

Investigation

From American College Campuses to ISIS Camps

How Hundreds of Saudis Joined ISIS in the U.S.

Ali al-Ahmed
&
Mohamed Dhamen



معهد شؤون الخليج

Institute for Gulf Affairs

Institute for Gulf Affairs
T: 202-466-9500
Washington DC
www.gulf institute.org



The Institute for Gulf Affairs

June 1, 2017

Washington DC – The Institute for Gulf Affairs issued an exclusive investigative report detailing Saudi nationals living in the United States who joined the terrorist group ISIS in the past three years.

According to our investigation, approximately 400 Saudi and Kuwaiti nationals living in the United States mostly on government scholarships have joined terrorist groups, mainly ISIS. Some of them hold dual citizenship as they were born in the United States during their parents' schooling here. These are among the nearly 80,000 Saudi students and family members who are currently in the United States.

The report provides names, photos and details obtained exclusively by the Institute since 2014. The report also reveals how the Saudi government blocked this information from U.S. authorities and did very little to stop the flow of Saudis in the U.S. from joining ISIS and other armed groups in Syria and Iraq.

This was reflected in President Donald Trump excluding Saudi Arabia from his first and second executive orders to ban the citizens of seven countries from entering the United States for 90 days.

According to the currently available information, Saudi nationals make up the largest number of U.S. residents who left the United States to join ISIS, AlNusrah and other groups described as terrorist groups by the United States government.

The number of Saudi and Kuwaiti nationals who lived in the United States then left to join ISIS and other terrorist groups is larger than this list. The Saudi government knew of these individuals but chose to hold this information from the United States, according to our investigation.

IGA Informed White House

The FBI failed to notice dozens of Saudi nationals leaving the United States to join ISIS and other terrorist groups. That changed in April of 2014, when two American citizens from the Institute for Gulf Affairs met with White House official George Slim who worked at the on the National Security Council Staff as Director for Community Partnerships, and two FBI special agents brought by Slim at a coffee shop steps from the White House.

The Institute's representatives provided a list and photos of Saudi nationals who lived in the United States prior to leaving to join ISIS, AlNusrah and other armed groups fighting in Syria

and Iraq. This was the only and last meeting regarding the issue. Mr. Slim stopped answering emails and voice mails following the meeting.

The Saudi government is aware of most, if not all, Saudi students in the United States, U.K, Australia, New Zealand, Japan and other countries who abandoned their scholarships and joined ISIS and its sister groups. The Saudi government runs one of the most sophisticated systems that can track its citizens' entry and departure from the country. The system run by the ministry of interior is able to deny all government services to the offenders for as little as unpaid traffic tickets. All Saudis are mandated to have finger print verification for all their government services including traveling out of the country.

The Saudi government did not share any information regarding Saudi students in the United States leaving to join ISIS and other terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq with the U.S. government.

Our investigation shows that even after the Institute provided the information to the White House National Security Council, this information was not shared with other relevant departments, namely the State Department of State, which issues visa to tens of thousands of Saudis annually.

Behind this failure to respond is the longtime policy of treating Saudi issues lightly, as well as Saudi influence over successive administrations, including national security officials, directors of the FBI, CIA and other security bodies. In this context, it is important to note the hiring of former FBI director Louis Free as a lawyer for former Saudi ambassador Bandar bin Sultan in exchange of nearly one million dollars to represent him in the money laundering case.

The close personal relationship of former CIA director John Brennan with the Saudi Monarchy, especially with the current Saudi Crown Prince and Interior Minister Mohamed Naif Al Saud, may explain the Obama's administration turning a blind eye toward the well-established Saudi official involvement in supporting terrorism and terrorist groups such as ISIS, AlNusrah and similar groups.

Saudi Government Cover-up?

The Institute identified several Saudi officials who knew of Saudi students joining ISIS and AlNusra. They include the following:

- 1- Khalid Abdulrahman AlDayel, first secretary at the Saudi embassy in Washington and the representative of the Saudi Intelligence Presidency (GIP) at the Saudi Washington Embassy. In December 2016 AlDayel called Saudi national HD and told her that the Institute of Gulf Affairs provided names of Saudi students with extremist views and/or activities to the FBI. AlDayel represents GIP but works in the ranks of the Saudi Ministry of Interior headed by Saudi Crown Prince Mohamed bin Naif who also oversees GIP and enjoys close ties with CIA and its former director John Brennan.
- 2- Saudi Crown Prince Mohamed bin Naif, who leads the Saudi Interior ministry and oversees the Saudi Intelligence presidency run by one of his long time aides Khalid AlHomaidan. Bin Naif had full knowledge of Saudi students leaving the U.S. for Syria and Iraq to join ISIS and AlNusrah. Bin Naif, known in the West as MBN, could have certainly shared the information with American officials including CIA but did not.
- 3- Saudi FM AlJubair who served as Saudi ambassador to Washington from 2007-2015 certainly was fully aware of the matter but did not share it with the State Department, who remained unaware of the matter until February 2017 when the Institute's director provided the details to State Department officials. Since 2014 and until 2017, the Institute's staff worked diligently to determine if the State Department knew of any Saudi national holding student visas issued by the US embassy in Saudi Arabia by doing a multi departmental survey and tests. We can confirm that none of the State Department political or counsel affairs department knew of the matter. A source at the U.S. embassy in Saudi Arabia who would have access to such information if known also expressed shock confirming the U.S. Embassy in Riyadh had no knowledge of the matter to take appropriate measures such as increasing vetting.

As in indication of U.S. embassy lack of knowledge on this matter, it has issued a visa to Saad AlDurihim an open supporter of ISIS and AlNusrah who urged ISIS "mujahedeen" to kill Iraqi children and women to revenge killing of Sunnis by Iraqi forces. AlDurihim arrived to the United States in December 2016, to attend his son's graduation from Shawnee State University in Ohio.



Saad AlDurihim with his son Yaser. December 16, 2016

<https://twitter.com/Saldurihim/status/809874345602514944>

- 4- Noura AlNafisi, Director of Cultural and Social Affairs Department at the Saudi Cultural Mission in Washington, who is reportedly working for the Saudi ministry of interior and is in charge of monitoring student activities. Saudi dissident lawyer Abdulaziz Alhassan, who lives in Virginia, attempted to assist several students whose scholarships from the Saudi government were canceled. He said AlNafeesah works for the interior ministry based on his interactions with employees at Saudi Cultural Mission who told him that AlNafeesah does not report to the cultural attaché Mohamed Al-Issa.

Side Bar:

- Abdullah Al-Shaikh a nephew of Saudi grand Mufti AbdulAziz AlShaikh, the highest official Wahhabi religious authority appointed by the king was a student in Australia but left to join ISIS and was killed fighting Syrian government forces.
- Saudi deputy Crown Prince and son of King Salman Mohamed bin Salman met with ISIS and AlQaeda promoter Mohamed Alrefi



Bin Salman Saudi defense minister & son of king meets ISIS promoter Mohamed Alrefi, Dec. 2016

- Saudi nationals constitute the largest non –Syrian and non- Iraqi in ISIS ranks.
- Saudi Arabia and Kuwait has persecuted anti –ISIS activists including U.S. educated Dr. Mohamed AlQahtani, who received 15 years in prison, and lawyer Khalid AlShatti, who tried for insulting ISIS and cleared after two years in court but subjected to a travel ban nevertheless.

List of Some Saudi Nationals who lived in the United States & left to join ISIS and sisters in Syria & Iraq

- 1- Thamer Al Saikhan (ثامر ناصر الصيخان). Aged 24, Al Saikhan was a student at Old Dominion University in Virginia Beach, VA with his brother Mamdoh until 2013, and left the US in August 2013 for Turkey and then Syria. In that country, he joined ISIS and was killed in clashes with Kurdish forces in January 2014. Thamer's ISIS name is Abu Naser AlJazrawi. Mamdoh stated that his brother was a student in the US, then left to Syria.



Thamer AlSyakhan's dead photo in Syria

- 2- Fares Qauan (AlYami) (فارس قعوان اليامي), a 24-year old student on Saudi government scholarship from Jeddah, who attended Virginia Commonwealth University, and then left the United States in May 2015 to Syria through Turkey to join ISIS. His family falsely told the media that he was killed by ISIS in September 2015 for refusing to carry out a suicide bombing. The story appears to be a cover up for AlYami's joining ISIS, a common practice in Saudi Arabia where some families reportedly claim that their sons are in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan to receive food and medicine benefits for the needy.



Fares AlYami in Virginia

- 3- Bashir al Morshid (بشير المرشد العنزي), a dual US- Saudi national born in San Francisco in 1980 when his father was a student. He is currently a commander of ISIS in Homs desert and is still alive. He traveled to Syria and Iraq several time and returned home to marry and have three children, the eldest of whom is named Sami. That suggests Saudi government had no problem with his activities. He was involved in executing several Saudi militants who were members of AlNusrah Front.



Bashir AlMorshid (Dual American Saudi citizen)

- 4- Ali Ibrahim AlThwaini, (علي إبراهيم الثويني), who came to the U.S. in 2013 on a Saudi government scholarship, then traveled to Syria through Turkey and joined ISIS. He died from his wounds at a Lebanese hospital after blowing himself at Hotel De Roy in Beirut 25 June 2014 while Lebanese police tried to apprehend him. His body was returned to Saudi Arabia and was buried in Buraydah city.



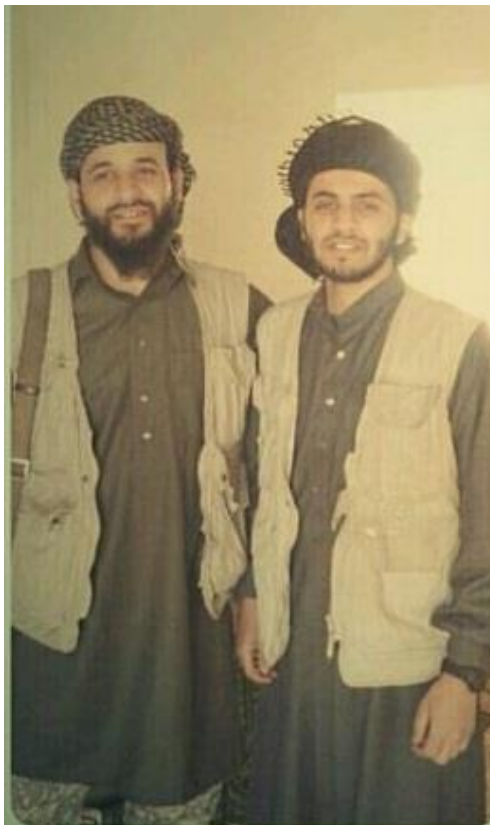
Ali AlThwaini in Syria

- 5- Mishari alTahqeel (Alhabardi) (al Otaibi) (مشاري الثقيل الحبردي), a native of Onaiza, Mishari and his brother Badr left their English language academic program at Los Angeles to travel to Syria and join ISIS. Mishari came to the U.S. in 2012 and left to Syria in 2013 to join his brothers there who were with ISIS. He was killed in Syria in February 2014.



Mishari alTahqeel in Syria

- 6- Badr and Mishari al Tahqeel Alhabardi al Otaibi, (بدر الثقيل الحبردي), two Saudi nationals and holders of government scholarship who travelled together to the U.S. in about 2011 to study English. Six months later they left for Syria via Turkey and were killed in April and May 2014. They were 24 and 28. A third brother is in Syria with ISIS. He was there before his two brothers came to the United States. U.S. consular officials were not aware of this information when they issued their visas because the Saudi government did not share it with U.S.



Badr and Mishaeri al Tahqeel Alhabardi in Syria

- 7- **Abdallah Ahmad al Ashwali**, (عبدالله أحمد الشوالي), He came to the US in 2011 and studied at the West Kansas engineering school in 2012. At the end of 2013 he traveled to Syria via Turkey. He is most likely still alive.

- 8- Khaled Abdallah Al Doseri, خالد الدوسري, a 30-year old who entered the US on Saudi government scholarship in 2010 in spite of his low grades. While on his summer vacation in Saudi Arabia in 2013, he left for Syria and joined AlNusrah Front. He was killed March 25, 2015.



Khalid AlDosary in the U.S.

- 9- **Yazeed Mohammed A. Abunayyan.** -يزيد محمد ابونيان-, aged 26, arrived to the U.S. in 2011 and spent one year in the country during which he failed to complete a single course. He left the United States following an arrest for unruly behavior on board a Continental airline. He was arrested in the US twice and left voluntarily with the embassy's help. He took part in an attack on Saudi police in Riyadh April 2015, was arrested, and remains incarcerated since then.



Yazeed Abu Nayan in U.S. court

- 10- **Misfer Abdullah Al Shamri**, who arrived to Illinois, US in 2013. Misfer then traveled to Syria to join ISIS during his vacation. He entered Syria from Turkey. He is still alive, according to available information.



Misfer Abdullah Al Shamri in Syria

- 11- **Mohamed AlOtaibi**, a former student in the United States, left the US in the summer of 2013 for Syria and joined ISIS. He then recruited his longtime friend, Suliman AlSubaie, a social media star who was also accepted into the Saudi government scholarship program to the U.S. AlSubaie's older brother Abdulaziz was killed in the ranks of AlNusrah a few months before. AlOtaibi traveled to Syria through Turkey in August 2013 and remained in Syria for 5 months with his friend. They have then returned to Saudi Arabia, where they received a light sentence of five years in prison. Al-Otaibi was released in April.



Mohamed AlOtaibi with his best friend Sulaimon AlSubaie in Syria

- 12- Nahedh Abdalla al Ramdi, **ناهض عبدالله الرمضي**, who studied in Boston in 2014, returned to Saudi on vacation, and then went to Syria to join ISIS. In 2015 he carried out a suicide bombing at against Iraqi military in Anbar.
- 13- Abdullah Yousef Al Shehri, **عبدالله يوسف الشهري**, who was pursuing a graduate degree in Texas in 2009 on a government scholarship. He joined AlNusrah Front and was killed in June 22, 2013 in Aleppo.



Abdullah Yousef Al Shehri in Syria

A video of AlShaheri in Six Flags in Dallas, Texas was uploaded in March 2009
<http://youtu.be/g1T5fvFYeFg>

This is a twitter account set up in his memory. It contains comments from his relatives and his photos including in the US. https://twitter.com/_ForAbdullah

His brother Mohamed's account is https://twitter.com/M7_Alshehri

- 14- Ahmed Saeer AlDhubaiti (AlMutairi) **أحمد صعيير الضبيطي المطيري** arrived to the U.S. in 2012 and studied English in Atlanta, GA. He left the US to join ISIS in 2013. He was killed in June 2014 in clashes with Iraqi military.



Ahmed Saeer AlDhubaiti in Iraq 2014

15- Fahad Mehmas AlDowaifin (Al Qahtani) (فهد الدويفن القحطاني) lived in Texas in 2011 and traveled to Florida as well. He left to Syria via Turkey in 2013 to join AlNusrah Front. He was killed in March 14, 2014 in an attack by Syrian government forces in Homs.



Fahd Mehmas AlDowifin in Miami

Video eulogizing AlDowifin https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i727QC_51ho

AlDowifin twitter account after he removed its content

<https://twitter.com/AlDowifin1>

- 16- Fahd Mohsen AlGhasab AlAjami (فهد محسن الغصاب العجمي), who travelled to the U.S. in 2006, then went to Syria in 2012 and joined AlNusrah Front. On January 24, 2013 he became the third suicide bomber in an attack on Syrian government security center in Saa Saa station outside Damascus. His father received a call from Syria saying he had been killed in a suicide operation.



Fahd AlAjmi in Saudi Arabia with his daughter Leen

- 17- Mohamed Abdullah AlNawfal , 28, came to the United States in 2007 to study electric engineering. He left the US in May 2014 and joined ISIS. He was killed in Kubani in fighting with ISIL against Kurds March 2015.
- 18- Ahmed Abdulrahman Al Olyan, أحمد العليان, who left the United States and joined ISIS. He was killed in December. 2014 in Syria. His brother Abdullah was killed in May 9, 2015. No further information was available. Abdullah was among those detained for protesting and calling for the release of prisoners in Buraydah. He was among a dozen protesters released in exchange for traveling to Syria.

Ahmed AlOlyan twitter account
<https://twitter.com/a7mad177>

Thana AlOlyan sister of both Ahmed and Abdullah
https://twitter.com/thana_alolyan

Twitter account dedicated to him
https://twitter.com/S_a7mad177

19- Zaid Salah Mahmoud Aljarba.¹ . Born in 1985, he first came to the U.S. in about 2011 and stayed 1 year and 4 months. He returned to Saudi for vacations, following which he returned to the U.S. in 2013 and stayed for 6 months. He then traveled to Turkey via Saudi Arabia and then Syria. A registered ISIL fighter, he was killed in a suicide bombing against Kurdish forces in Kobane Oct. 2014 in Syria



Zaid AlJarba in Syria

Other names include Saudi and Kuwaiti student and killed in Syria 2015.

- 1- Mefreh Najm AlAtoui, 28, PHD student.
- 2- Khaled Ahmad BenShehwain, Saudi killed in Syria.
- 3- Ziad Jamil Yamani, Saudi killed in Syria.
- 4- Abdallah Mousam al Moutairi.
- 5- Mohammad Abdelkarim Al Salem.
- 6- Abdulhadi Alhajeri, Kuwaiti killed in Syria.
- 7- Abdulaziz Anwar al Maas, Abu Anwar, Kuwaiti killed in Syria in April 2016. University of Arizona.

Recommendations:

- 1- Senate should hold hearings on the apparent failure to investigate and cover up with this matter. The hearing should request the testimonies of former FBI director James Comey, former CIA director John Brennan, former Secretary of State John Kerry, and former DHS Secretary Jeh Johnson, who should be questioned on the issue.
- 2- Senate should form an ad hoc commission to review Saudi record of supporting terrorism and extremism at all levels including education and spreading extremist Islam to other countries. The commission should review all former FBI, CIA and national security agencies financial and personal ties to Saudi Arabia and to Saudi-linked entities.
- 3- Reinforce visa sections at American embassy in Saudi Arabia and expand its vetting procedures to reduce the risk of Saudi nationals with extremist views entering the United States.



List of Recommended Contacts

- 1- FBI Headquarters, (202) 324-3000
- 2- FBI Washington Field Office, (202) 278-2000
- 3- CIA, (703) 482-0623.
- 4- George Selim, DHS, (202) 786-9900
- 5- Saudi Embassy in Washington, Khalid Abdulrahman AlDayel (202) 342-3800
- 6- Nourah Alnefisah, (571)-327-2294
- 7- State Department, (202)-647-4000



The Institute for Gulf Affairs

Washington, DC

(202) 466-9500

www.gulfinstitute.org

About IGA

The Institute for Gulf Affairs is an independent, nonpartisan, tax exempt organization that disseminates reliable information about the Gulf region (the Gulf Cooperation Council countries plus Iraq) and produces thoughtful analyses of Gulf politics and international relations. Based in Washington, DC, the Institute is at the center of a global network of reliable individuals, some of whom, due to the closed nature of the Saudi and Gulf political systems, have no other outlet for their views. In order to fulfill this mission, the Institute:

- Convenes conferences in Washington, where informed analysts debate major issues concerning the Gulf countries and US-Gulf Relations.
- Conducts independent research and investigations, reports of which are posted on this website: www.gulfinstitute.org
- Fosters a deeper understanding of the Gulf countries among Washington and international policymakers and members of the press corps by providing them with up-to-date and exclusive information, and by putting them in contact with reliable analysts.
- Sponsors taskforces whose reports help define the foreign policy agenda.