

Executing Political Opponents: Saudi Arabia's Growing Body Count

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(Featured image: Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr)

Mass executions at home, war abroad – Saudi Arabia tries to kill its way out of adversity. As the new year rolled in around the world, Saudi Arabia was already getting off to a bad start. The Western media published muted reports of a mass execution of some 47 prisoners alleged to be “terrorists,” though the most prominent among them was clearly a political leader, not a militant.

The US State Department's Voice of America service, sourcing AP, AFP, and Reuters reports, would claim in its article, "[Saudi Arabia Executes 47, Including Prominent Shi'ite Cleric](#)," that:

Saudi Arabia has carried out its largest mass execution in more than three decades, putting to death 47 people convicted of terrorism, including a prominent Shi'ite cleric.

Most of those put to death were alleged Sunni militants, and some had ties to al-Qaida, according to media outlets. All but two were Saudi; one was Chadian and the other Egyptian.

The cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr was a key figure in Shi'ite protests that erupted during the 2011 Arab Spring. He had also criticized the government's treatment of Saudi Arabia's Shi'ite minority.

Missing from VOA and the rest of the Western media's coverage of the mass executions was any of the indignation that usually accompanies articles on Wall Street, Washington, London, and Brussels' enemies when they carry out acts of perceived reprisals against mostly Western-backed political opponents – reprisals that usually include sentences much less severe than execution, for crimes usually much more severe than political activism.

Also missing from Western reports was any attempt to analyze or question reports coming out of Saudi Arabia – such as claims that most of those executed were “Sunni militants” or “had ties to Al Qaeda,” a terrorist organization whose affiliates [were just invited to Riyadh](#) to consort with the Saudi government regarding ongoing militant operations Riyadh is underwriting in Syria, Iraq, and beyond – Al Qaeda itself being a gestation of joint US-Saudi conspiring beginning as early as the 1980s.

Executing Political Opponents

Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr may or may not have been receiving foreign backing to help undermine the Saudi regime. He clearly represented regional aspirations to check and balance US hegemony and the regimes the US has used to maintain, expand, or claw back that hegemony – including Saudi Arabia.

However, his execution, had it been a prominent political leader in Syria, or Russia, would have resulted in widespread, coordinated condemnation across the West among political circles, throughout the media, and among alleged “human rights advocacy” groups like Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International.

Instead, for Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, there was only complicit silence. And while Western “human rights advocacy” groups like Amnesty International did indeed point out that Saudi Arabia was putting to death a political prisoner, such reports were selectively glossed over, rendered as minor footnotes in Western reports, or ignored altogether, and the usual threats, sanctions, and direct action wielded by Western politicians against nations like Syria, Russia, Iran, or China, utterly absent before and after Saudi Arabia’s mass executions.

Amnesty International’s report, [“Saudi Arabia: Appalling death sentence against Shi’a cleric must be quashed,”](#) would claim:

Evidence for all the other charges he was convicted of came from religious sermons and interviews attributed to the cleric. Amnesty International’s review of these texts confirms that he was exercising his right to free expression and was not inciting violence. Some of the charges, such as disobeying the ruler, should not be offences as they criminalize the right to freedom of expression. Other charges are vague and have been used simply to punish him for his peaceful activities.

Yet despite this, it appears the Western media is attempting to justify the mass executions in the minds of unwitting readers.

That the Western political establishment and the media monopolies that serve as its voice, selectively report on and exploit perceived human rights abuses in some nations, while intentionally muting, spinning, or otherwise covering up very real abuses by other nations, illustrates perfectly the West’s selective enforcement of what it claims are its central organizing principles – democracy, freedom, and the defense of human rights.

Mass Executions at Home, War Upon its Neighbors

It should be noted that the West – and the United States in particular – used military force to topple the government in Libya in 2011 on “humanitarian” grounds and that the West’s involvement in Syria has been predicated on similar grounds. Why then, has the West not moved against Saudi Arabia, who is openly declaring war on not only its own people, but on its neighbors, including most notably Yemen?

Indeed, the West’s hypocrisy goes far beyond this more recent mass execution. This same complicit silence accompanies Saudi Arabia’s US-European-backed war waged against neighboring Yemen. It is a war that has laid waste to many of Yemen’s largest and most important cities, destroying its infrastructure, and cutting off the Yemeni people from economic and humanitarian resources beyond their borders through the seizure of their ports and a coordinated naval blockade.

It is a war fought using Western weapons. The US recently sold over a billion dollars worth of ordnance to Saudi Arabia to help it continue with its operations in Yemen. The BBC in its article, "[US State Department approves Saudi Arabia arms sale](#)," would report:

The US State Department has approved the sale of \$1.29 billion (£848.6m) worth of bombs to Saudi Arabia, as its military carries out air strikes in neighbouring Yemen.

It is American tanks, both M-60 Pattons and M1 Abrams, as well as French Leclerc main battle tanks leading armored charges into Yemen from across the Saudi-Yemeni border in the north, and from the port city of Aden in the south. And it is American aircraft Saudi Arabia is flying above Yemen, raining destruction down upon populated areas, killing thousands, injuring tens of thousands, and displacing or otherwise effecting many more.

In other words, between brutal, armed crackdowns and mass executions at home, and a war of aggression abroad, Saudi Arabia is in every sense as real a threat to human rights, freedom, and democracy as the US claimed the government in Libya was in 2011 before intervening and toppling the government there, and as much so a threat as the US claims the Syrian government currently is amid an increasingly convoluted attempt to topple the government there.

Yet, instead of confronting Saudi Arabia - one of the West's oldest and most stalwart allies in the region for decades - the US has continued propping it up, defending it, and covering up for its numerous and ever-multiplying crimes against humanity.

Signs of Weakness

However, it should be clear by now that the US and its allies are failing in Syria and Iraq, while struggling in Yemen. Saudi Arabia's growing body count indicates a regime clinging to power amid increasing adversity. But as the body count grows, adversity grows with it. Should the US fail in Syria, Iraq, and should its proxy war waged in Yemen with Saudi and other Persian Gulf forces also fail, it will not be long before the conflict finds itself pushed from the Levant and the southern most tip of the Arabian Peninsula, and onto Saudi soil itself.

While the West is gladly playing its hegemonic games from the safety of Wall Street, Washington, London, and Brussels, it will be its proxies in the region - in Turkey, in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar that face a very real existential struggle and the prospect of falling victim to their own brand of "regime change" turned finally back against them.

If and when that day comes, the despots of the Persian Gulf and those tarnishing Turkey's reputation and global standings in Ankara will have wished they chose a multipolar world order to lend their backing to. While that is a world order they would not have been as wealthy and influential in, it would have been one in which they would at least still be alive.

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