



JASTA is a sincere effort to hold Saudi Arabia accountable

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For the first time of his presidency, Congress overrode President Barack Obama's veto of the Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act (JASTA). As my colleagues, [Danielle Pletka](https://www.aei.org/publication/downside-floodgates-of-anti-saudi-lawsuits/) (<https://www.aei.org/publication/downside-floodgates-of-anti-saudi-lawsuits/>) and [Ambassador John Bolton](http://www.wsj.com/articles/the-folly-of-fighting-terrorism-by-lawsuit-1473116091) (<http://www.wsj.com/articles/the-folly-of-fighting-terrorism-by-lawsuit-1473116091>) point out, the law could “endanger Americans” by creating an exception to the concept of sovereign immunity that fundamentally won't get the result proponents want.

Nonetheless, JASTA represents a sincere effort to hold Saudi Arabia accountable for its involvement in terrorism over the past three decades. When people inside the Beltway use words and phrases like “no official” or “as an institution” to describe Saudi Arabia's role in the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack on the United States, Main Street Americans hear equivocation and spin. No matter how much spin is used, it is beyond doubt that Saudi Arabia funded Salafist mosques around the world, with many of those mosques housing imams who preached a radical version of Islam.



(https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/RTSOMWI_jasta-e1475162345358.jpg)

Protesters and family members of 9/11 victims protest in front of the White House regarding in support of Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act (JASTA) in Washington, U.S., September 20, 2016. REUTERS/Gary Cameron.

Just like Pandora who knowingly opened the box, Saudi Arabia must be held accountable for what it unleashed on the world through its funding of radical mosques and imams who preach anti-western and offensive jihad doctrine.

Having just spent a week in Europe being briefed by security agencies in five countries on terrorism issues, I heard firsthand the connection between Saudi Arabian-funded mosques and hotbeds of terrorist activity. For example, in the now infamous neighborhood of Molenbeek in Brussels where many of the Paris and Brussel attackers lived and “worked” is [one of the largest Saudi Arabian-funded grand mosques in Europe that has been preaching “a hard-line Salafist doctrine”](http://www.news.com.au/world/brussels-terror-central/news-story/e72fcd0504660099682c4e01b339bc3d) (<http://www.news.com.au/world/brussels-terror-central/news-story/e72fcd0504660099682c4e01b339bc3d>) since the early 1970s. As the grand mosque grew,

... more than 600 Salafist fundamentalist teachers moved into schools across Brussels particularly in the Molenbeek area that quickly evolved into a large migrant settlement. Today the district has 20 official mosques alone but it’s the unofficial ones, backroom teaching dens and other ‘underground’ prayer halls that has authorities worried.

Though the Obama Administration and others dismissed the recently released report on Saudi Arabia’s involvement in 9/11, a close [reading of the documents](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/07/15/us/document-september-11-28-pages.html) (<http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/07/15/us/document-september-11-28-pages.html>) shows that, at a minimum, Saudi Arabian officials interacted extensively with the 9/11 attackers and provided funding to them. Whether those officials knew what the 9/11 attackers would soon do is highly questionable, but the fact that there are connections is deeply problematic and offer circumstantial evidence of possible knowledge. It isn’t coincidental that the King Fahad Mosque and the Tamiyah Mosque in Los Angeles and other mosques are mentioned at least eight times in the unredacted portions of the twenty-nine pages. The circumstantial funding ties and direct ties to Saudi Arabian officials noted throughout the report also raise troubling issues. Perhaps we don’t know more because “a number of FBI agents and CIA officers complained to the Joint Inquiry about a lack of Saudi cooperation in terrorism investigations both before and after the September 11 attacks.” One veteran FBI agent reported that “the Saudis have been useless and obstructionist for years...[and] will only act when it is in their self-interest.” At a minimum, JASTA will raise the level of when cooperating with terrorism investigations is in the self-interest of countries.

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With the rise of ISIS and its version of Wahhabi doctrine of Sunni Islam, the seeds planted decades ago are coming into full bloom. Europe and the United States now face years of directed, enabled, and inspired attacks from both returning foreign fighters and frustrated fighters who couldn’t make it to Syria and Iraq. I have [written extensively on how America can reform our domestic national security apparatus](https://www.aei.org/feature/homeland-security-reform-series/) (<https://www.aei.org/feature/homeland-security-reform-series/>) to prepare for and deal with this latest wave of terrorism. Our future will remain clouded by the threat of terrorism until Saudi Arabia and other countries not only

end any support of such groups, but actively destroy them and their leaders and, equally importantly, reform their societies.

It is one thing for Saudi Arabia to fund and to enforce a strict version of Islam inside its borders — in which women are rendered second-class citizens with few individual rights. It is quite another for Saudi Arabia to spread that doctrine across the world without any concerns of how that doctrine will directly influence adherents. From Pakistan to Belgium to Los Angeles, too many terrorists have sprouted from the Salafist mosques and madrassas Saudi Arabia has funded. Just as America must make amends for the messes it made in Iraq and Afghanistan, so too must the Saudi Arabian government make amends for the messes it indirectly or directly aided over the years. JASTA may not be the right answer, but it is a step in the right direction.

Learn more: [Enhanced Human Intelligence Is Key to Defeating Terrorists](https://www.aei.org/publication/enhanced-human-intelligence-is-key-to-defeating-terrorists/)

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| [Let's remember 9/11 by taking action, not talking](https://www.aei.org/publication/lets-remember-911-by-taking-action-not-talking/)

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[Consolidate Domestic Intelligence Entities Under the FBI](https://www.aei.org/publication/consolidate-domestic-intelligence-entities-under-the-fbi/)

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