balances are gone."³⁶

In a country where politics is traditionally conducted cautiously, Prince Mohammed has broken with convention. He has been quick to exercise his immense power, both domestically and abroad. His flagship Vision 2030 programme, announced in April 2016, is a sweeping series of economic reforms aimed at diversifying the country's economy, reducing its dependence on oil and modernising the nation.³⁷ He has mobilised a vast PR campaign in support of his reforms. He is open with the press and has given interviews to publications like the *Economist*.³⁸

Yet behind this veneer of liberalisation many of Saudi Arabia's authoritarian practices persist. Several female activists have been arrested on insubstantial charges, and in the summer of 2017 the regime jailed 30 clerics, writers and intellectuals for voicing opposition to Prince Mohammed's policies.³⁹ Confessions of corruption were extracted without trial, and at least one prominent Saudi, Ali al-Qahtani, died in suspicious circumstances.⁴⁰

Prince Mohammed has adopted an aggressive foreign policy to thwart Iran and establish Saudi Arabia as the pre-eminent force in the region, and has developed close ties with the Trump Administration, which also wants to see Iran weakened.⁴¹ He has shown himself willing to risk chaos in the region and has fuelled human rights abuses across the Middle East. He has created a humanitarian crisis in Yemen in his attempt to "eradicate all Iranian influence" there,⁴² and the forced resignation of Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri, the shocking death of journalist Jamal Khashoggi and the failed blockade in Qatar illustrate his willingness to extend Saudi influence no matter the cost.

35 - The New Yorker, [A Saudi Prince's Quest to Remake the Middle East](#), 09/04/18

36 - ibid

37 - ibid

38 - The Economist, [Transcript: Interview with Muhammad bin Salman](#), 06/01/16

39 - The Guardian, [Mohammed bin Salman never was a reformer. This has proved it](#), 18/10/18

40 - ibid

41 - ibid

42- The New Yorker, [A Saudi Prince's Quest to Remake the Middle East](#), 09/04/18

DIPLOMACY AND INFLUENCE

Image: Foreign & Commonwealth Office



Diplomatic relationship

Saudi Arabia is the UK's largest market for British goods, including arms, in the Middle East - the government describes it as a "core market" for "*defence and security opportunities*"⁴³ - and a key source of counter-terrorism intelligence. The UK government and military maintain a close relationship with their Saudi counterparts. UK military personnel mentor the Saudi National Guard and run a programme to help it improve its communications.⁴⁴ Political relations, particularly since the 1986 al-Yamamah deal, are cemented by frequent diplomatic visits from senior political figures, and there are close links between the two royal families. Prince Charles has visited the country more than a dozen times, often paving the way for large arms deals.⁴⁵

With Brexit approaching, the UK government has attempted to strengthen its relationship with Saudi Arabia in economic, military and intelligence matters, and Prince Mohammed's rise to power has given a boost to this diplomatic work. Theresa May and senior Cabinet ministers have visited the country several times since 2017, and have signed a number of major new agreements, including a military and security co-operation agreement covering counter-terrorism, intelligence, training, medical services and logistics in September 2017.⁴⁶

The government signed a more comprehensive strategic partnership agreement with Saudi Arabia during Prince Mohammed's March 2018 visit to the UK, deepening the links between the countries' defence and security forces. The partnership, which had been in preparation since 2011, signals that the UK will be providing more technologies and services to Saudi Arabia, and sharing information across a far wider range of areas than at present. The government states that there will be much greater co-operation between the two countries in military capacity-building, cyber security, countering terrorism and violent extremism, and aviation security.⁴⁷

43 - House of Commons, [UK Trade and Investment Defence and Security Organisation: Written question - 161130](#), 05/07/18

44 - House of Commons, [Armed Forces: Saudi Arabia: Written question - 46071](#), 12/09/16

45 - The Guardian, [The future British king, Saudi princes and a secret arms deal](#), 24/02/14

46 - Gov.uk, [New agreement strengthens UK-Saudi Arabia Defence relationship](#), 19/09/17

47 - Gov.uk, [United Kingdom-Saudi Arabia Joint Communiqué](#), 10/03/18



Lobbying

As part of his rebranding exercise, Mohammed bin Salman has been targeting the UK with a well-financed PR campaign involving major UK-based agencies including Freud, Consulum and Publicis, and online publisher Vice has produced films promoting the country.⁴⁸ As the Economist reports, whereas previous Saudi leaders have been wary of inviting press attention, Prince Mohammed:

“has ordered a PR blitz. Bright young Saudi graduates of Western universities staff the ranks of a new Centre for International Communication in Riyadh. Ministries have press offices for the first time. The three-day London trip includes a ‘celebration of culture’ showcasing Saudi art, music and film, forms of expression that in the old kingdom might have merited a lashing. Saudi lobbyists have taken out ads in the papers (including this one) and placed billboards hailing ‘the united kingdoms’ along London’s arteries. Pop-up ads litter the internet with portraits of the young prince, claiming that he is ‘empowering Saudi Arabian women’.”⁴⁹

Saudi lobbying also includes the targeting of individual MPs. This year, it has spent more than £100,000 providing MPs, including senior members of the government, with expensive gifts, luxury accommodation, first-class travel, food hampers and positions on sympathetic think tanks.⁵⁰ The Intercept reports that Philip Hammond, “who has come under fire for defending a mass execution in Saudi Arabia that included a nonviolent government critic, accepted a watch from the Saudi ambassador worth £1,950 (\$2,514)” in July 2015.⁵¹ It is impossible to know precisely how much this kind of lobbying influences MPs’ behaviour, but some MPs who have received such treatment have come under criticism for making favourable statements on the Floor of the House.⁵²



Intelligence sharing

The UK government regularly defends its close relationship with Saudi Arabia by pointing to its reliance on the Gulf kingdom for security and counter-terrorism information. Interviewed on the BBC shortly after the Saudi air force bombed a bus full of schoolchildren in Yemen, Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt said: “Our relationship with Saudi Arabia means that we stop bombs going off on the streets of Britain”.⁵³

48 - The Guardian, [Saudi Arabia pays UK firms millions to boost image](#), 19/10/18

49 - The Economist, [Saudi Arabia launches a charm offensive in Britain](#), 08/03/18

50 - The Mirror, [The British MPs who have accepted thousands of pounds worth of benefits from Saudi Arabia](#), 19/10/18

51 - The Intercept, [Saudi Arabia lavishes Conservative UK officials with gifts, travel and plum consultancies](#), 04/06/17

52 - Middle East Eye, [Tory MP accused of ‘perks for questions’ over Saudi Arabia visit](#), 25/11/17

53 - BBC, [Foreign Secretary defends UK-Saudi ties after Yemen bus deaths](#), 22/08/18

The UK's use of such intelligence is concerning, however, as it is widely acknowledged that Saudi Arabia uses torture as a tool for information gathering. Amnesty states: *"Torture and other ill-treatment of detainees remained common and widespread. Courts continued to convict people and uphold death sentences on the basis of contested pre-trial 'confessions'. Security officials continued to torture and otherwise ill-treat detainees with complete impunity."*⁵⁴ Moreover, the Foreign Affairs Committee warned that it is difficult to ascertain whether information the UK intelligence services receive from Saudi Arabia was collected through torture because *"the Saudi government does not acknowledge that torture is ever used by its officials"*.⁵⁵

However, reports suggest UK intelligence officers are aware that at least some intelligence derives from torture, and may be complicit in its gathering. The Independent has reported on high-profile case in which British security officials knew that Saudi information was *"produced under duress"*.⁵⁶ This follows a wider pattern of UK security services participating in the rendition of terror suspects and the gathering of intelligence from torture since 9/11. Parliament's Intelligence and Security Committee has recently reported on the UK's involvement in hundreds of such cases, including several *"where UK personnel received intelligence from liaison services obtained from detainees whom they knew had been mistreated, or with no indication as to how the detainee had been treated but where, in our view, they should have suspected mistreatment."*⁵⁷



Home Office and the Ministry of Justice

The Home Office and the Ministry of Justice have also become increasingly engaged in the close political and commercial relationship with Saudi Arabia. In 2014, the Home Office signed a £5.9 million contract to train Saudi prison service officers, under the auspices of Justice Solutions International, a commercial arm of the Ministry of Justice set up by Chris Grayling to sell MoJ training and consultancy services to foreign governments. The contract attracted significant criticism due to Saudi Arabia's human rights record and the high-profile case of a British pensioner who was sentenced to 360 lashes after transporting homemade wine in his car, and in 2015 Michel Gove, then Justice Secretary, cancelled the contract and closed down JSI, despite Philip Hammond's opposition.⁵⁸

54 - Amnesty, [Saudi Arabia 2017/2018](#)

55 - House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, [The UK's relations with Saudi Arabia and Bahrain](#), 12/11/13

56 - The Independent, [Revealed: How torture was used to foil al-Qaeda 2010 plot to bomb two airliners 17 minutes before explosion](#), 01/03/15

57 - Intelligence and Security Committee, [Detainee Mistreatment and Rendition: 2001-2010](#), 28/07/18

58 - The Guardian, [Saudi prisons contract: Gove and Hammond clash over deal](#), 13/10/15

However, a contract for training police officers remains active. Since 2009, the College of Policing, an arm's-length body of the Home Office, has provided advanced forensic investigation training to Saudi officers, including in decrypting hard drives, retrieving deleted files, voice recognition and trawling CCTV systems.⁵⁹ Human rights charity Reprieve has warned that the training “could be misused to target pro-democracy activists”.⁶⁰ The College of Policing itself, in internal documents released under the Freedom of Information Act, admits that the training could “be used to identify individuals who later go on to be tortured or subjected to other human rights abuses.”⁶¹

The scale of the training is significant. Documents obtained by the BBC show that, between December 2012 and October 2015, the College of Policing trained 270 Saudi officers in the UK, and deployed 26 staff in Saudi Arabia.⁶² The College's internal documents describe the training as an “*income generating business opportunity*.”⁶³ The House of Commons Home Affairs Committee has reported that the College “*has been put under pressure by the Home Office to raise revenue*” from foreign sources.⁶⁴ Saudi Arabia is the College's largest foreign customer, and has paid more than £1.2 million for training since 2011.⁶⁵

In 2014, Theresa May – then Home Secretary – signed a memorandum of understanding with Saudi Arabia on behalf of the Home Office. Although the government has refused to make public its content, and is reluctant even to acknowledge its existence, the Financial Times reported that it “*contains the basis for 'UK expertise' in security and policing to be given to the Saudi state. The reference to this expertise as having a 'modernising' impact suggests this is a substantial offering to the Saudis. In effect, and not only on security matters, the Home Office is assisting the Saudi police to be more effective.*”⁶⁶



UK-Saudi influence

The UK's close relationship with Saudi Arabia is frequently justified on the basis that it enables the government to exercise a positive influence over the country and to export liberal values, yet, as Human Rights Watch points out, the government “appears very reluctant to press the Saudi authorities on human

59 - Reprieve, [UK training Saudi police in CSI techniques that risk torture](#), 07/06/16

60 - *ibid*

61 - National Police Chiefs' Council, [IPAB referral form](#)

62 - Evening Standard, [New data reveals hundreds of Saudi police officers have received training in Britain](#), 08/01/16

63 - National Police Chiefs' Council, [IPAB referral form](#)

64 - Home Affairs Committee, [College of Policing: three years on](#), 05/06/16

65 - The Guardian, [UK police earned millions training officers in repressive regimes](#), 15/09/17

66 - Financial Times, [Hidden agreement on justice and policing: UK's appeasement of Saudi Arabia](#), 12/10/15

human rights issues and it rarely makes public statements of concern about the rights situation within Saudi.”⁶⁷ Armida van Rij and Benedict Wilkinson of King’s College London write, “*There is little evidence, based on publicly available information, that the UK exerts either influence or leverage over Saudi Arabia. In fact, there is greater evidence that Saudi Arabia exerts influence over the UK.*”⁶⁸

On several occasions, the UK has suppressed reports critical of the Saudis due to either direct Saudi pressure or the fear of affecting trade and diplomatic relations. In 1992, the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, Bob Sheldon MP, refused to allow a National Audit Office report on corruption in the al-Yamamah deal to be published. It is the only NAO report never to have been publicly released. A 2005 Serious Fraud Office report on the al-Yamamah deal was suppressed so that BAE Systems’ capacity to win future contracts with Saudi Arabia would not be damaged.⁷⁰ In 2017, the government refused to publish a Home Office report on the financing of terrorism, as it would have reflected poorly on Saudi Arabia.⁷¹

The UK has similarly bent the rules to try to attract Saudi Aramco, the \$10 trillion Saudi oil company, to conduct its IPO in London in 2019. After Theresa May visited Riyadh in 2017 on a ‘charm offensive’⁷² to persuade Aramco to list in London, the Financial Conduct Authority relaxed its ‘premium category’ rules for companies linked to foreign governments. Essentially, the changes will exempt companies from certain rules if a government holds 30% or more of its stock. For example, the sovereign shareholder would not have to seek approval from minority shareholders for transactions with the state. Therefore, “*investors will only find out afterwards if the company has sold significant assets back to its government at below-market prices.*”⁷³

Andrew Bailey, Chairman of the Bank of England, admitted to the House of Commons Treasury Committee that meetings had taken place with the Saudis about the FCA’s change: “*we can confirm that we held conversations with Saudi Aramco and their advisors in light of their interest in a possible UK listing in the early part of this year. We emphasised during those conversations that we were reviewing the Listing Regime.*”

Van Rij writes: “*We were hard pressed to find similar cases of Saudi Arabia placating the UK in a similar fashion.*”⁷⁴

67 - Human Rights Watch, [Evidence to the Foreign Affairs Committee](#), 19/11/12

68 - King’s College London, [Security cooperation with Saudi Arabia: Is it worth it for the UK?](#) 01/10/18

69 - The Telegraph, [Second secret report on Saudi deal](#), 07/06/06

70 - Independent, [Court condemns Blair for halting Saudi arms inquiry](#), 11/04/08

71 - The Guardian, [Rudd’s refusal to publish full report into extremist funding ‘unacceptable’](#), 12/07/17

72 - The Guardian, [May and LSE chief woo Saudi ministers for \\$2tr Aramco listing](#), 05/04/17

73 - The Spectator, [Bending City of London rules for the Saudis smacks of Brexit desperation](#), 22/07/17

74 - The Conversation, [Britain’s relationship with Saudi Arabia does far more damage than it’s worth](#), 04/09/18

TRADE AND INVESTMENT



The arms trade

Despite its obligations under the Arms Trade Treaty, the EU Common Position on Arms Exports and the Consolidated EU and UK arms licensing criteria, which all require that export licences are not granted where there is a 'clear risk' that the items might be used in the commission of a serious violation of international humanitarian law,⁷⁵ the UK remains the world's second-largest supplier of arms to Saudi Arabia, behind only the United States. Saudi Arabia is the UK's biggest customer, accounting for 50% of its total arms exports, compared with only 18% for the United States.⁷⁶

The UK's arms sales have increased since the start of the war in Yemen, despite calls by two parliamentary committees,⁷⁷ countless human rights groups, and even the head of the government's own Exports Control Organisation, to stop arming Saudi Arabia.⁷⁸ At the very start of the conflict, Philip Hammond said that the UK will "support the Saudis in every practical way short of engaging in combat".⁷⁹ To all intents and purposes, this remains government policy.

The government has licensed the sale of at least £4.7 billion of military equipment to Saudi Arabia since 2015.⁸⁰ In 2017 alone it authorised arms sales worth over £1.1 billion,⁸¹ and in March 2018 BAE Systems signed a provisional agreement to deliver an additional 48 Typhoon jet fighters.⁸² UK-supplied aircraft including the Panavia Tornado and Eurofighter Typhoon, and munitions including Storm Shadow cruise missiles, Paveway IV bombs and armoured vehicles, are currently being used in Yemen.⁸³ War Child UK has accused private manufacturers, including BAE Systems and Raytheon, of "*profiteering from the deaths of innocent children*."⁸⁴

We may never know the exact figures for the arms we sell to Saudi Arabia, as the details of the UK's deals

75 - Joint Report of the Business, Innovation and Skills and International Development Committee, [The use of UK manufactured arms in Yemen](#), 09/16

76 - Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, [Trends in International Arms Transfers](#), 01/03/18

77 - Business, Innovation and Skills Committee and International Development Committee, [The use of UK-manufactured arms in Yemen](#), 15/09/16

78 - The Independent, [Ministers refused to stop bomb sales to Saudi Arabia despite being told to do so by own export control chief](#), 07/02/17

79 - The Telegraph, [UK will support Saudi-led assault on Yemeni rebels but not engaging in combat](#), 27/3/15

80 - Full Fact, [The UK has licensed at least £4.7bn of arms exports to Saudi Arabia since the start of the Yemen War](#), 07/09/18

81 - The Guardian, [UK sales of arms and military kit to Saudi Arabia hit £1.1bn in 2017](#), 24/10/17

82 - The Telegraph [BAE Systems agrees long-awaited Saudi order of 48 Typhoon jets](#), 09/03/18

83 - APPG for Yemen, [Yemen: The Continuing Tragedy](#), 22/05/18

84 - The Independent, [UK weapons companies have made £6bn from Saudi Arabia since it started bombing Yemen](#), 19/09/17

are almost always confidential. In 2015, the government updated the process for issuing Open Individual Export Licences, which are described as 'secretive' because they allow an uncapped number of items to be sent and there is no requirement to declare the licence value.⁸⁵ Last year, the use of these licences more than doubled, from a total of 21 to a total of 44.⁸⁶



UK personnel in Saudi Arabia

These figures tell only half the story, however, as a significant element of the UK's provision to Saudi Arabia is manpower. The original al-Yamamah deal committed the UK to supply civilian and military personnel, who would *"remain available in Saudi Arabia for preparation, including arming and support of aircraft during an armed conflict"*.⁸⁷ This relationship has persisted, and today UK personnel train and advise the Saudi military, run its military facilities, and help operate its aircraft and weapons.

In 2016, the MoD confirmed that UK military officers had provided targeting training to Saudi forces, including for cruise missile attacks, by participating in a Joint Combined Planning Cell command centre (JCPC),⁸⁸ and in 2018 it confirmed that Royal Saudi Air Force pilots have been trained at RAF bases.⁸⁹ The government has maintained that the JCPC was established to ensure compliance with international humanitarian law and that the UK is not involved in targeting decisions or military operations,⁹⁰ although the Saudi Foreign Minister confirmed that UK and US personnel knew of Saudi targeting lists.⁹¹ The government insists that Royal Air Force and Navy liaison officers stationed at Saudi bases, including the Saudi Air Operations Centre, merely monitor coalition operations and provide information to the MOD to increase the UK's insight into the air campaign.⁹²

The government states that there are approximately 110 UK service personnel and 130 Ministry of Defence civilian staff permanently based in Saudi Arabia.⁹³ But these personnel are supplemented by about 7,000 UK civilians – often former RAF and UK Army personnel who fulfil *"essentially similar roles in Saudi Arabia to those they carried out in military service, and indeed in many cases...the same roles as serving UK military*

85 - Sky News, [UK accused of using 'secretive' deals to sell arms to Saudi Arabia](#), 07/03/18

86 - Sky News, [UK arms sales to Saudi Arabia rose by two thirds in 2017](#), 18/10/18

87 - Mike Lewis and Katherine Templar, [UK personnel supporting the Saudi armed forces](#), 01/04/18

88 - The Guardian, [UK military officers give targeting training to Saudi military](#), 15/04/16

89 - House of Commons, [Saudi Arabia: Military Aid: Written question - 182736](#), 23/10/18

90 - *ibid*

91 - The Guardian, [British and US military 'in command room' for Saudi strikes on Yemen](#), 15/01/16

92 - Committee on Arms Export Controls, [Response of the Secretaries of State for International Trade, Defence, Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, and International Development](#), 01/11/16

93 - House of Commons, [Saudi Arabia: Military Aid: Written question - 181351](#), 18/10/18

personnel seconded to BAE Systems in support of the Saudi Arabian armed forces.”⁹⁴



UK complicity

The war in Yemen has opened up a significant new phase in the UK's military relationship with Saudi Arabia. Before 2010, with some exceptions, such as the 1991 Gulf War, most of the arms that the UK supplied to Saudi Arabia were not used; but since the outbreak of the Yemen conflict they have been used extensively.

The government claims that *“the UK is not a member of the Saudi-Led Coalition. We do not have any role in setting Coalition policy, or in executing airstrikes. All UK military personnel in Saudi Arabia remain under UK command and control.”*⁹⁵ Nevertheless, the deep involvement of UK personnel in the Saudi military means that the UK does have a tangible role in prosecuting the war. As Professor Phillippe Sands QC said, *“The United Kingdom is involved. The United Kingdom is engaged...However we characterise the nature, extent or depth of that involvement, it is impossible, on the basis of the evidence that is before us, to claim plausibly that the United Kingdom is not involved.”*⁹⁶ Professor Sands has even suggested that government ministers could be individually prosecuted under international criminal law, *“if it turns out that the United Kingdom is supplying weapons in a conflict that is giving rise to systematic violations of international humanitarian law”*.⁹⁷



The economic relationship

Notwithstanding the UK's arms sales, Saudi Arabia is not a major trading partner for the UK in global terms. In 2016, it was Britain's 17th largest export market and 32nd largest import market.⁹⁸ Exports to Saudi Arabia comprised only 1% of the UK's total export value in 2016, and its imports accounted for only 0.3% of the UK's total.⁹⁹ Neither is it a significant source of the UK's oil. Britain did import a large amount of oil from Saudi Arabia in the years following the Second World War, but its imports reduced significantly from the 1970s onwards as the North Sea came on stream. In 2016, Saudi oil accounted for only 2.8% of the UK's imports. In contrast, Norway supplied 67%.¹⁰⁰

Arms sales are even less significant to the economy as a whole. In 2016, they accounted for only 0.2% of

94 - Mike Lewis and Katherine Templar, [UK personnel supporting the Saudi armed forces](#), 01/04/18

95 - House of Commons, [Saudi Arabia:Written statement - HCWS716](#), 23/05/18

96 - Committee on Arms Export Controls, [Oral evidence: Use of UK-manufactured arms in Yemen](#), 13/04/16

97 - Business, Innovation and Skills Committee, [The use of UK-manufactured arms in Yemen](#), 15/07/16

98 - Office for National Statistics, [Who does the UK trade with?](#) 03/01/18

99 - Reuters, [Anglo-Saudi trade love-in starts from a low base](#), 08/03/18

100 - The Observatory of Economic Complexity, [Where does the UK import Crude Petroleum from?](#)

the UK's total exports,¹⁰¹ and generated only an estimated £30 million in tax for the Treasury, or 0.004% of total tax revenue.¹⁰²

Today there are over 170,000 jobs in the UK arms industry.¹⁰³ BAE builds aircrafts in Warton and Samlesbury; Raytheon manufactures Pathway bombs in Harlow and Glenrothes; and MDA produces missiles in Stevenage, Lostock and Henlow.¹⁰⁴ All of these weapons are currently being used in Yemen. However, these jobs have been precarious for many years now, and it is only through state intervention that they have survived. Only 55,000 of these jobs relate to arms exports, rather than production for the MoD.¹⁰⁵

BAE, the main exporter of arms to Saudi Arabia, has been accused of inflating these jobs figures. Its recent sale of Eurofighters to Saudi Arabia was sold to the public on the basis of it generating 50,000 jobs, a figure quoted by many British media outlets. But a study commissioned by the Eurofighter consortium, of which BAE is a part, found the real figure to be a tenth of that.¹⁰⁶



International investigations

The government has consistently rejected calls for the immediate suspension of arms sales to Saudi Arabia. In January 2016, it rejected a UN Panel of Experts report investigating the Saudi-led bombing campaign in Yemen, which confirmed a pattern of “*widespread and systematic*” attacks on civilian targets, including 119 coalition sorties.¹⁰⁷ It has also undermined attempts to launch international investigations. In February 2016, it blocked the Dutch government's effort to form an independent commission to investigate breaches of international humanitarian law in Yemen,¹⁰⁸ and in September 2017 it stated it would not back a proposed UN investigation after Saudi Arabia threatened to review its trading relations.¹⁰⁹ Instead it has argued that the coalition's Joint Incident Assessment Team (JIAT) should investigate allegations, despite the widespread perception that the JIAT lacks credibility, impartiality and transparency. Human Rights Watch reports that the majority of JIAT's conclusions have found that the coalition acted lawfully, was not responsible for attacks, or had made “unintentional mistakes”.¹¹⁰

101 - Sky News, [UK boxed into a corner over Saudi Arabia](#), 11/01/18

102 - King's College London, [Security cooperation with Saudi Arabia: Is it worth it for the UK?](#) 01/10/18

103 - Campaign Against The Arms Trade, [Arms to Renewables](#), 01/10/14

104 - Campaign Against The Arms Trade, [A Shameful Relationship](#), 01/04/16

105 - Campaign Against The Arms Trade, [Arms to Renewables](#), 01/10/14

106 - Middle East Monitor, [From Westminster to Riyadh, British arms deals stink of corruption](#), 20/01/15

107 - Campaign Against Arms Trade, [UK arms sales: immoral and illegal](#), 03/02/17

108 - The Guardian, [UK accused of blocking UN inquiry into claim of war crimes in Yemen](#), 25/09/16

109 - The Independent, [UK refuses to back UN inquiry into Saudi 'war crimes' amid fears it will damage trade](#), 28/09/17

110 - BBC News, Yemen war: [Saudi coalition war crimes investigation "not credible"](#), 24/08/18

The UK government's position is increasingly at odds with the rest of the world. Since the start of the war in Yemen, and particularly in the wake of the Khashoggi affair, many European countries, including Norway, Sweden, Finland, Spain and - significantly - Germany,¹¹¹ have suspended or terminated their arms agreements. The European Parliament has also called for "an EU-wide arms embargo on Saudi Arabia".¹¹²



Saudi investment in the UK

Saudi Arabia's investment in the UK is considerably lower than that of other Gulf countries, although both governments are seeking to increase the countries' economic ties. Today, Saudi Arabia has an estimated £60 billion invested in the UK economy,¹¹³ but a major pillar of Mohammed bin Salman's Vision 2030 programme involves increasing the assets held by Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (PIF) - its chief sovereign wealth fund and main vehicle for foreign investment - from \$250 billion to \$2 trillion by 2030.¹¹⁴ During Prince Mohammed's March 2018 visit to the UK, the two countries agreed approximately £65 billion of mutual trade and investment opportunities over 10 years, including £20 billion of direct investment from the PIF in UK sectors including education, financial services, life sciences, technology, clean energy and defence.¹¹⁵

The Saudi PIF is becoming more active in buying foreign assets, and is starting to become a significant force in UK tech financing. In 2016, it provided half of the \$90 billion funding for SoftBank's Vision Fund - the world's largest tech investment fund - and it has announced that it will provide another \$45 billion for a second fund.¹¹⁶ In July 2016, SoftBank bought the Cambridge-based chip designer ARM Holdings for £24.3 billion, and shortly afterwards sold 25% of the company to the Vision Fund.¹¹⁷ In May 2017, SoftBank invested \$502 million in London-based virtual simulation start-up Improbable, and it is likely that this holding will be moved to the Vision Fund.¹¹⁸ In October 2018, it was confirmed that the Vision Fund and London-based British digital bank Acorn Oaknorth Holdings are holding talks over a potential \$500 million investment.¹¹⁹

Saudi Arabia provides large investments in Islamic banking and finance instruments in London's financial

111 - Financial Times, [Germany halts arms sales to Saudi Arabia after Khashoggi's death](#), 22/10/18

112 - European Parliament, [Resolution on the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul](#), 22/10/18

113 - The Telegraph [How Britain can help build Saudis' Vision 2030](#), 08/03/18

114 - The Guardian, [Business titans fight shy of Saudi's trillion-dollar charm offensive](#), 20/10/18

115 - Gov.uk, [Press Release: Visit of Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia concludes](#), 10/03/18

116 - Business Insider, [Saudi Arabia is investing another \\$45 billion with SoftBank](#), 08/10/18

117 - The Financial Times, [SoftBank to sell 25% of ARM to Saudi-backed fund](#), 08/03/17

118 - The Telegraph, [SoftBank leads \\$500m investment in British startup Improbable](#), 11/05/17

119 - Sky News [£70bn Saudi-backed Softbank fund in talks with UK's Oaknorth](#), 18/10/18

120 - Chatham House, [Saudi-British Relations: Workshop Summary](#), 15/04/14

The UK is the leading western hub for the Islamic finance sector, with five licensed (Sharia-compliant) UK-based banks and more than £500 million of Islamic funds. In 2014, the UK became the first non-Muslim majority country to issue a sovereign Islamic bond (Sukuk), worth £200 million.¹²¹ In September 2018, the London Stock Exchange welcomed Saudi Arabia's US dollar-denominated Sukuk paper to its main market. It received strong demand from investors and raised \$2 billion.¹²²

Saudi asset managers have significant investments in UK commercial real estate, particularly since the pound weakened against the dollar in 2016, and these are likely to increase.¹²³ In October 2018, the Saudi asset management firm SEDCO Capital announced it had acquired two UK properties on behalf of its clients: a 25 acre Yorkshire distribution site for £31.8 million and a 4.7 acre Berkshire office complex for £35.2 million.¹²⁴ The UK is among the top five most popular destinations for Saudi investors.¹²⁵ In September 2018, the financial services company Sidra Capital announced that it had acquired the 89,000 square-foot seven-storey Weston House office building in London's High Holborn for £94 million, increasing its UK real-estate portfolio to 17 investments (London's Kinnaird House included).¹²⁶

¹²¹ - Raconteur, [How Islamic finance could plug the UK investment gap](#), 26/03/18

¹²² - London Stock Exchange, [London Stock Exchange welcomes Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's \\$2bn Sukuk](#), 19/09/18

¹²³ - Property Week, [Who owns London?](#), 16/03/17

¹²⁴ - Arabian Business, [Saudi buyers snapping up European commercial real estate](#), 14/10/18

¹²⁵ - Select Property Group, [UK "natural partner" for Saudi Arabia privatisation](#), 15/07/18

¹²⁶ - Arabian Business, [Saudi's Sidra Capital acquires London's prestigious Weston House](#), 09/09/18

HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES



Criminal justice system

Saudi Arabia's Sharia-based criminal justice system lacks a formal penal code and relies on individual judges interpreting Sharia law to determine crimes and punishments. The death penalty is used for crimes falling far below international standards of 'serious crime',¹²⁷ and there are no guidelines for sentencing, introducing evidence or assessing witness credibility.¹²⁸

Although Saudi Arabia has introduced several important pieces of legislation to help ensure the right to a fair trial,¹²⁹ narrowly worded regulations and the vagueness of criminal law more generally mean that mere suspicion of guilt is often enough for a death sentence.¹³⁰ In September 2017, a judge sentenced a man to be executed on the statement of a witness who was not even present at the crime scene, despite concluding that the court had insufficient evidence for conviction.¹³¹

Saudi Arabia uses the threat of terrorism to prohibit freedom of expression and assembly, arbitrarily detain people and impose punitive sentences, including capital punishment, for peaceful protest.¹³² The Crimes of Terrorism and its Financing law, which was passed in January 2014, defines a terrorist act as one which *"disrupts public order, risks the national unity, harms the reputation of the state, and threatens or incites anyone to commit these acts"*.¹³³



Executions and torture

Despite Mohammed bin Salman's reform agenda, executions in Saudi Arabia have doubled since he became Crown Prince: there were 67 executions in the eight months prior to his appointment and 133 in the first eight months after.¹³⁴ Saudi Arabia has remained one of the top five state executors for over a decade, and carried out 138 executions in 2017 - more than any other country, except Iran and

127 - UN, [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#), 16/12/66

128 - MATEC Web of Conferences, [The Right of the Accused in Saudi in Criminal Procedure during Investigation Process and Arbitrary Detention and Prohibits Torture and Protects the Rights of Suspects to Obtain Legal Council](#), 23/02/18

129 - ibid

130 - Amnesty International UK, [An execution every two days: Saudi Arabia's surge in killings](#), 12/01/18

131 - Amnesty International UK, [Saudi Arabian Man's Execution Date Set](#), 11/09/17

132 - Human Rights Watch, Saudi Arabia: [New Terrorism Regulations Assault Rights](#), 20/03/14

133 - Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain, [ADHRB Publishes Report on Saudi Arabia's Judiciary](#), 10/03/2015.

134 - Reprieve, [Is Saudi Arabia really reforming?](#) 07/03/18

China.¹³⁵ It is the only country that carries out capital punishment by beheading – normally in public – and crucifixion. Three such sentences were carried out in 2018.¹³⁶ Deera Square in Riyadh is colloquially known as ‘Chop Chop Square’.

Capital punishment is mandatory for some crimes. The failure to take individual circumstances into account breaches international law. In 2017, 40% of death sentences were for non-violent drug charges, and a woman was executed for witchcraft, sorcery and adultery.¹³⁷ Although Saudi Arabia is a party to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, children can be sentenced to death.¹³⁸ They are treated as adults if they show physical signs of puberty, which could include girls as young as eight.¹³⁹

Many executions have been carried out following unjust trials where the courts have failed to investigate allegations of coerced confessions through torture and the denial of legal representation.¹⁴⁰ The country’s broad definition of terrorism was used to execute several peaceful protestors in 2017, including Yussuf Ali al-Mushaikass, despite the fact that his confession was obtained under torture.¹⁴¹

Torture is banned under international law without exceptions. Although Article II of Saudi Arabia’s Criminal Procedure code prohibits torture and “*undignified treatment*”, these terms are not defined, and there are no formal sanctions for violations.¹⁴² Torture remains common, and the courts continue to uphold sentences of pre-trial ‘confessions’ obtained through torture.¹⁴³ In November 2017, the royals and businesspeople detained at the Ritz-Carlton in Riyadh during Prince Mohammed’s ‘anti-corruption drive’ were apparently tortured and blackmailed.¹⁴⁴ In November 2018, the journalist Turki Bin Abdul Aziz Al-Jasser died after being tortured. His alleged crime was running a Twitter account that disclosed human rights abuses committed by Saudi authorities.¹⁴⁵

Saudi Arabia also uses flogging, which is prohibited under international humanitarian law, as a judicial

135 - Amnesty International, [The Death Penalty in 2017: Facts and Figures](#), 12/04/18.

136 - Times of Islamabad, [Two Pakistani executed and bodies crucified at public park in Saudi Arabia](#), 06/07/18 and The Times of Israel, [Saudi Arabia crucifies Myanmar man convicted of murder](#), 08/08/18

137 - Amnesty International, [Death Sentences and Executions 2017](#), 01/04/18

138 - Press TV, [UN rights experts urge Saudi Arabia to halt six imminent executions](#), 30/10/18

139 - Human Rights Watch, [Saudi Arabia Events of 2017](#), 01/01/18

140 - US State Department, [Saudi Arabia 2017 Human Rights Report](#)

141 - ESOHR, [Following torture and unfair trials, Saudi Arabia executes 4 on protest related charges without charging them with any serious offence](#), 12/07/17

142 - Human Rights Watch, [UN Committee against Torture: Review of Saudi Arabia](#), 26/04/18

143 - Amnesty International, [Saudi Arabia 2017/2018](#)

144 - MEMO, [Report reveals Saudi detainees were subjected to torture and blackmail](#), 05/11/18

145 - MEMO, [Saudi journalist tortured to death in prison](#), 05/11/18

corporal punishment. Sentences of up to 1,000 lashes can be carried out in stints continuing for months, exacerbating the victims' physical pain, increasing the risk of heart attack among older victims, and leaving individuals traumatised. Victims have reported that they have developed mental health conditions, including depression and post-traumatic stress disorder.¹⁴⁶ In 2017 and 2018, this punishment was issued for 'crimes' including blogging and promoting freedom of religion.¹⁴⁷ Other punishments include amputations, clinical paralysis and eye gouging.¹⁴⁸



Freedom of speech, press freedom and extrajudicial killings

Saudi Arabia does not have an independent media, and since 2011 all online newspapers and bloggers, including YouTube users, have had to apply for a special 'licence' from the government.¹⁴⁹ The government is also targeting new social media platforms – for example, Al Jazeera's Snapchat account has been censored.¹⁵⁰ Censorship is carried out under the Basic Law (1992), the New Media Law (2003) and the Cybercrimes Law (2009).¹⁵¹

The Crimes of Terrorism and its Financing law gives the police excessive powers, which are not subject to judicial oversight, and criminalises virtually all forms of protest.¹⁵² Counter-terrorism legislation is regularly used to prevent individuals from exercising the freedom of expression, freedom of religion and freedom of association or assembly.¹⁵³

Exercising free speech is punishable by imprisonment. In 2013, Saudi Arabia found two members of a human rights group guilty of charges including disseminating false information to foreign groups and forming an unlicensed organisation.¹⁵⁴ In 2014, a human rights lawyer was sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment, a 15-year travel ban and a fine of 200,000 Saudi riyals (£35,000) as punishment for 'human rights activities', including representing the blogger Raif Badawi.¹⁵⁵ Badawi was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment, 1,000 lashes and a fine of \$250,000 for mocking Saudi Arabia's censorship laws.¹⁵⁶ Many individuals

146 - The Telegraph, [How do you survive 1,000 lashes?](#), 16/01/15

147 - Global Freedom of Expression, [The Case of Mikhlef Al-Shammari](#)

148 - Amnesty International, [Ten ways that Saudi Arabia violates human rights](#), 12/01/18, Huffington Post, [Ali al-Khawahir, Faces Being Paralysed In 'Eye-For-An-Eye' Punishment](#), 03/04/13, and Human Rights Watch, [Saudi Arabia: Court Orders Eye to Be Gouged Out](#), 09/12/05

149 - Freedom House, [Saudi Arabia](#)

150 - Al Jazeera, [Censorship, Social Media and Saudi Arabia](#), 19/09/17

151 - Freedom House, [Saudi Arabia](#)

152 - Human Rights Watch, [2015 World Report](#)

153 - The Guardian, [UN Accuses Saudi Arabia of Using Terror Laws to Suppress Free Speech](#), 4/05/17

154 - Amnesty International, [Saudi Arabia Punishes Two Activists for Voicing Opinion](#), 11/03/13

155 - Amnesty International, [Waleed Abu al-Khair, Imprisoned in Saudi Arabia for Defending Human Rights](#), 12/01/18

156 - The New Yorker, [Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Picks a Very Strange Fight with Canada](#), 08/08/18

have been imprisoned without trial, including Prince Khaled bin Talal, who was released in October 2018 after he was arrested for criticising the government's anti-corruption crackdown.¹⁵⁷

Censorship has increased under Prince Mohammed.¹⁵⁸ Reporters Without Borders ranks Saudi Arabia at 169th of 180 countries in its World Press Freedom Index 2018 and reports a “*steady increase*” in abuses against journalists since June 2017. The number of imprisoned journalists has doubled since Prince Mohammed came to power, and at least 28 are currently detained.¹⁵⁹

Those exercising free speech face increasingly violent punishments, including extrajudicial killings, tragically illustrated by Jamal Khashoggi's death inside the Saudi Arabian consulate in Istanbul in October 2018, which was met by widespread international condemnation. According to a Turkish official, Jamal Khashoggi was strangled and his body “*cut up and dissolved in acid*”.¹⁶⁰ Other sources have suggested that his body parts were removed from the country in separate suitcases.¹⁶¹

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions has stated that those responsible for Khashoggi's murder are “*high enough to represent the state*” and that the murder “*bears all the hallmarks of an extrajudicial execution*”.¹⁶² Despite the many conflicting explanations of offered by the Saudi government, the CIA has investigated the case and concluded that there is sufficient evidence to suggest that Khashoggi's assassination was ordered by Mohammed bin Salman personally.¹⁶³

Between 2015 and 2017, three Saudi princes critical of the government living in Europe disappeared, demonstrating that the Saudi government is increasingly willing to intervene on foreign soil.¹⁶⁴ Prince Khaled bin Farhan al-Saud, a critic of the government living in Germany, maintains that he was the subject of a kidnapping plot 10 days before Khashoggi was killed. He said that the Saudi government “*asked my family to bring me to Cairo to give me a cheque. I refused. Over 30 times the Saudi authorities have told me to meet them in the Saudi embassy, but I have refused every time. I know what can happen if I go into the embassy*”.¹⁶⁵

157 - BBC, [Saudi Arabia frees Prince Khaled bin Talal after month of detention](#), 04/10/18

158 - The Washington Post, [Why was MBS so Afraid of Jamal Khashoggi?](#), 25/10/18

159 - Reporters Without Borders, [RSF Issues Warning About Saudi Arabia's Press Freedom Index Ranking](#), 22/10/18

160 - The Mirror, [Jamal Khashoggi's body 'cut up and dissolved in acid' after embassy assassination](#), 02/11/18

161 - Al Jazeera, [Khashoggi's body parts transported in suitcases: Report](#), 05/11/18

162 - Business Insider, [UN says Jamal Khashoggi murder was likely an 'extrajudicial killing' committed by the Saudi state](#), 26/10/18

163 - Washington Post, [CIA concludes Saudi crown prince ordered Jamal Khashoggi's assassination](#), 16/11/18

164 - BBC News, [Saudi Arabia's missing princes](#), 15/08/17

165 - The Independent, [Dissident Saudi royal claims he was targeted with plan to 'disappear him' just days before journalist vanished](#), 11/10/18



Women's rights

Women face significant barriers to public participation, including in the labour market, caused by sex segregation, widespread legal discrimination in Saudi Arabia's guardianship system and a strict interpretation of Sharia law.¹⁶⁶ In June 2018, Thomson Reuters Foundation ranked Saudi Arabia as the fifth most dangerous country for women, based on factors including widespread sexual and gender-based violence, healthcare inequities and restrictive cultural traditions.¹⁶⁷

Mohammed bin Salman has announced several highly publicised reforms as part of his Vision 2030 programme. In 2015, women were permitted to participate in municipal council elections as voters and candidates, although at least two, including a human rights campaigner, were banned from running.¹⁶⁸ They have been allowed access to sports stadiums,¹⁶⁹ and have been encouraged to enter the labour market and increase their economic input. A small number of women have been appointed to prominent positions at the Saudi Stock Exchange. Vision 2030 includes a commitment to increase women's participation in the workforce from 22% to 30%.¹⁷⁰ More symbolically, the ban on women driving was lifted by royal decree in June 2018. However, Human Rights Watch describes the reforms as "*partial and incomplete*", and significant restrictions remain.¹⁷¹ Ultimately, Saudi Arabia's legal and social power structures remain intact.¹⁷²



Guardianship

The principal barriers to substantive reform are Saudi Arabia's guardianship system, state-sanctioned policies and customary practices, which limit women's choices. Women must get the permission of a male 'guardian' – often their husband or father – for activities such as obtaining a passport, travelling abroad, marrying or being discharged from prison. They may need to get permission to access healthcare, buy property, file legal claims and make decisions about education.¹⁷³

Campaigns to abolish guardianship have been accelerated by social media. In July 2016, the hashtag #AbolishGuardianship appeared on Twitter, and in September 2016 an online petition signed by 14,000

¹⁶⁶ - Freedom House, [Freedom in the World 2018, Saudi Arabia](#)

¹⁶⁷ - Thomson Reuters Foundation, [The World's Most Dangerous Countries For Women 2018](#)

¹⁶⁸ - Washington Post [Saudi Women are voting and running for office for the first time ever](#), 09/12/15

¹⁶⁹ - The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, [Saudi Arabia, Condemned to Silence, the Situation of Women Human Rights Defenders](#), 01/01/18

¹⁷⁰ - Reuters, [Saudi stock exchange appoints first female chair](#), 16/02/17

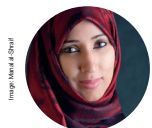
¹⁷¹ - Human Rights Watch, [Boxed In - Women and Saudi Arabia's Male Guardianship System](#), 16/07/16

¹⁷² - New York Times, [Saudi Women Can Drive Now. Will That Hurt Saudi Women?](#) 22/06/18

¹⁷³ - Human Rights Watch, [Boxed In - Women and Saudi Arabia's Male Guardianship System](#), 16/07/16

people was delivered to the Saudi royal court.¹⁷⁴ In 2009 and 2013, Saudi Arabia agreed to implement reforms to its guardianship laws after its universal periodic review at the United Nations Human Rights Council, although it has never agreed to end the system by royal decree.¹⁷⁵ In April 2017, it was announced that government agencies, including for education and healthcare, could not deny women access to services because they did not have a guardian's consent, unless required by existing regulations.

However, the system remains largely unaltered in practice. Although women are no longer legally required to get guardian consent to enter paid employment, the government does not penalise employers who still request permission. Many hospitals still require guardian consent,¹⁷⁶ and women face deeply entrenched discrimination in the legal system. This is particularly acute in divorce proceedings, as the man remains the woman's guardian until the divorce is finalised.¹⁷⁷ Human Rights Watch maintains that, despite piecemeal reform, guardianship remains the "most significant impediment to realizing women's rights in the country".¹⁷⁸



Violence against women and imprisonment of women's rights activists

It is estimated that 50% of Saudi women are subject to violence, and 25% to sexual abuse, before turning 15.¹⁷⁹ In 2013, a law criminalising domestic abuse was passed, although it has been implemented weakly. The difficulty of transferring guardianship means that women remain vulnerable to violence.¹⁸⁰ Although a woman can apply to have her guardian removed, the process is complex, and it has been estimated that courts approve less than 5% of cases filed.¹⁸¹ Women's lives therefore remain largely dictated by the goodwill of their male guardians, which can prove life-threatening. Saudi Arabia does not have written laws for sexual harassment and assault, including rape, and convictions depend the individual judge's interpretation of Sharia law.¹⁸²

Mohammed bin Salman's image as a liberal reform is tarnished by the fact that many women's rights campaigners have been arrested since he came to power, including several activists involved in the women's right to drive campaign.¹⁸³ Since May 2018, at least 15 human rights defenders - men and women

174 - The Guardian, [Saudi Women Strive to Bring Male Guardians to a Twitter End](#), 28/03/18, and BBC, [Saudi Women File Petition to End Male Guardianship System](#), 26/11/16

175 - Human Rights Watch, [Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of Saudi Arabia: 31st session of the Universal Periodic Review; 3rd cycle](#), 29/03/18

176 - Human Rights Watch, [Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of Saudi Arabia](#), 29/03/18

177 - Human Rights Watch, [Boxed In - Women and Saudi Arabia's Male Guardianship System](#), 16/07/16

178 - ibid

179 - Foreign Affairs, [Guardians of the Gender Gap](#), 10/08/16

180 - Human Rights Watch, [Boxed In - Women and Saudi Arabia's Male Guardianship System](#), 16/07/16

181 - Foreign Affairs, [Guardians of the Gender Gap](#), 10/08/16

182 - Human Rights Watch, [Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of Saudi Arabia](#), 29/03/18

183 - The Guardian, [Saudi Arabia Arrests Key Activist in Human Rights Crackdown](#), 25/05/18

have been arrested on unspecified charges, although the figure is likely to be higher, as other cases have gone unreported.¹⁸⁴ Human rights groups have campaigned vocally on the issue, and UN experts have described the arrests as “reprehensible” and have called for the release of the activists “immediately and unconditionally”.¹⁸⁵ Saudi Arabia has reacted aggressively to international criticism, including by expelling the Canadian ambassador, and subsequently severing diplomatic ties with the country, after Canada’s foreign ministry advocated the release of women’s rights activists.¹⁸⁶

Other minorities



Shia Muslims

The state religion of Islam is strictly enforced in Saudi Arabia, and the practice of other faiths is prohibited and punishable by law.¹⁸⁷ Since 2004, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom has repeatedly classified Saudi Arabia as a “country of particular concern”.¹⁸⁸ Human rights groups regularly highlight the political, economic and legal discrimination faced by Shia Muslims – 10% to 15% of the population.¹⁸⁹ In addition to restrictions on the freedom to express their faith, they experience anti-Shia bias in the justice system and face barriers when accessing state services and employment. They have historically been prohibited from serving in political office and public sector roles.¹⁹⁰ In recent years, the tolerance of Shia Muslims has increased, in accordance with plans to introduce ‘moderate Islam’, and the power of the Saudi religious police has been reduced.¹⁹¹ A Shia cabinet minister was appointed in 2014 and the national football team features a Shia player.¹⁹²

Classroom intolerance remains rife, despite education reform.¹⁹³ The education system uses negative stereotyping and stigmatising language about Shia Muslims and other minorities, including Jews, Christians, Sufis and Zoroastrians.¹⁹⁴ Human Rights Watch reports that inflammatory anti-Shia rhetoric by Saudi religious preachers is widespread and has occasionally constituted incitement to hatred.¹⁹⁵ Groups including ISIS

184 - The Guardian, [UN Sounds Alarm Over Saudi Human Rights Crackdown After Two More Arrests](#), 02/09/18

185 - UN News, [Continuing incarceration of women’s rights activists in Saudi Arabia, ‘reprehensible’: UN experts](#), 12/10/18

186 - The Guardian, [Saudi Arabia Expels Canadian Ambassador For Urging Release of Activists](#), 06/08/18

187 - Freedom House, [Freedom in the World 2018](#), Saudi Arabia

188 - Human Rights Watch, [Briefing on Religious Freedom and Human Rights For Shia Communities in Sunni Countries](#) 26/06/18

189 - See for example, Amnesty International, [World Report 2017/18, Saudi Arabia](#), Discrimination- Shi’a Minority, Human Rights Watch, [Briefing on Religious Freedom and Human Rights For Shia Communities in Sunni Countries](#), 26/06/18

190 - Human Rights Watch, [“They are not our Brothers” Hate Speech by Saudi Officials](#), 26/09/11

191 - BBC, [Saudi Arabia’s Religious Police Ordered to be Gentle](#), 13/04/16

192 - The Economist, [Shias are Doing Better in Saudi Arabia](#), 30/08/18

193 - Human Rights Watch, [Saudi Arabia’s Reforms Don’t Include Tolerance of Shia Community](#), 21/09/18

194 - Human Rights Watch, [“They are not our Brothers” Hate Speech by Saudi Officials](#), 26/09/11

195 - ibid

have exploited such derogatory language to justify violence against Shia peoples. Since mid-2015, ISIS has attacked at least six Shia mosques and religious buildings in Saudi Arabia, citing language commonly used in Saudi religious education textbooks when claiming responsibility.¹⁹⁶

Saudi authorities violently suppressed Shia dissent following the Arab Spring. Security forces shot dead more than 20 people during the 2011 to 2013 protests, and many people remain in detention on the charge of spying for Iran.¹⁹⁷ Amnesty International has accused Saudi Arabia of increasingly using the death penalty against the Shia population.¹⁹⁸ In 2016, Saudi Arabia executed prominent Shia cleric and leader Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr on sedition charges.¹⁹⁹ Several activists are awaiting trial for their involvement in protests supporting the rights of Shia Muslims and face the death penalty, including Israa al-Ghomgham - the first female campaigner in Saudi Arabia facing execution.²⁰⁰

Shia Muslims are also subject to state-sanctioned violence. For example, there are plans to demolish the Shia-majority town of Awamiya - home to approximately 30,000 people - in the eastern Qatif province.²⁰¹ It has been the site of regular protests against government discrimination since 2011.²⁰² Despite condemnation by a UN panel in April 2017, Saudi authorities persisted with redevelopment plans and demanded the evacuation of residents.²⁰³ This was met by resistance, prompting armed clashes and the death of 20 civilians, including a three-year-old child. Humanitarian conditions in Awamiya have worsened, and medical aid has been restricted.²⁰⁴ The town has been virtually destroyed by the fighting,²⁰⁵ and Freedom House reports that the situation is “*part of a broader government effort to suppress dissent and unrest among the marginalized Shiite minority.*”²⁰⁶



Migrant workers

Saudi Arabia is home to approximately 10 million migrants working in manual, clerical, and service jobs, representing over half the workforce.²⁰⁷ Migrant groups, predominantly from Bangladesh, India, Indonesia,

196 - Human Rights Watch, [Briefing on Religious Freedom and Human Rights For Shia Communities in Sunni Countries](#), 26/06/18

197 - BBC [Fifteen Shia Sentenced to Death for 'Spying for Iran'](#), 06/12/16

198 - Amnesty International, [Saudi Arabia: Death Penalty Used as a Political Weapon Against Shi'a as Executions Spike Across Country](#), 12/07/17

199 - The Independent, [Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr profile: A 'holy warrior' who called for elections in Saudi Arabia](#), 02/01/16

200 - The Guardian, [Saudi Arabia Seeks Death Penalty Against Female Human Rights Activist](#), 22/09/18

201 - BBC, [Awamiya: Inside Saudi Shia town devastated by demolitions and fighting](#), 16/08/17

202 - Financial Times, [Tensions Run High Amid Saudi Crackdown](#), 09/02/16

203 - The Independent, [Inside the Saudi town that's been under siege for three months by its own government](#), 04/08/17

204 - The Independent, [Awamiyah: Three-year-old boy dies from wounds after Saudi security forces 'open fire on family'](#)

205 - BBC News, [Awamiyah: Inside Saudi Shia town devastated by demolitions and fighting](#), 16/08/17

206 - Freedom House, [Freedom in the World 2018, Saudi Arabia](#)

207 - Human Rights Watch, [World Report 2018: Saudi Arabia](#)

Pakistan and the Philippines, have few legal protections and are vulnerable to exploitation, including forced labour and withheld wages. Saudi Arabia uses the kafala visa-sponsorship system, which effectively ties migrant workers' residency permits to their employers, who must give their consent if workers want to find alternative employment or leave the country.²⁰⁸ This gives employers disproportionate power and means that migrant workers are vulnerable to abuse. Human rights organisations regularly report that employers confiscate migrants' passports to force them to work.²⁰⁹

The international media has documented abuses including overworking, forced confinement, non-payment of wages, food deprivation and psychological, physical and sexual abuse.²¹⁰ The plight of migrant construction workers gained media attention in 2016, when an economic downturn prompted a lay-off, and workers were detained in labour camps. Some reported that they had not received wages for eight months. Reports highlighted inhumane living conditions including crowded dormitories with limited access to food, clean water and medical care.²¹¹ Those who left risked never receiving their wages.²¹²

Human Rights Watch maintain that the 'defects' in the criminal justice system are most acute for migrants, who struggle to navigate court proceedings and secure legal assistance. It highlights the long periods of detention without charge or trial, lack of legal assistance, ineffective translation services and pressure to sign confessions. Saudi Arabia executes more Pakistani migrants – the second largest migrant community at 1.6 million people – than any other foreign population. 22 were executed in 2015, seven in 2016 and 17 in 2017, primarily for non-violent drug charges.²¹³

It is difficult to get precise information about Saudi Arabia's detention and deportation procedures, due to a lack of government transparency and reliance on intermittent press accounts and human rights organisation reports. In recent years, there has been a government drive to deport undocumented migrant workers, fuelled by amendments to labour laws and a policy of 'Saudisation' to restructure the labour market.²¹⁴ Human Rights Watch has documented abuse during the detention process, including violence by security forces and inhumane detention conditions.²¹⁵ Significantly, Saudi Arabia does not recognise the UN Convention

208 - Freedom House, [Freedom in the World 2018, Saudi Arabia](#)

209 - Human Rights Watch, [World Report 2018: Saudi Arabia](#), Migrant Rights, [Death and Desolation Shepherds and Farmworkers in Saudi Arabia](#), 16/05/18, and Migrant Rights, [Victims of Financial Crisis See No Reprieve After months of Suffering](#), 27/11/17

210 - Al Jazeera, [Overworked, Abused, Hungry: Vietnamese Domestic Workers in Saudi](#), 19/07/18

211 - Reuters, [Abandoned in Saudi desert camps, migrant workers won't leave without pay](#), 18/09/16

212 - Newsweek, [The Starving Guest Workers Trapped in Saudi Arabia](#), 07/11/16

213 - Human Rights Watch, ["Caught In A Web" Treatment of Pakistanis in the Saudi Criminal System](#), 07/03/18

214 - Global Detention Project, [Saudi Arabia Detention Profile](#), 01/01/16

215 - Human Rights Watch, [Detained, Beaten, Deported, Saudi Abuses Against Migrants during Mass Expulsions](#), 10/05/15

Relating to the Status of Refugees, and does not have an established asylum system. Many of the migrants are asylum seekers - from Ethiopia or Sudan - who have escaped serious government abuse and whose lives would at risk if they were sent home.²¹⁶



LGBT rights

Although Saudi Arabia's written laws do not address sexual orientation or gender identity, Sharia law prohibits all sexual relations outside marriage, which can only be between a man and a woman. The religious police firmly uphold severe public morality laws. In February 2017, the police arrested 35 Pakistani citizens, including transgender women, for public morality offences,²¹⁷ and at least one individual was killed in detention.²¹⁸ In 2016, a school in Riyadh was fined for displaying "*the emblem of the homosexuals*" after it repainted its facade in rainbow colours.²¹⁹ Cybercrime laws have been used to arrest people expressing their sexuality, including an individual who posted an online video depicting a "*gay wedding scene*."²²⁰ In June 2018, representatives from Saudi Arabia opposed a proposed resolution for LGBT rights during a meeting held by the Human Rights Commission.²²¹

216 - Amnesty International, [Saudi Arabia: Sudanese Activist at Imminent Risk of Detention](#), 04/04/18

217 - Human Rights Watch, [Saudi Arabia: Investigate Transgender Woman's Death](#), 13/04/17

218 - The Independent, [Two Transgender Pakistanis "Tortured to death" in Saudi Arabia](#), 03/03/17

219 - The Guardian, [Everything You Need to Know about Being Gay in Muslim Countries](#), 21/06/18

220 - The Independent, [Saudi Arabia Police Arrest Men Following 'Gay Wedding' Video](#), 11/01/18

221 - The Observers, [Saudi religious police target 'gay rainbows'](#), 24/07/15

RELATIONS WITH OTHER STATES

SAUDI ARABIA'S FOREIGN POLICY



The Arab Cold War

Saudi Arabia's foreign policy is predominantly focused on countering the influence of Iran in the Middle East, which it views as an existential threat. The Saudi Arabia-Iran proxy conflict dates back to the Iranian Revolution in 1979, when the Persian monarchy was overthrown and replaced with an Islamic Republic, prompting calls for similar regime change in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries. As the West backs Saudi Arabia and Russia supports Iran, it has been referred to as the 'Arab Cold War'.²²² Since Prince Mohammed came to power, Saudi Arabia has been increasingly aggressive in consolidating its regional power and destroying any elements of support for Iran among the Shia populations in the Middle East. *"disrupts public order, risks the national unity, harms the reputation of the state, and threatens or incites anyone to commit these acts".*¹³³



The Gulf Cooperation Council

The Cooperation Council for Arab States in the Gulf, known as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), is a supra-national organisation comprising all Persian Gulf states except Iran. Its members are Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE.²²³ It has several economic and security agreements, as well as a standing coalition land army - the Peninsular Shield Force - which is tasked with defending the six nations. As the largest, most powerful and ideologically-driven member, Saudi Arabia has dominated the GCC for many years. However, since the fallout between Saudi Arabia and Qatar, the group has been described as *"ruptured permanently"*.²²⁴



The 2011 Arab Spring

In December 2010, demonstrations broke out in Tunisia against its corrupt and authoritarian government. Led by young people and organised through social media channels, they spread like a wave across the Arab countries of the Middle East and North Africa. Saudi Arabia and the other GCC countries viewed the protests as a serious threat and took heavy-handed measures to quell them. With the

222 - CATO Institute, [The Saudi-Iranian Cold War](#), 20/02/18

223 - Al Jazeera, [What is the GCC?](#), 04/12/17

224 - Al Jazeera, [World must revise stance on Saudi to end GCC crisis: analysts](#), 14/09/18

exception of Yemen, the Arab Spring protests were largely unsuccessful across the Gulf and led to limited regime change.²²⁵ In many ways, they had the opposite effect. There has been a significant erosion of human rights and civil liberties – to the extent that they existed beforehand – as the various regimes have consolidated their power to prevent such uprisings from happening again.

Saudi Arabia's relationship with the following countries demonstrates its increasingly aggressive and interventionist foreign policy under Prince Mohammed.



The conflict in Yemen has been described as the greatest humanitarian crisis of the 21st century. It dates back to the fragile 1990 settlement between the (predominately Zaidi Shia) northern Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) and the (predominately Sunni) southern socialist People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDYR). Both merged to form the Republic of Yemen, and Ali Abdullah Saleh, the former ruler of the YAR, became President. His rule was characterised by corruption, intra-elite rivalries and huge economic and social problems.²²⁶

Two key events caused the current conflict. The first was the unsuccessful 2004 coup by the small Northern Houthi movement 'Ansar Allah', which argued that the government's alliance with Saudi Arabia was leading to a growth of Wahhabism in Yemen and greater discrimination against the Zaidi Shia community.²²⁷

The second was the 2011 Arab Spring. Youth-led demonstrations against the government attracted popular support, including from prominent members of the regime. They had become increasingly violent by mid-2011, prompting the West and the GCC to intervene by negotiating President Saleh's resignation.²²⁸ Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi was appointed President, but faced challenges to his authority from the Houthis, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and military officers loyal to Saleh, as well as ongoing economic problems, including spiralling unemployment and food insecurity.²²⁹

225 - Brookings, [From the Arab Spring Comes a More Unified Gulf Cooperation Council](#), 15/04/11

226 - Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs 11 (3), [Understanding the War in Yemen](#), 04/01/18

227 - House of Commons Library, [Yemen at War](#), 28/04/17

228 - Crisis Group Middle East Briefing N°45, [Yemen at War](#), 28/03/15

229 - House of Commons Library, [Yemen at War](#), 28/04/17

The economy is teetering on the brink of collapse. The cost of infrastructure damage and economic losses is more than \$14 billion, and the World Bank reports that output has contracted by 50%, GDP growth has reduced to 2.6% in 2018 compared with 5.9% in 2017, and 52% of the population are living below \$1.90 a day. Half the population have seen their livelihoods destroyed by the conflict, and the collapse of the education system has caused a dramatic increase in violations against children, including child marriage, labour and military recruitment. 2.6 million women have been identified as being at risk of gender-based violence, and 52,000 have been identified as being at risk of sexual violence, including gang rape.

The Saudi-led coalition and its objectives

In March 2015, Saudi Arabia assembled a 10-member coalition and launched a military offensive against the Houthi movement in Yemen. Responding to President Hadi's appeal for international intervention, they began conducting airstrikes against Houthi/Saleh forces and imposed a blockade on Yemeni air and sea ports. The coalition included all GCC states except Oman, as well as Jordan, Egypt, Sudan, Morocco and Senegal. Saudi Arabia provided the bulk of resources, deploying 100 fighter jets, 150,000 soldiers and other navy units²³² at a cost of approximately \$175 million per month.²³³

The coalition's formal objective is to restore Yemen's legitimate government at the request of the internationally recognised president.²³⁴ However, Saudi Arabia principal objective is to consolidate its control of the GCC and contain Iranian influence within the Arabian Peninsula.²³⁵ There is some evidence that Iran and its Lebanese ally Hezbollah have supported Houthi/Saleh forces by providing military advisers, training and advanced weaponry including drones, missiles and improvised explosive devices.²³⁶

Saudi Arabia also believes that success in Yemen could have a positive impact on its other proxy conflicts with Iran in Lebanon, Bahrain, Iraq and elsewhere.²³⁷ Yemen is of geographic strategic importance to Saudi Arabia. If Iran gained control of the country's coastline, its warships could disrupt the southward flow of Saudi crude oil through the Red Sea and potentially interfere with the construction of the Hadramawt Pipeline that will diversify Saudi Arabia's oil supply routes.²³⁸

230 - Congressional Research Service, [Yemen: Civil War and Regional Intervention](#), 21/03/17

231 - Reuters, [Yemen says would join talks if Houthis publicly accept U.N. resolution](#), 15/09/15

232 - The Guardian, [Yemen airstrikes: a guide to the countries backing Saudi Arabia](#), 10/04/15

233 - Reuters, [Cost no barrier to Saudi Arabia's Yemen intervention](#), 31/03/15

234 - Kings College London, [Security cooperation with Saudi Arabia: Is it worth it for the UK?](#), 01/09/18

235 - Foreign Affairs, [Houthi and the Blowback](#), 29/03/15

236 - Reuters, [Exclusive - Iran steps up support for Houthis in Yemen's war: sources](#), 21/03/17

237 - BBC News, [Saudi Arabia's new muscular foreign policy](#), 21/04/15

238 - RUSI, [Anything but Straight-Forward: The Saudi Agenda in Yemen](#), 02/03/18

The largest humanitarian crisis in the world

The UN has described the situation in Yemen as the “*largest humanitarian crisis in the world*”.²³⁹ Accurate casualty figures are difficult to obtain due to the challenges faced by humanitarian monitors, and estimates vary greatly. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights estimates that at least 6,300 people have been killed and 9,900 injured since the start of the conflict,²⁴⁰ but a recent study by the non-partisan Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project estimates that 56,000 civilians and combatants were killed between January 2016 and October 2018 alone (excluding those dying of malnutrition and disease).²⁴¹

The conflict has resulted in the displacement of some 3.1 million people, of whom 2.2 million remain displaced and 89% have been displaced²⁴² for more than one year.²⁴³ 22.2 million people (78.6% of population) need humanitarian assistance, and 11.3 million are in acute need.²⁴⁴ Amnesty has reported that more than 500,000 people have contracted Acute Watery Diarrhoea (AWD)/cholera due to the absence of access to safe drinkable water and health facilities, and that approximately 2,000 people had died of AWD since 2016.²⁴⁵ 16 million Yemenis are in need of water, sanitation and hygiene assistance.²⁴⁶

The war has led to the world’s largest food security emergency. The World Food Programme estimates that 18 million Yemenis are food insecure, including 8.4 million who are ‘severely’ food insecure,²⁴⁷ and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs states that the plummeting of the Yemeni rial could cause a further 3.5 million to become ‘severely’ food insecure.²⁴⁸ Over 1.8 million children under five are acutely malnourished, including 500,000 suffering from severe-acute malnutrition (four in every 10 children),²⁴⁹ and the continuing blockade of ports means the projected 50,000 death toll of children will likely be surpassed this year.²⁵⁰ The UN’s top emergency relief official has stated that Yemen faces the “worst famine in 100 years” within the next three months.²⁵¹

239 - UN News, [Yemen: Tackling the world’s largest humanitarian crisis](#), 24/09/18

240 - OHCHR, [OHCHR Press briefing note on Yemen](#), United Nations in Yemen, 24/04/18

241 - The Independent, [The Yemen war death toll is five times higher than we think - we can’t shrug off our responsibilities any longer](#), 26/10/18

242 - UN News, [More than 3 million displaced in Yemen - joint UN agency report](#), 22/08/16

243 - UHCRF, [Yemen UNHCR Update, 1 - 21 September 2018](#), 21/09/18

244 - OCHA, [About OCHA Yemen](#), 01/10/18

245 - Amnesty International, [Yemen 2017/2018](#), 2018

246 - UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, [Yemen: Water and Sanitation Cluster Snapshot \(January to May 2018\)](#), 31/05/18

247 - World Food Programme, [Yemen](#), 01/10/18

248 - OCHA, [Yemen Humanitarian Update Covering 18 - 27 September 2018](#), 27/09/18

249 - World Health Organisation, [WHO scales up support to mitigate child malnutrition in Yemen](#), 18/05/18

250 - Save the Children, [Yemen](#), 01/10/18

251 - The Guardian, [Yemen on brink of ‘world’s worst famine in 100 years’ if war continues](#), 15/10/18

The economy is teetering on the brink of collapse. The cost of infrastructure damage and economic losses is more than \$14 billion, and the World Bank reports that output has contracted by 50%, GDP growth has reduced to 2.6% in 2018 compared with 5.9% in 2017, and 52% of the population are living below \$1.90 a day.²⁵² Half the population have seen their livelihoods destroyed by the conflict, and the collapse of the education system has caused a dramatic increase in violations against children, including child marriage, labour and military recruitment.²⁵³ 2.6 million women have been identified as being at risk of gender-based violence, and 52,000 have been identified as being at risk of sexual violence, including gang rape.²⁵⁴

Violations of human rights and international humanitarian law

Both Houthi forces and the Saudi-led coalition have been accused of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, but the UN claims that most civilian casualties in Yemen have been caused by coalition airstrikes. It says there are *“reasonable grounds to believe that individuals in the government of Yemen and the coalition may have conducted attacks in violation of the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution that may amount to war crimes”*.²⁵⁵

The coalition's airstrikes do not effectively differentiate between militant and civilian-populated areas. There have been more than 18,000 air raids since the beginning of the conflict – an average of 14 per day – more than 30% of which have targeted non-military sites.²⁵⁶ There were at least 85 documented unlawful coalition airstrikes in 2017; they targeted households, schools and mosques, killing approximately 1,000 civilians.²⁵⁷

The coalition has repeatedly targeted healthcare, agriculture, food and water supply infrastructure. In the three years since the start of the war there have been:

- 456 air raids targeting farms;
- 195 targeting market places;
- 110 targeting water and electricity sites;
- 70 targeting healthcare sites; and
- 63 targeting food storage units.²⁵⁸

252 - World Bank, [Yemen's Economic Outlook - October 2018](#), 03/10/18

253 - MPN News, [From Students to Child Soldiers or Teen Brides: The War's Cruel Impact on Yemen's Children](#), 25/09/18

254 - United Nations Population Fund, [Yemen Factsheet on Gender-based Violence](#), 10/17

255 - UNHR, Yemen: [United Nations Experts point to possible war crimes by parties to the conflict](#), 28/08/18

256 - Yemen Data Project, [Three Years of Saudi-led air war: Yemen Data Project full data summary](#), 26/03/18

257 - Human Rights Watch, [World Report 2018: Yemen](#), 09/17

258 - The American Conservative, [U.S. Refueling of Saudi Coalition Planes Leads to More Civilian Casualties](#), 29/03/18

A recent report shows that the 'systematic' targeting of civilian agricultural and fishing sites has led to chronic food shortages. Cultivated agricultural land has been a main target of coalition strikes despite constituting only 3% of total land. The coalition has undoubtedly used the precise targeting of food supplies as a method of warfare.²⁵⁹

Although the coalition has pledged to reduce civilian casualties, the UN reported that 370 of the 552 children killed in 2017 were the result of coalition airstrikes.²⁶⁰ In August 2018, an airstrike killed 40 children on a school bus.²⁶¹ In October 2018 Saudi bombings killed 19 civilians including two children at a fruit and vegetable market in Bayt el-Faqih, 30 civilians at a fish market and 17 civilians riding a bus in the port city of Hodeida.²⁶²

Yemen imports 90% of its goods, so the ongoing blockade of air and sea ports has exacerbated the humanitarian crisis. The UNHCR has stated that there are "*reasonable grounds*" to conclude that the coalition has violated the proportionality rule of international humanitarian law.²⁶³ It has restricted imports of food, water and fuel (needed to power generators to hospitals and pump water to houses), imposed an aerial blockade on Sana'a's airport (which has curtailed the ability to import medical supplies), and interfered with aid delivery.²⁶⁴

The number of airstrikes targeting the Al-Hudaydah port has increased precipitously since June 2018 as the coalition looks to retake the port from Houthi forces. Al-Hudaydah remains a vital conduit for humanitarian aid delivery, as 80% of Yemen's imports enter the country through the port. The International Organization of Migration has stated that "any blockade or destruction of the port risks toppling the country into a full-blown famine".²⁶⁵



On 5 June 2017 Saudi Arabia, leading the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain, cut all diplomatic and economic ties with Qatar. The countries blocked all land, air and sea traffic, ejected diplomats, and ordered all Qatari

259 - The New Arab, [Engineering famine](#), 13/10/18

260 - Al Jazeera, [UN: Saudi-led coalition behind most Yemen child casualties](#), 26/06/18

261 - The Guardian, [Yemen school bus bombing 'one of 50 strikes on civilian vehicles this year'](#), 16/08/18

262 - DW News, [Saudi-led airstrike hits civilians at Yemen market](#), 25/10/18

263 - Bloomberg, [How the Saudis Turned the Yemen War Into a Humanitarian Crisis](#), 19/10/18

264 - Human Rights Watch, [World Report 2018: Yemen](#), 01/09/17

265 - IOM (2018), [Despite Ongoing Conflict Al-Hudaydah Port Remains Lifeline of Yemen](#), 05/10/18

citizens to leave within 14 days.²⁶⁶ Qatar was also forced out of the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen, and its national news outlet, Al Jazeera, had its licence revoked and its Saudi office closed.

The four countries accused Qatar of funding Islamist groups and tolerating Iran. Although Qatar denied the allegations, it remains a key financial backer of Hamas in the Gaza Strip – it has accommodated exiled Hamas official Khaled Mashaal since 2012 – and the Muslim Brotherhood. It has also been accused by Western officials of funding al-Qaeda's Syrian faction.²⁶⁷

On 23 June 2017, Saudi Arabia issued a list of unrealistic demands to be met by Qatar to end the embargo. These included shutting down Al Jazeera, downgrading diplomatic relations with Iran, ceasing military activities with Turkey, cutting ties with Islamist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, and financially compensating the four countries for loss of life, property and income caused by Qatar's policies over the years. These demands were rejected.²⁶⁸

As a measure of Saudi Arabia's disregard for both international relations and human rights, Prince Mohammed has even proposed digging a giant canal to turn Qatar into an island.²⁶⁹

Human rights consequences

It is ordinary citizens across the Gulf who have suffered most as a result of the embargo. In particular, there have been widespread violations of the rights to freedom of movement, family life and education.²⁷⁰ Qatari nationals living in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt and the UAE have been forced to return home, and vice versa.²⁷¹

Mixed-nationality couples have been torn apart,²⁷² over 3,000 Qatari students studying abroad have been forced to abandon their studies, and thousands of families have been placed under immense strain by the displacement and financial loss.²⁷³ Many people have been forced to abandon their businesses and sources of income. This has been made particularly difficult as the Gulf states do not allow dual citizenship

266 - The Guardian, [Gulf plunged into diplomatic crisis as countries cut ties with Qatar](#), 05/06/17

267 - ibid

268 - Human Rights Watch, [Qatar, Events of 2017](#), 2017

269 - The Independent, [Saudi official hints at plans to turn Qatar into island by building canal](#), 01/09/18

270 - United Nations, [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), 10/12/48

271 - Temple Garden Chambers, [The Blockade of Qatar One Year On: Violations of Human Rights and Coercive Measures](#), 05/06/18

272- ibid

273 - Euro Med Monitor, [One Year into Gulf Crisis and Cutting of Ties: Community Peace at Stake and Basic Rights in Jeopardy](#), 05/06/18

and women – unlike men – are not able to pass on their nationality to their children. In July 2018, the International Court of Justice made a provisional order that Qatari families affected by the dispute should be reunited.

Qatari nationals living abroad have even been denied access to treatment and emergency medical operations, and vice versa. Access to essential medicine has been disrupted in Qatar, which purchased 60% of its pharmaceutical supplies from companies in the boycotting countries.²⁷⁴

A further consequence has been the restriction of freedom of speech in the boycotting countries. The four countries have stated that expressing sympathy for Qatar or posting pro-Qatar material on social media will be criminalised. In Saudi Arabia, offenders will be punished with up to five years' imprisonment and a fine of up to 3 million Saudi riyals (approximately £620,000).²⁷⁵

The boycott has also affected non-GCC labour in Qatar, which accounts for a third of the country's population. The measures have caused increased food and medicine prices and a lack of construction materials has caused many migrant workers to lose their jobs.



Bahrain is a small island country connected to Saudi Arabia by the King Fahd Causeway. Like Saudi Arabia, it is ruled by a royal family, the al-Khalifas. It has a majority Shia population, but is dominated by a minority Sunni ruling elite. The regime is heavily supported by, and reliant on, Saudi Arabia.

Bahrain's economy is based on oil exports, but over the last decade its reserves have been running low, although it recently discovered a vast new shale oil site.²⁷⁶ Bahrain's oil production is closely linked to that of Saudi Arabia. In October 2018, Saudi Aramco and the Bahrain Petroleum Company announced a new pipeline to meet Bahrain's energy demands.²⁷⁷

Bahrain's economy is reliant on Saudi Arabia in other ways, too. For example, it receives significant income from Saudi

274 - Euro Med Monitor, [One Year into Gulf Crisis and Cutting of Ties: Community Peace at Stake and Basic Rights in Jeopardy](#), 05/06/18

275 - South Front, [Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates criminalise sympathy with Qatar](#), 07/06/17

276 - BBC News, [Bahrain discovers offshore oilfield 'containing 80bn barrels'](#), 04/04/18

277 - Arab News, [Saudi Aramco and BAPCO announce new pipeline to meet Bahrain energy demand](#), 09/10/18

Saudi tourists who travel across the causeway to spend time in a less restrictive society. In October 2018, it received a \$10 billion bailout from Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Kuwait to help balance its significant budget deficit. Conversely, Bahrain is of huge strategic significance to Saudi Arabia because of its proximity to key Saudi oil fields and its status as an important ally against Iran.

Human rights violations

Bahrain has little respect for democracy or human rights and, with the support of Saudi Arabia, the Shia majority population is heavily repressed.²⁸¹

During the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings, there were protests in Bahrain calling for democratic reforms and greater equality for the Shia majority population. In particular, there were demands for the release of hundreds of Shia men and boys who had been rounded up since August 2010, and an end to civil rights abuses.²⁸² Fearing that the protests would spread to its own significant Shia population, particularly in the key oil-producing east of the country, Saudi Arabia applied pressure on the Bahraini government to quickly quell the protests.²⁸³

The demonstrations were focused around the Pearl Roundabout in the centre of the capital Manama. Initially the police and security forces left the protestors alone, but on 17 February 2011 they launched a violent pre-dawn raid to clear the camp, in what became known as 'Bloody Thursday'. Seven people were killed and over 300 seriously injured.

The government quickly denounced the protestors as Shia terrorists sponsored by Iran, and Saudi Arabia encouraged a crackdown on activism by the Shia population and imposed red lines on the Bahraini government, which limited dialogue with the protestors.²⁸⁴ After a month of struggling to contain further protests, the government requested help from the GCC. On 14 March 2011, around 2,000 Saudi and UAE troops entered Bahrain across the King Fahd Causeway.²⁸⁵ A day later, the King declared a three-month state of emergency and martial law.²⁸⁶

278 - Arab News, [Saudi Arabia, Bahrain share a long history of civilizations, says tourism chief](#), 26/06/18

279 - The National, [UAE, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait give \\$10bn to support Bahrain reforms](#), 05/10/18

280 - The Oil Drum, [The Strategic Importance of Bahrain to Saudi Arabia](#), 29/06/11

281 - Amnesty International, [Bahrain 2017/2018](#)

282 - BBC News, [Bahrain protests prompt global concerns](#), 15/02/11

283 - The Guardian, [Saudi Arabian intervention in Bahrain driven by visceral Sunni fear of Shias](#), 20/03/11

284 - LSE Middle East Blog, [Saudi Arabia, Iran and the Struggle for Supremacy in Lebanon and Bahrain](#), 07/05/18

285 - New York Times, [Saudi Troops Enter Bahrain to Help Put Down Unrest](#), 14/03/11

286 - BBC News, [Bahrain king declares state of emergency after protests](#), 15/03/11

What ensued was a brutal crackdown on protestors by the Saudi and Bahraini armies. Soldiers raided Shia neighbourhoods, arresting and kidnapping thousands of protestors. There was widespread abuse and torture, including extrajudicial killings. The government later launched the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, which found that the security services' actions resulted in the deaths of 13 civilians, due mostly to the use of "excessive and unnecessary lethal force", and that five people in custody died from torture.²⁸⁷

The Saudi army left in June 2011, but the country has continued to wield significant influence over the Bahraini government. It also controls one of the main TV stations in Bahrain, Al Wesel, which has been accused of preaching Wahhabism and spreading anti-Shia propaganda.

In 2015, Saudi Arabia encouraged Bahrain to shut down Al Arab TV, the pro-democracy news station, for giving airtime to an opposition leader.²⁸⁸ It has also mandated Bahrain to join the war in Yemen²⁸⁹ and the embargo of Qatar.²⁹⁰ Saudi Arabia's support of, and influence over, the Bahraini government has directly worsened the human rights situation in Bahrain and the Gulf in recent years.²⁹¹ As a sign of the solidarity between the countries, in the middle of the Khashoggi affair Bahrain declared its "full support for Saudi Arabia on all wise policies".²⁹²



Lebanon has long been caught up in this proxy struggle between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Its significance is attributable to the presence of Hezbollah, the Shia militia created during Lebanon's civil war to oppose the invasion by Israel. Hezbollah is backed by Iran, and its role beyond Lebanon's border has been increasing since it backed the Assad government in the Syrian civil war in 2013.²⁹³

The Saudi government has accused Lebanon of arming and training Houthi forces in Yemen, firing missiles at Riyadh,²⁹⁴ and even intervening in Bahrain.²⁹⁵ However, The New York Times reports that there are perhaps only around 50

287 - BBC News, [Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry excerpts](#), 23/11/11

288 - The New York Times, [Channel in Bahrain Goes Silent After Giving Opposition Airtime](#), 02/02/15

289 - Al Jazeera, [Key facts about the war in Yemen](#), 25/03/18

290 - Al Jazeera, [Understanding the blockade against Qatar](#), 05/06/18

291 - Human Rights Watch, [Bahrain Events of 2017](#)

292 - Gulf News, [Bahrain expresses solidarity with Saudi Arabia](#), 14/10/18

293 - House of Commons Library, [Lebanon 2018](#), 25/10/18

294 - CNN, [Missile attack 'an act of war' by Iran, Saudi Foreign Minister says](#), 06/11/17

295 - Arab News, Saudi FM: [Hezbollah holding Lebanon hostage, uses its banks to launder money](#), 18/11/17

Hezbollah fighters in Yemen,²⁹⁶ and the Brookings Institution claims that its backing of the Houthi rebels is “cheap”.²⁹⁷

Hezbollah is a significant force in Lebanese parliamentary politics, and in 2016 Saad Hariri formed a government that included two Hezbollah ministers. This has led Saudi Arabia to become increasingly active in Lebanon. In February 2016, it cancelled all aid to the country, including \$3 billion of military loans, on the basis that Hezbollah’s role in the Lebanese government meant that the Lebanese army could no longer be counted on to confront it.²⁹⁸ Some in the Saudi government have been more explicit about policy towards Lebanon: two days after Hariri’s forced resignation, the Saudi minister of Gulf affairs, Thamer al-Sabhan, declared, “We will treat Lebanon as if it is a government that has declared war on Saudi Arabia.”²⁹⁹

Saudi Arabia’s interventions in Lebanon

On 4 November 2017 Saudi Arabia committed an astonishing breach of international diplomatic norms by ‘kidnapping’ the Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri and forcing him to resign.

Hariri was summoned to Saudi Arabia for a meeting with the King on 3 November 2017, but when his plane landed it was surrounded by Saudi police and his phone was confiscated.³⁰⁰ The next morning, he was summoned under the pretence of meeting the prince but was manhandled by Saudi officials and handed a resignation speech to read.³⁰¹

His ‘kidnapping’ ended only when French President Emmanuel Macron flew to Riyadh and personally demanded that Prince Mohammed release him to prevent turmoil and a civil war in Lebanon. Hariri, who holds French, Lebanese and Saudi citizenship, was then permitted to leave for France. He returned to Lebanon on 22 November 2017 and rescinded his resignation on 5 December 2017.³⁰²

Saudi Arabia exercises significant control over Lebanon, which it is likely to continue to exploit. Lebanon suffers from a range of longstanding economic problems. Reconstruction after the civil war ended in 1990 left Lebanon with huge debt levels, structural imbalances, insufficient revenues and endemic corruption.

296 - The New York Times, [Why Saad Hariri had that strange sojourn in Saudi Arabia](#), 24/12/17

297 - The Brookings Institution, [In Yemen, Iran outsmarts Saudi Arabia again](#), 06/12/17

298 - House of Commons Library, [Lebanon 2018](#), 25/10/18

299 - The Financial Times, [Lebanon caught in the crossfire as Saudi steps up battle against Iran](#), 07/11/17

300 - The Independent, [Saad Hariri’s resignation of prime minister of Lebanon is not all it seems](#), 09/11/17

301 - The New York Times, [Why Saad Hariri had that strange sojourn in Saudi Arabia](#), 24/12/17

302 - The New York Times, [Lebanese Prime Minister meets Macron after mysterious Saudi stay](#), 18/11/17

Nearly half of its domestic revenue goes towards financing its 153% debt-to-GDP ratio – the third worst in the world after Greece and Japan³⁰³ – and it is currently host to 1.5 million Syrian refugees, despite having a settled population of only 4.5 million.³⁰⁴

Saudi Arabia has about \$860 million deposited at the Lebanese central bank, originally placed there in 1992 to help stabilise the Lebanese lira. Although this accounts for only 2% of Lebanon's foreign reserves, its removal could shake confidence in the central bank and destabilise the lira.³⁰⁵

Saudi Arabia also hosts 200,000 Lebanese citizens, and a further 200,000 live in the other GCC states. Nearly 16% of Lebanon's GDP is generated by remittances from these citizens working abroad.³⁰⁶ Saudi Arabia has recently increased the costs of sending money abroad, and there are fears that it will expel Lebanese workers.³⁰⁷ Saudi tourists also make up a significant percentage of Lebanon's tourism sector. Saudi first embargoed Lebanon in 2012, although Saudi tourist numbers have since been rising.³⁰⁸ On 9 November 2017, five days after Hariri's resignation, Saudi Arabia told its citizens to leave Lebanon and issued advice not to travel to the country.³⁰⁹

Lebanon is a highly unstable country, with a delicate balance among its ethnic groups. If Saudi Arabia continues to pursue Hezbollah aggressively, it could push the country, and the region, into chaos.



Saudi Arabia's relationship with Canada provides insight into the consequences of a Western nation taking a proactive response to human rights abuses in the country. A tweet from Canada's Global Affairs Ministry in the summer of 2018 protesting the arrest of two female activists elicited an unprecedented response from the Saudi Government.

Prior to this incident, relations between the countries had been warm, with a total of approximately US\$3 billion in trade each year, made up largely of oil and arms.³¹⁰ This changed following a tweet by the Canada

303 - The World Bank Group, [Strategic Assessment: A capital investment plan for Lebanon](#), 06/04/18

304 - The Financial Times, [Surge in bond yields signal fear of Lebanese default](#), 03/10/18

305 - The Washington Institute, [Saudi Arabia's War on Lebanon](#), 13/12/17

306 - *ibid*

307 - The Independent, [This isn't the first time Saudi Arabia has threatened the stability of Lebanon](#), 13/11/17

308 - *ibid*

309 - BBC, [Saudi Arabia tells citizens to leave Lebanon at once](#), 09/11/17

310 - The Globe and Mail, [Saudi Arabia-Canada spat: What we know so far](#), 28/08/18

Global Affairs Ministry protesting the arrest of two female activists.³¹¹ The tweet, in Arabic, was seen as a provocative attempt to humiliate the Saudi government.³¹²

Saudi Arabia almost immediately suspended trade with Canada and severed diplomatic ties by expelling Canada's ambassador and recalling its own ambassador. It also withdrew 15,000 Saudi students it had been sponsoring at Canadian universities, colleges and other schools.³¹³

The dispute remains unresolved. The Canadian government has refused to back down from their position, whilst the Saudi foreign minister accused Canada of treating Saudi Arabia like a "*banana republic*" at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York.³¹⁴

What was telling was the lack of solidarity shown with Canada by Western governments, including the UK. Whilst human rights groups declared their support for Canada's position, the UK, the European Commission and the United States all remained neutral in the dispute.³¹⁵ As former leader of the Liberal Party, Bob Rae tweeted: "*The Brits and the Trumpians run for cover and say 'we're friends with both the Saudis and the Canadians' - thanks for the support for human rights, guys, and we'll remember this one for sure*".³¹⁶

It is also important to note that this was a show of force by Prince Mohammed and a statement that the Saudi government will not be lectured by foreign powers.³¹⁷ As one commentator stated: "*This message is obviously not just being sent to Ottawa. It's a message to countries across Europe and across the rest of the world that criticism of Saudi Arabia has consequences*".³¹⁸

311 - ibid

312 - Reuters, [A Canadian tweet in a Saudi king's court crosses a red line](#), 10/08/18

313 - The Globe and Mail, [Saudi Arabia-Canada spat: What we know so far](#), 28/08/18

314 - The Guardian [Saudi Foreign Minister demands Canada stop treating it like a 'banana republic'](#), 28/09/18

315 - The Globe and Mail, [Saudi Arabia-Canada spat: What we know so far](#), 28/08/18

316 - The Guardian, ['We don't have a single friend': Canada's Saudi spat reveals country is alone](#), 11/08/18

317 - The Star, [Saudi Arabia expels Canadian ambassador, freezes trade in human rights dispute](#), 05/08/18

318 - ibid

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the growing humanitarian catastrophe in Yemen, it is essential that a ceasefire is reached as soon as possible. The UK should push for a UN security council resolution to stop the fighting and resume humanitarian aid deliveries.

The government should pressure Saudi Arabia to lift the de facto blockade on Yemen's ports. In particular, it should demand the reopening of Sana'a airport and the restoration of access to Al-Hudaydah port to allow for the delivery of humanitarian aid, food and basic commodities. It should also call for a UN Peacekeeping Force to be deployed to Yemen – in particular, to protect humanitarian aid routes.

The UK must press for an international investigation into the actions of all parties, as the Saudi-led coalition's Joint Incident Assessment Team lacks credibility, impartiality and transparency. The UK's role in the conflict should also be fully investigated.

Appropriate sanctions should be applied to all who are found to have committed war crimes or breaches of international humanitarian law.

There is overwhelming evidence that the Saudi-led coalition has deliberately targeted healthcare, agriculture, food and water supply infrastructure, and repeatedly breached international humanitarian law. The UK must condemn these attacks immediately. The absence of condemnation weakens the UK's ability to influence international opinion and undermines the credibility of UK initiatives in other countries where there are alleged violations of international humanitarian law.

The UK government should follow the precedent set by Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden and immediately suspend licences for arms exports to Saudi Arabia, while putting in place measures to either prevent job losses in the arms manufacturing sector or support those individuals and communities affected. In the long-term, the UK should seek to create more sustainable, ethical and rewarding jobs – for example, by redistributing resources from the arms manufacturing industry to the green energy sector.

The UK should end all co-operation between the UK and Saudi militaries, as well as non-military training contracts, such as the College of Policing programme. All existing programmes should be investigated to determine whether British training has directly aided the commission of human rights abuses.

The UK should adopt a more rigorous and transparent system of arms export licensing that takes human rights into account.

Ministers should be banned from representing arms companies in informal or formal meetings with foreign governments.

Limits should be applied to the UK's intelligence-sharing with Saudi Arabia to ensure that intelligence received has not been gathered using torture, and Parliament's Intelligence and Security Committee should investigate Britain's intelligence-sharing relationship with Saudi Arabia to assess the provenance of this intelligence.

The UK should urge Saudi Arabia to comply with the UN Committee Against Torture recommendations on torture.

The UK should join Germany, France and the EU in calling for an independent investigation of the murder of Jamal Khashoggi. Further, Magnitsky-style sanctions, such as asset freezes and visa bans, should be applied to all Saudi individuals identified as being involved in his murder.

The UK should call on Saudi Arabia to stop using death penalty for non-violent crimes.

The UK should give express support to Canada in its criticism of Saudi Arabia's human rights record.



LCHR

Labour Campaign for Human Rights