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SAUDI ARABIA AND ISRAEL ARE IN THE SAME PREDICAMENT

Yoni Ben Menachem

[JCPA](#), July 20, 2015

In the wake of the nuclear agreement between Iran and the world powers, Israel's and Saudi Arabia's respective situations have certain features in common. That much is evident from the phone calls President Obama chose to make immediately after the agreement was signed. He opted to call Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz, seeking to allay their concerns and promise them that the United States would ensure the their countries' security.

For the Gulf States, the agreement evoked great apprehension. True, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates praised the deal, calling it a "historic agreement that could mean opening a new chapter in regional relations." What truly reflects the sentiments of the Gulf States, however, is Saudi Arabia's deafening silence. A senior Saudi source, responding to the agreement in a briefing to CNN, used exactly the same language as Netanyahu: "The Obama administration has made a historic mistake."

Worth noting is an article that Prince Bandar bin Sultan bin Abdulaziz published on the Elaph website on July 15. Prince Bandar served as head of Saudi intelligence and as the Saudi ambassador in Washington from 1981 to 2005. In the article,

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Prince Bandar rejects the comparison between the nuclear agreement with Iran and the one that President Clinton reached with North Korea. “The facts,” he writes, “are bitter and cannot be ignored.” He quotes former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger’s remark that “America’s enemies should fear America, but America’s friends should fear America more.”

Yesterday, Saudis quoted statements from Iranian sources about the mood that prevailed among the top Iranian leadership during the nuclear talks - and about the squandering of a great opportunity by the U.S.-led world powers. The Iranian sources said that the world powers could have achieved a much better agreement than they did; the Iranian leadership was even prepared to give up the nuclear program altogether because of the severe economic hardships that were paralyzing the economy and endangering the regime’s stability. The Western representatives, however, blinked first and lost the chance to get a good agreement.

Saudi Arabia, which currently serves in the role of “policeman of the Gulf”, has spearheaded the effort to counter Iranian expansion, notably in the military campaign it is conducting against the (Shiite) Houthi rebels in Yemen. The Saudi’s main concern is that the nuclear agreement will abet Iran’s efforts to bolster its influence in the Middle East and sow further instability in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen.

Saudi Arabia is already preparing for eventualities. It has purchased 18 nuclear reactors from Russia, and this year it will increase its weapons purchases worldwide by over 50 percent. It is also reportedly considering purchasing a ready-made nuclear bomb from Pakistan and, thereby, become a nuclear state immediately. During the ten-year period of the agreement with Iran, the Saudi leadership, with King Salman at the helm, does not rule out pursuing nuclear projects along with other Gulf States. These would create a new reality of deterrence toward Iran akin to the nuclear balance of terror that now exists between India and Pakistan.

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Saudi Arabia is keenly disappointed with the way the Obama administration conducted the talks with Iran. This was particularly evident two months ago when King Salman shunned President Obama's summit meeting with Gulf State leaders at Camp David.

The Saudis' conclusion is that the country cannot rely on the United States to fight its battles. It stands alone against Iran, and will now have to formulate a new strategy toward the Iranian danger. Saudi Arabia is the leader of the Sunni axis, and Shiite Iran's hatred of Saudi Arabia is no less than the Shiite state's visceral hatred of Israel. However, Israel is much stronger than Saudi Arabia and can successfully face the Iranian threats.

Iran's intentions after the signing of the agreement will quickly become clear. The first litmus test will be its behavior toward the crisis in Yemen. If Iran prods the Houthi rebels to reach a political settlement with the "legal" government of the country, it will indicate that Iran is on the way to reconciling with its Saudi-led neighbors in the Gulf.

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IN HAMAS'S EMBRACE OF SUNNI SAUDI ARABIA, A SLAP TO IRAN

Elhanan Miller

[Times of Israel](#), July 21, 2015

After years of alignment with Shiite Iran and its Arab allies, the Palestinian Hamas

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group is bidding for Sunni patronage from Saudi Arabia in a deal that will become a geostrategic orientation. A high-level Hamas delegation headed by the group's politburo chief, Khaled Mashaal, visited Riyadh last Friday to meet with King Salman, Crown Prince Muhammad bin Nayef, and a host of Saudi officials. The makeup of Hamas's team was noteworthy, as it included Mashaal's deputy, Moussa Abu Marzouk, and Saleh al-Arouri, the movement's Turkey-based official suspected of guiding recently exposed terror cells in the West Bank, as well as the abduction-killing of three Israeli teenagers last summer. Arab media rushed to note that it was the first such meeting in over three years.

The Hamas daily *al-Resalah* cleared some of the fog surrounding the visit on Sunday, reporting that Saudi King Salman had requested that Hamas and Fatah empower him to replace Egypt as mediator in the reconciliation efforts between the two groups. Mashaal, the report said, came to Riyadh carrying a written "letter of empowerment" for Salman, while Fatah leader and PA President Mahmoud Abbas refused to do so.

The sudden, overt rapprochement between revolutionary Hamas and conservative Saudi Arabia — both followers of Sunni Islam — is unsurprising given the gradual decline in Hamas's relations with Iran in recent years. It is not just money that Hamas is after (although given its financial pitfalls, some cash certainly couldn't hurt), but more importantly, a new patron in a region increasingly defined by its sectarian divides.

As Gaza-based Hamas leader Khalil Haya appealed to Muslim and Arab states on Monday night for money and arms "with no political price," Abu Marzouk struggled to explain that his movement's trip to Saudi Arabia was not intended as a snub to Iran. "Hamas's compass will remain directed to Jerusalem, with the liberation of Palestine the basis of its strategy," he wrote on Facebook. "We will maintain relations with everyone." The United States, Abu Marzouk continued, is currently in the process of reevaluating its old alliances in the region, angering some while creating new opportunities for others. "Hamas remains the exception to this policy. It [the US] has maintained its animosity to the movement," he wrote.

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Hamas’s public appeal for American favor does not please Iran, Hamas’s former benefactor. The Islamic Republic would not accept Abu Marzouk’s attempt to pacify everyone, indicating that Hamas’s shift toward Saudi Arabia means a cut with Iran. “ Hamas takes a step toward Riyadh and two steps away from Tehran,” read the headline of pro-Hezbollah — and, by extension, pro-Iran — Lebanese daily *al-Akhbar* on Sunday.

After the visit, which ended on Saturday, Iran’s semi-official Fars news agency reported that the Saudi king had asked Mashaal to send hundreds of trained Hamas gunmen to Yemen to fight alongside the Saudi army against the Houthi separatists, who are backed by Iran. Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri rushed to deny the Iranian report as “pure lies.” Other Iranian news outlets, both liberal and conservative, launched a scathing attack on Hamas. An article in reformist daily *Ghanoon* on Sunday blasted Khaled Mashaal’s ingratitude toward Iran with the headline “Bank account in Tehran, stronghold in Riyadh.”

The article described the deteriorating relations between Gaza and Tehran, beginning with Hamas’s abandonment of Iran’s Syrian ally Bashar Assad in January 2012. The tensions escalated with Hamas’s reported support for Saudi attacks on Houthi strongholds in Yemen recently.

In the wake of last summer’s war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, Iranian media expressed hope that Hamas would “realize its mistake” in supporting the Sunni axis against Iran, noted Raz Zimmt, an expert in Iranian politics at Tel Aviv University and the Forum for Regional Thinking. “ Hamas’s alliance with Saudi Arabia during the war in Yemen was another slap in the face for Iran, which realized that Hamas’s political leadership prefers the Saudi axis to the Iranian one,” Zimmt told *The Times of Israel* Tuesday.

Despite the crisis, Zimmt believes that Iran and Hamas cannot completely sever

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[-saudis-hamas-talk-and-israel-riyadh-find-common-enemy-](#) ties. Hamas's armed wing continues to demand military aid that Saudi Arabia will never provide, while Iran will always require a significant Palestinian partner. "I believe there's deep disagreement within Hamas whether to prefer Iran or Saudi Arabia, with the political leadership leaning toward Saudi Arabia and the military leadership toward Iran," he said. "For Iran, there aren't too many alternatives. If they want to influence the domestic [Palestinian] political arena, they can only do it through Hamas. Islamic Jihad just isn't a significant player."

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THE US COUNTERINSURGENCY STRATEGY IN YEMEN

Stephanie Baric

[Jerusalem Post](#), July 14, 2015

For decades, Yemen has been on the brink of economic and political collapse. Today, with no functioning government, a severely crippled economy and a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran, Yemen is a failed state. Since 9/11, US foreign policy in Yemen has focused exclusively on eradicating the threat of al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), one of the deadliest branches of the terrorist organization. The result? The beleaguered country increasingly resembles Somalia, including internal armed conflicts among rival factions and a major humanitarian crisis.

Four years earlier, millions of Yemenis took to the streets of major cities throughout the country demanding an end to poverty, protesting political repression, the neglect of public services, and social exclusion. Led by the country's most disenfranchised groups, women and youth, the uprising resulted in

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~~the overthrow of president Ali Abdullah Saleh, a dictator who during his 33-year rule had amassed billions of dollars in wealth skimmed from Yemen's oil revenues while the majority of Yemenis continued to live in abject poverty.~~

As post-revolution Yemen continued to face daunting challenges such as a separatist movement in the south, the expansion of AQAP within its borders and the decade-long Houthi insurgency, there were promising developments such as the completion of the National Dialogue Conference with recommendations for reforming state institutions and addressing social justice and policy issues. Even though there remained questions about state structure and the future status of southern Yemen, the National Dialogue marked a critical step for the fledgling democracy.

Despite the positive changes in Yemen, the US continued implementing the counterinsurgency (COIN) strategy. The American government spent millions of dollars in efforts to bolster the credibility of the government of Yemen, beginning in 2010 with president Saleh, despite his corrupt and despotic rule, and train Yemeni troops to capture and kill AQAP militants while the US carried out drone attacks. There was simply no way to counter insurgents in Yemen based on the COIN model with a government that lacked legitimacy and was not supported by the majority of citizens.

Even following the revolution when Yemen embraced democracy, rather than support the difficult transition the COIN model proved ineffective in eradicating AQAP and may have created an additional burden for a government struggling with a myriad of economic, political and social issues. But the failure of the COIN strategy in Yemen should have not have come as a surprise given its negligible results in Iraq and Afghanistan. Good governance simply cannot be achieved within 24 months, which was the timeframe laid out in the COIN strategy in Yemen.

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When the Houthis carried out a coup d'état in January, the US stood by as Saudi Arabia, a country ruled by an autocratic regime with a dismal human rights record and very little interest in seeing democracy flourish in the region, launched in late March what has proven to be a disastrous air war that has killed more than 3,000 civilians. The Saudi-led bombing campaign has done little to weaken the Houthis and is instead creating a severe humanitarian crisis with millions of Yemenis facing food insecurity and displacement. AQAP has taken advantage of the security vacuum, capturing towns, freeing jailed members and looting banks.

Throughout the Middle East, the US missed the opportunity during the Arab Spring to champion human rights and support reform based on the democratic aspirations of the people, which is unfortunate given that it is exactly the kind of counter narrative the region needs to stop the growing influence of violent extremism and terrorism.

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"SOMETHING RADICALLY NEW" IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Paul Merkley

[Think-Israel](#), April 5, 2015

A few days ago, the potentates who rule the lives of the people of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Jordan, Morocco, Egypt and Pakistan entered into a pact to eliminate by force the Houthi regime which has been governing most of Yemen — at least, to the extent that anybody has ever governed this lawless corner of Arabia — since the end of last year. The Saudi-led coalition has a so-far-silent partner in the United States, which is assisting with intelligence and logistics.

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Performance on behalf of citizens has never mattered much in politics of the Arabian Peninsula. According to the impartial judgment of Transparency International in 2009, the Republic of Yemen under Ali Abdullah Saleh, its dictator/President since 1990, ranked 164 out of 182 countries surveyed for degree of honesty in government. What did matter was that this out-and-out kleptocracy served the interests of the neighboring Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which kept Yemen afloat through great gifts of money made directly to the chiefs of the major tribes—together with other great gifts of money that kept the religious and educational institutions equipped to inculcate the Wahhabi vision of Islamic society and government.

Saleh was forced out of his palace in March, 2011, the early days of the Arab Spring. The uprising was initially about unemployment, economic conditions, and corruption, as well as against the government's proposals to modify the constitution so that Saleh's son could inherit the Presidency. What has gone on since then is so chaotic that it cannot be made to fit anybody's definition of a civil war. On 23 November 2011, Saleh flew to Riyadh, capital of Saudi Arabia, to sign on to a plan under which his office would be transferred to his deputy, Vice President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi. Predictably, the dictator soon returned to Yemen and has spent his best energies ever since trying to claw back his former powers.

Late last year (2014) military units following the leadership of Abdul Malik al-Houthi, leader of the most disciplined of the tribal gangs that rule most people's lives in Yemen, decided that the time had come to punish all the politicians for their persecution of the Shia minority — to which they belong. Houthi forces suddenly took control of the capital, even shelling the President Hadi's private residence and placing him under house arrest, until the whole government resigned in January 2015; thereupon, the Houthis dissolved parliament and devolved all power upon a Revolutionary Committee. At this point, ex-President Saleh attached his campaign for restoration to the Presidency to the Houthi side. The latest bulletin regarding Saleh is that he was flown out of Yemen's capital Sanaa on board a Russian aircraft sent there for the purpose of evacuating

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The Shiite Houthis look for spiritual, economic, military and political guidance to Iran, a majority Shiite nation. Through its support of the Houthis, Iran seeks to start up inside Yemen a civil war that will spill over into Saudi Arabia and become another theatre in the war between Shia and Sunni alongside the war in Iraq, Syria and Bahrain. (See, "Iranian ship unloads 185 tons of weapons for Houthis at Saleef Port, wnbglsh.alarabiya.net, March 23.) Iran has begun calling upon the Houthis to strike against government facilities, oil tankers, industries inside Saudi Arabia and against Saudi vessels and facilities in the Strait of Hormuz — and also to attack other Sunni regimes and assets in Iraq, Syria, Bahrain. [Note: since this paper was published, President Hodi walked away from the job and Isis took over Sana'a. At this point, like ancient Gaul, all Yemen is divided into three parts, ASAQ, Houthi and ISIS.-bsl]

As usual, Daniel Pipes of the Middle East Forum (www.danielpipes.org) is ahead of the pack in discerning the broad, long-term significance of what is happening here. Pipes writes: Through Israel's early decades, Arabs dreamt of uniting militarily against it but the realities of infighting and rivalries smashed every such hope. Even on the three occasions (1948-49, 1967, 1973) when they did join forces, they did so at cross purposes and ineffectively. How striking, then that finally they should coalesce not against Israel but against Iran. This implicitly points to their understanding that the Islamic Republic of Iran poses a real threat, whereas anti-Zionism amounts to mere indulgence ... It also points to panic and the need to take action resulting from a stark American retreat. (Daniel Pipes, " Why Yemen Matters," *Washington Times*, March 28, 2015.)

This political turn-around reflects the re-examination by all the parties of all of their priorities. Of perhaps great consequence to all of us —it exposes a willingness by these Muslim powers to review in their hearts and minds the relative threat to their lives and their values of the continued existence of the Jewish state.

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Needless to say, no hint of such thinking appears in the public utterances of these worthy leaders. The official line for now and undoubtedly to the end of time is that the existence of the Zionist Entity is the cause of all unhappiness in the Arab world. But until this moment, it had equally been a cardinal point of Arab politics that war to the death against the Jewish state is the cause that Allah gave to the Arab nation as its one sure unifying principle. Without saying so out loud — the Sunni kingdoms have moved that cornerstone to the side.

Each of the potentates heading up the two camps in this war — the King of Saudi Arabia and the Ayatollah of the Islamic Republic of Iran — regards the other as having no claim to the name of Muslim. On the website of MEMRI (Middle East Media Research Institute, memri@m.emri.com), we can hear Senior Iranian Ayatollahs denouncing the Saudi regime before their fanatical audiences as "a *takfiri* [that is, heretic, gang] ... acting against Islam and the Muslims, in cooperation with the U.S., Israel and Zion." Long before the crisis caused by the Houthi uprising and the Saudi King's response to it, the official voice of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards, Iran's military elite, was crying out publicly for "a decisive and crushing response [towards King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia].. [and] operations ... that should start on the street leading to King Abdullah's palace in Riyadh... If Saudi Arabia continues to equip and arm the terrorists of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq (ISIS) and several other groups like Ansar Al-Sunna, every operation that the Shi-ites will carry out against Saudi facilities and centers will be legitimate."

It is important to grasp that vitriolic hatred is not a monopoly of the Muslim princes. It draws upon, and in turn feeds, a deep toxic contempt that all Shias everywhere have for all Sunnis everywhere. [I have developed this theme at greater length in two essays published on www.thebayviewreview.com): "Civil War Has Begun in the Heartland of Islam: The Shia /Sunni Feud," April 11, 2014; and "A Toxic Family Quarrel," May 24, 2014.] A recent BBC News Documentary, "Freedom to Broadcast Hate," gives us access to this increasingly mad world of Shia versus Sunni. From mosques and before great outdoor crowds we hear, via satellite television and internet websites, Sunni preachers declaiming coldly against Shias: "Their heads should be smashed as the head of a snake... Shia is a cancer

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attacking the Muslim religion." From the Shia preachers we hear: We do not believe a Sunni will be considered a Muslim in the afterlife.... Shia Islam is the only Islam." Sunni clerics weep as they call upon Allah to "punish the Shia... [to] freeze the blood in their veins ... They have insulted the wives of the Prophet.... Shi'ism is not true Islam. It is worse than cancer."...

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[Gulf Arab Power UAE Chides EU Over Opening to Iran: William Maclean, Reuters, July 29, 2015](#) —Gulf Arab power the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on Wednesday criticized the European Union for seeking Iranian cooperation in stabilizing the region, saying that an "aggressive" Tehran was helping to polarize the countries there.

[Middle East Allies See Heightened Peril in Newly Empowered Tehran: Matthew Rosenberg & Ben Hubbard, New York Times, July 14, 2015](#)—Even in the final months of talks to peacefully resolve the conflict over Iran's nuclear program, events across the Middle East showcased the acrimony between Washington and Tehran.

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[In Yemen's Grinding War, if the Bombs Don't Get You, the Water Shortages Will](#)

[Ali al-Mujahed & Hugh Naylor, *Jerusalem Post*, July 23, 2015](#)—For months, citizens of this war-torn country have been terrorized by bomb explosions and mortar attacks. Now another threat is growing, which could be just as deadly.