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OPINION

THE SAUDIS ARE FIGHTING TERRORISM, DON'T BELIEVE OTHERWISE

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Those who accuse Saudi Arabia of supporting violent extremism not only fail to acknowledge the kingdom's leadership in combating terrorism around the world but also do not see that it is illogical and irrational for Saudi Arabia to be anything less than at the forefront of nations combatting this scourge.

Multiple actors—each with their own motives—have targeted the kingdom, seeking to destabilize the country and terrorize the Saudi people. So it is in our national interest to defeat terrorism—and a national priority.

Whether non-state actors like Al-Qaeda or the Islamic State militant group (ISIS), or state-sponsored extremism from Iran and its proxies, Saudi Arabia has, as much as any other country, a national security incentive to stop the men, the money and the mindset that foments terrorism and violent extremism.

Some try to malign Saudi Arabia by reciting that “15 of the 19” 9/11 hijackers were Saudi. They should know that the mastermind of the 9/11 attacks, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, told U.S. interrogators that the initial plan was to have 20 hijackers from different nationalities, but late in the planning Osama bin Laden directed him to use as many Saudis as possible to give the attack a Saudi face.

This was likely designed to drive a wedge between the kingdom and the U.S. If this was Osama bin Laden's plan, it almost succeeded, as we saw from the wave of criticism the kingdom experienced after 9/11.

Al-Qaeda

In 2003, the Saudi capital was targeted with simultaneous suicide bombings at three residential compounds. These bombings killed more than 30 persons, including Saudis, Lebanese, Americans, British and Australians.

Other attacks followed, seeking to destabilize the kingdom and shake the confidence of expatriates to cause them to leave. It did not succeed. Faris al-Zahrani, a top Al-Qaeda strategist whose death sentence was recently carried out, along with other convicted terrorists, masterminded a 2004 attack on the U.S. Consulate in Jeddah, killing four security guards and five staff members.

ISIS

The murderers of ISIS have publicly proclaimed the taking of the Saudi state as one of their goals.

Throughout 2015, ISIS militants struck four mosques in Dammam, Qatif, Abha and Najran, killing 38 and wounding 148. In August 2015, Saudi authorities arrested 421 suspects from four different extremist cells in connection with these crimes. Another 15 suspects were arrested while planning a suicide operation against the U.S. Embassy in Riyadh using a truck loaded with explosives.

ISIS operatives in Saudi Arabia have been caught trying to free terrorists from prison, recruit young people to their cause and spread ISIS propaganda.

Iran

Iran has used terrorism as an instrument of its foreign policy since the 1979 Revolution.

Saudi Arabia has long been a target of terrorism perpetrated by Iranian proxies. In 1987, the Iranian sponsored Hezbollah al-Hejaz set fire to an oil facility in Ras Tanura in eastern Saudi Arabia. That same year, Saudi authorities foiled a plot by Iranian pilgrims to smuggle explosives into the kingdom. In 1988, Hezbollah al-Hejaz attacked a petrochemical company facility in Jubail.

Most despicable was Iran's involvement in the 1996 Khobar bombings, which resulted in the deaths of 120 people, including 19 Americans.

Faced with such diverse and dangerous adversaries, Saudi Arabia has spared no effort or expense to combat terrorism. The kingdom is committed to uprooting extremism at the source and draining militant groups of resources.

Saudi Arabia has arrested extremists within its borders, tried them before specialized courts and imposed the ultimate penalties on those convicted. The kingdom has implemented one of the world's strictest financial control systems to combat terrorism financing.

Donations in mosques and public places are prohibited, and Saudi charities are prohibited from transferring money outside the country to ensure that charitable funds do not find their way to violent extremists.

In 2005, the kingdom launched a national public awareness campaign against extremism that is still ongoing to counter the extremist narrative and educate our public about the dangers of violent extremism. In 2008, it launched a global interfaith dialogue to promote harmony among the world's religions and cultures. A global center was established in Vienna to continue this effort.

In addition to actions, Saudi Arabia has worked with other nations to combat terrorism—both diplomatically and militarily. Through a \$110 million grant, Saudi Arabia helped establish the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Center to combat terrorism, address the mindset of extremism that foments terrorism and build the capacity of U.N. member states to fight against terrorism.

Saudi Arabia has established “fusion cells” where law enforcement and intelligence officials from Saudi Arabia, the United States and other partners work closely together to investigate and interdict terrorism plots and finances.

Saudi Air Force planes were one of the first to fly sorties over Syria as part of the military actions against ISIS, and Saudi Arabia is leading a coalition of 38 Islamic countries to fight terrorism and extremism.

Terrorism is a global scourge. Many countries have known the grief and pain it causes. It makes no sense for Saudi Arabia to support or condone those who have as their goal the destruction of Saudi Arabia. It is against our values, our faith and our national character.

That is why the kingdom has responded with strength, persistence and resolve. To accuse the kingdom of being lax, much less complicit, when it comes to combatting terrorism and its financing is not only irresponsible but also flies against the face of reality.

Adel al-Jubeir is the foreign minister of Saudi Arabia. This is distributed by Qorvis MSL Group on behalf of the Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia. Additional information is available at the Department of Justice, Washington, D.C.