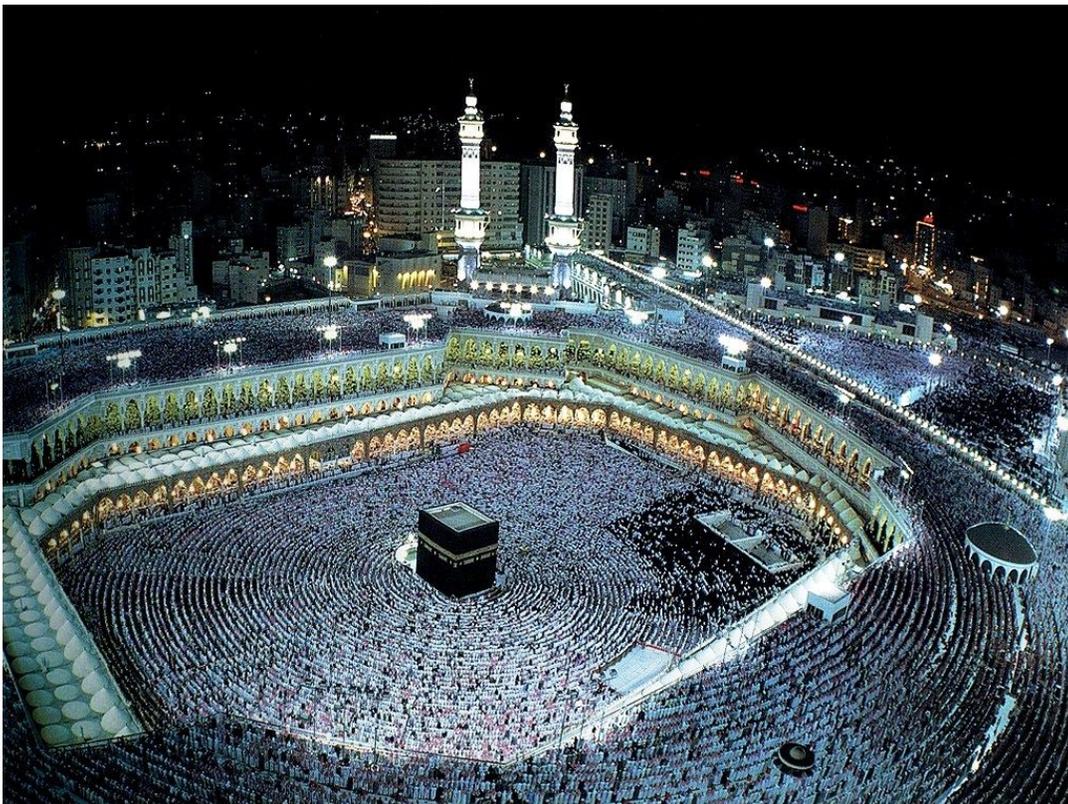


HH Sheikh Nasser
al-Mohammad al-Sabah
Publication Series

Allocating 'God's Guests': The Politics of Hajj Quotas

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Number 32: May 2021



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Introduction*

Each year millions of Muslims make the annual pilgrimage to Mecca in fulfilment of a fundamental religious obligation. For individual believers, it is doubtless an intense spiritual experience, but it has also had distinct political consequences for the Saudi regime. The pilgrimage has provided an opportunity to demonstrate its paramount commitment to Islam and thus to certify its legitimacy. Yet the vast numbers of those referred to as ‘God’s guests’ (*duyuf al-Rahman*) also present a logistical and political dilemma that has often proved counter-productive for the self-appointed ‘custodians of the Holy Places’.

Dilemmas of Saudi Custodianship

Saudi control of the *hajj* has brought it immense respect, especially from non-Arab Muslims who have often felt – and been made to feel – that they are less knowledgeable, pious, or committed to Islam than the purportedly pivotal Arabs or, better still, Arabians. At the same time, however, principally domestic dissidents and pro-Iranian critics, but others of various persuasions and ideologies as well, have denounced the Saudis for their inherent moral

unworthiness or at least their mismanagement of so important an event. The question of Saudi Arabia’s right to control the pilgrimage grew acute after the events of 1987 when more than 400 people died in clashes between Iranian pilgrims and Saudi security officials. Saudis accused the Iranians of using the sacred occasion, when all forms of violence are doctrinally prohibited, to advance a political agenda of revolutionary upheaval, and the Iranians accused the Saudi government of unrestrained force. Charges of heresy and illegitimacy flew back and forth.

The Saudi management quandary was considerable: if it continued to allow unrestricted access, it ran the risk of further unsettling events that it might not be able to control; if it restricted the pilgrimage, it allowed its critics to claim that it had violated a basic Islamic precept—*hajj* at least once in the lifetime of each able-bodied Muslim. The solution was the introduction of a quota system (*hisat al-hajj*) at the Amman meeting of the foreign ministers of the then Organisation of the Islamic Conference in March 1988.¹ Designed principally to limit the number of Iranian pilgrims, the Saudis claimed that because of on-going construction and expansion work, temporary



restrictions were needed until new arrangements could be put in place. One Saudi newspaper went so far as to claim that unrestricted large numbers of pilgrims entering the Kingdom constituted a kind of disorder and thus were incompatible with Islamic precepts.² What was intended to operate for three years is now formally institutionalised: the total number of *hajjis* is limited to 1,000 per million of the total Muslim population of each country, or one pilgrim for every 1,000 of the Muslim population. The reaction was predictably focused on Saudi violation of the Qur'anic precept that Muslims should perform the *hajj* at least once in their lifetime if they can. Critics complained that some Muslims are being deprived of the right to pilgrimage and, given the demographics, they would have to wait decades, if even then, in order to qualify. One criticism labelled the quota system a 'mega-*bid'a* [unacceptable innovation]'.³

In the succeeding thirty years of operation, the pressure for participation has not abated despite the quotas. While the peak occurred in 2012 with 3.16 million pilgrims, and the Saudis ostensibly reduced the numbers by 20 percent from 2013 to 2016 owing to construction work, the number of foreign pilgrims has increased by over ten times since

the end of World War II. The total number of pilgrims from across the world in 2019 was 2.5 million. In 2018, the *New York Times* estimated that, even if the participation rate were to reach an equilibrium of 3 million a year, it would take 581 years for all the world's current Muslim population to do the *hajj*.⁴ Moreover, an unanticipated consequence of the quota is the steep rise in the *umra* pilgrimage, when participation is less expensive, easier to arrange, and not as restricted by the ritual calendar or administrative regulation. The Saudi General Authority for Statistics reported that 19,158,031 performed *umra* in 2019, a rise of 4.63 percent over the preceding year.⁵ The Turkish quota has led to a decline in *hajj* participation per capita, but the number of Turkish *umra* pilgrims has steadily increased and is roughly three and a half times the size of its *hajj* delegation. In calendar year 2019, over 2 million Pakistanis performed *umra*, eleven times the number allotted for the *hajj*. While smaller than the *umra*, the numbers at the *hajj* are nevertheless daunting, making the efficiency and safety of the event difficult to maintain. A hotel housing pilgrims collapsed in 2006, killing some 75 and injuring others. Thousands of pilgrims have died, and many others have been injured in fires and stampedes, such as in 2004 and 2006



when a combined 600 pilgrims died during the stoning ritual. In 2015, at least 2,400 pilgrims were crushed to death; Iranian Ayatollah Khamenei said what the Saudis had done was tantamount to murder, while Indonesia expressed frustration at the dilatory and obfuscating Saudi response.

Other crises beyond the control of both Sharifian and Saudi authorities have caused great difficulties. Past epidemics have taken a toll, such as cholera and bubonic plague outbreaks in the nineteenth century when thousands of pilgrims died. In 2012 and 2013, the elderly and ill were discouraged from performing the *hajj* owing to the outbreak of the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS).

The Saudis have understandably argued that management of so large and emotionally charged event is a demanding logistical challenge, and they have consistently expanded and redesigned the sacred geography of the *hajj* both in response to the challenges and as self-certification of their right of guardianship.⁶ Expansion of the Holy Places owing to increasing number of pilgrims has been an on-going project over the centuries from the time of the second caliph Umar in 638 and the third caliph

Uthman, both of whom enlarged the area of the Grand Mosque (*al-Masjid al-Haram*). The most ambitious modern project began in 1989 and construction work has continued apace since then. In May 2019, King Salman launched the Guests of God Service Programme (*Barnamaj Khidmat Duyuf al-Rahman*), consisting of 130 initiatives involving 30 government agencies to enhance pilgrims' experience of the *hajj* and specifically to increase their number by improving and expanding infrastructure. The government claimed that already 87 percent of *hajjis* were satisfied with the services provided but aimed to do more, in large part to increase revenues in line with the Crown Prince's economic reform package, Vision 2030.⁷

Despite the challenge of managing ever-increasing pilgrim numbers, demand far outstrips the supply of places. Behind the resultant pressure on Saudi Arabia lies a two-sided demographic profile. On the one hand, the per capita rates of national *hajj* participation have significantly declined as quota increases have not kept pace with Muslim population increases and *hajj* demand. When measured by proportion of total Muslims, fewer are able to go on the *hajj* relative to the past. Yet, on the other hand, in



terms of crude numbers, more do so, and many more are disappointed that they cannot. With domestic constituencies putting pressure on their governments to lobby the Saudis for more places as a result of this demand, the very logic of the quota system has come in for questioning. Critics of the Saudi regime go further and see evidence of its incompetence, malfeasance, or impiety. Where once the Iranians led the charges, others have joined in. There have been calls in Indonesia, for example, to abolish the quota system entirely and to base participation on a more realistic assessment of the financial impact that national delegations make on the local Saudi economy.⁸ Even the Indonesian Minister of Religious Affairs argued in 2016 that the current system was no longer valid since some countries do not use their full quotas while, in others, waiting lists continue to expand.⁹ A widespread complaint is that the expansion and construction projects have destroyed the cultural heritage of Mecca and Medina and laid bare the al-Saud's prioritisation of financial self-interest over its commitment to guardianship.¹⁰ Often heard is the demand to strip the Saudi regime of its presumptuous custodianship through internationalisation of the two Holy Places (*al-haramayn*) and thus the *hajj*.¹¹

Politicisation

The quota's politicisation was inevitable and has had three aspects. First, a kind of nationalisation of the transnational *hajj* has been unfolding over time but has grown more salient as quotas have become a matter of state-to-state negotiation. The Saudis have required individual states to take increasing responsibility for their citizens and to organise them according to strict, nationally devised procedures. Bureaucratisation was well under way in some countries prior to the advent of the quota. For example, the Malaysian government, which had established Lembaga Tabung Haji, the Pilgrims' Management and Fund Board, in 1969 is often touted as a model of localised administration. Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura (MUIS) was established in 1968 to manage locals' participation in the *hajj* as well as provide advice to the government on Islamic affairs in general in Singapore.

The role of national administrative bodies has only increased since the late 1980s. In the Indian system, for instance, a Central Hajj Committee oversaw 140,000 of the 200,000 pilgrims who went on pilgrimage in 2019; the remainder—presumably, wealthier pilgrims—made their own arrangements via



regulated commercial travel agencies. The Ministries of Civil Aviation and External Affairs coordinate logistical matters, and the Indian consulate in Jidda arranges for reception of the pilgrims, their transportation and accommodation, and medical and other assistance if needed. In 2019, 620 volunteer doctors, paramedics, and other assistants, including women, were dispatched to aid Indian pilgrims. Like other countries, Britain also sends an official support delegation, consisting of volunteer doctors, counsellors, and Muslim staff of the Foreign and Commonwealth and Development Office. There are benefits to both the host and sending country. The Saudis delegate responsibility to sending governments for their nationals in trouble or making trouble, while minimising interference in or strains on Saudi resources; for their part, the sending governments are able to use their delegations to reach out to, and influence, home constituencies.

In a more troubling example, in October 2020 the People's Republic of China issued a regulation of forty-two articles controlling the *hajj* of its Muslims, no doubt in response to the bypassing of official channels in the past. The new regulation emphasises that only one organisation, the Chinese Islamic

Association, is allowed to authorise travel to Mecca, and makes explicit that pilgrims are required to obey the laws of both countries as well as 'oppose religious extremism'. The law is purportedly intended to improve the efficiency of the pilgrimage process and is broadly consistent with regulations of other countries.¹² But it is also in line with the Chinese government's restriction of Muslim rights at home – a policy that has been met with silence from Saudi Arabia, which has been courting improved economic and diplomatic relations with Beijing since 2016. King Salman visited Beijing in 2017, mainly for oil deals, and China is Saudi Arabia's largest trading partner.

In the case of Russian Muslims, Norihiro Naganawa documents¹³ a kind of 'hajj market' whereby the implementation of the quota encourages intra-national competition, such as among Dagestan, Tatarstan, and annexed Crimea. At the national level, Presidents Putin and Medvedev used their success in obtaining quota increases – for instance, 4,600 in 2007 and 2,000 in 2011 – to enhance their standing. Regional governments have similarly sought to project the image of fair and effective management of localised quotas for their own validation purposes. In fact, a more intricate set of



relations has emerged among the central Hajj Council, the official religious establishment of the Spiritual Boards, religious figures opposed to them, and diverse tour operators. There are disruptive ideological differences over whether the *hajj* encourages Wahhabisation, as the Spiritual Boards of Tatarstan and Crimea tend to believe,¹⁴ but also the more mundane patterns of cronyism and corruption. This form of post-Soviet Muslim politics, like patterns elsewhere, enlists religion in general and the pilgrimage in particular in the service of traditional political authorities.

From the Saudis' perspective, while they emphasise the pan-Islamic side of *hajj* as part of its legitimacy formula, they recognise that national pilgrim delegations are easier to control and, importantly, that it is advantageous to shift responsibility, and thus blame, on to the sending countries for ensuing disappointments and failures of the system. Waiting lists and application requirements are two areas which follow from the quota system but are conveniently offloaded onto the sending countries. Indonesia, for example, sends the largest number of pilgrims, but even its allowed delegation of roughly 221,000 considerably understates the demand. It requires would-be

pilgrims to pay around US\$2,500 to be considered in a lottery system – a not inconsiderable sum when the average monthly income is less than \$900. Successful lottery winners are then put on a waiting list that can extend to nearly 40 years.¹⁵ China specifies that *hajjis* are to be between fifty and seventy years old and are required to lodge a security bond of some \$8,000 before travelling. Under the regulations of October 2020, they must also prove their patriotism and adherence to the law.¹⁶ Although it is difficult to be precise about the total Muslim population, the delegations – between 11,000 (2019) and 14,500 (2014-16) – are relatively small, suggesting that the PRC's restrictions on access to the *hajj* are an integral part of its stringent monitoring of its Muslim communities. The delegation size also reflects a negotiated approach over quotas with Saudi authorities who are happy to comply with the wish for limited numbers. In general terms, the quota system gives rise to a concomitant delegation of accountability that neatly serves Saudi state interests, while, at the same time, augmenting the ability of sending state bureaucracies to influence or even control domestic constituencies. Second, the quota system has been applied selectively. Iran was singled out for adverse



treatment and it boycotted the pilgrimage from 1988 to 1990 and in 2016 after the tragedy of 2015 and worsening diplomatic relations over Yemen and the Saudi execution of the Shi'i cleric, Nimr Baqr al-Nimr. In 2018, 85,000 pilgrims went on the *hajj* and Iranian media report that 86,550 went in 2019.¹⁷ In a fragile compromise that has evolved over time and despite the lack of diplomatic relations, the Saudis accept Iranian *hajjis* and, while allowing the 'disavowal of polytheist' demonstrations at Mount 'Arafat that are aimed at the United States, Israel, and by implication Saudi Arabia itself, subject them to strict security oversight. Iran complains that, while the numbers are in line with quota expectations (with a population of some 84 million), the Saudis discriminate against its pilgrims on entry and generally treat them poorly while in the Kingdom.

The selective application of quotas is seen in the liberal approach taken to Muslim minority countries. This may be due, in part, to their relatively greater wealth and the hope of Saudi authorities thereby to increase local spending during the *hajj*, but likely also as support for friendly countries. The United Kingdom's sending of between 23,000 and 27,000 a year (23,843 in 2019), for example,

exceeds what might be expected (some 3,300) given that the Muslim population is around 3.37 million. Among Muslim minority countries, it has one of the highest participation rates per capita, but, even so, Seán McLoughlin of the University of Leeds notes that available *hajj* places, having risen 10 to 15 percent over the past ten years, may still not keep pace with an expected Muslim population growth of 30 percent.¹⁸ Australia sent 3,347 in 2019, considerably more than what would have been allowed under strict quota terms (the 2016 census reported that 604,200 individuals self-identified as Muslims). The 13,554 French Muslims who went on the *hajj* in 2019 was a little more than twice the quota allowance on a Muslim population of around 6 million. 14,118 pilgrims went on the *hajj* from the United States in 2019 – four times what a formal quota would specify on a Muslim population of roughly 3.45 million. The ever-present potential for overt politicisation of the *hajj* was realised in the difficulty Canadian pilgrims faced in 2018 when, as a consequence of Saudi Arabia abruptly breaking diplomatic relations with Canada over human rights criticisms, many pilgrims were stranded in the Kingdom. But cooling of relations did not overturn quota arrangements, and in the following year



Canada sent 3,236 pilgrims, three times what would have been expected on a Muslim population of just over 1 million.

The question of who should be in a national delegation is a further complicating factor. Some seek to circumvent their national limit by participation in other-country delegations. For example, authorities at Cairo airport arrested Egyptian travel agents just prior to the 2001 *hajj* because they were attempting to place over a hundred of their clients in the German delegation. In 2016, 177 Indonesians attempted to bypass their country's quota by illegally buying Filipino *hajj* visas and to join the Philippines delegation; they were arrested at Manila airport.¹⁹

The matter of pilgrims circumventing their national quotas because of work or residence in Saudi Arabia has also come in for criticism. The growth in domestic pilgrims—both Saudi citizens and non-citizens such as expatriate workers, most of whom come from Muslim-majority countries of South Asia and the Middle East – was particularly striking from the 1980s, with 1983 the peak year when 60 percent were pilgrims from within the Kingdom and 80 percent of those were non-citizens. Since then, the proportions have declined in response, in part, to the

burgeoning overall numbers and the difficulty of managing them and, in part, to criticism from across the Muslim world that the system was imbalanced in favour of the host. Internal, non-Saudi pilgrims have been limited to *hajj* once every five years and must register with agencies approved by the Ministry of Hajj and Umra, but they still constitute the majority of Saudi-based pilgrims. In 2019, the number of pilgrims from within the Kingdom (Saudi and non-Saudi) was 25 percent of the total pilgrims and, of these, 67 percent were non-Saudi.²⁰ The largest number of these were Egyptians and Pakistanis whose countries are normally in the top ten sending countries. This kind of back-door advantage is grating to those hoping for enlarged delegations.

An example of irritation occurred in 2015 when the United Arab Emirates (UAE) protested that the quotas for other countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council were illogical (*ghayr mintaqi*).²¹ An inherent problem was, and remains, ambiguity over who makes up the Muslim population of a country, especially when nationality and ethnicity, common official designators of identity, and Islam do not always overlap. The UAE argued that its quota was unfair in comparison to those of other Gulf countries,



especially Oman's, since they were larger than their population baselines would have allowed without even taking into account the further 20 percent reduction of the time.

Third, the entire regulatory system, including the quota, *hajj* visas, and fees, has lacked transparency. Bribery of officials within the Saudi and other national bureaucracies as well as discriminatory practices are thought to be common.²² In Indonesia, for instance, bureaucrats and party officials have at times used the promise of bypassing long waiting lists for financial or political patronage and corruption. In Turkey, elites of the ruling party, the Justice and Development Party (AKP), have tended to view the *hajj* and *umra* as perquisites that allow the bypassing of normal waiting lists.²³ They also are known to participate in a black market of *hajj* visas.

Although there does not appear to have been objection earlier, the very idea of these visas came under attack when quotas were introduced. They too were denounced as an unworthy innovation and emblematic of a ruling house that had allied itself with the 'enemies of Islam'.²⁴ The Saudis have not charged for first-time *hajj* visas but had charged the equivalent of \$533 (SR2000) for repeat *hajjis*, a sum that many regarded as

prohibitive. The introduction of a digital system in late 2019 specifically excluded the *hajj* visa, which, unlike the eVisa, imposes stricter time and geographical constraints. The Saudi government announced that it would abolish the repeat visa fees but, according to the Malaysian Prime Minister's Department after consultation with the Saudis over the 2020 *hajj*, it would charge a general application fee of \$80 (SR300) via licensed tour operators.²⁵ Given that that *hajj* was severely curtailed owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, it remains to be seen whether this system will be in effect for the next pilgrimage.

The Saudis are also routinely condemned for privileging VIPs rather than reinforcing belief in the equality of all believers as the pious expect of the *hajj*'s guardians. Examples include disproportionately according places for the ceremonial 'standing' (*wuquf*) at 'Arafat and camp sites at Mina to members of the royal family and their guests. The fees system, used to pay for guides (*mutawwifs*), agents who distribute Zamzam water, housing tents in Mina and 'Arafat, and internal travel within the Kingdom, has also been criticised as fundamentally dishonest. One Saudi dissident group argued that the government



siphons off money that should rightfully go to the guides and allows domestic and complicit foreign officials to use funds for their own gain.²⁶

Negotiating the Quota

As imperfect as the quota system is and as riven with political and logistical problems, sending governments remain under domestic pressure to increase their quotas and reduce waiting times. Each year negotiations unfold between them and Saudi authorities and often they are successful. Revised quota figures for the 2020 *hajj* were agreed and announced but, because of the threat to public health, only about ten thousand pilgrims overall who were already in the country were in fact allowed to attend in person.²⁷

Having had its quota reduction reinstated, Indonesia's official quota increased from 168,800 in 2016 to, first, 211,000, then, augmented by 10,000, 221,000 in 2017. It remained constant until 2019 when an extra 10,000 was agreed in principle. The Indonesians wish to increase their quota to 250,000, but this is a 'struggle' according to the Indonesian ambassador to the Kingdom. Malaysia's quota increased from 30,200 in 2019 to 31,600 in 2020. Although Tabung Haji was unsuccessful from 2013 to 2016,

when the blanket reduction was imposed on all countries, it was successful during the negotiations over 2020 in persuading the Saudis that Malaysia's population should be based on the United Nations figure of 31.6 million instead of the lower Saudi estimate. Despite requests for an extra 20,000 places, Pakistan has achieved annual increases of 5,000 for the past three years, with the 2020 quota set at 189,210. India has been especially successful. Its quota increased from 170,000 in 2018 to 200,000 in 2019 and 2020, the third increase since Prime Minister Modi came to power in 2014.

Alternatively, the South African quota has remained static for a few years. For 2020, It was set at 3,500, the same number that had been allowed in 2018 and 2019, though this represents an increase of 1,000 over the 2017 figure. A waiting list of 23,000 no doubt encouraged the South African Hajj and Umra Council to ask for an increase to 6,000, even though the drop-out rate owing to cost has at times reached 40 percent. Singapore's quota was raised from 680 in 2016 to 800 in 2017 when the 20 percent reduction was removed. It was increased to 900 in 2018 – just slightly above what might be expected under the quota. Although Prime Minister Lee raised the issue of a quota increase directly with



Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman (MBS) at the Osaka G20 Summit in 2019, it has stayed at the 2018 level.

In the negotiations with the Saudis, several dimensions have stood out:

Diplomatic relations: The chances of a quota increase are enhanced when there are established, or increasing, state-to-state relations. King Salman, for example, has expressed appreciation for Indonesia's 'leadership in maintaining stability in the region and world'.²⁸ Indian-Saudi relations have markedly improved with greater trade and investment, and security cooperation. Saudi Arabia is India's fourth largest trading partner and its second largest supplier of oil. Indian pilgrims were the second largest delegation in 2019.

Iraq's quota for 2019 was set at 50,000, a 24 percent increase over the 38,000 who went in 2018 and a greater number than would have been expected on a Muslim population of around 38.5 million. The Iraqis claimed that they were owed an increase since they had not used their allotted quotas in the past due to the war and domestic upheavals. Relations with Iraq have been strained as the Saudis have been alarmed at undue Iranian influence, and they would not have been

pleased when, on Saudi soil itself prior to the 2019 *hajj*, a representative of the Iranian Leader of the Islamic Revolution for Hajj Affairs pledged *hajj* cooperation with the head of the Iraqi High Commission for Hajj and Umra against their joint 'enemies'.²⁹ Iraq's increased quota may thus be viewed as, in part, an appreciation for the pivotal role that it plays in the competition for regional hegemony.

Contrarily, Qatari pilgrims have fallen foul of the poor relations between the two countries since June 2017 when the Kingdom, Bahrain, the UAE, and Egypt broke relations and imposed a blockade on Qatar. There were 1,210 pilgrims from Qatar in 2016, and, in August 2017, the Saudis briefly opened the border to allow travel from Qatar. While difficult to verify, the Governor of Mecca, Prince Khalid al-Faysal, said that the number actually increased by 30 percent to 1,564. But, in 2018, each accused the other of disrupting a dedicated website for Qatar pilgrims and not allowing unimpeded travel. It is at least clear that travel agencies found it difficult to obtain the necessary permits and, as a result, it was very difficult for would-be pilgrims to register. Some 500 reportedly made the *hajj* via Kuwait, although the official quota had been set at 1,200. For the



2019 and 2020 pilgrimages, Qatari nationals and residents were to apply for visas via the online link without going through their national agency, the Ministry of Awqaf, as would be expected and normally preferred by the Saudis. Pilgrims could not travel on Qatar Airways or directly from Qatar to Saudi Arabia. As a result of these difficulties, Qatar has been vocal in its denunciation of the Saudis for interfering with a fundamental pillar of Islam. Recognising the danger of a threat to its Islamic credentials, the Saudi Foreign Minister denounced related renewed calls for internationalisation of the pilgrimage, now from an ostensibly fellow member of the Gulf Cooperation Council, as tantamount to a 'declaration of war'.³⁰ The Mufti, Abd al-Aziz ibn Abdullah ibn Muhammad Al al-Shaykh, also hit back saying the Saudis have worked hard and honourably to protect the sacred shrines, as, he said, is universally recognised throughout the broader Muslim world.³¹ There is no doubt that, with the criticisms, a raw nerve had been hit. The example of Malaysia has been more complicated. The relationship has generally been smooth, as indicated by Malaysia's selection in 2018, along with Indonesia, as the first in the 'Mecca Road' (*Tariq Makka*) initiative whereby travel is facilitated by pre-

clearance in the country of origin. Under this system, which is part of the National Transition Programme of Vision 2030, the Saudi Ministry of Health checks the vaccinations and health requirements of pilgrims electronically without the need to examine documents, and security checks, like passport control and fingerprinting, are done at the point of origin rather than on arrival. The Ministry of Hajj and Umra then takes responsibility for internal transport and accommodation within the Kingdom. Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Tunisia participate in the system in addition to Malaysia and Indonesia. Malaysia, with its King Salman Centre for International Peace, also participated in the disparaged Saudi counter-terrorism initiative, the Global Centre for Combating Extremist Ideology, in, though only for a year.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Prime Minister Mahathir, who cancelled participation in the anti-terrorism initiative, irritated the Saudis further by staging an Islamic summit in December 2019. Its stated purpose was to deal with five issues, all of which would not have been at the top of a Saudi agenda: the Rohingyas, Uighurs, Yemen, gender inequality, and economic disparity. Perhaps of greater irritation was the attendance of



three prominent critics of Saudi Arabia, Turkish President Erdogan, Qatar's Amir Tamim, and Iranian President Rouhani. The leaders of Saudi allies – the UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain, Indonesia, and Pakistan – stayed away, and the Saudis complained that the summit was itself a rival to the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), based in Jidda.³² UMNO (United Malays National Organisation) Youth argued that because of poor relations with the Saudis, the governing coalition, Pakatan Harapan, had undermined efforts to increase Malaysia's quota further.³³

Bilateral approaches: Quotas are negotiated every year, and bilateral negotiations are normally conducted at the Ministerial level and joint working groups are set up. Primary contact is with the Saudi Ministry of Hajj and Umra, such as when the Algerian Minister of Religious Affairs and Endowment met directly with the Saudi Minister of Hajj and Umra to negotiate an increase of 5,300 for the Algerian quota of 2020. Other Saudi Ministries may also be involved. For example, agreement on setting the 2020 quota occurred between the Pakistani Minister of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony and the Saudi Hajj and Umra Minister. The final decision on the quota was to be left to the Minister of the

Interior, however, since at issue was the available space in Mina, and therefore a question of safety and security of the pilgrimage. A ten-member Pakistani-Saudi Joint Working Committee was established to oversee arrangements. In addition to the quota, the Pakistanis sought to include Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar, and Quetta in the Mecca Road system. Malaysia has followed a multi-agency and multi-level approach: Tabung Haji has sought to enlist support from the OIC; the Minister for Religious Affairs in the Prime Minister's Department directly lobbied both the Saudi Minister of Hajj and Umra and, somewhat unusually, the Minister of Islamic Affairs, Dawah and Guidance for the 2020 *hajj*; and the Prime Minister made representation to the King. Indonesia has mobilised fifteen of its government agencies, principally the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Home Affairs, and Religious Affairs, to provide multiple access points through which to put their case to the Saudis.

As these examples indicate, the common approach has typically had single-issue focus. However, discussions on the *hajj* sometimes form part of omnibus negotiations. A pertinent example is when Iraqi Prime Minister 'Abdul Mahdi took a delegation of eleven Ministers, sixty-eight government



officials and some seventy businessmen for discussions in April 2019 that resulted in thirteen agreements, beyond the quota, covering energy and oil, agriculture, and investment.

The pandemic-induced uncertainty over the July 2021 *hajj* has delayed or halted bilateral negotiations. As of late April, the Saudis had not yet announced who would be allowed to attend. It is certain, however, that this will entail continuing caps on the number of participants as well as stricter conditions governing health requirements. Umra pilgrims during Ramadan 2021 were restricted, for example, to the ‘immunised’ (*al-muhassanin*), defined as those having had two vaccination doses or one within 14 days of travel, or those having recovered from COVID-19.³⁴ The Saudis have openly acknowledged the related challenges to their management, such as over whether and, if so, how to quarantine pilgrims. Although part of a limited government reshuffle, the unexpected dismissal of the Minister of Hajj and Umra, Muhammad Salih Bantan, on 12 March – so close to the *hajj* season – points to anxiety, if not also disagreements, over how to handle an anomalous situation for the second year running. For sending authorities, the uncertainty has adversely affected

planning, particularly curtailing the lead-in time required for national preparations. This normally is at least six months prior to the *hajj*. The Indian government deadline was, for example, in December 2020, as was that of the Philippines. In addition, if external pilgrims are allowed, their expenses are bound to be more expensive because of higher transportation, accommodation, and health requirement costs induced by the crisis. Given the uncertainties, the number of Indian *hajj* applicants has declined by about three-quarters³⁵ – a pattern that is likely to be replicated elsewhere. The Ministry of Religious Affairs in Indonesia has planned for three scenarios – a normal *hajj* with a set quota; a reduced *hajj* of 30 to 50 percent; and cancellation as in 2020. The chief organiser of the Indonesian pilgrimage has suggested that Indonesia should take the initiative and cancel its participation in 2021.³⁶

Personal diplomacy: The bilateral talks are often facilitated by direct discussions at the highest level. Prime Minister Modi had visited Saudi Arabia in April 2016, the Saudi Crown Prince visited India in February 2019, and Modi had discussions with him a few months later at the G20 meeting in Japan. On the occasion of MBS’s state visit, an increase in the *hajj* quota formed part of broader



agreement on investment, release of prisoners, and formalisation of inter-governmental cooperation. The Crown Prince sought links that would help to ensure the success of his Vision 2030, incorporating India as one of the eight Strategic Partner Countries, and seemed to have found in Modi a trading and diplomatic partner that would be less critical of Saudi policy in general, and human rights abuses in particular, than traditional partners in the West.

Prime Minister Mahathir, as noted above, seems also to have spoken directly with King Salman about Malaysia's *hajj* quota. The current Prime Minister, Muhyiddin Yassin, sought a meeting with MBS in Riyadh in March 2021 and announced that an extra 10,000 places had been agreed. The brandishing of a prized increase, however unlikely to be fulfilled in the circumstances of 2021, no doubt fulfilled its purpose: to enhance the personal political standing of the Prime Minister at home. A more stable relationship was established with Indonesia's Joko Widodo. Although criticised at home for lack of Islamic credentials, and likely for the same reason, Widodo has cultivated strong ties with the Saudi leadership. The trading relationship is not particularly robust: the Kingdom has not invested heavily in

Indonesia, and ranked twenty-third in Indonesian export markets, though in the top ten import countries in 2019 largely because of refined petroleum products. But there has been a good personal rapport since the King visited Indonesia in March 2017 – the first visit of a Saudi monarch in forty-seven years. In the 2017 visit, eleven agreements were reached, the most important of which dealt with lowering trade barriers and Saudi Aramco assistance for the expansion of the largest Pertamina refinery. On Widodo's visit to Riyadh in April 2019, King Salman granted him an extra 10,000 *hajj* places (though apparently not implemented in the *hajj* of that year). The Saudis saw synergy with Indonesia's counter-radicalisation efforts and approved of Widodo's espousal of a 'moderate Islam' of the kind MBS has personally promoted (*'al-Islam al-wasati'*), and Widodo recognised an opportunity to burnish his reputation among Muslim groups at a time when both conservative and radical Islamist elements were criticising him.

Conversely, relations between Turkey's Erdogan and the Saudi elite, especially MBS, have taken a decidedly negative turn. Previously, Erdogan had been an admirer of the Kingdom, welcoming leaders and declaring a state of mourning on the death of



King ‘Abdullah in January 2015. In December of that year, he was granted the honour of entry inside the Kaaba. However, disagreements set in over Syrian policy, Turkish support for the Muslim Brotherhood and Qatar, and especially the Khashoggi affair in late 2018. Erdogan, not noted for measured rhetoric, has expressed sharp criticism of the Saudi elite, even going so far at the time of the Trump Administration’s Israel-Palestine peace plan in early 2020 to warn that it might not be possible to defend the ‘Kaaba’ – that is, Saudi guardianship of the *hajj* and, by implication, the regime itself – if attacked because of Gulf states’ collusion: ‘Saudi Arabia mostly, you are silent. When will you speak?’³⁷ In response, Saudi Arabia is currently embarked on a trade boycott of Turkish products, but of greater concern to Turkey would be a diminution of its *hajj* quota, a ban on Turkish pilgrims, or their harassment. Turks have noted how the Saudis have restricted Qatari and Iranian pilgrims and banned individual Muslim, especially Islamist, leaders with whom they disagree. While a diplomatic stand-off, the stakes are also economic and political. The 80,000 Turkish pilgrims bring in considerable money for the Diyanet, the Directorate of Religious Affairs, but a greater problem would be the blow to Erdogan’s and

AKP’s Islamic credentials if unable to protect so fundamental a religious duty of their citizenry.³⁸

Reputation of *hajjis*: A subjective factor that seems to have had a measure of influence on Saudi allocations is the character that some *hajjis* project. The most obvious example are Iranian pilgrims, whom the Saudis have viewed as a security threat since the 1980s. Negotiations over the *hajj* have been fraught and centred on whether the Iranians would eschew political agitation and whether some Shi‘i practices, such as ablution rituals and visits to the burial places of four Imams in Medina, would offend the Wahhabi inclinations of the host. By way of contrast, the reputation of Indonesian pilgrims for good behaviour is well-established in the Kingdom. The Governor of Medina said they were the ‘most well-organised and disciplined as well as neatest’ of all pilgrims.³⁹ Such a favourable image at least does not harm the Indonesian cause in quota negotiations.

The lenient approach to minority-country quotas coincides with an obvious preference for pilgrims who will obey the laws of the country, not bring diseases with them, and spend freely in the local economy. Pilgrims



from the West, among others, tend to fulfil this ideal of compliance, health, and wealth. The last has been particularly important. While difficult to give a precise figure and clearly still only a small share of GDP, the amount of money the *hajj* brings into the Saudi economy is considerable and thought to be around \$16 billion.⁴⁰ In 2018, the Mecca Chamber of Commerce and Industry reported that the pilgrimage accounted for 25 to 30 percent of private sector income in the Mecca-Medina area.⁴¹ Pilgrims from high income countries would doubtless increase the *hajj*'s financial impact, especially now that the Kingdom is developing a domestic tourist industry as part of its new economic strategy. The Saudi newspaper, *Arab News*, noted in 2018 the 'higher spending power' of Singaporean pilgrims, for example, with greater expenditure than others on expensive accommodation nearer the Grand Mosque and on souvenirs and gifts.⁴²

Conclusion

Facing ever larger numbers of pilgrims and problems in managing them, the Saudi regime has applied a quota system since the late 1980s. The system has provided a measure of stability to this supremely important spiritual occasion, but, understandably given the logistical

challenges, it has not always been followed by a safe and well-regulated experience. Critics, who have long questioned the Saudi appropriation of guardianship over the pilgrimage because of such failings, have also pointed to preferential and patently politicised implementation of the quota. They argue that, in the name of a purportedly transparent allocative method, opaqueness and corruption have resulted.

An ironic consequence of the quota system is that sending national governments have themselves become a kind of sub-guardians of the *hajj*. The appropriate bureaucratic agencies must conduct bilateral negotiations with the Saudis over the annual quota, usually done by the equivalent of a Ministry of Religious Affairs – though other agencies are often involved – dealing with the Saudi Ministry of Hajj and Umra, or, particularly in the case of Muslim-minority countries, by other relevant government departments such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. At times, the matter is considered of such domestic import to the sending country that it is elevated to the top level, with direct and personal representations to the King or Crown Prince. Once a quota is agreed, sending countries are responsible for approving and overseeing travel agencies



through which visas, payment of fees, travel, and accommodation are arranged, and for providing medical and consular assistance to their pilgrims once on the ground. This has created a sensible and functioning arrangement of mutual benefit to sender and host, but also provided opportunities for cronyism and profiteering.

The Saudi regime has benefitted immensely from the *hajj*, principally in terms of prestige but also increasingly economically. 2020 was a very difficult year for Saudi Arabia, however. The financial losses as a result of the pilgrimage's severe restriction were deepened by the decline in income owing to the worldwide economic downturn and specifically the decline in oil demand and prices. The Ministry of Finance estimated the 2020 budget deficit at \$79 billion – one and half times what had originally been forecast – and, as a result, the value-added tax was tripled to 15 percent and other expenditure tightening measures were introduced. Saudi *hajj* agencies, not to mention the roughly 1,300 hotels and copious shops, lost considerable income in 2020, and the government is concerned about the continuing adverse ripple effect on the local and national economy. In response, it introduced measures, such as underwriting a

loan guarantee for a large property developer, in March 2021. For their part, national delegations also lost money in 2020 when travel and housing that had been paid in advance were cancelled at the last minute. They have also expressed grave concern about the loss of income owing to the 2021 *hajj* uncertainty and the added costs – estimated at 25 to 30 percent – such as vaccinations, healthier accommodation, and incoming direct flights only, if the pilgrimage does go ahead.

Regardless of the pandemic, it is clear, however, that the conventional pattern of quota increases, or the lack thereof, intersects with larger diplomatic and economic interests of the regime. To the extent that personal entreaties to the royal family have been successful, leader-to-leader diplomacy has also been productive. Everyone instrumentalises the *hajj*, and there is no doubt that the value to the Saudis is especially immense: the *hajj* and the administrative edifice constructed around it are an extension of its religious legitimacy formula, its regional and international politics, and now its post-oil economic future. But, when allocation policy is seen as violating doctrinal obligations in order to reward friends and admonish enemies and to enhance the



commercialisation of a spiritual enterprise, it runs the risk of undermining the repute of those in charge of it. Yet, an inescapable fact of life is that, as long as the Saudi regime remains in power – as is overwhelmingly likely – sending countries will remain clients of a Saudi *hajj* patron.

Notes

*I am grateful to Wai-Yip Ho for his informed assistance.

- ¹ Resolution No. 21/17-P of the Seventeenth Conference of Foreign Ministers, Organisation of Islamic Conference, Amman, 3-7 Sha'ban 1408 A.H./ 21-25 March 1988.
- ² *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 25 March 1988.
- ³ "The Hajj and the Haramain under Saudi Control". Accessible online at <http://www.muslimedia.com/archives/editorial00/editor82.htm>.
- ⁴ Sarah Almkhtar, "To Get All the World's Muslims to Hajj, It Would Take At Least 581 Years", *New York Times*, 23 August 2018.
- ⁵ "Ziyadat 'adad al-mu'tamarin bi-nisba 4.63% fi'l-'am 2019 [Increase in Those Performing Umra by 4.63% in 2019] (Riyadh: al-Hayya' al-'Ama li-l-Ihsa' [General Authority for Statistics], 2020).
- ⁶ For background information on the political implications of Saudi *hajj* management, see: James Piscatori, "Managing God's Guests: The Pilgrimage, Saudi Arabia, and the Politics of Legitimacy", in Paul Dresch and James Piscatori (eds), *Monarchies and Nations: Globalisation and Identity in the Arab States of the Gulf* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), pp. 222-246.
- ⁷ Ru'ya/Vision 2030, Barnamaj Khidmat Duyuf al-Rahman, 'Min al-Fikra ... ila al-Dhikira' [From Idea ... to Memory]. <https://darp.gov.sa/>. For the official Saudi government detailing of the Programme, see: Ru'ya/Vision 2030, Barnamaj Khidmat Duyuf al-Rahman, *Wathiqat Barnamaj Khidmat Duyuf al-Rahman* [Document of the Guests of God Service Programme] (n.p.: n.d.).
- ⁸ See the informative chapter of Robert Bianchi, "The Hajj and Politics in Contemporary Turkey and Indonesia", In Luitgard Mols and Marjo Buitelaar (eds), *Hajj: Global Interactions through Pilgrimage*, Mededelingen van het Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde 43 (Leiden: Sidestone Press, 2015), p. 65.
- ⁹ See: Ainur Rohmah, "Indonesia Wants Unused Hajj Quotas Offered Around", *Anadolu Agency*, 5 September 2016. Accessible online at <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/indonesia-wants-unused-hajj-quotas-offered-around/641309>.
- ¹⁰ Two examples, among many, are: "Cultural Vandalism at Heritage Site by Al Saud Family", *AlHaramain Watch*, 16 April 2020. Accessible online at <https://www.alharamainwatch.com/en/2020/04/16/cultural-vandalism-of-heritage-site-by-al-saud-family/>; and "Why is Saudi Arabia Destroying the Cultural Heritage of Mecca and Medina?", *AlHaramain Watch*, 16 September 2020. Accessible online at <https://www.alharamainwatch.com/en/2020/09/19/why-is-saudi-arabia-destroying-the-cultural-heritage-of-mecca-and-medina/>.
- ¹¹ Soon after the Iranian Revolution, the International Hajj Seminar, held in London in 1982, denounced single-country control of Holy Places: *Hajj—A Ritual or the Heart of the Islamic Movement* (London: The Open Press, 1983), p. 56. Pro-Iranian elements have been especially active in calling for internationalisation, for example *Crescent International*, a pro-Iranian newspaper which was published in Canada and Britain: "Hajj Beyond Rituals", 16-30 April 1996. Arab, particularly Saudi, oppositional elements have joined in this demand: Haroon



- M. Jadhakhan (ed.), *The Thieves of Riyadh; Lives and Crimes of the Al Sauds* (London: The Muslim chronicle, 1990), p. 87.
- ¹² “China Issues Regulation on Organizing Hajj Trips for Muslims to Ensure Security, Services”, *Global Times*, 12 October 2020. Accessible online at <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1203202.shtml#:~:text=Gallery-China%20issues%20regulation%20on%20organizing%20hajj,Muslims%20to%20ensure%20security%2C%20services&text=China%20released%20on%20Monday%20a,pilgrimage%20trips%20for%20the%20believers>.
- ¹³ Norihiro Naganawa, “Elusive Piety: Hajj Logistics and Local Politics in Tatarstan, Dagestan and the Crimea”, *Religion, State and Society*, vol. 47, no. 3 (2019), pp. 307-324.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 311, 319.
- ¹⁵ Benjamin Soloway uses a 2015 figure of \$1,200 per month: “Who Decides Who Gets to Go on the Hajj?”, *Foreign Policy*, 23 September 2015. Accessible online at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/09/23/how-to-score-a-ticket-to-the-hottest-event-in-saudi-the-hajj/>. Also see: Areeb Ullah and Mohammed Ayesh, “The Politics of Hajj Quotas: “What Would Allah Say to This?””, 23 August 2017. Accessible online at <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/politics-hajj-quotas-what-would-allah-say>.
- ¹⁶ Didi Tang, “China Bans Hajj for Muslims Who Fail Patriotism Test”, *The Times*, 14 October 2020.
- ¹⁷ “86,550 Iranians to Start Hajj Pilgrimage”, *Tehran Times*, 26 June 2019. Accessible online at <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/437482/86-550-Iranians-to-start-hajj-pilgrimage>.
- ¹⁸ Seán McLoughlin, *Mapping the UK’s Hajj Sector: Moving Towards Communication and Consensus; An Independent Report, 2019* (Leeds: University of Leeds, August 2019), p. 8.
- ¹⁹ “Egyptians Seized with 114 Passports”, *CNN*, 19 February 2001. Accessible online at <http://www.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/briefs/02/19/world/>; and Natasha Christy Wahyuni, “177 Indonesians Detained Over Hajj Passport Scam in Philippines”, *Jakarta Globe*, 21 August 2016. Accessible online at <https://jakartaglobe.id/news/177-indonesians-detained-hajj-passport-scam-philippines>.
- ²⁰ See: *Ihsa’at al-Hajj, 2019-1440* [Hajj Statistics, 2019-1440] (Riyadh: al-Hayya’ al-‘Ama lil-Ihsa’ [General Authority for Statistics], 2019), p. 10.
- ²¹ “Issam Sahmrani, ‘Makdha Tawzi’ al-Sa’udiyya Hisas al-Hajj’ [How Saudi Arabia Distributes Hajj Quotas]”, *al-Arabi al-Jadid* [The New Arab], 31 August 2017. Accessible online at <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/%D9%87%D9%83%D8%B0%D8%A7-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AD%D8%B5%D8%B5-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%AC>.
- ²² Ullah and Ayesh, ‘The Politics of Hajj Quotas’.
- ²³ Bianchi, ‘The Hajj and Politics in Contemporary Turkey and Indonesia’, pp. 69-70 (Turkey), pp. 73-74, 77 (Indonesia).
- ²⁴ See, for example, ‘Hajj: The Qur’anic or Saudi Way?’, *Crescent International*, 8-22 Dhu’l-Hijja 1417 A.H./16-30 April 1997; Zafar Bangash, *The Makkah Massacre and Future of the Haramain* (Markham, Ontario and London: The Open Press, 1988), p. 84.
- ²⁵ “Saudi Introduces New Hajj Fee”, *Middle East Monitor*, 22 January 2020. Accessible online at <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200122-saudi-introduces-new-hajj-fee/>.
- ²⁶ The Committee for the Defence of Legitimate Rights (Lajnat al-Difa’ ‘an al-Huquq al-Shar’iyya), which was more active in the 1990s and based in London, denounced in their publications what it saw as the misappropriation of *hajj* funds: for example, *al-Huquq* [Rights], no. 47, 10 April 1995.
- ²⁷ The official figure is unclear at the time of writing, but the Saudis publicised the supposed satisfaction of those who did attend, including individuals from Syria, Bosnia, the Central African Republic, and Ivory Coast: “Duyuf al-Rahman Sa’adatuna la Tusaf wa-l-Khidmat al-Muqadamat Sayadhkaruha al-Tarikh [Guests of God: Our Happiness is Indescribable and the Services Provided Will Be Remembered in History]”, *al-Madina*, 2 August 2020. Presumably, these were already in the Kingdom.
- ²⁸ Dian Septiari, “Saudi Arabia Grants RI Bigger Haj Quota”, *Jakarta Post*, 16 April 2019.
- ²⁹ “Iran Welcomes Cooperation with Iraq on Hajj”, *IranPress News Agency*, 25 July 2019. Accessible online at <https://iranpress.com/content/12703>.
- ³⁰ “Al-Jubayr: Talab Qatar Tadwil al-Masha’ir al-Muqadasa ‘Udwani wa I’lan Harb dad al-Sa’udiyya [Al-Jubayr: Qatar’s Request to Internationalise the Holy Places is Aggressive and a Declaration of War against Saudi Arabia]”, *al-Sharq al-Awsa*, 30 July 2017. Accessible online at <https://aawsat.com/home/article/986271/>.
- ³¹ “Mufti al-Sa’udiyya li-al-Sharq al-Awsat: Da’wat Tadwil al-Haramayn ‘Haqida wa Dala’ [The Saudi Mufti to al-Sharq al-Awsat: Calls for the Internationalisation of the Holy Places are Spiteful and Aberrant]”, *al-Sharq al-*



Awsat, 1 August 2017. Accessible online at <https://aawsat.com/home/article/987646/-«الشرق-الأوسط»-مفتي-السعودية-ل-«الشرق-الأوسط»-دعوات-تحويل-الحرمين-«حاكمة-وضالة»>.

- ³² Mahathir acknowledged but downplayed a direct telephone call from King Salman: the King ‘feels that matters like these shouldn't just be discussed by two or three countries and there should be an OIC meeting, and I agreed with him’. See: P. Prem Kumar, “Mahathir’s Muslim Summit Turns Malaysia-Saudi Ties Bitter”, *Nikkei Asia*, 24 December 2019. Accessible online at <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Mahathir-s-Muslim-summit-turns-Malaysia-Saudi-ties-bitter>.
- ³³ “Haj Pilgrim Quota Remains at 30,200”, *New Straits Times*, 4 May 2019.
- ³⁴ Ministry of Hajj and Umra, ‘Rafa’ al-Taqaat al-Tashghiliyyat li-l-Masjid al-Haram khilal Shahr Ramadan al-Mubarak [Increasing the Operating Capacity of the Grand Mosque during the Blessed Month of Ramadan]’, *Saudi Press Agency*, 23 Sha’ban 1442 A.H./ 5 April 2021. Accessible online at <https://www.spa.gov.sa/2211515>.
- ³⁵ Syed Ameen Kader, “India’s Haj Applications Drop 77% as Costs Soar, COVID-19 Concerns Persist”, *Salaam Gateway*, 17 March 2021. Accessible online at <https://www.salaamgateway.com/story/indias-haj-applications-drop-77-as-costs-soar-covid-19-concerns-persist>.
- ³⁶ Leila Afifa, “Hajj Organizer Recommends to Suspend 2021 Pilgrimage”, *Tempo.co*, 13 April 2021. Accessible online at <https://en.tempo.co/read/1452277/hajj-organizer-recommends-to-suspend-2021-pilgrimage>.
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- ³⁸ Pinar Tremblay, “Turkey Fears Further Downward Spiral in Relations with Saudi Arabia”, *Al-Monitor*, 20 October 2020. Accessible online at <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/10/turkey-saudi-arabia-economic-boycott-preventative-measures.html>.
- ³⁹ As quoted in an Indonesian news source: “Indonesia Struggles to Increase Hajj Quota to 250 Thousand: Ambassador”, *Antaranews.com*, 31 July 2019. Accessible online at <https://en.antaranews.com/news/130158/indonesia-struggles-to-increase-hajj-quota-to-250-thousand-ambassador>.
- ⁴⁰ For example: Mehmet Ozalp, “Millions of Muslims Prepare for the Hajj Amid Calls for Boycott”, *The Conversation*, 9 August 2019. Accessible online at <https://theconversation.com/millions-of-muslims-prepare-to-perform-the-hajj-amid-calls-for-a-boycott-121618#:~:text=Estimates%20put%20Saudi%20income%20from,cater%20for%20millions%20of%20pilgrims.> Precise figures are notoriously elusive. Mohammed Francis writes in *Inside Saudi*, a wide-ranging UK-based website devoted to Saudi society, culture, and heritage, that revenues from the *hajj* itself are around \$8 billion a year and \$4 billion from the *umra*, but \$21 billion overall is spent in Mecca by visitors, including *hajj* and *umra* pilgrims. This overall figure doubtless reflects that many stay on beyond the average visit of 15 days (according to Mastercard’s *Global Cities Destination Index 2019*, unnumbered page 14). See: “How Much Money Does Saudi Arabia Make from Hajj and Umrah?”, *Inside Saudi*, 2020. Accessible online at <https://insidesaudi.com/how-much-money-does-saudi-arabia-make-from-hajj-and-umrah/>.
- ⁴¹ Paul Cochrane, “Economics of the Hajj”, *Accounting and Business*, 1 July 2018, reproduced in *ACCA Insights*. Accessible online at <https://www.accaglobal.com/an/en/member/member/accounting-business/2018/07/insights/economics-hajj.html>.
- ⁴² Nor Arlene Tan, “Despite Bigger Quota, More Young Singaporeans are Dreaming of Hajj”, *Arab News*, 23 July 2018.

