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The undiplomatic diplomat

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Swedish Foreign Minister Margot Wallstrom's remarks about Islam and Saudi Arabia's domestic policies should be an object lesson for every government up-and-comer who hopes to carve out a career in the diplomatic corps.

In Wallstrom's zeal to further the cause of women's rights — at least women's rights as perceived by western nations — she managed to disrespect Shariah, the Sunnah and 1.5 billion Muslims. Wallstrom can be held as an example of a western diplomat who didn't do her homework. No reasonable person can object to criticism when based on fact and research, but when criticism comes from ignorance, well, consequences abound.

Whenever a diplomat inserts the word "medieval" when discussing the domestic policies of a country with which it has a long and productive partnership, it becomes necessary for them to take basic lessons in diplomacy.

As if her remarks are not enough for the Swedish government to work up a sweat, Wallstrom has a temper tantrum for being turned away from speaking at the Arab League where she was scheduled to discuss women's rights. Sweden's churlish response to the League's action was to scuttle a major 10-year-old military sales partnership with Saudi Arabia.

In a nutshell, Wallstrom criticized Saudi Arabia for preventing her from speaking to the League. The Kingdom responded by recalling its ambassador to Sweden for its "interference in its internal affairs." About a week later, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) recalled its ambassador for pretty much the same reasons. Things escalated when Saudi Arabia decided to stop issuing business visas to Swedish citizens.

Western political pundits and more than a few western politicians and diplomats have made sport of Saudi Arabia in the past year, as the self-ascribed Islamic State (IS) continues to wield its murderous influence throughout the region. Inexplicably, and without evidence, Saudi Arabia has been targeted for allegedly spawning violent extremism under the so-called banner of "Wahhabism." Without a hint of self-awareness of their own practices, some democratic countries embrace a double standard that boggles the mind. For example, France prosecuted and convicted a French comedian for expressing sympathy with the killer of the Charlie Hebdo editorial staff while celebrating Charlie Hebdo's reckless insistence of

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exercising hateful free speech that marginalizes minorities living in poverty. Yet France bristles at the suggestion that an Arab country interfere with its internal anti-terrorism policies.

The same goes for Sweden. In an interview in January with The New York Times, Adrian Groglopo, professor of social science with the University of Gothenburg, said, "Sweden has long been a racially segregated country" with racism becoming "more socially acceptable" with the rising popularity of the Sweden Democrats. And a disproportionate number of the country's 9.6 million immigrants and children of immigrants are unemployed at twice the country's 8 percent unemployment rate, according to The Times.

Really, clean up your own house before you criticize mine. France and Sweden's hypocrisy point to democratically elected governments that have their own human rights issues, so pressuring Saudi Arabia and its neighbors to conform to their ideal of what they believe constitutes full embrace of human rights rings false.

Wallstrom's rant about her exclusion at the Arab League was a set-up. I'm not much for conspiracy theories, but surely Wallstrom, a seasoned diplomat, was well aware of the limitations of a female making any kind of controversial remarks in a roomful of Arab League delegates. She seized the moment by creating a political kerfuffle by maligning Saudi Arabia.

But clearly Wallstrom and the Swedish government did not think through. While Wallstrom made headlines, the Swedes sadly didn't anticipate the long-term fallout when it canceled its arms deal with the Kingdom. Sweden sold an estimated \$39 million in military arms and equipment in 2014. Saudi Arabia ranks in the top 20 countries doing business with Sweden. For a small country that is no insignificant chunk of change. The Swedish business community was alarmed enough to issue a statement claiming that the country's business reputation is in danger and that jobs and financial security of its workers are threatened.

Saudi Arabia is in a position to go elsewhere for its military equipment. There are plenty of countries that spout rhetoric of alleged human rights abuses in Arab nations while continuing fruitful business relationships that ensure jobs and a thriving economy for both partners. That's because they use proper channels to air their concerns. The only thing Wallstrom accomplished was threatening the livelihood of manufacturers and their workers. I'm not sure a Swedish factory worker gives 2 cents to Wallstrom's rant after being kicked out of the Arab League.

Wallstrom certainly has the right to address human rights abuses, but it behooves diplomats and their governments to consider the venue for airing such grievances, their own conduct in curbing abuses in their own countries and the ramifications of such outbursts. Sweden hasn't quite figured that out yet.

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