

Saudi killings cause unrest

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Culture Editor

The perennial unrest between the Shiite Muslims of Iran and the Sunni Monarchy of Saudi Arabia has worsened since the New Year. As the close of the Iran nuclear deal neared and peace talks on Syria and the Yemen Civil War approached, Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia, broke diplomatic relations with Tehran, the Iranian capital.

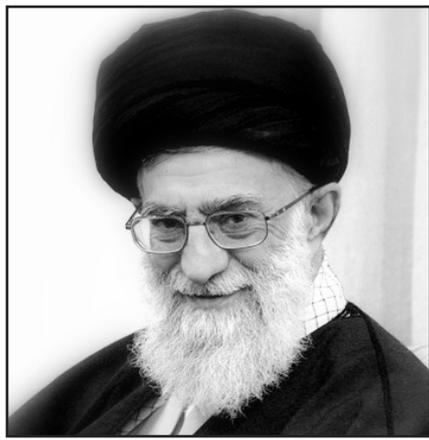
The break follows the beheading of 47 men in Saudi Arabia on Jan. 2. Among those beheaded was a popular, outspoken Shiite cleric, Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, who defended the minority Shiites in Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia executed the men on charges of terrorism.

However, many are outraged at the death of the cleric because he was not associated with terrorists, and his supporters praise his defense of the Shia people in Saudi Arabia.

The Shia in Iran, Iraq, and several other Middle Eastern countries spoke out against the beheading of Nimr al-Nimr. The Iranian supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, threatened that "divine retribution" would "grip the neck of Saudi politicians," following Nimr's death. Closely following the execution, mobs attacked the Saudi consulate and stormed the Saudi embassy in Tehran, breaking furniture, smashing windows, throwing firebombs



NIMR AL-NIMR: Al-Nimr's execution sparked international outcry.



AYATOLLAH: Iran's supreme leader refused to pardon al-Nimr.

Although the police did eventually arrive, Riyadh accuses Tehran of failing to defend the embassy and cut off diplomatic relations.

The 14-century-old sectarian tensions between the Shiite and the Sunni have continued to rise throughout the Middle East, especially since September, when about 2000 Muslims were crushed to death in a stampede during a pilgrimage. Saudi Arabia's failure to return many of the bodies angered Iran. Now, with tensions at their highest, the end of diplomatic relations between the two countries forebodes even greater sectarian and political strain.

The split comes at an inopportune time as far as the United States is concerned. With negotiations with Syria just around the corner, the US was hoping for cooperation with both Saudi Arabia and Iran. The schism will certainly detract attention and military force from the fight against the Islamic State. The United States requires the assistance of Saudi Arabia's military force in the fight against ISIS, yet is in the midst of finalizing the nuclear deal with Iran. The United States is thus caught in a very difficult position. The feud poses a massive obstacle in the effort to stabilize the region.

(Sources: New York Times, The Guardian, CNN)

China's economy implodes

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China's economy has had a rough new year: so far, its stock market has fallen around 15 percent, triggering falls in other markets and raising fears of a decline in international economic growth. Furthermore, the Chinese economy's growth is slowing quickly, with gross domestic product growth last year estimated by several US analysts to be well below the officially reported rate of 6.5 percent.

At the same time earlier this month, the centralized and state-controlled People's Bank of China directed state banks to purchase large sums of the Chinese yuan in Hong Kong finance markets. This was likely an attempt to stem the loss of capital from the country. As a result of signs of reduced growth, speculators were exchanging the currency, which was pushing down its value. The Bank of China's mass purchase of the yuan temporarily increased interest rates to an annualized rate of 66.82 percent on Jan. 12, which quickly fell to 8 percent the next day.

The problem was compounded by poor coordination on the part of the Chinese government. Xi Jinping, who took office as President in 2012, recently began consolidating power with an anti-corruption campaign. This resulted in changes in management and structure within the Chinese intelligence service, senior military staff, and the Communist Party. His policies have frightened senior party officials, paralyzing them during crises.

China's economic problems are also a result of Xi's attempt to transition China's economy away from an export-driven economy toward a more sustainable, consumer-driven model. China's economy is currently composed of many inefficient, state-owned enterprises that have managed to survive by taking on debt and utilizing government subsidies.

Many of China's financial problems are a

result of a conflict between this transition towards a freer market and a heavily government-controlled one. Earlier this month, when the stock market fell seven percent, the government ordered investors not to sell. This triggered a sell-off and a larger capital flight.



CHINESE EXCHANGE: Investors were blindsided by the CSE crash.

China's move to boost domestic consumption and reduce dependence on federal infrastructure projects has had significant implications on the global economy as a whole. China has been consuming fewer globally-traded commodities, leading to subsequent economic slowdowns in oil-producing economies such as Russia and Saudi Arabia. Recently, crude oil traded below 30 dollars a barrel for the first time in a decade, indicating low global demand and forecasting continued problems in the future for oil-driven economies. Furthermore, foreign investors have decreased the flow of capital into countries such as Brazil and Mexico; this has also lowered the value of the real and peso, respectively.

(Sources: The Economist, Washington Post, Forbes)

DPRK detonates H Bomb

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The world reacted with both concern and doubt after North Korea announced that it had tested its first ever hydrogen bomb on Jan. 5. The country's state-run news station, KCNA, boasted of the success just hours after a bomb was detonated at a known nuclear test site in the northeastern area of the country.

Quoting North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, the news station reported that "The DPRK's H-bomb test ... is a self-defensive step for reliably defending the peace on the Korean Peninsula and the regional security from the danger of nuclear war caused by the U.S.-led imperialists." Kim also said that the test was "the legitimate right of a sovereign state and a fair action that nobody can criticize." The leader, who took power in 2011, is well-known for his determination to improve and expand North Korea's nuclear program. In 2006, the country had its first nuclear test and has had two since, arousing concern within neighboring countries and the US



KIM JONG UN: The supreme leader celebrates his H bomb detonation.

Although many see this test as a threat to the outside world, it is likely that it also has to do with North Korea's goal of inspiring its own citizens. This May, a high-level national convention of government officials called The Workers Party Congress will be held for the first time since 1980. It is speculated

that Kim Jong Un might introduce plans to increase his own power, reorganize party officials, and create new state policies to boost the nation's struggling economy at this convention. Chang Gwang-il, a former head of the South Korean Defence Ministry's Policy Department, said that "The test is being used to build a legacy for Kim Jong Un, ahead of the seventh congress of the Workers' Party rather than as a bargaining chip with the outside world."

KCNA also quoted North Koreans saying that the detonation of the H-bomb would motivate them and their peers to work harder and be more productive. A letter written by Kim Jong Un reads: "Let's begin the year of 2016 - a glorious and victorious year when the historic seventh conference of the Workers' Party of Korea will be held - with a thrilling sound of the first hydrogen bomb explosion."

North Korea has insisted that a successful hydrogen bomb test occurred. However, the US and other global powers are in doubt of the announcement because the state-run network is notorious for its propaganda journalism. The underground test of the bomb measured 5.1 on the seismic Richter scale, which equates to about 10,000 tons of TNT. This is much smaller than a typical hydrogen bomb, which has an explosion equal to millions of tons of TNT. Since North Korea made its claim, the US, South Korea, China, and Japan have all been using planes and drones to test the area to detect airborne and ground radiation but have not found any evidence that the explosive tested was actually a hydrogen bomb. Ned Price, Spokesman of the White House National Security Council, said that American officials "cannot confirm [North Korea's] claims at this time." He also said that he expected "North Korea to abide by its international obligations and commitments."

Despite the lack of evidence, there are many factors that might have contributed to the lack of radioactivity found at the blast site. Radioactive isotopes might have disappeared within hours of the test because of their short half-lives. Additionally, in past tests, North Korea has been known to be good at shielding its test facilities, which prevents any radiation from being detected. It may take several more weeks for the US to work with other countries in order to come to a conclusion about the type and size of the bomb that was tested.

(Sources: The Guardian, CNN, NY Times)

UK debates banning Trump

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On Jan. 18, Parliament debated banning billionaire and current Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump from entering the United Kingdom. The debate followed a huge push from British citizens, including a petition that garnered over 572,000 signatures, surpassing the 100,000 signatures required to bring the issue to Parliament. Though Parliament does not actually have the power to keep Trump out of England, the debate could convince Home Secretary Theresa May to enact the ban.

Trump has stirred up controversy many times in the past, especially with his comments about immigrants and Muslims. The online petition, created by Suzanne Kelly on Dec. 8, cites hate speech as its reason for Trump's ban, referencing Trump's various attacks on different races, religions, and social classes. It was created just days after two controversial statements from Trump: his call for Muslims to be barred from entering America and his claim that parts of London were so "radicalized" by Muslims that they could not be controlled by police. The petition also states, "If the United Kingdom is to continue applying the 'unacceptable behaviour' criteria to those who wish to enter its borders, it must be fairly applied to the rich as well as poor, and the weak as well as powerful."



GEORGE OSBORNE: Osborne is one of Trump's biggest critics in the UK.

After announcing that the issue would be debated, the British government wrote a reply to Kelly and the signers of the petition. The reply did not reference Trump specifically, but it did mention the Home Secretary's ability to "prevent from entering the UK those who seek to harm our society and who do not share our basic values." In the past, both Prime Minister David Cameron and Home Secretary May have openly disagreed with Trump's remarks.



DONALD TRUMP: Trump's incendiary rhetoric bothers the UK.

The United Kingdom Chancellor, George Osborne, had a different reaction to the call for Trump's ban. Osborne claimed that a "robust democratic debate" would be more effective than a ban, especially since Trump has no plans to visit Britain. Meanwhile, First Minister of Scotland Nicola Sturgeon has moved to cut all financial and political ties with the millionaire, including the withdrawal of his GlobalScotland membership, a company owned by Trump.

The debate began with Labour lawmaker Paul Flynn reading Kelly's petition and an opposing one in the main chamber of the House of Commons. Flynn's 20 minute introduction made it clear that the ban would be an act against Trump as an individual, not the United States. He also warned against banning Trump, as it could give him a "halo of martyrdom." The majority of Parliament members expressed their opposition to the ban, but not without condemning Trump and his presidential platform. Some called for the British government to invite Trump to the United Kingdom so he could witness the error in his claims. Others supported a full ban for Trump, on the grounds of hate speech and the possibility of danger. Flynn wrapped up the debate three hours after it began. The decision is now in the hands of Home Secretary May.

(Sources: CNN, The Guardian, Washington Post, petition.parliament.uk)