

GREAT DECISIONS

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4. Saudi Arabia in transition

Acronyms and abbreviations

AQAP—Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula

GCC—Gulf Cooperation Council

IMF—International Monetary Fund

ISIS—Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham

JASTA—Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act

NTP—The National Transformation Program

Glossary

Abdu Mansour Hadi: President of Yemen. Hadi took office in 2012, and fled the country in 2015 amid civil war. He returned later that year after Saudi-backed government forces recaptured the port city of Aden from rebels.

Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud (1924–2015): King of Saudi Arabia from 2005 until his death in 2015.

Al-Qaeda: A militant Islamist organization founded by Osama bin Laden during the final years of the Soviet-Afghan War (1979–89), and headquartered in Afghanistan. The international terrorist network orchestrated the 9/11 attacks.

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP): A prominent affiliated sect of al-Qaeda, formed in 2009 from a merger of the Saudi and Yemeni branches of the group.

Arab Spring (Arab Awakening; Arab Uprisings): A series of pro-democracy uprisings in the Arab world that began in early 2011 with protests in Tunisia. These movements led to the ousting of leaders in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Yemen. Uprisings also erupted in Bahrain and Syria, as well as in Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco and Sudan.

Bashar al-Assad: President of Syria since 2000. Assad cracked down on anti-government protests in 2011, ultimately leading to a civil war that has drawn in international actors, and constitutes the 21st century's deadliest conflict thus far.

Battle of Sibila (1929): The central battle between the forces of Ibn Saud and the Ikhwan rebels, won by the former in a decisive victory.

Bid'a: An Arabic term for religious innovation.

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC): A regional inter-governmental political and economic union consisting of all Arab states of the Persian Gulf, excepting Iraq.

Gulf War (1990–91): A war waged and won by a coalition of 24 nations, led by the U.S., against Iraq in response to the latter's invasion and annexation of Kuwait.

Hosni Mubarak: President of Egypt from 1981 until the Egyptian Revolution in 2011. Mubarak is serving a three-year prison sentence on a corruption conviction.

Ikhwan Revolt (1927–30): A failed revolt of the Ikhwan, or the tribal army that had supported Ibn Saud as he conquered territory in Arabia. The rebellion resulted from a fundamental disagreement between the Ikhwan, who wanted to expand their campaign into British protectorates, and Ibn Saud, who wanted to avoid conflict with Great Britain.

Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) [Islamic State (IS), Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) or Daesh: A transnational jihadist-Salafi insurgent group based in Iraq and Syria, and led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. It

is designated a terrorist group by dozens of individual countries, as well as by the UN and the European Union.

Jihad: Meaning “struggle” or “to strive.” Jihad denotes a Muslim’s duty toward religious practice amid struggle. The term can refer to both spiritual and external struggle: the inner struggle of a Muslim to practice Islam or the physical struggle against religious enemies to build a society in accordance with Islam.

Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act (JAS-TA): A law that amends the federal judicial code, in effect authorizing U.S. citizens to sue foreign states. It was initiated in order to allow families of the victims of the 9/11 terrorist attacks to sue Saudi Arabia as an alleged state sponsor of terrorism. President Obama vetoed the bill, but Congress overturned his veto in September 2016.

Kafir: An Arabic term used to describe someone who does not practice Islam.

Mohamed Morsi: President of Egypt from 2012 until 2013, when he was ousted in a military coup. He has since faced a series of legal charges, including espionage and inciting the killing of protestors.

Mohammad bin Salman: Deputy crown prince and minister of defense of Saudi Arabia. He is the son of King Salman, and has launched a reform campaign since his appointment as deputy crown prince in 2015.

Muhammad bin Nayef: Crown prince of Saudi Arabia since 2015, appointed by King Salman, and minister of interior since 2012. As chairman of the Council for Political and Security Affairs, he oversees Saudi military operations in Yemen.

Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703–92): Founder of the Wahhabi movement, which sought to return Islam to its original practices. Wahhabism remains the predominant branch of Islam in Saudi Arabia today.

Muhammad Ibn Saud: The first monarch of the modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which he founded in 1932. Since then, the Kingdom has only been ruled by Ibn Saud’s descendants.

National Transformation Program: A program developed to help achieve Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030 plan. It seeks to identify the challenges facing government bodies in the economic and development sectors through the year 2020.

Raif Badawi: Saudi blogger, dissident and activist. He founded the website *Free Saudi Liberals*, for which he was sentenced to ten years in prison and 1,000 lashes in 2012. The U.S. State Department issued a rare statement condemning the sentence in 2015.

Sahwa Movement: A movement of Saudi clerics that arose in the mid-1980s and peaked in the 1990s. The Sahwa oppose the Saudi religious establishment and government as being insufficiently “Islamic.”

Salafism: Derived from *salaf*, meaning “predecessors.” An ultraconservative branch of Sunni Islam aimed at returning to the ancient “orthodox” teachings of Islam. Although the term *salaf* has appeared in Islamic religious scholarship for centuries, Salafism started as a reform-oriented movement in the 19th and 20th centuries, and was centered in particular in Egypt.

Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud: King of Saudi Arabia since 2015, following the death of his half-brother, King Abdullah.

Shaikh Nimr al-Nimr: A prominent Saudi Shi’a cleric, convicted of “disobedience to the ruler” and executed in January 2016. His execution sparked an outcry in Shi’a-dominated Iran, where protestors stormed the Saudi embassy in Tehran. In response, Saudi Arabia broke off diplomatic ties with Iran—a nadir in relations.

Shi’a Islam: The second largest denomination of Islam, constituting 15–20% of the world’s Muslim population and 40% of the Middle East’s entire population. The Shi’a divided with the Sunnis over the proper successor of the Prophet Muhammad.

Shura Council (Consultative Assembly of Saudi Arabia; Majlis Ash-Shura): Saudi Arabia’s consultative body, consisting of 150 members appointed by the king, with the power to propose, but not to pass or enforce, laws.

Sunni Islam: The largest single religious denomination in the world. In the schism from Shi'ism, Sunnis argued that the leaders of the Muslim community didn't have to come from the Prophet Muhammad's lineage. Sunnis accepted Abu Bakr as the first caliph after Muhammad.

Takfir: A proclamation of excommunication of one Muslim by another.

Turki al-Faisal: Saudi prince, former director of general intelligence (1979 – 2001) and former ambassador to the U.S. (2005 –07).

Ulama: Muslim religious scholars with recognized authority in matters of sacred law and theology.

Vision 2030 Plan: A plan for reforms and expenditure reductions introduced by the Saudi government in 2016 in response to the economic crisis and budget deficit facing the Kingdom following a sustained drop in oil prices.

Wahhabism: The predominant form of Islam in Saudi Arabia. It seeks a return to a purified faith and opposes innovation. Critics of Wahhabism argue that this strict form of the faith has fueled Islamic extremism.

Zakat: One of the Five Pillars of Islam. Zakat is the paying of a charity tax to benefit the needy.