

**SAUDI'S CUT TIES WITH CANADA OVER HUMAN RIGHTS  
DENUNCIATION, DESPITE MBS' ONGOING REFORMS**

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Isranet Daily Briefing, August 13, 2018

<https://www.isranet.org/daily-briefing/saudis-cut-ties-with-canada-over-human-rights-denunciation-despite-mbs-ongoing-reforms/>

**[In Saudi-Canada Standoff, Riyadh Should Stand Down: Jonathan Schanzer & Varsha Koduvayur, \*New York Post\*, Aug. 9, 2018](#)**— The last time Canada undertook an act of aggression was in 1999, when it declared war on the United States — in the comedic universe of “South Park,” that is.

**[Saudi Arabia's Global Ambitions Leave No Room for Meddling: Father Raymond J. de Souza, \*National Post\*, Aug. 9, 2018](#)** — The diplomatic fight between Saudi Arabia and Canada bears watching, and not for the astonishing novelty that anyone could really take offence at our prime minister, whose prime directive is generally not to give offence.

**[Saudi Arabia and Israel: Know Thine Enemy: Dr. Edy Cohen, \*BESA\*, July 20, 2018](#)**— Saudi Arabia and Israel do not maintain official relations, but by the time Crown Prince Abdullah published the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, bilateral ties between the two countries had already been established behind the scenes.

**['Unite with the Devil': Yemen War Binds US, Allies, Al-Qaida: Maggie Michael and Trish Wilson and Lee Keath, \*Washington Times\*, Aug. 7, 2018](#)**— Again and again over the past two years, a military coalition led by Saudi Arabia and backed by the United States has claimed it won decisive victories that drove al-Qaida militants from their strongholds across Yemen and shattered their ability to attack the West.

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**[Why Has Canada Spent Billions of Dollars Buying Saudi Arabian Oil?: Tristin Hopper, \*National Post\*, Aug. 8, 2018](#)**

**[Good Riddance to Our Ties with Saudi Arabia: Tarek Fatah, \*Toronto Sun\*, Aug. 7, 2018](#)**

**[Saudi Arabia Cuts Exports to Canada Over Raif Badawi: Daniel Bordman, \*Post Millennial\*, Aug. 6, 2018](#)**

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**IN SAUDI-CANADA STANDOFF, RIYADH SHOULD STAND DOWN**

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*Jonathan Schanzer & Varsha Koduvayur*

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[\*New York Post\*](#), Aug. 9, 2018

The last time Canada undertook an act of aggression was in 1999, when it declared war on the United States — in the comedic universe of “South Park,” that is. But few were laughing Monday when Saudi Arabia shockingly cut ties with Canada and enacted severe punitive measures against Ottawa.

Riyadh's gripe? A Canadian Foreign Ministry tweet criticizing the kingdom's arrests of several human-rights activists. After new arrests last week, the total number of detained activists is now 18. In retaliation for what it described as Canadian meddling, Riyadh divested from its Canadian assets, froze new trade and investment, halted flights to the Great White North and recalled Saudi doctors and students from Canadian hospitals and universities.

The kingdom called Canada's response an “unacceptable affront” and a direct violation of its sovereignty. That's a valid, diplomatic response. But every other measure is utterly disproportionate. Riyadh's actions undercut its recent unprecedented progress. Women finally got behind the wheel of their cars in June — legally. Movie theaters opened. Western visitors have lined up. The once-dreaded religious police have been effectively decimated. And many regulatory changes have been implemented to open up the Saudi economy for foreign investment.

Mohammed bin Salman, the energetic crown prince helming this vast metamorphosis, has articulated his vision to put the kingdom on the right track. He vowed to roll back fundamentalist Islam and return the kingdom to a “tolerant, moderate Islam” — unprecedented words from a Saudi leader, given the kingdom's historical role in spreading Wahhabism. Saudi reform could have enormously positive consequences for the region. Which is why MbS, as he's known, should be lauded every time he takes a step in the right direction, and why legitimate criticism is important, too.

Of course, the Saudis don't always take criticism well. In 2015, Riyadh temporarily recalled its envoy to Sweden after the latter criticized human-rights violations, and last November it recalled its ambassador to Germany after its foreign minister protested Riyadh's meddling in Lebanon. Saudi Arabia even blacklisted some German companies as a result.

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Such moves may play well in Saudi Arabia, but may not have much of an impact in the current fracas. Riyadh is Canada's 17th-largest trade partner, and total trade last year amounted to \$3 billion. That may sound like a lot, but compared to the \$673.9 billion that Canada traded with the US in 2017, that's a drop in the bucket for Ottawa. Saudi institutions shed their Canadian asset holdings, but these divestments will likewise be small. Similarly, the Saudi decision to halt wheat and barley imports from Canada will not have a severe effect given that the kingdom had already been importing less in recent years.

Pulling Saudi students and doctors from universities and hospitals could have more of an impact: In 2017, Saudis made up about 2 percent of Canada's international students. Yet yanking them from their studies undercuts the kingdom's goal of creating a knowledge economy more than it will affect Canadian universities' bottom lines. Whether this holdout lasts for a semester, a year or longer, it'll deprive the kingdom of the talent and knowhow that it needs to increase private-sector employment.

Neither is Canada likely to feel much of a pinch from the drop in 75,000 to 80,000 barrels of Saudi crude that it imports per day. That's less than 10 percent of Ottawa's total oil imports and a gap that could be plugged by the US. But for Riyadh, that's a loss of \$2.48 billion. Perhaps that's why the Saudi energy minister put out a quick message that this diplomatic spat will "not, in any way, impact Saudi Aramco's relations" with Canadian customers. More concerning for Ottawa would be an \$11 billion arms deal to supply the Saudis with light-armored vehicles, which it doesn't want to lose.

But whatever pain Saudi Arabia ultimately inflicts on Canada, the kingdom may get the worst of it. Western institutional investors, actors that avoid risk whenever they can, are undoubtedly spooked. Foreign investment in Saudi Arabia had already plummeted to a 14-year low after last year's opaque anti-corruption purge that put a number of high-profile Saudis under house arrest. Riyadh certainly has a right to contest Canada's statements. But it must find a way to climb down from this senseless escalation. And in the process, it wouldn't hurt to reassure its supporters that it remains committed to reform, not to mention human rights.

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*Father Raymond J. de Souza*

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*[National Post](#), Aug. 9, 2018*

The diplomatic fight between Saudi Arabia and Canada bears watching, and not for the astonishing novelty that anyone could really take offence at our prime minister, whose prime directive is generally not to give offence. His Indian tour was ridiculed precisely because he was too aggressively ingratiating.

It bears watching because it is an indication of a possible new configuration in the geopolitics of Islam. One hundred years ago, the end of the Great War effectively meant the demise of the Ottoman Empire, which had been the geopolitical expression of Islam for centuries. Since then, global Islam has sought different political expressions, the various developments of which have been a major factor in international relations.

So whatever may be at the heart of the completely unexpected fight between Saudi Arabia and Canada, it cannot be an offensive tweet from our foreign affairs ministry which, in the age of Trump, is not even in the minor leagues when it comes to offensive tweets. Somehow, Saudi Arabia's ruler, Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud, has decided that he needs to have a fight with someone even as he presents himself at home and abroad as a reformer who is out to change traditional Saudi ways.

MBS, as he and his admirers style him, is the next generation in a state that is really a family business, and not a very good one at that. His grandfather — Abdulaziz al Saud — was the founder of Saudi Arabia, and his father — Salman — is the current king, the last of the seven brothers who inherited the throne from their father. Salman has given MBS the scope to rule now as crown prince, and in future as king. In the massive Saudi royal family, with its hundreds of descendants of Abdulaziz, MBS was not the obvious successor, but was named that last year by Salman. He has been taking the kingdom and the world by storm ever since.

The House of Saud has ruled Saudi Arabia for a century by using the country's massive oil wealth for two purposes. Spread around the family, it keeps dynastic struggles in check, as everyone has a stake in the ongoing chokehold they maintain on the country's resources. And spread around the population in generous public benefits, it suppresses thoughts of revolution. But both the family and the country have grown too large for indefinite high living off oil alone, so the

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country's economy must become more dynamic and diversified. Hence the new economic vision and reforms of MBS.

The other element keeping the House of Saud in business has been a pact with Wahhabi religious authorities. If the latter do not challenge the former's legitimacy as the "Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques," as the king of Saudi Arabia is styled, in exchange the royal family will permit extreme Wahhabi mores to prevail in Saudi Arabia and be funded abroad. That's why women weren't allowed to drive in Saudi Arabia until just six weeks ago, and why extremist madrassas are funded the world over.

That pact though prevents Saudi Arabia from leading the Islamic world. The majority of Muslims, who are Sunni, would prefer to see Saudi Arabia eclipse Iran, a Shia power, but from Egypt to Indonesia there is little appetite to elevate Wahhabism in Islam's geopolitical leadership. So MBS is seeking both economic and social reform, which means less money to buy alliances and less power for the religious authorities. Hence he has trumpeted around the world his decision to allow women to drive. But all reform generates opposition, which MBS has dealt with by deposing rivals and imprisoning dissenters, including resorts to violence and torture.

Will MBS pull off his plan to make Saudi Arabia the new centre of global Islam? He has sought to reconfigure the politics of the Gulf States, and is open to alliances with Israel to contain Iran. When Obama was president, he went to Cairo in his first visit to the Muslim world. Trump made Saudi Arabia his first foreign visit to any country, the first of a three-part religious journey, completed later with visits to Jerusalem and Rome.

So there is an openness abroad to the rise of Saudi Arabia, both in economic and strategic relations. But friends abroad may embolden rivals at home. MBS needs their investment and diplomatic support, but not their meddling, from his point of view, in the security of his regime. Hence the decision to escalate this contrived fight with Canada. MBS wants a more dynamic, moderate Saudi Arabia to be the heir to Ottoman-era influence, an alternative to the militancy of Iran or the failed pan-Arab nationalism of the 1960s. But he wants on it on his own terms.

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**SAUDI ARABIA AND ISRAEL: KNOW THINE ENEMY**

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*Dr. Edy Cohen*

***BESA***, July 20, 2018

Saudi Arabia and Israel do not maintain official relations, but by the time Crown Prince Abdullah published the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, bilateral ties between the two countries had already been established behind the scenes. In 2015, ties increased and some were even made formal as a result of the joint effort by both countries against the Iranian nuclear program. Saudis visited Israel and there were reports that the late Mossad chief Meir Dagan visited Saudi Arabia to coordinate on the Iran issue. Over the past two years, ties have reportedly reached new highs, with Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman allegedly holding a meeting with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

If there was once talk of a moderate Sunni alliance against Iran, this term has lost all meaning in the last two years. The Middle East is now divided into two camps: one made up of Turkey, Qatar, Iran, and Sudan, and the other made up of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt. The latter camp, which has the support of the US and Israel, imposed the boycott on Qatar over its growing ties to Iran and Turkey.

There can be no doubt that the growing ties between Riyadh and Jerusalem are a result of the hostility between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Tehran is aggressive in its attacks on Riyadh, including in the cyber arena. In 2012, a cyberattack on Saudi Arabia's national petroleum and gas company Aramco caused unprecedented damage, partially wiping or in some cases completely destroying some 35,000 of its computers. There have also been reports of Iranian hackers breaking into the bank accounts of Saudi princes to reveal how much money they have at their disposal.

Faced with these threats, Riyadh established the National Cyber Security Authority to fight Iran and the hackers. In 2017, the authority was tasked with an additional goal - inciting the Arab world against Qatar. Abdullah adviser Saud bin Abdullah al-Qahtani is responsible for the unit, which, according to assessments, employs some 4,000 people.

The National Cyber Security Authority's Twitter account has 400,000 followers.

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Employees operate online under false identities, and their job is to create hashtags that trend online. Their brief is to moderate and control public opinion and to vilify Qatar and its leaders. The agency's Twitter account tweets daily, mostly against Qatar and Iran. It uses anti-Semitic terminology, referring to Qatar as "Qatarial," a portmanteau of Qatar and Israel, and claiming the Al-Jazeera network "belongs to the Israeli Mossad."

"The deal of the century" is a Qatari scheme to sell Palestine to the "Zionist entity," one tweet reads, while another alleges that the "Zionist" Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, the father of Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, is scheming to divide the Arab states to fulfill the dreams of the "Zionist entity" and Iran. In another tweet, the authority alleges Qatar is "trying to destroy the Arab world to serve the enemies of the Muslim world: Israel and Iran." These statements penetrate deep into the Arab consciousness and increase their existing hatred towards Jews and Israel.

The Saudis are thus playing a double game. Behind the scenes, they send the Israelis the message that Tehran is a common enemy and goad it to fight Iran and Hezbollah. At home, however, they say that the enemy is first and foremost the State of Israel, followed by Iran. Their formula is clear: covert ties with Israel coupled with overt hostility to the Jewish state to satisfy the people, a majority of whom hate Israel.

The Saudi double game is sadly familiar. It is reminiscent of the Egyptian model under Egyptian Presidents Gamal Abdel Nasser and Hosni Mubarak: dozens of anti-Semitic articles were published on a daily basis, but the Israeli audience was not exposed to the phenomenon and the politicians closed their eyes. In the two-and-a-half decades since the onset of the Oslo "peace process," successive Israeli governments have similarly turned a deaf ear to the vitriolic Palestinian incitement that has indoctrinated the residents of the West Bank and Gaza with implacable hatred for Israel and helped pave the road for the BDS movement. Jerusalem must not accept anti-Israel incitement, and that is also true where Saudi Arabia is concerned. Incitement translates into action, and that action comes at a deadly price.

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**'UNITE WITH THE DEVIL': YEMEN WAR BINDS US, ALLIES, AL-QAIDA**

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*Maggie Michael and Trish Wilson and Lee Keath*

[\*Washington Times\*](#), Aug. 7, 2018

Again and again over the past two years, a military coalition led by Saudi Arabia and backed by the United States has claimed it won decisive victories that drove al-Qaida militants from their strongholds across Yemen and shattered their ability to attack the West. Here's what the victors did not disclose: many of their conquests came without firing a shot.

That's because the coalition cut secret deals with al-Qaida fighters, paying some to leave key cities and towns and letting others retreat with weapons, equipment and wads of looted cash, an investigation by The Associated Press has found. Hundreds more were recruited to join the coalition itself. These compromises and alliances have allowed al-Qaida militants to survive to fight another day - and risk strengthening the most dangerous branch of the terror network that carried out the 9/11 attacks. Key participants in the pacts said the U.S. was aware of the arrangements and held off on any drone strikes.

The deals uncovered by the AP reflect the contradictory interests of the two wars being waged simultaneously in this southwestern corner of the Arabian Peninsula. In one conflict, the U.S. is working with its Arab allies - particularly the United Arab Emirates - with the aim of eliminating the branch of extremists known as al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, or AQAP. But the larger mission is to win the civil war against the Houthis, Iranian-backed Shiite rebels. And in that fight, al-Qaida militants are effectively on the same side as the Saudi-led coalition - and, by extension, the United States.

"Elements of the U.S. military are clearly aware that much of what the U.S. is doing in Yemen is aiding AQAP and there is much angst about that," said Michael Horton, a fellow at the Jamestown Foundation, a U.S. analysis group that tracks terrorism. "However, supporting the UAE and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia against what the U.S. views as Iranian expansionism takes priority over battling AQAP and even stabilizing Yemen," Horton said.

The AP's findings are based on reporting in Yemen and interviews with two dozen officials, including Yemeni security officers, militia commanders, tribal mediators

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and four members of al-Qaida's branch. All but a few of those sources spoke on condition of anonymity, fearing reprisals. Emirati-backed factions, like most armed groups in Yemen, have been accused of abducting or killing their critics. Coalition-backed militias actively recruit al-Qaida militants, or those who were recently members, because they're considered exceptional fighters, the AP found. The coalition forces are comprised of a dizzying mix of militias, factions, tribal warlords and tribes with very local interests. And AQAP militants are intertwined with many of them.

One Yemeni commander who was put on the U.S. terrorism list for al-Qaida ties last year continues to receive money from the UAE to run his militia, his own aide told the AP. Another commander, recently granted \$12 million for his fighting force by Yemen's president, has a known al-Qaida figure as his closest aide. In one case, a tribal mediator who brokered a deal between the Emiratis and al-Qaida even gave the extremists a farewell dinner. Horton said much of the war on al-Qaida by the UAE and its allied militias is a "farce." "It is now almost impossible to untangle who is AQAP and who is not since so many deals and alliances have been made," he said.

The U.S. has sent billions of dollars in weapons to the coalition to fight the Iran-backed Houthis. U.S. advisers also give the coalition intelligence used in targeting on-the-ground adversaries in Yemen, and American jets provide air-to-air refueling for coalition war planes. The U.S. does not fund the coalition, however, and there is no evidence that American money went to AQAP militants. The U.S. is aware of an al-Qaida presence among the anti-Houthi ranks, a senior American official told reporters in Cairo earlier this year. Because coalition members back militias with hard-line Islamic commanders, "it's very, very easy for al-Qaida to insinuate itself into the mix," the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity under the terms of the briefing.

More recently, the Pentagon vigorously denied any complicity with al-Qaida militants. "Since the beginning of 2017, we have conducted more than 140 strikes to remove key AQAP leaders and disrupt its ability to use ungoverned spaces to recruit, train and plan operations against the U.S. and our partners across the region," Navy Cmdr. Sean Robertson, a Pentagon spokesman, wrote in an email to the AP. An Emirati government spokesman did not reply to questions from the AP.

But on Monday, Emirati Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Anwar Gargash tweeted that the UAE-backed counter-terrorism strategy is working. He said it had

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**“removed” thousands of militants and deprived them of safe havens. AQAP is “at its weakest since 2012,” he wrote, adding that the UAE and its allies “have all lost troops in the fight.” Coalition spokesman Col. Turki al-Malki on Monday said the AP’s findings were “incorrect” and “not based on convincing facts and evidence.” “The coalition is waging a war on terrorist organizations in Yemen, like al-Qaida, the Islamic State group and the Houthi militia,” he said. “It continues to carry our joint operations with its friends and brothers to dismantle these groups’ capabilities.”**

**The coalition began fighting in Yemen in 2015 after the Houthis overran the north, including the capital, Sanaa. The UAE and Saudi Arabia are determined to stop what they consider a move by their nemesis, Iran, to take over Yemen, and their professed aim is to restore the internationally recognized government of President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi. Al-Qaida is leveraging the chaos to its advantage.**

**“The United States is certainly in a bind in Yemen,” said Katherine Zimmerman, a research fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. “It doesn’t make sense that the United States has identified al-Qaida as a threat, but that we have common interests inside of Yemen and that, in some places, it looks like we’re looking the other way.” Within this complicated conflict, al-Qaida says its numbers - which U.S. officials have estimated at 6,000 to 8,000 members - are rising...**

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**[Why Has Canada Spent Billions of Dollars Buying Saudi Arabian Oil?](#): [Tristin Hopper, National Post, Aug. 8, 2018](#)—As Saudi Arabia aggressively severs ties with Canada, the two countries’ trade relationship hangs in the balance. On one hand, Canada will lose out on Saudi foreign students, military contracts and sales of wheat and grain. On the other, Saudi Arabia will lose the billions of dollars it earns every year by selling oil to Canada.**

**[Good Riddance to Our Ties with Saudi Arabia](#): [Tarek Fatah, Toronto Sun, Aug. 7, 2018](#)—Most Canadians were taken aback by the hostile reaction of Saudi Arabia**

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towards Canada after Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland issued statements late last week calling on Riyadh to release imprisoned Saudi blogger Raif Badawi, whose wife, Ensaf Haider, and three children are Canadian citizens.

**[Saudi Arabia Cuts Exports to Canada Over Raif Badawi](#)**: Daniel Bordman, *Post Millenial*, Aug. 6, 2018—Many of us have been waiting around for Justin Trudeau's administration to finally take a moral stand on the international stage. Justin Trudeau has always shown a knack for lecturing countries with complete gender equality on their need for even more gender equality. However, his first real foray into morality isn't going so well.

**[US Withdrawal From Iran Deal Helping Wind Down Yemen War, Officials Say](#)**: Hollie McKay, *Fox News*, Aug. 7, 2018 —Despite Tehran's repeated denials of arming Shiite Houthi rebels in war-torn Yemen, government and military officials insist President Trump's withdrawal from the landmark Iran nuclear deal has had an immediate impact in helping bring the four-year conflict at least a step toward closure.