

# Riyadh's Geopolitical Designs. Expanding Saudi Arabia's Sphere of Influence?

The Global Ambitions Of The Saudi's New "Anti-Terror" Coalition: Part II

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*Please refer to Part 1 before reading this article.*

## The 'Odd' Men Out

*Having just described the breadth of membership in the Saudis' 34-nation "anti-terrorist" coalition, a few words deserve to be said about some of the states that aren't party to this framework because their absence is indicative of certain political decisions that don't often meet with scrutiny from the public eye. The sectarian reasons for Iran, Iraq, and Syria's exclusions are obvious, but less known are the grounds on which Algeria, Eritrea, and Oman didn't join:*

### **Algeria:**

This North African state has one of the [most capable militaries](#) on the continent and is routinely threatened by AQIM and other terrorist groups, but despite this, it refused to sign on to the Saudis' coalition. The cause is actually pretty simple, and it's that Algeria is a quasi-member of the Resistance Bloc - not being closely aligned enough with Iran to be a constituent member, but also being far away enough from the US and Saudi Arabia to retain a large degree of independence. Algeria's historical relations with Russia are another added plus, and it could also be said that its 1990s civil war against Islamic terrorists convinced its present leadership of the need to stay as far away from the Saudis as is realistically possible. Another motivating factor for its government's decision to abstain from the military coalition is because of Morocco's membership within it. The two neighbors have a heated rivalry and are presently in a cold war with one another, even going as far as [keeping the border closed](#) between them. Under these conditions, as well as Morocco's chummy ties with the [US/NATO](#) and [Saudi Arabia/GCC](#), it's impossible for Algeria to ever entertain the possibility of joining, although if [aging and stroke-ridden](#) President Bouteflika passes away soon and the country falls victim to an Islamist coup or Egyptian-style regime change, then all of this could rapidly change.

### **Eritrea:**

The author previously wrote [an extensive analysis](#) about the GCC's expansion to Eritrea, and it would naturally seem probable that Asmara would join the same framework as its new patrons. This didn't happen, and it can be attributable to Saudi Arabia not wanting to endanger the viability of the militarily critical GCC naval base there. To explain, after the revelation came out that Eritrea had sold its sovereignty to the Gulf, Ethiopian Prime

Minister Hailemariam Desalegn firmly [declared in an interview](#) that he would not tolerate the facility being used for any aggressive designs against his country. At the moment, it's widely thought that a type of military parity exists between Ethiopia and Eritrea that has kept the conventional (but not asymmetrical) peace between them since their mutually disastrous war from 1998-2000, but the GCC base could theoretically tip the balance in favor of Eritrea.

Understanding the enormity of the threat that could be facing it, Ethiopia may have signaled to its Gulf counterparts (especially in this case GCC and "anti-terrorist" coalition leader Saudi Arabia) that it would not tolerate Eritrea's formal incorporation into any military alliance and that it might preemptively act to stop such a development out of defense of its national interests. The GCC places such an importance on the Eritrean facility's use in assisting in their War on Yemen that they don't want to put it in any sort of danger at the moment, likely explaining why they didn't allow Eritrea to join (although it likely would have if offered). Conversely, an alternative but complementary possibility is that Eritrea itself realized that it would probably spark a formal continuation war if it joined the bloc (provided that it was offered an invitation and refused, which is extraordinarily improbable considering its current GCC cooperation but still theoretically possible), and instead wagered against it out of its government's interest for self-preservation.

### **Oman:**

The GCC member is noticeably absent from the Saudi-led "anti-terrorist" coalition, but regular regional observers shouldn't be too surprised. It's a well-established fact that Oman is the most pragmatic and moderate of all of the Gulf States, and Muscat has a deeply entrenched reputation for pursuing a foreign policy that's largely independent of any unipolar influence. For example, it played the role of [neutral meeting ground](#) between the US and Iran prior to the conclusion of the nuclear deal, and it's also [exploring the possibility](#) of having Iran build a gas pipeline to the country. Sultan Qaboos has thus been geopolitically wise in preserving his country's sovereignty and refraining from membership in the Saudi-led military bloc, knowing full well that joining it would likely put Shiite blood on the Kingdom's hands sooner or later. Another fact that may have motivated this decision is that most Omanis follow the Ibadi sect of Islam, which might one day make them a target of the Wahhabist hordes if Saudi Arabia and its ilk decided that the geopolitical conditions were ripe for such an offensive (possibly after Qaboos' passing if a power struggle ensued between pro-GCC and GCC-neutral elements). Therefore, by being in a similar sectarian vulnerability as Iran and others vis-à-vis the Wahhabis, the Ibadi Sultanate was already disinclined to join the alliance as it was.

### **"Terrorists" Everywhere**

It was earlier mentioned that one of the 'benefits' that the Saudi-led coalition members can receive from one another is multilateral support in fighting their own "Wars on Terror", with the label of "terrorist" being subjectively thrown around to any manner of anti-government or anti-establishment group. It's very probable that the aforementioned support will presumably be dominated by Saudi financial largesse, but it could also potentially see the formation of regional 'peacekeeping' deployments in support of the host state's "anti-terrorist" mission, provided of course that the anticipated strategic and economic benefits were enough to justify the military risk. Saudi Arabia's forecasted geopolitical application of this strategy will be discussed in the next section, but for now, it's relevant to briefly address some of the ways in which the coalition members might abuse the "terrorist" label (commonly associated in the current global context with extreme Islamic groups, although

by no means exclusive to them) in order to aggressively pursue their own self-interests:

### **Guinea/Sierra Leone/Ivory Coast/Togo/Benin:**

These five countries may likely label any rebel group or anti-government tribe as “terrorists” in order to discredit them and ‘justify’ a harsh community-wide crackdown against them (bordering, if not exceeding, outright ethnic cleansing).

### **Mali:**

It’s foreseeable that separatist and/or autonomy-demanding Tuaregs might fall under this label if they continue to be a nuisance to the UN-led peace efforts in the country.

### **Sudan:**

While the myriad of rebel groups fighting in South Kordofan and Blue Nile states already commit terrorist acts as it is, information about their crimes might become more widely disseminated among the Saudi bloc if Khartoum ties them in with the organization-wide “War on Terror”. There’s a possibility that Riyadh may not support this, however, so long as Washington continues to implicitly encourage the militant dissolution of the unified Sudanese state as a proxy attack against Chinese energy interests.

### **Turkey:**

It’s without a doubt that Erdogan will use his Saudi-granted pedestal to preach about why the bloc should recognize the PKK and supportive Kurds as “terrorists”, hoping that he can gain wider acceptance for his bloody crackdown against them, and any other groups that rise up in defiance of his government (leftists, secular protesters, etc.) will also fall under this umbrella.

### **Lebanon/Palestine:**

The only reason that these two states are part of Riyadh’s “anti-terrorist” coalition is so that the Saudis can ‘justify’ possibly forthcoming material assistance to each of their respective proxies within them (to varying extents, some Hariri-aligned elements in the Lebanese Armed Forces and the most pro-Saudi agents in Hamas) for their fight against Hezbollah. The reader should remember that Hezbollah is a Shiite Resistance organization whose religious identity makes it an irresistible target of the Wahhabist and identity-exterminating Saudis, and that the royal family will stop at nothing in trying to wipe out the group. Any (Saudi-driven) Lebanese Armed Forces and/or Hamas attack against Hezbollah also tacitly serves the interests of Israel, which isn’t at all coincidental because the [exceptionalist convergences](#) between Wahhabism and Zionism are an open secret in the Mideast.

### **Yemen:**

The puppet government led by deposed premier Hadi has an existential interest in having the Ansarallah labeled and ‘widely’ recognized as “terrorists” so that an expanded Saudi-coalition-led occupation force (probably euphemistically labeled as “peacekeepers”) can come in and wipe them out completely.

## **The Contradiction And It’s Anti-Shiite “Solution”**

In speaking about the self-serving interests that many members of the Saudi-led coalition are expected to promote through the “terrorist” label, it seems almost inevitable that the Saudis will turn against their Turkish and Qatari ‘partners’ by declaring war against the Muslim Brotherhood. One should bear in mind that the Muslim Brotherhood legitimately is a terrorist group, but that Riyadh is purposely turning somewhat of a temporary blind eye to Turkey and Qatar’s support of it for the moment in order to pursue the broad-based multilateral alliance that it’s constructed. Sooner or later, however, the internal terrorist contradictions between the Wahhabis and Muslim Brotherhood (different for the most part only by their hierarchy, foreign patronage, and slight divergences in religious misinterpretation) might become too strong to ignore, especially if one or the other feels confident enough to make a power play on their respective host’s territory one day. Another coalition-disrupting scenario would be if the Turkey and Qatar use the Saudi-led framework as a vehicle for advancing the Muslim Brotherhood’s ideological interests in some respect among all of the other coalition members, thereby engendering fierce competition from the Saudis that might warrant a militant backlash.

Either way, in order to prevent the bloc from falling apart along diverging terrorist lines, the Saudis are expected to informally link their alliance with a larger crusade against Shiites. The presence of an external, non-Sunni ‘enemy’ is the only real force capable of holding the alliance together for the long-term and indefinitely mitigating the terrorist differences between its respective Saudi and Turkish/Qatari ideological poles. Perceived in this manner, it’s not coincidental then that the Saudis probably masterminded the Zaria massacre in order to show that the so-called “Shiite threat” even stretches into Africa’s largest country. Considering that the Saudi-led coalition will most likely functionally become an anti-Shiite NATO (and therefore anti-Iranian, anti-Iraqi, anti-Syrian, and anti-Ansarallah), it implicitly supports the US and Israel’s grand strategic vision for the Mideast and can be seen as logical extensions of both of their militaries. From a conceptual standpoint, the Saudi-led bloc represents a partial civilization-wide Lead From Behind application of the US and Israel’s decades-long attempts in fiendishly trying to initiate a Muslim fratricide by turning most of the Islamic world against its Resistance Bloc members.

### **Riyadh’s Geopolitical Designs**

Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the 30-year-old Defense Minister, [announced](#) that the Saudi “anti-terrorist” coalition would be active in Iraq, Syria, Libya, Egypt, and Afghanistan, and given everything that’s been discussed in the research thus far, it’s possible to make some solid assessments about Riyadh’s interests in each and possible forecasts for how they may be actualized.

### **Syria and Iraq**

It’s not yet known what form of “anti-terrorist” support Saudi Arabia wants the coalition to apply in Syria and Iraq, but it’s anticipated beyond any pale of doubt that it will have to do with anti-Shiite activity of some sort or form. For example, this could take the shape of Riyadh decreeing that the Shiite anti-ISIL militias in Iraq are “terrorists” and then ordering airstrikes or other attacks against them in order to support pro-Saudi Sunni militias that may be fighting to carve out a [pseudo- or fully independent “Sunnistan” there or in eastern Syria](#). A more watered-down variation of this strategy would be for the coalition to provide arms, training, and special forces support to Sunni anti-government militias in each of these countries, all with the eventual grand intent of actualizing the geopolitical construct mentioned above and described in detail in the afore-cited link.

## **Libya and Egypt**

Moving along to Libya and Egypt, these two theaters are inherently intertwined. Cairo frets about a full Islamist takeover in Libya but is very reluctant to get caught up in a quagmire there to prevent it. Instead, Egypt and the UAE have carried out a few surgical and highly symbolic (but scarcely substantial) strikes against terrorists there, but the formalization of the Saudi-led coalition might provide them with additional multilateral support. Also, because Libya is becoming a central focus in the West's anti-ISIL efforts, doing so could also earn the praise and international acceptance of the EU and could substitute for NATO's own possibly planned efforts there (a War on Libya 2.0). As positive as this could be for the Saudis' image, there's a very strong potential for intra-bloc conflict between the Muslim Brotherhood-supporting states of Turkey and Qatar on one hand, and the internationally recognized Libyan government-supporting states of Egypt and the UAE on the other, with the Saudis conceivably trying to play 'kingmaker' (but predictably to no avail) if their competition comes to cataclysmic heights. A similar fallout could be possible in the Sinai as well, with the Qatari-supported terrorist groups there likely not giving up without a very brutal fight that might escalate to the level of state-on-state (Turkish/Qatari-on-Egyptian/Saudi) tensions.

## **Afghanistan**

The final publicly stated theater of intent is in Afghanistan, and here it's a bit more difficult for the Saudis to directly exert influence in this area. Nonetheless, this explains why the bloc was so eager to bring Pakistan on board, since Riyadh would like for Islamabad to play a destabilizing role there which would be fundamentally contradictory to it and its Chinese ally's national self-interests. At this point, it's not possible to tell how deep the Saudis and their influence may have infiltrated the Pakistani military and intelligence services or whether it's just isolated to a few high-level decision makers, but the fact remains that the Saudi intent (key word) is to use Pakistan as a springboard for further Afghan destabilization at the expense of Russia's CSTO peripheral security. There's also the tangential 'benefit' of keeping Afghanistan as a black hole of US- and Saudi-supported chaos so as to indefinitely retain a geographically convenient training ground for Uighur terrorists and to perpetually [keep Turkmenistan under threat](#). The latter is very important nowadays because the former Central Asian republic is an energy super-hub for the multipolar world, being linked mostly to China, but also to Russia, Iran, and [in the future](#) to India. It's also a 'sitting duck' for destabilization due to the constitutional neutrality that prohibits it from fruitful and productive cooperation with the CSTO and SCO's anti-terrorist bodies, and if ISIL, the Taliban, a new terrorist group, and/or some sort of hybrid repeats the "Syraq" scenario and storms across the Afghan-Turkmen border, then it could suddenly create an urgent and simultaneous strategic threat to Russia, China, and Iran.

## **It All Comes Back To Yemen**

Prior to concluding this far-reaching study, it's necessary to bring the reader's focus back towards its beginnings and the failed War on Yemen. The Saudis interpret this unnecessary conflict as being integral to their conception of "security", and they're obsessed with 'winning' at all costs. Their present losses, the pathetically underperforming capabilities of their contracted armies, and the embarrassing ineptitude of their own Armed Forces have created a pitiful military situation that's in need of immediate correcting. The "anti-terrorist" coalition is one of the methods by which Saudi Arabia hopes to gain tangible support for its war-fighting efforts, and it's anticipated that some (if not most) of the members will pay

'mercenary tributes' to their institutional leader in exchange for the financial largesse mentioned earlier. They also have their own perceived self-interests in having the entire bloc play along with their "anti-terrorist" labelling and supporting them in a similar manner, thus meaning that the Saudi-led coalition is really a 'legitimized' and large-scale marketplace for mercenaries. It's also very probable that with the War on Yemen continuing to go south for the Saudis, they may desperately try to 'institutionalize' the aggrandized mercenary presence there under the false auspices of an illegal non-UN-mandated "peacekeeping" mission deployed by the "anti-terrorist" bloc. This, more so than any other possible application, would dramatically (albeit very brutally and with the major risk of identity cleansing) increase the likelihood that the Saudis could win their War on Yemen, which as was mentioned, has become an obsession for them and might even pave the way for future "peacekeeping" deployments in other "anti-terrorist" locations within the coalition.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Saudi Arabia's "anti-terrorist" coalition may have come as a news-making surprise the moment it was first reported and was widely treated as a sick and ironic joke by most of those who heard about it, but upon closer examination, it can authoritatively be said that it was predictable in hindsight and is predicated on long-standing sectarian and geopolitical designs.

The bloc encompasses a wide swatch of territory across the world and abuts three separate oceans, but the cohesiveness of the organization has yet to be tested, especially as it relates to the group's internal Wahhabi-Muslim Brotherhood fault line. In light of this terrorist contradiction within its own ranks, it means that the Saudis will press the anti-Shiite identity of the organization even more feverishly than if Turkey and Qatar hadn't been admitted to the organization, thus raising fears that Saudi Arabia is preparing for a prolonged proxy conflict with Iran and other Resistance Bloc members like Iraq, Syria, Hezbollah, and the Ansarallah. However, it'll probably be the last of the bunch that the Saudi-led military alliance attacks first, turning it into an unwitting bell weather of the bloc's capabilities. If Saudi Arabia's "anti-terrorist" coalition is 'successful' in their first real battle (given that the earlier GCC-majority coalition was a dismal failure by all metrics), then it's exceedingly probable that it'll swiftly ride the wave of confidence that this creates in getting itself directly entangled in Syria and Iraq, with all of the globally destabilizing consequences.

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