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**IRAN AND SAUDI ARABIA**

*Lt. Col. (ret.) Michael Segall*

*[JCPA](#), November 9, 2017*

**Iran and Saudi Arabia, on the two sides of the Sunni-Shiite fault line, are trying to gain influence in reshaping the Middle East. They are ratcheting up the war between them in their secondary arenas of conflict, namely Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen. Iran has also warned that its Houthi allies in Yemen will launch missiles at the United Arab Emirates because of its involvement, alongside the Saudi Arabian coalition, in the ongoing conflict in Yemen.**

**The erstwhile Lebanese prime minister, Saad Hariri, who resigned and took refuge in Saudi Arabia, accused Iran of trying to assassinate him. (In 2005, working with Hizbullah and Syria, Iran assassinated his father, Rafik Hariri). Iran today is indeed working, through Hizbullah, to consolidate its grip on Lebanon. It hastened to deny Hariri's accusation and claimed his resignation was nothing but a "plot" to raise the tension in the region. Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's adviser, Hussein Sheikh al-Islam, who served as ambassador to Syria, charged that the United States and Saudi Arabia were behind the plot.**

**With Hariri's resignation and accusations against Iran, the protracted struggle between the two rival regional powers, Iran and Saudi Arabia, has reached an apex. Both powers are trying, in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, to shape the Middle East in line with their respective worldviews. This struggle has been waged for a long time - since before the Arab Spring - and now extends over all of the Middle East from the Persian Gulf to North Africa.**

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A short time after Hariri arrived in Saudi Arabia and denounced Iranian-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen - who receive military and propaganda support from Iran and Hizbullah - fired a Borkan-2 (Volcano-2) long-range ballistic missile at Riyadh's international airport. Saudi Patriot defense batteries fired, and parts of the missile landed on the outskirts of the airport and caused property damage. Houthi "combat information" claimed the attack and uploaded to its Twitter account a video of the alleged launch. In the background, the launch crew shout "Death to America, Death to Israel, curse upon the Jews, Victory to Islam."

After the firing of the missile, the radical Iranian newspaper *Kayhan*, which is Khamenei's mouthpiece, had a lead headline "Ansar-Allah's missile launch at Riyadh, next target, Dubai." It praised the launch and justified it "in light of the ongoing Saudi aggression in Yemen and their strikes against women and children." *Kayhan* also leveled a direct threat at the United Arab Emirates, which is part of the Saudi coalition in Yemen, saying it is now a target for Houthi missiles. "The Saudi nightmare is coming true, and even the UAE recognizes the fact that the recent threats of Abdulmalik Houthi, leader of the Houthis, to hit the Emirates are being fulfilled. A spokesman for the Houthis said at the end of October 2017 that Abu Dhabi is the main target of their ballistic missiles." *Kayhan* noted that not only the missiles' range but also their accuracy is improving. Hence the UAE's rulers must

"... recognize the new reality and flee from Yemen.... They must understand that their turn has come and they must pay the price for their crimes in Yemen.... Not only is Saudi Arabia no longer safe but the same is true of Dubai and Abu Dhabi, which, though they have not been hit [by missiles] so far, can no longer be considered a safe location, not for the Western capitalists either.... From now Ansarallah [the Houthis] will mark targets for long-range missiles in Riyadh, Jeddah, Ta'if, [cities in Saudi Arabia] or perhaps the port of Dubai..."

Since the Houthi ballistic missile attack, the Saudi-led coalition has tightened the siege of Houthi-held areas in Yemen, blocking even UN-supervised relief supplies, claiming that its action was aimed at preventing "smuggling of (Iranian) missiles

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and military equipment” to the Houthis. It should be noted that UAE forces are operating mainly in southern Yemen against the Al Qaeda and Islamic State terror organizations and are also training local forces to fight these organizations as well as the Houthi rebels...

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**SAUDI PURGES AND DUTY TO ACT**

*Caroline B. Glick*

[Jerusalem Post](#), Nov. 6, 2017

For 70 years, Saudi Arabia served as the largest and most significant incubator of Sunni jihad. Its Wahhabist Islamic establishment funded radical mosques throughout the world. Saudi princes have supported radical Islamic clerics who have indoctrinated their followers to pursue jihad against the non-Islamic world. Saudi money stands behind most of the radical Islamic groups in the non-Islamic world that have in turn financed terrorist groups like Hamas and al-Qaida and have insulated radical Islam from scrutiny by Western governments and academics. Indeed, Saudi money stands behind the silence of critics of jihadist Islam in universities throughout the Western world.

As Mitchell Bard documented in his 2011 book, *The Arab Lobby*, any power pro-Israel forces in Washington, DC, have developed pales in comparison to the power of Arab forces, led by the Saudi government. Saudi government spending on lobbyists in Washington far outstrips that of any other nation. According to Justice Department disclosures from earlier this year, since 2015, Saudi Arabia vastly

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increased its spending on influence peddling. According to a report by *The Intercept*, "Since 2015, the Kingdom has expanded the number of foreign agents on retainer to 145, up from 25 registered agents during the previous two-year period."

Saudi lobbyists shielded the kingdom from serious criticism after 15 of the 19 September 11 hijackers were shown to be Saudi nationals. They blocked a reconsideration of the US's strategic alliance with Saudi Arabia after the attacks and in subsequent years, even as it was revealed that Princess Haifa, wife of Prince Bandar, the Saudi ambassador to Washington at the time the September 11 attacks occurred, had financially supported two of the hijackers in the months that preceded the attacks.

The US position on Saudi Arabia cooled demonstrably during the Obama administration. This cooling was not due to a newfound concern over Saudi financial support for radical Islam in the US. To the contrary, the Obama administration was friendlier to Islamists than any previous administration. Consider the Obama administration's placement of Muslim Brotherhood supporters in key positions in the federal government. For instance, in 2010, then secretary for Homeland Security Janet Napolitano appointed Mohamed Elibiary to the department's Homeland Security Advisory Board. Elibiary had a long, open record of support both for the Muslim Brotherhood and for the Iranian regime. In his position he was instrumental in purging discussion of Islam and Jihad from instruction materials used by the US military, law enforcement and intelligence agencies. The Obama administration's cold relations with the Saudi regime owed to its pronounced desire to ditch the US's traditional alliance with the Saudis, the Egyptians and the US's other traditional Sunni allies in favor of an alliance with the Iranian regime.

During the same period, the Muslim Brotherhood's close ties to the Iranian regime became increasingly obvious. Among other indicators, Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated president Mohamed Morsi hosted Iranian leaders in Cairo and was poised to renew Egypt's diplomatic ties with Iran before he was

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overthrown by the military in July 2013. Morsi permitted Iranian warships to ~~traverse the Suez Canal for the first time in decades.~~ Saudi Arabia joined Egypt and the United Arab Emirates in designating the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist group in 2014.

It was also during this period that the Saudis began warming their attitude toward Israel. Through Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, and due to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's leading role in opposing Iran's nuclear program and its rising power in the Middle East, the Saudis began changing their positions on Israel. Netanyahu's long-time foreign policy adviser, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs president Dr. Dore Gold, who authored the 2003 bestseller *Hatred's Kingdom: How Saudi Arabia Supports the New Global Terrorism* which exposed Saudi Arabia's role in promoting jihadist Islam, spearheaded a process of developing Israel's security and diplomatic ties with Riyadh. Those ties, which are based on shared opposition to Iran's regional empowerment, led to the surprising emergence of a working alliance between Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the UAE with Israel during Israel's 2014 war with Hamas - the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood.

It is in the context of Saudi Arabia's reassessment of its interests and realignment of strategic posture in recent years that the dramatic events of the past few days in the kingdom must be seen. Saturday's sudden announcement that a new anti-corruption panel headed by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, and the near simultaneous announcement of the arrest of more than two dozen royal family members, cabinet ministers and prominent businessmen is predominantly being presented as a power seizure by the crown prince. Amid widespread rumors that King Salman will soon abdicate the throne to his son, it is reasonable for the 32-year-old crown prince to work to neutralize all power centers that could threaten his ascension to the throne.

But there is clearly also something strategically more significant going on. While many of the officials arrested over the weekend threaten Mohammed's power, they aren't the only ones that he has purged. In September Mohammed arrested

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~~some 30 senior Wahhabist clerics and intellectuals. And Saturday's tensions of the~~  
~~princes, cabinet ministers and business leaders was followed up by further arrests~~  
~~of senior Wahhabist clerics. At the same time, Mohammed has been promoting~~  
~~clerics who espouse tolerance for other religions, including Judaism and~~  
~~Christianity. He has removed the Saudi religious police's power to conduct arrests~~  
~~and he has taken seemingly credible steps to finally lift the kingdom-wide~~  
~~prohibition on women driving.~~

At the same time, Mohammed has escalated the kingdom's operations against Iran's proxies in Yemen. And of course, on Saturday, he staged the resignation of Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri amid Hariri's allegations that Hezbollah and Iran were plotting his murder, much as they stood behind the 2005 assassination of his father, prime minister Rafiq Hariri. There can be little doubt that there was coordination between the Saudi regime and the Trump administration regarding Saturday's actions. The timing of the administration's release last week of most of the files US special forces seized during their 2011 raid of al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden's compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan was likely not a coincidence...

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**SAUDI CRACKDOWN RAISES SPECTER OF WIDER DISSENT**

*Dr. James M. Dorsey*

[BESA](#), Nov. 6, 2017

Prince Muhammad has dismissed and/or detained eleven princes, various senior government officials, top military officers, and an unidentified number of

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~~prominent businessmen largely linked to different factions within the ruling family/ He will also be heading a new anti-corruption committee that will be looking into the handling of the Jeddah floods of 2009.~~

Those floods killed 120 people and caused destruction as well as prolonged power outages in Jeddah. The floods triggered an unusual public debate about the management of public funds and infrastructure defects. The Saudis said the port city's poor infrastructure was the reason why the floods had such a devastating effect, prompting dozens to protest. In 2011, another protest arose in response to a mass Blackberry message campaign calling on residents to gather on the city's main shopping street. Up to 50 protestors are believed to have been arrested.

The government, in a bid to address the frustration in Jeddah, this year contracted China's state-owned Chinese Communication Construction Group (CCCC) to build a 37-kilometer channel to catch rain and flood water. "It might be an ordinary channel in another area, but it isn't the same in Saudi Arabia and it has special importance and came after painful lessons," said Ma Chifeng, the director of CCCC's Jeddah City Project for Flood Drainage.

The political crackdown is of course about much more than the Jeddah floods, even if making them one of the anti-corruption committee's initial focal points is significant. Among those dismissed and/or detained were National Guard head Prince Meteb bin Abdullah; economy minister and former Jeddah mayor Adel bin Mohammad Fakeih; and navy commander Abdullah al-Sultan, as well as reportedly businessmen such as multi-billionaire Prince Al-Waleed bin Talal bin Abdulaziz, a major shareholder in some of the world's best-known blue chips and a media mogul who is widely seen as a liberal. Also swept up in the crackdown were Waleed bin Ibrahim al-Ibrahim, a brother-in-law of King Fahd; Abdulaziz bin Fahd, the late king's son and owner of the Middle East Broadcasting Company (MBC), which operates the *Al Arabiya* television network; and Saleh Kamel, head of one of the Middle East's largest conglomerates, who in the past had close ties to the Muslim Brotherhood...



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The crackdown on National Guard and military commanders coincided with the firing of a missile by Houthi rebels at Riyadh, a signal that the Saudi capital is now within their range. The firing suggested that Saudi Arabia's strategy in the two and one-half year-long Yemen war, based on an air campaign rather than the commitment of Saudi ground troops, has so far failed to achieve its declared goal of ensuring the kingdom's security. The crackdown also follows the disappearance and alleged kidnapping of three of four known dissident members of the Saudi ruling family who had gone into exile in Europe. Among the four were Prince Turki bin Bandar, a former senior police officer responsible for policing the ruling family; and Prince Sultan bin Turki, the husband of a late daughter of King Abdullah.

It also follows a wave of earlier arrests of scores of Islamic scholars, judges, and intellectuals whose views run the gamut from ultra-conservative to liberal. Among those arrested were scholars Salman al-Odah, Aidh al-Qarni, and Ali al-Omari; poet Ziyad bin Naheet, and economist Essam al-Zamil, some of whom have more than 17 million followers on Twitter. The detentions were designed to silence 1) alleged support in the kingdom for an end to the almost four-month old Gulf crisis that has pitted Saudi Arabia and its allies against Qatar; 2) mounting criticism of the kingdom's conduct in the Yemen war; and 3) criticism of Prince Muhammad's reforms.

Beyond grandiose plans, Prince Muhammad has yet to deliver on the economic aspects of his reform plans articulated in his Vision 2030. He has so far delivered on limited, headline-grabbing social changes, such as lifting the ban on women's driving and the granting of access for women to sports stadia. These changes were needed for his economic reforms as well as for the encouragement of greater entertainment opportunities that contribute to economic growth and address grievances among youth, who account for a majority of the kingdom's population. Prince Muhammad has yet to deliver on jobs in a country that has high un- and under-employment and whose population has been weaned on cradle-to-grave welfare.

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The most recent crackdown breaks with the tradition of consensus within the ruling family, whose secretive inner workings are equivalent to those of the Kremlin at the time of the Soviet Union. The dismissals and detentions suggest that Prince Muhammad, rather than forging alliances, is extending his iron grip to the ruling family, the military, and the National Guard to counter what appears to be widespread opposition within the family as well as the military to his reforms and the Yemen war. This raises questions about a reform process that is increasingly based on a unilateral rather than a consensual rewriting of the kingdom's social contract. "It is hard to envisage MBS [Prince Muhammad] succeeding in his ambitious plans by royal decree. He needs to garner more consent. To obtain it, he must learn to tolerate debate and disagreement," wrote *The Economist*.

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**JARED KUSHNER, MOHAMMED BIN SALMAN,**

**AND BENJAMIN NETANYAHU ARE UP TO SOMETHING**

*Dov Zakheim*

[Foreign Policy](#), Nov. 7, 2017

There seems to be a general consensus in Washington that Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's ongoing purge of princes and businessmen — including the wealthiest of them all, the business mogul and Prince Al-Waleed bin Talal — is motivated by his determination to consolidate his power, well before his father, King Salman, passes from the scene. He is in this regard a latter-day Adonijah, who had himself crowned king while his father King David was alive. And, like Adonijah, Mohammed bin Salman has made some very powerful enemies in the process. Unlike that Biblical figure, however, he has his father's support and has taken care to arrest anyone who might threaten his drive to preeminence.

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Jared Kushner, U.S. President Donald Trump's son-in-law and senior advisor, was in Riyadh again only recently. It was his third trip to Saudi Arabia since Trump took office. He again met with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, with whom he appears to have established a close personal relationship. It should therefore come as no surprise that Trump, who shares the young crown prince's antipathy toward Iran, has commented favorably on the recent developments in Riyadh.

It is said of Donald Trump that he has undermined America's credibility with its allies. That may be the case in Europe, and perhaps in parts of Asia, though not in Japan or India. But it is certainly not the case in the Middle East. Tensions with Turkey and Egypt emanate primarily from the U.S. Congress, not from the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue. Relations with Israel are better than they have been since the day former President Barack Obama took office. The same can be said of U.S. relations with both Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates or, for that matter, Bahrain and Morocco. The force that unites them all is Iran, whose support for instability throughout the region received a financial fillip from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action — that is, the Iran nuclear deal.

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman may or may not be a true reformer. His record on that score is not unequivocal. But he is determined to halt the expansion of Iranian influence, which now really does manifest itself as the Shiite crescent about which Jordan's King Abdullah II forewarned over a decade ago. The crown prince recognizes that his country's worst nightmare is slowly materializing: Iran is supplying the Houthi rebels to its south and dominates neighboring Iraq to its north. It foments instability in Bahrain and could well do the same in Saudi Arabia's Shiite-majority Eastern Province. And if that were not enough, Iran's influence is entrenched in Damascus and Beirut. It is particularly for that reason the Saudis forced their ally Saad Hariri, the Lebanese prime minister, to resign his office while on a visit to the Kingdom.

Mohammed bin Salman may or may not have recently visited Tel Aviv, where Israel's Defense Ministry is located. But even if he never set foot in the HaKirya complex, there is little doubt that he has authorized ever closer relations with the

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Israelis, who view the Iranian threat exactly as he does. And the crown prince is not the only one Jared Kushner has been speaking to: Trump has given his son-in-law overall leadership on the peace process between Israel and the Arabs, and he is reportedly a welcome guest in Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office.

Given Kushner's role, did Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman signal his plans when Kushner last met with him — and did Kushner then inform his father-in-law? And if so, how far will Washington, or more precisely, the White House, go to back up the Saudis if their confrontation with Iran gets hot? Or will Israel serve as Trump's proxy? With this president, this crown prince, and the current prime minister of Israel, anything is possible.

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[What the Political Turmoil in Saudi Arabia and Lebanon Means for Israel](#): Ron Kampeas, *Times of Israel*, Nov. 8, 2017—What is MBS? Why did Lebanon's prime minister resign — and why in Saudi Arabia? What's Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas doing in Saudi Arabia? Where is Jared Kushner in all this? And what does it all mean for Israel?

[The End of Saudi-Style Stability](#): Thomas W. Lippman, *New York Times*, Nov. 8, 2017—For decades, Saudi Arabia was a stable and reliable economic and strategic partner of the United States. That country no longer exists.

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[Hannah, \*The Hill\*, Nov. 7, 2017](https://www.isranet.org/daily-briefing/saudi-political-crackdown-coincides-iran-backed-houthi-missile-launch-escalating-tensions-tehran/)—Most of us have told our kids that the ends don't  
justify the means. But what if your objective is something as audacious as rapidly  
modernizing the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia?