

Trump & 55 Muslim-majority states sign pact pledging 34,000 troops to fight ISIS in Iraq & Syria

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The US and Middle Eastern countries have backed a new pact that promises to provide extra troops for defeating Islamic State, singles out Iran for destabilizing the region, and says that Riyadh is to become the heart of the region's counter-terrorism operations.

Described as the Riyadh Declaration, the document was signed following US President Donald Trump's visit to the Saudi capital for a summit that brought in Islamic representatives from 55 countries, and vowed *"to combat terrorism in all its forms, address its intellectual roots, dry up its sources of funding and to take all necessary measures to prevent and combat terrorist crimes in close cooperation among their states."*

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“The leaders welcomed the establishment of a global center for countering extremist thought to take base in Riyadh, and praised the center's strategic objectives of combating intellectual, media and digital extremism and promoting coexistence and tolerance among peoples,” said the text of the [document](#), published by the Saudi Press Agency.

The exact membership of what the communique called the Middle East Strategic Alliance will be

decided next year, but putative members have committed to assembling *“a reserve force of 34,000 troops to support operations against terrorist organizations in Iraq and Syria when needed.”*

Currently the burden of anti-IS combat in both states is being shouldered mostly by local troops and Kurdish forces, with the international coalition providing air support, equipment and funding.

Despite a stated desire for inclusivity and tolerance – the declaration advocates *“a rejection of any attempt to draw a link between terrorism and any religion, culture or race, affirming their determination to protect and promote a culture of tolerance, coexistence and constructive cooperation among different countries, religions and cultures”* – an entire third of the resolution was aimed specifically against Iran, a Shia-majority state, and its *“sectarian agendas.”*

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“The leaders confirmed their absolute rejection of the practices of the Iranian regime designed to destabilize the security and stability of the region and the world at large and for its continuing support for terrorism and extremism,” said the final communique, which also accused the Islamic Republic of running a *“dangerous ballistic missiles program”* and *“continuing interference in the domestic affairs of other countries.”*

Iran—fresh from real elections—attacked by [@POTUS](#) in that bastion of democracy & moderation. Foreign Policy or simply milking KSA of \$480B? pic.twitter.com/ahfvRxK3HV — Javad Zarif (@JZarif) [May 21, 2017](#)

While rich in specific epithets, the declaration broadly [followed](#) the agenda of Sunday’s Sunni-dominated Riyadh summit, and the speech delivered by Trump, which mentioned Iran a dozen times, and accused it of *“spreading destruction and chaos across the region.”*

‘Drive them out’

Trump’s speech called on the leaders of the Muslim world to join their efforts in fighting terrorism and extremist ideologies, and pledged unconditional support to the US’s old and new allies in the region.

“Our goal is a coalition of nations who share the aim of stamping out extremism and providing our children a hopeful future that does honor to God,” Trump said.

“This is a battle between barbaric criminals who seek to obliterate human life, and decent people of all religions who seek to protect it. This is a battle between good and evil,” Trump adding, stressing that the Muslim countries should take an active role in this battle and make a choice that no one else can make for them.

“A better future is only possible if your nations drive out the terrorists and extremists... Drive them out of your places of worship. Drive them out of your communities. Drive them out of your holy land, and drive them out of this Earth,” Trump said.

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He then announced establishment of several international anti-terrorism centers, including two Riyadh-based groups joined by Gulf Cooperation Council members and co-chaired by the US that will be tasked with preventing the financing of terrorism.

Trump then went on to accuse Iran of providing terrorists with *“safe harbor, financial backing, and the social standing needed for recruitment”* as well as of being *“responsible for so much*

instability in the [Middle East].”

He blamed Tehran for aggravating the Syrian crisis through what he called a “*destabilizing intervention,*” before calling on “*all nations of conscience*” to “*work together to isolate Iran, deny it funding for terrorism.*”

Trump separately thanked King Salman, the leader of the Saudi Arabia, for his “*massive investment in America, its industry and its jobs*” as well as for “*for investing in the future*” of the Middle East, as he spoke about a recent arms deal signed by the US and Saudi Arabia, which is worth \$350 billion over 10 years, with nearly \$110 billion to take effect immediately.

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While news agencies of the Gulf States presented the news on the signing of the alliance as a milestone event, critics were not impressed with the facade, saying it all boiled down to pragmatic interests, notably those of the US military-industrial complex.

Trump’s speech was “*all about defense procurement,*” Martin Jay, a Beirut-based journalist and a Middle East expert, told RT, adding that Trump basically told all the Muslim leaders who attended the summit that the US would support them as long as they bought US weapons.

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“*What [Trump] was basically saying to all of these [leaders], some of whom had poor human rights records in their own countries, is that the [US] does not care about their human rights records and does not care about what they do to their own people and would even help them stay in power... if they buy American guns,*” Jay said.

Tehran’s initial reaction to the Riyadh declaration and Trump’s speech was sarcastic, with Foreign Minister Javad Zarif tweeting: “*Iran – fresh from real elections – attacked by @POTUS in that bastion of democracy & moderation.*”

Zarif then wondered if the anti-Iran text could be explained by: “*Foreign Policy or simply milking KSA of \$480[billion]?*”
