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[A New Politics Emerges in Middle East. It Doesn't Involve Democracy:](#) Robert Fulford, *National Post*, Nov. 10, 2017— On December 17, 2010, a 26-year-old Tunisian street vendor named Mohamed Bouazizi was infuriated by bureaucrats who refused to give him a peddler's permit.

[Don't Forget Middle East Madness:](#) Victor Davis Hanson, *National Review*, Nov. 7, 2017 — There is currently a real Asian pivot as the president completes one of the longest presidential tours of Asia in memory.

[As Saudi Arabia Reels, the Middle East Will Only Get Worse:](#) Dr. James M. Dorsey, *BESA*, November 10, 2017—As Saudi Arabia reels from Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman's frontal assault on the kingdom's elite, indications are that the Saudi-Iranian proxy war is heating up.

[The U.S. Middle East Peace Plan?:](#) Bassam Tawil, *Gatestone Institute*, Nov. 13, 2017— Who said that Palestinians have no respect for Saudi Arabia and the rest of the Arab countries? They do.

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[The Real Arab Spring:](#) Sohrab Ahmari, *Commentary*, Nov. 6, 2017

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A NEW POLITICS EMERGES IN MIDDLE EAST.

IT DOESN'T INVOLVE DEMOCRACY

Robert Fulford

[*National Post*](#), Nov. 10, 2017

On December 17, 2010, a 26-year-old Tunisian street vendor named Mohamed Bouazizi was infuriated by bureaucrats who refused to give him a peddler's permit. When he was slapped by a policewoman while registering his complaint, he was so humiliated that he set himself on fire. That act became a catalyst for the demonstrations known as the Arab Spring.

His self-immolation set off violent mobs across Tunisia so intense and so menacing that President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali stepped down after 23 years in power and left with his family for Saudi Arabia. Bouazizi spent 18 comatose days in the hospital and then died. About 5,000 people followed his funeral procession as news of his suicide swept quickly across the Arab world. He turned into an international hero. A Tunisian professor declared that Bouazizi "changed the course of Arab political history," with a "breakthrough in the fight against autocracy." Tunisia put his picture on a postage stamp. Two Tunisian directors promised to make a movie about him, one of them calling him "a symbol for eternity." *The London Times* named him "person of the year." Paris named a square after him.

Most of the mobs demanded democracy. In the West, they were cheered on by the media. It was still the era when President George W. Bush expressed the belief that everyone in the world wanted to live in a democracy. Many westerners (I was typical) accepted that, if the mobs demanded democracy, they probably wanted democracy. We talked about how it would be managed. In truth, the Arabs had little experience of democracy, no tradition of it and no way to bring it about. What they wanted, more likely, was freedom from oppression.

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As a result, the Arab world today remains politically and intellectually constricted. Despots are still in charge. In Egypt especially, the goals of the Arab Spring now look pathetic. In April 2011, as Egypt prepared for an experiment with democracy, the Muslim Brotherhood launched a political party, Freedom and Justice, to contest the 2012 presidential election. Its candidate, Mohamed Morsi, became Egypt's first democratically elected president, an apparent triumph for freedom. But a year later, when the Muslim Brotherhood grew spectacularly unpopular, the military under Abdel Fatah al-Sissi overturned it and installed a regime at least as repressive and violent as the pre-Arab Spring dictatorship of Hosni Mubarak. The crowds shouting for democracy in Tahrir Square accomplished precisely the opposite of their demands. The Muslim Brotherhood has since been identified as a terrorist group by Russia, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

Yemen and Libya turned into failed states; ISIL chose Libya as an attractive location for one of its wings. Morocco and Jordan managed to deflect the demands of the mobs. Tunisia, where it all began with Bouazizi, emerged as the one partial success of the Arab Spring. Tunisians uniquely knew enough to bargain their way to political compromise. They drafted a new constitution, determining how to rotate power. But their government faces fresh reversals through terrorism that cripples their economy.

This year, a new pattern is emerging in the Middle East. Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman (often referred to as MBS), the designated Saudi king-to-be, has begun a broad anti-corruption campaign. His officials have detained hundreds of leaders in government and big business, many of them the royal relatives of MBS. This campaign may be MBS' way of consolidating and defining power, but it may also be a way of making progress by cutting down the endemic corruption of the oil kingdoms. It is said that MBS recently encouraged the King's decision to break tradition by allowing women to drive cars. That change may be the first step in the liberation of women, or merely a fresh way of making Saudi Arabia seem relatively attractive to foreigners. Possibly it signals an attempt to turn a hidebound kingdom into a fledging modern state.

At the same time, the Saudis have taken an aggressive stand against Iran and its puppet Lebanon. For a long time, Iran has been free to establish itself through its terrorist connections as a leading power in the region. Hezbollah, the Iran-supported Shi'a Islamist terror faction, is so well situated in Lebanon that it has representatives in the national parliament and enough seats in the cabinet to veto any legislation. The Saudis have mainly ignored Iran's progress, but now it seems that they have recognized this threat and decided to oppose it. MBS' vision of reform doesn't involve democracy. But it offers populism, nationalism and realism. As Sohrab Ahmari wrote this week in Commentary magazine, Arab society isn't configured to democracy as the West understands it. The Arab Spring has yielded Islamism, failed states and civil war. Perhaps MBS is breaking free of past failures and charting a new route to reform and prosperity for the Saudis and their region.

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DON'T FORGET MIDDLE EAST MADNESS

Victor Davis Hanson

[National Review](#), Nov. 7, 2017

There is currently a real Asian pivot as the president completes one of the longest presidential tours of Asia in memory. Three carrier battle groups are in the West Pacific...In contrast, Americans lately have gladly almost forgotten about the Middle East, except for occasional updates on the systematic destruction of the once "jayvee" ISIS. They are certainly relieved that Fallujah is no longer in the news much. It is a relief that no one catches any more *Al Jazeera* clips of ISIS cowards burning, drowning, decapitating, blowing up, and hanging women and children. More likely, ISIS jihadists are bedraggled, soiled, and drifting about asking for clemency from their betters...

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There are no more U.S. troops in a supposedly “sovereign, stable, and self-reliant Iraq” — and hardly an Iraq at all. So much for Vice President Joe Biden’s pre-pullout boast that a post-surge, consensual Iraqi government was likely to be the Obama administration’s “greatest achievement”. After Barack Obama was embarrassed by his faux-red-line in Syria, then-secretary of state John Kerry sought to address a loss of face by fobbing off the region to the Russians after their 40-year ostracism from the Middle East. The last few years, Vladimir Putin seems more the arbiter of peace and war than does an American president.

Few liberals now defend the Obama-Clinton-Rice-Power bombing of Libya and the mess that followed. After Benghazi and the failed-state terrorist sanctuaries, who could? As for Egypt, the Obama administration managed to be despised all at once by the old Mubarak kleptocracy, by the administration’s once-favored Muslim Brotherhood “one-election, one time” cabal led by USC grad Mohamed Morsi, and by the junta of General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. Who can keep track?

Until recently America apparently favored an ascendant Iran-Shiite-Hezbollah-Assad nexus over the ossified and estranged Sunni Gulf monarchies. The prior administration pushed through the Iran deal that sent billions of dollars into the Iranian terrorist pipeline and eventually will guarantee an Iranian bomb — on the promise that the bomb would come later rather than sooner. Who can count all the masked side deals, hidden cash supplements, and unspoken corollaries in the agreement? The U.S. is now exporting vast amounts of oil, coal, and natural gas, and is the world’s largest producer of fossil-fuel energy. It eventually will have little need for Middle East energy, although it is still worried that belligerents do. We rarely hear much anymore of the old petrodollar stories about revolving-door government officials and lobbyists selling out to Saudi interests.

Iran now has the cash to buy almost all the weapons it needs. With ISIS gone, the Kurds increasingly isolated, and the U.S. not likely to remain much longer in the region after the demise of ISIS, Iran will finish building its pathway to the

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Mediterranean. There will be lots of jihadists, terrorists, and insurgents out of work and eager to fight Israel, much as they did in 2006. Eleven years is a long time without a major Israeli-Islamic Arab war — and so plenty of time for a foolish new generation of Islamists to believe that they can destroy the IDF.

So this much-needed respite from the Middle East madness may be coming to a close. An empowered Iran is getting richer, and it is watching closely how nuclear North Korea fares in its threats to the U.S. and its allies. Hezbollah, the Assad government, and Iran are waging a veritable proxy war against Saudi Arabia. Lebanon may soon become the Lebanon battleground of the 1970s and 1980s again.

Which brings us to Israel, out late, great — but most dependable — ally. Over the last eight years, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was demonized by the Obama administration to the point that Democratic operatives interfered in a foreign election in hopes of defeating Netanyahu at the polls. Israel's strategic worries were often written off as neuroses by the U.S. security apparatus. Yet Israel still quietly rises to growing existential threats as if they were the same old, same old "death to Israel" boilerplate. While we fight over the cost, efficacy, symbolism, and ethics of building a wall along our southern border, Israel long ago shrugged and simply built a 440-mile barrier to fence out terrorists. It worked quite well and stopped most suicide bombing. When the U.N., the EU, and the International Court of Justice condemned Israel for doing what now much of Eastern Europe and the Gulf monarchies routinely do to protect their borders, Israel just shrugged.

When North Korea, as is its weekly habit, threatens to blow up Seoul with "tens of thousands of guns," South Korea and the United States all but declare that they are strategically emasculated by the specter of 250 square miles of Seoul instantly vaporized — as if that were a given. Yet when Iran, Hezbollah, and Hamas brag that they can collectively send more than 200,000 rockets and missiles of various calibers and payloads into Israeli cities (Israel's entire population is a third of Seoul's), Israel shrugged. It apparently remembers that in 2006 its enemies launched more than 4,000 rockets into Israeli cities, killed about 50 people, and

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hardly prevented Israel from retaliating as it saw fit.

If facing Armageddon, Israel is apparently determined to take out quite a large portion of the radical Middle East with it. When North Korea promises that a nuclear-tipped missile will land on the West Coast, we rightly go into near panic. When Iran promises that very shortly it will have the ability to do the same and wipe out the “one-bomb-state” of Israel, Israel shrugs. If facing Armageddon, it is apparently determined to take out quite a large portion of the radical Middle East with it — if anyone would be so foolish as to test whether Israel, as reputed, really has an arsenal of 100 to 200 nukes.

In any future war, the Sunni “moderates” may be a bit more eager to press Israel to hit the Iranian Shiite forces harder. And they may be a bit more restrained in their loud but empty Pan-Islamic denunciations of “Zionist aggressions” against non-Sunni Muslims whom they despise and fear more than they do Israel. For all its bluster, Iran might be a bit more careful, given that no one quite knows what Donald Trump will do, though they can see he likes Israel a lot more than Barack Obama did — and radical Islamists a lot less. Russia is now right in the way of a new version of the 2006 battleground, but Putin’s method seems to back likely winners if it does not too ostentatiously erode Russian credibility...

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AS SAUDI ARABIA REELS, THE MIDDLE EAST WILL ONLY GET WORSE

Dr. James M. Dorsey

[BESA](#), Nov. 10, 2017

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As Saudi Arabia reels from Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman's frontal assault on the kingdom's elite, indications are that the Saudi-Iranian proxy war is heating up. The arrests occurred as Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri resigned in what many saw as a Saudi-engineered move aimed at stymying Lebanon's powerful, pro-Iranian Hezbollah militias. Saudi defenses also intercepted a ballistic missile attack by Iranian-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen.

A Saudi-backed military alliance that includes the UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain, Egypt, and Sudan appeared to open the door for a more direct confrontation with Iran when it denounced the missile strike as "a blatant and direct military aggression by the Iranian regime, which may amount to an act of war against Saudi Arabia." "Saudi Arabia also has a right to respond to Iran at the appropriate time and manner, supported by international law and in accordance with its inherent right to defend its territory, its people, and its interests protected by all international conventions," the alliance said in a statement.

Aware that a military confrontation with Iran could prove disastrous, Saudi Arabia signaled that it is more likely to strike at Iranian proxies. In response to the missile attack, it imposed a temporary air, land, and sea embargo on Yemen, a country that is struggling with a humanitarian catastrophe as a result of the kingdom-led two-and-one-half-year military intervention. Some 10,000 people have been killed in the war, which, according to the UN, has left half a million Yemenis infected with cholera and some seven million on the brink of famine in the Arab world's poorest nation.

Yemen is not, however, the only place that is likely to see escalation because of increasing Saudi-Iranian tensions. Lebanon, for example, is a collection of religious and ethnic minorities that has yet to cement an overriding national identity - but that has miraculously maintained stability despite the Syrian civil war on its doorstep and a massive influx of refugees. Following Hariri's resignation, Lebanon is teetering. While there is only circumstantial evidence for Saudi Arabia's role in

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persuading Hariri, who said he feared for his life amid rumors of a foiled assassination attempt, to resign, he was unequivocal in towing the Saudi line in his announcement.

Iran, Hariri said, “has a desire to destroy the Arab world and has boasted of its control of the decisions in all the Arab capitals. Hezbollah imposed a reality in Lebanon through force of arms, and their intervention causes us big problems with all our Arab allies.” The impression of Saudi influence was fueled by the fact that Hariri made his announcement not on his *Future TV* network but in the Saudi capital of Riyadh, on the kingdom’s *Al Arabiya* station. Ironically, the owner of *Al Arabiya*, Waleed bin Ibrahim al-Ibrahim, was among the businessmen detained on the instructions of Prince Muhammad. Beyond holding dual Lebanese-Saudi citizenship, Hariri long headed Saudi Oger, a conglomerate owned by his family. Saudi Oger went bankrupt earlier this year, becoming one of the first victims of the economic downturn in the kingdom as a result of decreased oil revenues.

While there is little doubt that Saudi Arabia is seeking to weaken Hezbollah’s strong position in Lebanon, it was not clear whether that was sole reason for Saudi enthusiasm about Hariri’s resignation. The former prime minister was widely seen as Lebanon’s most accommodating Sunni Muslim politician, willing to acknowledge that Hezbollah, believed by many to be responsible for the 2005 killing of his father, Rafik Hariri, was a part of the country’s political infrastructure. By throwing a monkey wrench into Lebanese politics, Hariri has opened the door to Saudi attempts to generate pressure on Hezbollah to choose between being a political party that is subject to government decisions, like not interfering in the Syrian war, or an Iranian proxy that engages in regional conflicts. The problem is that due to the weakness of the Lebanese state and military, past attempts to blunt Hezbollah’s fangs have failed...

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THE U.S. MIDDLE EAST PEACE PLAN?

Bassam Tawil

[Gatestone Institute](#), Nov. 13, 2017

Who said that Palestinians have no respect for Saudi Arabia and the rest of the Arab countries? They do. Palestinians have respect for the money of their Arab brethren. The respect they lack is for the heads of the Arab states, and the regimes and royal families there. It is important to take this into consideration in light of the growing talk about Saudi Arabia's effort to help the Trump Administration market a comprehensive peace plan for the Middle East, the details of which remain intriguingly mysterious.

Last week, the Saudis unexpectedly summoned Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas to Riyadh for talks on Trump's "ultimate solution" for the Israeli-Arab conflict, reportedly being promoted by Jared Kushner. According to unconfirmed reports, the Saudis pressured Abbas to endorse the Trump Administration's "peace plan." Abbas was reportedly told that he had no choice but to accept the plan or resign. At this stage, it remains unclear how Abbas responded to the Saudi "ultimatum." Last week, the Saudis unexpectedly summoned Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas to Riyadh for talks on Trump's "ultimate solution" for the Israeli-Arab conflict. Abbas was reportedly told that he had no choice but to accept the plan or resign.

If true, the Saudi "ultimatum" to Abbas is tantamount to asking him to sign his death warrant. Abbas cannot afford to be seen by his people as being in collusion with an American "peace plan" that does not comply completely with their demands. Abbas has repeatedly made it clear that he will not accept anything less than a sovereign Palestinian state on all the pre-1967 lands, including east

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Jerusalem. He has also emphasized that the Palestinians will never give up the "right of return" for millions of "refugees" to their former homes inside Israel. Moreover, Abbas has clarified that the Palestinians will not accept the presence of any Israeli in their future Palestinian state.

Abbas has done his dirty work well. He knows that he cannot come back to his people with anything less than what he promised them. He knows that his people have been radicalized to the point that they will not agree to any concessions or compromise with Israel. And who is responsible for this radicalization? Abbas and other Palestinian leaders, who continue unendingly to tell their people through the media, discourse and mosques that any concession to Israel constitutes treason, pure and simple. So it would be naïve to think that Saudi Arabia or any other Arab country would be able to strong-arm any Palestinian leader to accept a "peace plan" that requires the Palestinians to make concessions to Israel. Abbas may have much respect for the ambitious and savvy young crown prince of Saudi Arabia, Mohammed bin Salman. This respect, however, certainly stops at the border of the political suicide - and extreme personal risk — from Abbas's point of view.

Abbas is now caught between two choices, both disastrous: On the one hand, he needs the political backing of his Arab brothers. This is the most he can expect from the Arab countries, most of whom do not give the Palestinians a penny. It is worth noting that, by and large, the Arab countries discarded the Palestinians after the PLO and Yasser Arafat openly supported Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. Kuwait was one of several Gulf countries that used to provide the Palestinians with billions of dollars a year. No more. Since then, the Palestinians have been almost entirely dependent on American and European financial aid. It is safe to assume, then, that the US and EU have more leverage with the Palestinians than most Arab countries.

Nevertheless, no American or European on the face of this Earth could force a Palestinian leader to sign a peace treaty with Israel that would be rejected by an overwhelming majority of his people. Trump's "ultimate solution" may result in some Arab countries signing peace treaties with Israel. These countries anyway

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have no real conflict with Israel. Why should there not be peace between Israel and Kuwait? Why should there not be peace between Israel and Oman? Do any of the Arab countries have a territorial dispute with Israel? The only "problem" the Arab countries have with Israel is the one concerning the Palestinians...

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On Topic Links

[The Real Arab Spring](#): Sohrab Ahmari, *Commentary*, Nov. 6, 2017—Around this time of the year in 2010, a Tunisian fruit vendor's self-immolation triggered a tsunami of uprisings that soon engulfed much of the Middle East and North Africa. The results were catastrophic.

[Trump Team Begins Drafting Middle East Peace Plan](#): Peter Baker, *New York Times*, Nov. 11, 2017—President Trump and his advisers have begun developing their own concrete blueprint to end the decades-old conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, a plan intended to go beyond previous frameworks offered by the American government in pursuit of what the president calls "the ultimate deal."

[Why There Is No Peace in the Middle East](#): Philip Carl Salzman, *Gatestone Institute*, Oct. 14, 2017—Living as an anthropologist in a herding camp of the Yarahmadzai tribe of nomadic pastoralists in the deserts of Iranian Baluchistan clarified some of the inhibitions to peace in the Middle East. What one sees is strong, kin-based, group loyalty defense and solidarity, and the political opposition of lineages, whether large or small. This raised the question how unity and peace could arrive in a system based on opposition.

[The Iran-Hamas-Hezbollah Connection](#): Khaled Abu Toameh, *Gatestone Institute*, Nov. 8, 2017—The Lebanese Prime Minister, Saad Hariri, has had enough. Last

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week, Iran finalized its takeover of Lebanon when Hariri resigned, and reportedly fled to Saudi Arabia. Hariri, denouncing Hezbollah and its Iranian backers, said he feared for his life. Hariri has good reason to be afraid of Hezbollah, the powerful Shia terror group and Iranian proxy that effectively controls Lebanon.

[Turks, Arabs Welcomed the Balfour Declaration](#): Efraim Karsh, *Middle East Quarterly*, Winter 2018—"100 years have passed since the notorious Balfour Declaration, by which Britain gave, without any right, authority or consent from anyone, the land of Palestine to another people. This paved the road for the Nakba of Palestinian people and their dispossession and displacement from their land."