



Clear and Present Danger

by HRH Prince Sultan bin Khalid Al-Faisal Al-Saud

Changing geopolitical realities spur shift in Saudi regional role

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has long faced threats to its security, justifying our government's increasingly robust intelligence services and growing military capacity. These threats are both conventional and unconventional; serious risks and threats as a result of the pervasive and corrosive influence of Iran in our region—and in particular on Saudi Arabia—amount to a conventional threat and present a clear danger to our national security. Terrorist movements such as Al-Qaeda and Daesh and their affiliated groups amount to threats deemed to be unconventional and every bit as serious as Iran. Indeed, Iran's support for the Houthis, a Zaydi Shia

movement in Yemen, is at the exact intersection of the conventional and unconventional threats that face the kingdom and our partners in the broader region. The fall of Yemen's legitimate government earlier this year at the hands of Houthis was the realization of this threat and the actualization of a clear and present danger to the national security of Saudi Arabia, requiring direct action to support the legitimate government in Yemen and shore up our border.

Between crisis and instability

In the short history since the modern Yemeni state was founded (1990), it has moved between crisis and superficial stability as the government grapples with the challenge of unity and a highly complex tribal puzzle. With the support of Saudi Arabia, successive governments have managed to achieve and maintain periods of stable calm. However, the fall of the government earlier this year at the hands of Iranian-backed Houthis undoubtedly represents the country's biggest crisis yet, leading to the request by the fallen government for Saudi intervention to re-instate President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi. A coalition led by the Kingdom subsequently launched an air campaign to reinstate Yemen's internationally recognized government, a government that Saudi Arabia and its GCC partners worked hard to support and form in the wake of the Arab Spring by initiating the process for a national referendum and elections that resulted in a freely elected government.

A modern Bay of Pigs

As we enter 2016, the military campaign is ongoing, with the inclusion of a ground offensive. Such is the importance of a stable Yemen to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the broader GCC region, and such is the depth of the threat to the region from Iran. A solely regional military coalition (UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Sudan) involved in active operations represents a new era in the

evolution of the Kingdom's military prowess and indeed, that of our regional partners. Although international opinion is mixed, Saudi Arabia must uphold its obligation to defend its borders, strategic access points (notably the Bab el Mandeb Strait), and its national security—we cannot and will not tolerate an Iranian-backed and controlled insurgent group taking control of a country right on our doorstep. This is our modern Bay of Pigs.

Saudi Defense Doctrine

Saudi Arabia's current involvement in Yemen highlights our emerging doctrine for defending our homeland (Saudi Defense Doctrine or SDD). The SDD has five main components, focused on our commitment to the kingdom and its people, all of which mirror the approach of any responsible government: (1) defend the homeland; (2) protect Saudi citizens; (3) secure national security and interests; (4) bolster the defense of partner states; and (5) strengthen inter-agency partnerships. Saudi-led coalition operations and the ongoing rationale for our engagement in Yemen are driven by this very doctrine. Many are asking, what is the end point? This is clear: the reinstatement of the legitimate Yemeni government by whatever means necessary, creating stability in Yemen, a roadmap for a sustainable future, and a peaceful border between our two countries.

The crisis in Yemen comes at a time of immense volatility and risk in our region, meanwhile also at a time when our western partners continue with a process of passive disengagement from active roles in regional conflicts. In addition, the combined agendas of non-state actors post-Arab Spring are far from neutralized, adding risk to established states and making failing states all the more vulnerable. The backdrop to this—rapprochement with Iran by our friends in the west—further exposes our region and heightens risks across all our borders from Yemen to the south, Iraq to the North, and Syria just beyond, where in all locations, Iran directly sponsors

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turmoil and conflict. This increasing Iranian incursion into other states' affairs directly threatens our own national security and its on-going influence has no positive ending. That said, we must always remain open to engagement and peaceful resolutions where possible. However, where this is not possible, as a regional power, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia must lead the way in repelling this influence and protecting its interests and supporting its partners. This drives our logic and objectives in Yemen and we will stay the course until we achieve short-term stability and an agreed roadmap for the future.

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