

Saudi monarchy executes 81 men in one day: Medieval barbarism from top US ally in Mideast

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In a brutal act of mass murder, the US-backed Saudi monarchy executed 81 men Saturday, the largest such massacre in the history of the kingdom. The Saudi government did not say how the executions were carried out, but beheading is the method it usually employs against its victims. Seven of those executed were Yemenis, one was Syrian, and the rest were Saudi citizens.

The barbaric action received only perfunctory attention in the American media, in sharp contrast to the saturation coverage of every alleged atrocity carried out by Russian forces in Ukraine. The White House and State Department did not issue any public statements.

While the Saudi Ministry of Interior claimed that the capital crimes for which the 81 had been executed included terrorism and “multiple heinous crimes that left a large number of civilians and law enforcement officers dead,” it gave no details of the alleged offenses or name any of the supposed victims killed by those executed.

The death toll was largest in a single day of executions since the bloodstained kingdom was founded by Ibn Saud in 1932, when he united the Arabian Peninsula in the wake of the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I by British and French imperialism.

The largest previous mass execution came in 1980, when 63 men were put to death after Islamist militants seized the Grand Mosque in Mecca in an effort to overthrow the regime. In 2016, the monarchy executed 47 people, including the Shi’ite Muslim leader Nimr al-Nimr, to suppress political opposition in the eastern provinces, largely populated by the Shi’ite minority.

Similar political considerations were apparently

involved in Saturday’s bloodbath, as Shi’ite young men were the majority of those executed. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman—the real ruler of Saudi Arabia under the nominal reign of his senile, 85-year-old father King Salman—has focused internal repressive measures on Shi’ite opposition, portraying all dissidents as agents of Iran.

The regime dropped the death penalty for drug offenses in 2019, resulting in a sharp fall in state killings in 2020. This underscores the fact that Saturday’s mass execution, which produced a greater death toll in a single day than during all of 2020 or 2021, was for political offenses.

The Ministry of Interior issued a lurid statement portraying the victims as linked to foreign terrorist groups, including ISIS and Al Qaeda (both of them past beneficiaries of Saudi government support), who targeted government officials and “vital economic sites,” killed police and planted land mines, all without any evidence. The ministry did not even bother to present “confessions” extracted from the prisoners.

Some prisoners were said to be linked to the Houthis, the Yemeni group that overthrew a Saudi-backed regime and has been fighting a protracted war against Saudi military intervention in that country since 2015.

Human rights groups, including those formed by Saudi dissidents in exile, condemned the executions and said that the majority of the victims were from the brutally oppressed Shi’ite minority in the eastern region.

Reprieve, an advocacy group that tracks Saudi executions, said in a statement, “The world should know by now that when Mohammed bin Salman promises reform, bloodshed is bound to follow,”

adding, “We fear for every [prisoner] following this brutal display of impunity.”

The statement noted the upcoming visit of British Prime Minister Boris Johnson to Riyadh, “to beg for Saudi oil to replace Russian gas,” and pointed to the contrast between US and European denunciation of Russian actions in Ukraine and “rewarding those of the crown prince.”

The Iran-based Shi’ite news aggregator Ahlul Bayt News Agency (ABNA) reported that those killed in the mass executions included “41 from the peace protest movement in Al-Ahsa and Qatif [eastern Saudi Arabia], under the false accusation of committing ‘terrorist’ acts,” and accused the Saudi regime of “committing more crimes against innocent people, exploiting the so-called war on terror and making use of the current international situation, where the world is preoccupied with what is happening in Ukraine, to carry out a horrific massacre against a group of young people who only exercised their legitimate right of expressing their right to freedom.”

The European Saudi Organization for Human Rights said that in the cases it had been able to document, the charges involved “not a drop of blood,” even under the rules laid down by the Saudi monarchy to establish criteria justifying executions. The nature of the charges in many of the cases could not be determined because of judicial secrecy and intimidation of family members of those put to death.

The group said it had documented cases in which prisoners had been tortured, held incommunicado and denied access to lawyers, despite the official claims that all the victims had full access to legal defense.

Ali Adubusi, the head of the group, said in a statement: “These executions are the opposite of justice. Some of these men were tortured, most trials were carried out in secret. This horrific massacre took place days after Mohammed bin Salman declared executions would be limited. It is the third such mass killing in the seven-year reign of King Salman and his son.”

Adubusi was referring to the long interview with the crown prince published in *The Atlantic* last week, one of the most shameful efforts to glorify the Saudi butcher. Bin Salman is portrayed in the article as an autocratic but liberal reformer who seeks to put an end to mass executions.

Such groveling—once the province of *Times* columnist Thomas Friedman and other admirers of brute force—has been out of favor in the American corporate press since the crown prince was publicly linked to the killing of Saudi dissident Jamal Khashoggi, a regular op-ed contributor of the *Washington Post*. Khashoggi was murdered and dismembered inside the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, Turkey in 2018, by a hit squad dispatched by bin Salman.

The Saudi regime has been emboldened by the US-led war hysteria over Ukraine, not only to intensify its internal repression, but also to step up its near-genocidal war in Yemen. The assault on Yemen which began in 2015 has driven millions to the brink of starvation, creating what international agencies have characterized as the worst humanitarian crisis in the world, with more than 377,000 dead. The US government has been the principal enabler of these attacks, providing targeting information and replenishing Saudi weapons stockpiles.

According to a report Sunday in the *Wall Street Journal*, Saudi-led forces in Yemen carried out more than 700 airstrikes in February, the most since 2018, killing hundreds of Yemeni civilians. Most of the bombing raids have been focused on the oil-rich Marib area, where a Houthi offensive threatens to take the last significant portion of northern Yemen still under control of the Saudi puppet regime of ousted president Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi.



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