

# **Saudi Arabia's Pioneering Role in Combating State Treason: Legal Frameworks and National Security Strategies on the Global Level**

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## **Abstract:**

State treason is a critical threat to national security, capable of destabilizing political systems and straining international relations. In an era of evolving threats, such as espionage, cybercrimes, and transnational activities, Saudi Arabia has prioritized combating state treason as part of its national security agenda. Guided by Vision 2030, the Kingdom is reforming its legal frameworks to address emerging challenges while preserving its cultural and legal traditions. This study explores Saudi Arabia's leadership in addressing state treason, highlighting its innovative legal measures, institutional strategies, and alignment with international standards. By examining case studies and recent reforms, the research assesses the Kingdom's ability to protect its sovereignty and stability amid global security threats. Additionally, the study identifies areas for enhancement and provides recommendations to strengthen Saudi Arabia's role as a global model for national security administration in an increasingly interconnected world.

## دور المملكة العربية السعودية الريادي في مواجهة خيانة الدولة: الأطر القانونية واستراتيجيات الأمن الوطني على المستوى العالمي

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### ملخص

تُعتبر خيانة الدولة من أخطر التهديدات للأمن الوطني، حيث يمكن أن تؤدي إلى زعزعة استقرار الأنظمة السياسية وتوتر العلاقات الدولية. ومع تطور التهديدات، مثل التجسس والجرائم الإلكترونية والأنشطة العابرة للحدود، ركزت المملكة العربية السعودية بشكل كبير على مكافحة خيانة الدولة، وجعلتها جزءًا أساسيًا من استراتيجيتها للأمن الوطني. مسترشدة برؤية ٢٠٣٠، حيث تعمل المملكة على إصلاح أطرها القانونية لمعالجة التحديات الناشئة مع الحفاظ على تقاليد الثقافة والقانونية. تستكشف هذه الدراسة قيادة المملكة في مواجهة خيانة الدولة من خلال تسليط الضوء على تدابيرها القانونية المبتكرة واستراتيجياتها المؤسسية وتوافقها مع المعايير الدولية. ومن خلال دراسة الحالات والإصلاحات الأخيرة، تقيم البحث قدرة المملكة على حماية سيادتها واستقرارها وسط التهديدات الأمنية العالمية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، تحدد الدراسة مجالات التطوير وتقدم توصيات لتعزيز دور المملكة العربية السعودية كنموذج عالمي لإدارة الأمن الوطني في عالم مترابط بشكل متزايد.

## Saudi Arabia's Pioneering Role in Combating State Treason: Legal Frameworks and National Security Strategies on the Global Level

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### Introduction

State treason is universally recognized as one of the most severe threats to national security, with the potential to destabilize political systems, undermine public safety, and strain international relations. In the modern era, treason has evolved to encompass a wide range of activities, including espionage, cybercrimes, and collaboration with foreign adversaries, making it a multifaceted challenge for nations worldwide. For Saudi Arabia, a country positioned at the crossroads of global and regional power dynamics, combating state treason has become a cornerstone of its national security agenda. The Kingdom's strategic geographical location, coupled with its economic and political significance, necessitates the development of robust legal doctrines to safeguard against acts of treason, espionage, and other security threats. Defining these doctrines is critical to ensuring the Kingdom's stability and sovereignty in an increasingly interconnected and volatile world.

### Vision 2030 and Legal Reforms

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 enshrines ambitious goals and strategies for legal and economic reforms that meet international standards yet maintain the Kingdom's cultural and legal traditions.<sup>1</sup> In the framework of this modernization process, the Kingdom is determined to improve its laws on national security with emphasis on the type of offenses such as state treason. As encapsulated in Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia appreciates the fact that it needs to build a legal structure that can address emergent security threats such as cybercrime and international terrorism.<sup>2</sup> The vision also includes the justice sector, improving the speed of legal procedures, and

<sup>1</sup> Abadi, Jacob. "Saudi Arabia's Rapprochement with Israel: The National Security Imperatives." *Middle Eastern Studies* 55, no. 3 (2019): 433-449.

<sup>2</sup> Maisel, Sebastian. "Kingdom of Saudi Arabia." In *The Government and Politics of the Middle East and North Africa*, 307-336. New York: Routledge, 2018.

bringing domestic legislation into conformity with international standards to raise the Kingdom's profile on the global level.

### **Purpose of this Research**

This research investigates the role of Saudi Arabia as a pioneer in the fight against state treason through the legal, institutional, and strategic perspectives to contain this menace. The study also explains how Saudi Arabia complies with national security laws with an understanding of international standards and assesses the country's attempts to sustain political and social stability through the legal systems.<sup>3</sup> The study determines the emerging issues that need enhancement within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's security architecture and offers suggestions for enhancing its function as an international model of national security administration.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the results of this research will present the Saudi Arabian stance as a global leader in the fight against state treason based on both domestic and global attitudes toward the phenomenon in the modern system of international relations.

### **Thesis Statement**

Saudi Arabia has taken a pioneering approach to addressing state treason by integrating comprehensive legal and institutional measures with international best practices. This study highlights these achievements while offering recommendations for further advancements.

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<sup>3</sup> Mason, Robert. "Power and Competition in the Transitions toward Postrentierism: The Cases of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates." *Digest of Middle East Studies* 33, no. 3 (2024): 225-244.

<sup>4</sup> El Din, Aida Mohamed Yehia Salah. "The Relationship between Human Security and National Security of the State Case Study: Egypt and Saudi Arabia." (2021).

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### Conceptual Foundations of State Treason

#### Definition and Scope

State treason is a serious offense threatening a nation's sovereignty, security, and political stability. It means actions against the state, usually by citizens or a group of individuals, to overthrow the nation's government or parliament or destabilize the country. It is important to note that the spectrum of state treason can relate to all those actions that threaten the state's existence and stability of its political system.<sup>5</sup> Espionage is one of the constituent elements of state treason, which is the acquisition or passing of information belonging to the state to a foreign state or other hostile structure.

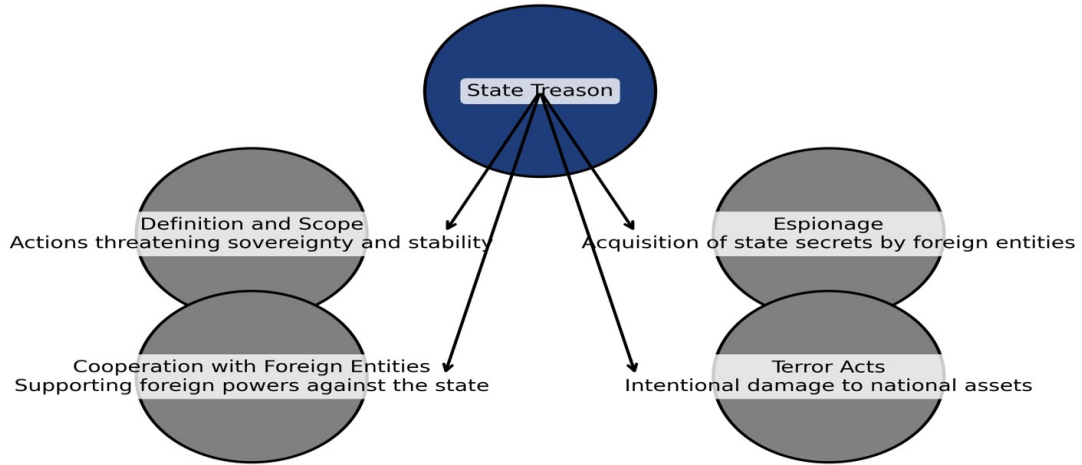
Espionage can focus on specific areas, specifically military strategy, intelligence information, or even government information, eradicating the entire concept of national security. Another type of state treason is cooperation with anti-state foreign individuals or legal entities.<sup>6</sup> This is in the form of backing up foreign powers or groups intending to make the state a target for an attack by providing material support and intelligence. Collaboration of this form threatens the nation's geopolitical stability and may trigger diplomatic conflicts.<sup>7</sup> Terror acts, which include the intentional damaging or destruction of critical national assets, such as military bases, communication infrastructure, or power grids, also constitute state treason. These actions all threaten the national integrity and security.

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<sup>5</sup> Uniacke, Robert. "Digital Repression for Authoritarian Evolution in Saudi Arabia." In *New Authoritarian Practices in the Middle East and North Africa*, 228-251, 2022.

<sup>6</sup> Hoffman, Jonathan. "Religion, the State and Politics in Saudi Arabia." *Middle East Policy* 26, no. 3 (2019).

<sup>7</sup> Helms, Christine. *The Cohesion of Saudi Arabia (RLE Saudi Arabia): Evolution of Political Identity*. London: Routledge, 2020.



**Fig 1. Conceptual diagram for state treason**

**Source: Study Analysis**

### Comparative Perspective

Treason is generally accepted as one of the serious offenses in the systems of criminal laws of all states, and its meaning depends on the history, the form of government, and the threats of each state. State treason in Saudi Arabia is regarded as an offense that is dangerous to the Kingdom's sovereignty, stability, and the administration of justice.<sup>8</sup> The laws of the Kingdom, as per the Islamic Sharia and other laws of the Kingdom, are unambiguous

<sup>8</sup> Boylen, Terence Connor. *The State as Mujahid: Jihadist Norms in International Narrative of Saudi Arabia*. PhD diss., Curtin University, 2023.

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when it comes to acts of treason, such as espionage, sabotage, and collaborating with enemy nations. Saudi Arabia's approach to state treason is based on the principle of national security with laws aimed at the elimination of threats to the country's political system and order.<sup>9</sup> The gravity of such crimes is evidenced by the given measures of punishment, including imprisonment and the death penalty, to ensure that the integrity of the state is maintained.

Internationally, there is much similarity as most countries consider state treason a major societal threat. For example, the constitution defines treason in the United States as waging war against the government or supporting its adversaries.<sup>10</sup> The legal effects are also serious in this country, which also formerly had the death penalty as a possible punishment for treason. Similarly, state treason is a capital offense under historical anti-treason laws in the United Kingdom. Even though capital punishment has been eradicated, the current British law concerns oneself with raids like espionage, terrorism, or even supplying enemies in wartime.<sup>11</sup> Though the death penalty is no longer given for treason in the United Kingdom, life imprisonment can be imposed on the convict.

Compared to the Middle Eastern countries, Saudi Arabia follows a similar procedure of its legal framework on state treachery. As in Iran and Egypt, state treason laws are severe, including espionage, cooperation with foreign states, or actions jeopardizing national security.<sup>12</sup> For instance, in Iran, those who are convicted of treason, which includes espionage or terrorism,

<sup>9</sup> Öztürk, Selim. "The Role of Political Salafism in the Formation of Saudi Arabia and the Taliban Regime." (2018).

<sup>10</sup> Huwaidin, Mohamed Bin. "The Security Dilemma in Saudi-Iranian Relations." *Review of History and Political Science* 3, no. 2 (2015): 69-79.

<sup>11</sup> Blanchard, Christopher M. "Saudi Arabia: Background and US Relations (Updated)." *Current Politics and Economics of the Middle East* 9, no. 2/3 (2018): 431-503.

<sup>12</sup> Vassiliev, Alexei. *The History of Saudi Arabia*. London: Saqi, 2013.

are subjected to harsh penalties, including death.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, the Egyptian treason laws entail consequences regarding individuals convicted of conspiring with foreign powers and any individuals participating in actions that could damage Egypt's best interest.

Since the crime against state treason is universal, it can be easily seen with the help of data regarding the state laws of different countries. In all the legal structures, the severity of the penalty for this offense is in response to preserving the unity and security of a nation.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, although retaining its particular legal and cultural context, Saudi Arabia's efforts to counter treason differ from those of other countries.<sup>15</sup> The Kingdom's legal system defines the global functions of a state's protection of its sovereignty and punishment of those who threaten it. In this regard, Saudi Arabia's actions align with the global focus adopted to maintain national security and political stability.

## **Saudi Arabia's Legal Framework on State Treason**

### **Historical Evolution of Treason Laws in Saudi Arabia**

The legal regulation of treason in Saudi Arabia relates to the historical and religious experience of the Kingdom. The Islamic legal rules extracted from the Quran and Sunnah have been the cornerstones of Saudi Arabia's government and justice system.<sup>16</sup> During the formation of the Kingdom, there were principles within statecraft, including adherence to the ruler and blasphemy, which were violations of law and attacks on the stability of the state. During the early century, when Saudi Arabia was forming its

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<sup>13</sup> Al-Rasheed, Madawi. *The Son King: Reform and Repression in Saudi Arabia*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021.

<sup>14</sup> Bsheer, Rosie. "A Counter-Revolutionary State: Popular Movements and the Making of Saudi Arabia." *Past and Present* 238, no. 1 (2018): 233-277.

<sup>15</sup> Cigar, Norman. "Tribes, Society and the State in Saudi Arabia: Change and Continuity and the Implications for Security and Stability." *The Maghreb Review* 36, no. 3 (2011): 211-263.

<sup>16</sup> Mann, Joseph. "Yemeni Threat to Saudi Arabia's Internal Security, 1962-70." *Journal of Arabian Studies* 4, no. 1 (2014): 52-69.



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unification of territories under the rule of King Abdulaziz Al Saud, sovereignty was of utmost importance.<sup>17</sup> Treason laws are a legal development that deals with threats to unity, as expressed through rebellions or conspiracies. These early laws were rooted in Islamic Jurisprudence, where serious consequences are imposed on acts that threaten the well-being of the Ummah, the Muslim community.<sup>18</sup> Writing these principles defined a more systematic legal framework for dealing with state treason in Saudi Arabia.

As the Kingdom modernized in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it started to codify its laws, including those of treason.<sup>19</sup> The principles of loyalty to the ruler and the state became the state regulatory principles after adopting the Basic Law of Governance in 1992.<sup>20</sup> In the Basic Law of Germany, there is a direct written reference to allegiance with clearly defined acts of treason, such as espionage or going to war with the King, violating law violations.<sup>21</sup> Such an evolutionary process stresses that Saudi Arabia has always been keen on preserving its sovereignty and stability by having a sound legal regime.

<sup>17</sup> Mabon, Simon. "Muting the Trumpets of Sabotage: Saudi Arabia, the US, and the Quest to Securitize Iran." *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 45, no. 5 (2018): 742-759.

<sup>18</sup> Blanchard, Christopher M. "Saudi Arabia: Background and US Relations (Updated)." *Current Politics and Economics of the Middle East* 9, no. 2/3 (2018): 431-503.

<sup>19</sup> Mabon, Simon. "Muting the Trumpets of Sabotage: Saudi Arabia, the US, and the Quest to Securitize Iran." *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 45, no. 5 (2018): 742-759.

<sup>20</sup> Napolitano, Andrew P. "The Legal History of National Security Law and Individual Rights in the United States: The Unconstitutional Expansion of Executive Power." *NYUJL & Liberty* 8 (2013): 396.

<sup>21</sup> Mason, Robert. "Politics in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: State Formation, Political Consolidation, and Reform." In *Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates*, 11-44. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2023.

## Key National Security Laws

In Saudi Arabia, state treason is regulated through a well-developed legal system that focuses on maintaining state security and independence. The Kingdom's state legal provisions of treason, espionage, and sabotage are based on Islamic Sharia and the Kingdom's statutory laws.<sup>22</sup> Under Saudi system, espionage and sabotage are serious offenses, and the sanctions for such crimes are severe. Treason in Saudi Arabia, unlike espionage, is prohibited in Saudi Arabia with provisions that punish anyone who acts as a spy for a foreign country or organization capable of harming another nation.<sup>23</sup> Crimes that are perceived as real threats to the national security of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia attract capital punishment. The crime of cyber espionage falls under the Saudi Penal Code and counter-terrorism laws, hence recognizing new technological espionage in today's world.<sup>24</sup>

## Institutional Mechanisms for Enforcement

Treason laws in KSA have the support of institutions responsible for the country's security and justice. With a focus on the Ministry of Interior as the lead security agency, the agency initiates action to seize and prosecute acts of treason in consultation with intelligence agencies' police and the judiciary.<sup>25</sup> Al-Mabahith, or General Directorate of Investigations, is the critical intelligence body responsible for identifying and preventing

<sup>22</sup> Terrill, W. Andrew. *The Conflicts in Yemen and US National Security*. Strategic Studies Institute US Army War College, 2011.

<sup>23</sup> Safran, Nadav. *Saudi Arabia: The Ceaseless Quest for Security*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018.

<sup>24</sup> Al-Faryan, Mamdouh Abdulaziz Saleh. "Corporate Governance in Saudi Arabia: An Overview of Its Evolution and Recent Trends." *Risk Governance and Control: Financial Markets & Institutions* 10, no. 1 (2020): 23-36.

<sup>25</sup> Cordesman, Anthony H. *Saudi Arabia: Guarding the Desert Kingdom*. London: Routledge, 2019.

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all threats to state security, including espionage and sabotage.<sup>26</sup> The independent judiciary of Saudi Arabia based on Sharia law ensures that treason cases are professionally prosecuted without violating the Islamic legal system.<sup>27</sup> Treason cases are usually tried in the Specialized Criminal Court. Such courts are supposed to work according to rules and regulations so that evidence should be firm and judgments should be based on the law of the land and religious law.

Like in the case of rights enforcement by institutions, Saudi Arabia's strategy also focuses on prevention and timely detection and eradication of any vice. Fighting threats before they escalate has become an essential priority for the Kingdom, so it focused on developing the corresponding intelligence capabilities.<sup>28</sup> This is the case when applying high-tech surveillance equipment and creating cyber security squads to combat cyber-treason through cyber-spying and hacking. Also, regular information campaigns and entertainment programs promote the culture of being trustworthy and active in countering attempts at treason to the general public, so the state is building its capacities to counteract treason.<sup>29</sup>

Having strong legalization in Saudi Arabia to deal with such offenses, specific issues cause development crises for this type of crime. While there is a clear idea about the concept of treason, there is a significant issue of how the concept will develop in the era of globalization and high technology.<sup>30</sup> For example, there are

<sup>26</sup> Bowen, Wayne H. *The History of Saudi Arabia*. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2024.

<sup>27</sup> Abukhalil, As'ad. *The Battle for Saudi Arabia: Royalty, Fundamentalism, and Global Power*. New York: Seven Stories Press, 2011.

<sup>28</sup> Cordesman, Anthony H. *Saudi Arabia: Guarding the Desert Kingdom*. London: Routledge, 2019.

<sup>29</sup> Wynbrandt, James. *A Brief History of Saudi Arabia*. New York: Infobase Publishing, 2010.

<sup>30</sup> Hoffman, Jonathan. "Religion, the State and Politics in Saudi Arabia." *Middle East Policy* 26, no. 3 (2019).

challenges in identifying and prosecuting cyber treason, and those threats remain ongoing investments in technology and law. Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 recognizes these challenges outright, noting that the nature of threats in the global environment requires the legal system to be reformulated.<sup>31</sup>

The other challenge is to balance security and justice on a national level. Due to the penalties, including the death of anyone found guilty of treason, sometimes international human rights organizations have criticized such provisions.<sup>32</sup> For the same reasons, the enforcement of treason laws must not offend the principle of openness and natural justice to protect the reputation of the Kingdom.<sup>33</sup> To this effect, Saudi Arabia has acted by improving the country's legal processes and encouraging more transparency within the legal sector. The international perspective of treason also offers developments in Saudi Arabia's legal regulation. Being part of the United Nations and other International organizations, it has contributed to formulating International instruments for combating transnational threats, including terrorism and espionage.<sup>34</sup>

### **Alignment with International Standards**

Saudi Arabia has improved its conformity with international trends and standards as the Kingdom continues modernizing its laws and enhancing its position in international security

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<sup>31</sup> Uniacke, Robert. "Digital Repression for Authoritarian Evolution in Saudi Arabia." In *New Authoritarian Practices in the Middle East and North Africa*, 228-251, 2022.

<sup>32</sup> Maisel, Sebastian. "Kingdom of Saudi Arabia." In *The Government and Politics of the Middle East and North Africa*, 307-336. New York: Routledge, 2018.

<sup>33</sup> El Din, Aida Mohamed Yehia Salah. "The Relationship between Human Security and National Security of the State Case Study: Egypt and Saudi Arabia." (2021).

<sup>34</sup> Hoffman, Jonathan. "Religion, the State and Politics in Saudi Arabia." *Middle East Policy* 26, no. 3 (2019).

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leadership.<sup>35</sup> It is the general strategy of Saudi Arabia to join the global community in various aspects and retain its rules and traditions on the subject.<sup>36</sup> However, the Kingdom's commitment to international conventions of national security, counter-terrorism, and human rights has been evolutionary and depends on its national interest but not the expectations of global communities.<sup>37</sup>

### Adherence to International Conventions and Treaties

The norms of state security of Saudi Arabian laws and its provisions against state treason have been influenced by provisions of numerous international treaties on combating terrorism, espionage and other forms of subversion.<sup>38</sup> They include the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism that was signed on 9 th December 1999 and the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime signed on 15 th October 2000.<sup>39</sup> These affect state treason through espionage, terrorism, and international criminal collaboration.

Saudi Arabia ratified the Arab Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism (1998), the instrument that offered a framework for regional cooperation against terrorism and other

<sup>35</sup> Mason, Robert. "Power and Competition in the Transitions toward Postrentierism: The Cases of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates." *Digest of Middle East Studies* 33, no. 3 (2024): 225-244.

<sup>36</sup> Terrill, W. Andrew. *The Conflicts in Yemen and US National Security*. Strategic Studies Institute US Army War College, 2011.

<sup>37</sup> Safran, Nadav. *Saudi Arabia: The Ceaseless Quest for Security*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018.

<sup>38</sup> Mabon, Simon. "Muting the Trumpets of Sabotage: Saudi Arabia, the US, and the Quest to Securitize Iran." *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 45, no. 5 (2018): 742-759.

<sup>39</sup> Safran, Nadav. *Saudi Arabia: The Ceaseless Quest for Security*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018.

forms of state subversion.<sup>40</sup> This convention obliges the states to make terrorism and state treason a criminal offense. It obliges the state members to cooperate in arresting individuals involved in such actions if they cross the border of the state member of the convention. Saudi Arabia is seen to fully respect all these conventions as it is a member of the international community that has adopted legal frameworks supporting acts of state treason.<sup>41</sup> The Kingdom follows these norms by internalizing them into domestic laws, ensuring they address the national security issue and conform to international standards.<sup>42</sup> Nonetheless, there is a strong emphasis on upholding the Kingdom's sovereignty and its cultural and legal traditions, which may occasionally present challenges in aligning fully with certain international human rights norms.

### Comparative Legal Practices and Global Cooperation

Compared with other states, the legal regulation of state treason in Saudi Arabia is similar to that of the USA, China, and Russia, which have strict state security legislation systems.<sup>43</sup> These countries, for instance, have well-developed legal frameworks that address the issues of treason, espionage, and sabotage that attract long-term imprisonment and or the death penalty.<sup>44</sup> As these nations do, Saudi Arabia understands that state treason endangers

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<sup>40</sup> Terrill, W. Andrew. *The Conflicts in Yemen and US National Security*. Strategic Studies Institute US Army War College, 2011.

<sup>41</sup> Napolitano, Andrew P. "The Legal History of National Security Law and Individual Rights in the United States: The Unconstitutional Expansion of Executive Power." *NYUJL & Liberty* 8 (2013): 396.

<sup>42</sup> Mann, Joseph. "Yemeni Threat to Saudi Arabia's Internal Security, 1962–70." *Journal of Arabian Studies* 4, no. 1 (2014): 52-69.

<sup>43</sup> Abadi, Jacob. "Saudi Arabia's Rapprochement with Israel: The National Security Imperatives." *Middle Eastern Studies* 55, no. 3 (2019): 433-449.

<sup>44</sup> Blanchard, Christopher M. "Saudi Arabia: Background and US Relations (Updated)." *Current Politics and Economics of the Middle East* 9, no. 2/3 (2018): 431-503.

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sovereignty, political stability, and communal safety and, therefore, warrants strict legal regulation.

Saudi Arabia also works with international security agencies, such as Interpol, in fighting cross-national crimes that include state treason, for example, radicalism, terrorism, and espionage.<sup>45</sup> This cooperation enables Saudi Arabia to exchange information, deport suspects, and join forces to counter groups that pose a threat to the country's and the region's security.<sup>46</sup> However, there are some concerns relating to the aspects of Saudi Arabia's approach to national security, for instance, the use of the death penalty against some treason-related offenses as viewed by international non-governmental organizations on human rights.<sup>47</sup> While the Kingdom is reported to have steadily improved laws in compliance with international human rights standards, critics have observed areas of concern in the Kingdom's laws, particularly on issues to do with fair trial hearings, legal proceedings, non-arbitrary detentions, and the like.

### Saudi Arabia as a Model for Security Governance

Saudi Arabia has set itself on a key role in the sphere of security governance, focusing on countering the threat of state betrayal and other connected offenses like terrorism, spying, and sabotage.<sup>48</sup> The favorable legal and institutional preconditions for safeguarding the Kingdom's national security and adherence to international conventions make the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia a

<sup>45</sup> Hoffman, Jonathan. "Religion, the State and Politics in Saudi Arabia." *Middle East Policy* 26, no. 3 (2019).

<sup>46</sup> Mann, Joseph. "Yemeni Threat to Saudi Arabia's Internal Security, 1962–70." *Journal of Arabian Studies* 4, no. 1 (2014): 52-69.

<sup>47</sup> Blanchard, Christopher M. "Saudi Arabia: Background and US Relations (Updated)." *Current Politics and Economics of the Middle East* 9, no. 2/3 (2018): 431-503.

<sup>48</sup> Vassiliev, Alexei. *The History of Saudi Arabia*. London: Saqi, 2013.

remarkable model for countries searching for the optimal balance between security sovereignty and political stability.<sup>49</sup> This model embodies the country's contextual characteristic of combining the conventional legal system with contemporary security requirements and global imperatives of countering terrorism and enhancing national security.<sup>50</sup>

### Strengths of the Legal System

The legal system of Saudi Arabia has grown over the decades by keeping the aspect of national security as its core, holding strong Islamic roots. Like many other aspects in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the laws governing state treason, including espionage and sabotage, are endowed with Sharia and modern legal codes.<sup>51</sup> The Kingdom has established a clear cut between state treason and other minor offenses that are easy for the legal system to handle.<sup>52</sup> Those threatening the state's sovereignty can be acted upon legally.

Among the remarkable factors of Saudi Arabia's security governance is the adherence of the legal principles in question to the country's cultural and religious traditions.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, the legal provisions relating to state treason are rooted in Islamic law and have aspects of modern anti-terrorism law that meet international standards.<sup>54</sup> Saudi Arabia's legal system relies on locating the best

<sup>49</sup> Huwaidin, Mohamed Bin. "The Security Dilemma in Saudi-Iranian Relations." *Review of History and Political Science* 3, no. 2 (2015): 69-79.

<sup>50</sup> Öztürk, Selim. "The Role of Political Salafism in the Formation of Saudi Arabia and the Taliban Regime." (2018).

<sup>51</sup> Cordesman, Anthony H. *Saudi Arabia: Guarding the Desert Kingdom*. London: Routledge, 2019.

<sup>52</sup> Wynbrandt, James. *A Brief History of Saudi Arabia*. New York: Infobase Publishing, 2010.

<sup>53</sup> Maisel, Sebastian. "Kingdom of Saudi Arabia." In *The Government and Politics of the Middle East and North Africa*, 307-336. New York: Routledge, 2018.

<sup>54</sup> Helms, Christine. *The Cohesion of Saudi Arabia (RLE Saudi Arabia): Evolution of Political Identity*. London: Routledge, 2020.



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strategies from traditional and contemporary international legal systems to develop a unique system that fits into the legal system while simultaneously conforming to international laws.<sup>55</sup>

Saudi Arabia pays much attention to the quick implementation of state treason laws, which ensures that security threats are effectively handled. This is accompanied by a relatively fast and sometimes response, considered a safeguard against threats to stability and the Kingdom's political climate.<sup>56</sup> The intensity of the punishment for state treason-related crimes, including life imprisonment or the death penalty, shows how much the authorities value the country's security.<sup>57</sup> Although considered provocative in some international political circles, this approach is regarded by many as vital for ensuring stability in a region marked by ongoing global security challenges.

### Case Studies and Practical Implementation

Saudi Arabia employs the fight against state treason and demonstrates its practical applicability through several case studies that exemplify its actions against security threats. Foreign espionage and terrorism activities dealt with by Saudi Arabia could be one example of the country's implementation of this law.<sup>58</sup> In the last decade, the Kingdom has responded proactively to espionage-threatening activities, especially those perpetrated by

<sup>55</sup> Öztürk, Selim. "The Role of Political Salafism in the Formation of Saudi Arabia and the Taliban Regime." (2018).

<sup>56</sup> Öztürk, Selim. "The Role of Political Salafism in the Formation of Saudi Arabia and the Taliban Regime." (2018).

<sup>57</sup> Huwaidin, Mohamed Bin. "The Security Dilemma in Saudi-Iranian Relations." *Review of History and Political Science* 3, no. 2 (2015): 69-79.

<sup>58</sup> Blanchard, Christopher M. "Saudi Arabia: Background and US Relations (Updated)." *Current Politics and Economics of the Middle East* 9, no. 2/3 (2018): 431-503.

foreign intelligence agencies and terrorists.<sup>59</sup> Saudi Arabia actively definitely combats state treason by addressing foreign espionage and terrorism, exemplifying its commitment through proactive responses to security threats over the past decade.

The National Anti-Terrorism Strategy, established in Saudi Arabia in the early 2000s, was critical in strengthening the country's security system.<sup>60</sup> The strategy covers both the deterrence, and the elimination of the terrorists' means: working with terrorists' cells, controlling radicalized organizations, and attention to the reintegration of the extremists. This is in addition to tackling immediate threats to security while at the same time endeavoring to prevent the long-term spread of ideas that may lead to acts of treason against states.<sup>61</sup> The strategy comprises both preventive and punitive measures, including the dismantling of terrorist cells, monitoring of radical groups, and a focus on rehabilitation programs for extremists.<sup>62</sup> This approach addresses immediate security threats and seeks to prevent the long-term spread of ideologies that could lead to acts of state treason.

The Kingdom's participation in the fight against domestic terrorism, especially after the 2003 bombing by al-Qaeda, has proved that it is willing and able to use intelligence, military power, and laws to fight threats to its security.<sup>63</sup> Such efforts have been further supported by the formation of security organizations, including the Saudi Arabian National Guard and the Ministry of

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<sup>59</sup> Boylen, Terence Connor. *The State as Mujahid: Jihadist Norms in International Narrative of Saudi Arabia*. PhD diss., Curtin University, 2023.

<sup>60</sup> Huwaidin, Mohamed Bin. "The Security Dilemma in Saudi-Iranian Relations." *Review of History and Political Science* 3, no. 2 (2015): 69-79.

<sup>61</sup> Maisel, Sebastian. "Kingdom of Saudi Arabia." In *The Government and Politics of the Middle East and North Africa*, 307-336. New York: Routledge, 2018.

<sup>62</sup> Hoffman, Jonathan. "Religion, the State and Politics in Saudi Arabia." *Middle East Policy* 26, no. 3 (2019).

<sup>63</sup> Maisel, Sebastian. "Kingdom of Saudi Arabia." In *The Government and Politics of the Middle East and North Africa*, 307-336. New York: Routledge, 2018.

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Interior, that coordinate in neutralizing threats.<sup>64</sup> Their functions include the dismantling of terrorist cells, monitoring of radical groups, and a focus on rehabilitation programs for extremists.<sup>65</sup> This approach addresses immediate security threats and seeks to prevent the long-term spread of ideologies that could lead to acts of state treason.

### Balancing Security and Justice

A heightened focus on national security characterizes the Saudi Arabian concept of security governance and is still an attempt to respond to justice. The legal system has checks and balances in that power is not abused in cases of state treason and equivalent crimes.<sup>66</sup> Saudi Arabian courts use Sharia law. However, they are bound by a court's legal processes, roles, and responsibilities concerning the defendant.<sup>67</sup> This is because one of the main issues of conflict between security and justice is the use of the death penalty when dealing with state treason. Saudi Arabia has implemented reforms to ensure greater transparency in trials, providing the accused with legal counsel throughout the process, particularly in cases involving treason charges. These reforms reflect the Kingdom's commitment to aligning its legal processes with principles of fairness and justice while addressing serious national security concerns.

The Kingdom has attached significance to the public in understanding and embracing the imperatives of national security.

<sup>64</sup> Hoffman, Jonathan. "Religion, the State and Politics in Saudi Arabia." *Middle East Policy* 26, no. 3 (2019).

<sup>65</sup> Öztürk, Selim. "The Role of Political Salafism in the Formation of Saudi Arabia and the Taliban Regime." (2018).

<sup>66</sup> Öztürk, Selim. "The Role of Political Salafism in the Formation of Saudi Arabia and the Taliban Regime." (2018).

<sup>67</sup> Abadi, Jacob. "Saudi Arabia's Rapprochement with Israel: The National Security Imperatives." *Middle Eastern Studies* 55, no. 3 (2019): 433-449.

By involving citizens in the struggle against state betrayal, Saudi Arabia is creating the consciousness of everyone in protecting the country's independence.<sup>68</sup> This is evident in the Kingdom's public enlightenment concerning the severity of espionage and terrorist activities and the campaigns that have been organized to foster reporting of any unusual activity.

## Opportunities for Enhancement

### Legal Innovation

To reinforce Saudi Arabia's leadership in combating state treason, the Kingdom should expand its legal framework to address emerging challenges such as cyber-treason and transnational crimes, ensuring its strategies remain robust and globally relevant. The increasing incidence of cyber espionage underscores the importance of Saudi Arabia's proactive measures to safeguard national security, as it works to protect its critical infrastructure, governmental organizations, and private companies from such evolving threats.<sup>69</sup> The current laws against national security must be interpreted to include cybercrimes, including hacking, theft, and digital sabotage. This would involve the formulation of well-rounded legal frameworks for prosecuting cyber espionage and enhanced legal measures for people who use digital media to undertake treason.<sup>70</sup> In addition, Saudi Arabia should improve its legal framework in combating international crimes. As most threats today are borderless, including terrorism, organized crime, and cyber warfare, the Kingdom needs to increase its cooperation with

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<sup>68</sup> El Din, Aida Mohamed Yehia Salah. "The Relationship between Human Security and National Security of the State Case Study: Egypt and Saudi Arabia." (2021).

<sup>69</sup> El Din, Aida Mohamed Yehia Salah. "The Relationship between Human Security and National Security of the State Case Study: Egypt and Saudi Arabia." (2021).

<sup>70</sup> Hoffman, Jonathan. "Religion, the State and Politics in Saudi Arabia." *Middle East Policy* 26, no. 3 (2019).

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other countries' security organizations.<sup>71</sup> This could involve developing rules for exchanging intelligence data, extradition procedures, and collaboration with international counterparts. By aligning its national security laws with the provisions of international conventions, Saudi Arabia can effectively address the multifaceted challenges posed by state treason.<sup>72</sup>

### Public Engagement

State treason cannot be prevented in isolation from public opinion. In this regard, Saudi Arabia can improve its activities by using various campaigns that would help its citizens be aware of the adverse effects of spying and destructive actions on the country and the importance of strong security measures.<sup>73</sup> Such measures should focus on the younger generations, influenced by social media and other online platforms, on national security. In mobilizing the public in this fight against state treason, Saudi Arabia creates a culture of shared responsibility in defending the nation's sovereignty.<sup>74</sup> This is well illustrated by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's efforts in enlightening the public on the risks of espionage and various acts of terrorism and also the efforts put in to ensure people report such theories.

The Kingdom can also have a good whistleblower program, where the law safeguards people who report possible threats of treason.<sup>75</sup> What the public officials have suggested, which would

<sup>71</sup> Al-Rasheed, Madawi. *The Son King: Reform and Repression in Saudi Arabia*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021.

<sup>72</sup> Vassiliev, Alexei. *The History of Saudi Arabia*. London: Saqi, 2013.

<sup>73</sup> Bsheer, Rosie. "A Counter-Revolutionary State: Popular Movements and the Making of Saudi Arabia." *Past and Present* 238, no. 1 (2018): 233-277.

<sup>74</sup> Boylen, Terence Connor. *The State as Mujahid: Jihadist Norms in International Narrative of Saudi Arabia*. PhD diss., Curtin University, 2023.

<sup>75</sup> Hoffman, Jonathan. "Religion, the State and Politics in Saudi Arabia." *Middle East Policy* 26, no. 3 (2019).

encourage citizens to be more responsible and on the lookout for anything that seems suspicious, would enhance the efforts of law enforcement agencies and help strengthen society.<sup>76</sup> The involvement of the public will help to develop a culture of security and consequently build up a defense of the country.

### Global Leadership

Saudi Arabia also has a chance to become a global model for national security governance by providing lessons learned to the rest of the world. By joining organizations like the United Nations and regional bodies like the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Saudi Arabia can influence the development of global standards in combating state treason.<sup>77</sup> Continuing to support and host international forums related to national security and providing training for law enforcement officers worldwide would further strengthen Saudi Arabia's position as an active participant in combating threats in the security sphere.<sup>78</sup> Developing diplomatic relations with the world's partners will contribute to improving cooperation with countries and combating state treason.<sup>79</sup> The geopolitical location of Saudi Arabia enables it to hold the world record in combating espionage, sabotage, and terrorism, all the time calling for cooperation and multilateralism in the pursuit of world peace and security.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Cigar, Norman. "Tribes, Society and the State in Saudi Arabia: Change and Continuity and the Implications for Security and Stability." *The Maghreb Review* 36, no. 3 (2011): 211-263.

<sup>77</sup> Hoffman, Jonathan. "Religion, the State and Politics in Saudi Arabia." *Middle East Policy* 26, no. 3 (2019).

<sup>78</sup> Uniacke, Robert. "Digital Repression for Authoritarian Evolution in Saudi Arabia." In *New Authoritarian Practices in the Middle East and North Africa*, 228-251, 2022.

<sup>79</sup> Öztürk, Selim. "The Role of Political Salafism in the Formation of Saudi Arabia and the Taliban Regime." (2018).

<sup>80</sup> Blanchard, Christopher M. "Saudi Arabia: Background and US Relations (Updated)." *Current Politics and Economics of the Middle East* 9, no. 2/3 (2018): 431-503.

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### Conclusion

This study analyzes how Saudi Arabia has combined traditionalism with modernism in dealing with state treason. The Kingdom's legal system is based on Islamic legislation, norms, and standards and complies with justice, security, and cultural context. In conclusion, thanks to its institutional framework and actions on its initiative, Saudi Arabia can be considered the leader in countering treasonous initiatives. The rapidly changing face of security threats will remain a key driver of the Kingdom's ongoing development and dynamism. Suppose Saudi Arabia pays more attention to improving its legal environment, promoting public participation, and developing international cooperation. In that case, it can broaden the foundation of its state security governance model even further on the global level. All these endeavors will protect the nation's sovereignty and work towards peace within the region and worldwide. As the statement aligns with Saudi Arabia's efforts to strengthen its legal and security frameworks in a global context. It emphasizes collaboration and adherence to international conventions, which is consistent with Saudi Arabia's goals under Vision 2030 to modernize its legal systems while maintaining sovereignty and cultural values. This approach reflects the Kingdom's commitment to addressing complex security challenges while fostering international cooperation, making it a constructive and non-controversial perspective.

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