

HERE'S THE ARTICLE ON SAUDI ARABIA THAT AL JAZEERA BLOCKED

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THE POST [HERE'S THE ARTICLE ON SAUDI ARABIA THAT AL JAZEERA BLOCKED](#) APPEARED FIRST ON [THE INTERCEPT](#).

This article was [published](#) by Al Jazeera America on December 3. Al Jazeera's headquarters in Qatar appear to have blocked the article outside of the United States because it is critical of an ally of Qatar, so we are making it available here to international readers. Read our accompanying piece, [Al Jazeera Blocks Anti-Saudi Arabia Article](#).

Saudi Arabia Uses Terrorism As An Excuse for Human Rights Abuses

By Arjun Sethi

Reports emerged last week that Saudi Arabia intends to imminently execute more than 50 people on a single day for alleged terrorist crimes.

Although the kingdom hasn't officially confirmed the reports, the evidence is building. Okas, [the first outlet to publish the report](#), has close ties to the Saudi Ministry of Interior and would not have published the story without obtaining government consent. Some of the prisoners slated for execution were likewise recently subject to [an unscheduled medical exam](#), a sign that many believe portends imminent execution. There has already been [a spike in capital punishment in Saudi Arabia this year](#), with at least 151 executions, compared with 90 for all of 2014.

[The cases of six Shia activists from Awamiya](#), a largely Shia town in the oil-rich Eastern province, are particularly disconcerting. The majority of Saudi's minority Shia population is concentrated in the Eastern province and has long faced government persecution. The six activists were convicted for protesting this mistreatment and other related crimes amid the Arab uprisings in 2011. Three of them were arrested when they were juveniles. [Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr](#), a prominent Shia religious leader who was convicted of similar charges, also faces imminent execution.

All the convictions were obtained through [unfair trials marred by human and civil rights violations](#), including in some cases torture, forced confessions and lack of access to counsel. Each defendant was tried before the Specialized Criminal Court, a counterterrorism tribunal controlled by the Ministry of Interior that has [few procedural safeguards](#) and is often used to persecute political dissidents. Lawyers are generally prohibited from counseling their clients during interrogation and have limited participatory rights at trial. Prosecutors aren't even required to disclose the charges and relevant evidence to defendants.

The problems aren't just procedural. Saudi law criminalizes dissent and the expression of fundamental civil rights. [Under an anti-terrorism law passed in 2014](#), for example, individuals may be executed for vague acts such as participating in or inciting protests, "contact or correspondence with any groups ... or individuals hostile to the kingdom" or "calling for atheist thought."

One of the defendants, Ali al-Nimr, was [convicted of crimes](#) such as "breaking allegiance with the ruler" and "going out to a number of marches, demonstrations and gathering against the state and repeating some chants against the state." For these offenses, he has been sentenced to beheading and crucifixion, with his beheaded body to be put on public display as a warning to others.

Because of these procedural and legal abominations, the planned executions for these Shia activists must not proceed. They should be retried in public proceedings and afforded due process protections consistent with international law, which includes a ban on the death penalty for anyone under the age of 18.

No other executions should take place in Saudi Arabia. Capital punishment is morally repugnant and rife with error and bias, as we know all too well in the United States. Moreover, any outcome produced by the Saudi criminal justice system is inherently suspect. Inadequate due process, violations of basic human rights and draconian laws that criminalize petty offenses and exercising of civil rights [are fixtures of Saudi rule](#).

Saudi Arabia often escapes moral condemnation in large part because of its close relationship with the US.

They're also fixtures of authoritarian regimes in general. Those who simply expect Saudi Arabia to reform its criminal justice system ignore the fact that the kingdom is an authoritarian regime that uses the law as a tool to maintain and consolidate power. They also ignore the reality that Saudi Arabia often escapes moral condemnation in large part because of its close relationship with the U.S.

In 2014, for example, President Barack Obama [visited](#) the kingdom but made no mention of its ongoing human rights violations. In return, he and the first family [received \\$1.4 million in gifts from the Saudi king](#) . (By law U.S. presidents must either pay for such gifts or turn them over to the National Archives.) The two leaders discussed energy security and military intelligence, shared interests that have connected the U.S. and Saudi Arabia for nearly a century.

Obama traveled to the kingdom earlier this year to offer his condolences on the passing of King Abdullah and to meet with the new ruler, King Salman. Again, human rights were never mentioned. Instead, U.S. National Security Adviser Susan Rice [tweeted](#) that Abdullah was a "close and valued friend of the United States."

This deafening silence is not lost on Saudi Arabia and has emboldened its impunity. In the wake of the Arab uprisings, the kingdom's brutal campaign against its Shia minority and political opposition has deepened. Shias [have limited access](#) to government employment and public education, few rights under the criminal justice system and diminished religious rights. Those who protest this discrimination face arbitrary trial and the prospect of execution for terrorism. Consider that Saudi Arabia [has not carried out](#) a mass execution for terrorism-related offenses since 1980, a year after an armed group occupied the Grand Mosque of Mecca.

Dissent of any kind is quelled. In November, Ashraf Fayadh, a Palestinian poet and artist born in Saudi Arabia, was [sentenced to death for allegedly renouncing Islam](#) . His supporters allege that he's being punished [for posting a video of police lashing a man in public](#) .

Even the kingdom's neighbors aren't immune from its authoritarian agenda. [Numerous reports](#) suggest that the Saudi-led coalition against opposition groups in Yemen has indiscriminately attacked civilians and used cluster bombs in civilian-populated areas, in violation of international law.

Despite its appalling human rights record, Saudi Arabia was awarded a seat on the U.N. Human Rights Council last year and this summer was [selected to oversee](#) an influential committee within the council that appoints officials to report on country-specific and thematic human rights challenges.

Unsurprisingly, Saudi Arabia has used its newfound power to [thwart an international inquiry](#) into allegations that it committed war crimes in Yemen.

It's not by happenstance that the kingdom announced the mass execution just days after 130 people were killed in Paris in the worst terrorist attacks in Europe in more than a decade. Even before Paris, the U.S. used its "war on terrorism" to invade and occupy Afghanistan and Iraq, engage in mass surveillance and develop an assassination program immune from judicial oversight. Is it any surprise that Saudi Arabia feels emboldened to intensify its own "war on terrorism"?

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Islamic State