

Art of the Deal: Behind Saudi-Lebanon Crisis Is Trump's Middle East 'Peace Project'

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The recent 'forced' resignation by Lebanese PM Saad Hariri in Riyadh under the influence of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, and [subsequent threats](#) by Saudi Minister Thamer al-Sadhan against Lebanon and Hezbollah – have puzzled analysts as to the motivation behind this seemingly irrational series of events.

While it's true Saudi Princes and their Wahhabi order have been slighted by both Shia-based popular mobilization movements' role eradicating ISIS from the region – Hezbollah in Syria, and by the Hashed al-Shaabi in Iraqi – with Arabian Sheikhs having to watch as their Gulf billions invested in the destabilization of Syria and Iraq have gone down a blood soaked drain of history – in reality, neither Lebanon nor its Hezbollah movement poses any direct threat to the country of Saudi Arabia. So who is directing these events?

Is this Saudi tirade just a case of an unstable young, soon-to-be king in 32 yr-old Mohammed bin Salman, consolidating too much power too soon, or is there more to it? Some analysts have been speculating that maybe Israel is the invisible hand pushing the oil Kingdom to do its bidding in the region as they both share a common enemy in Iran.



Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah (image on the right) also [made the claim](#) this week that Saudi Arabia has offered Israel 'billions of dollars' to attack Lebanon on its behalf, as well as accusing the Saudis of strong-arming Lebanese PM to resign on camera. Nasrallah knows that both Tel Aviv and Riyadh (with full US backing) have Hezbollah in mind when any threats are made toward Lebanon, but as Middle East analyst [Eisa Ali](#) explained on yesterday's [Sunday Wire](#) radio program, this perceived joint-threat by Israel and Saudi has

driven Lebanon closer to political unity on this issue.

Last night the Israeli press began to try and distance itself from a Saudi-led conspiracy, with Haaretz being the first to dismiss the ranting threats coming out of Riyadh, while simultaneously pushing the Trump Administration to the frontline. Writer Amos Harel's op-ed entitled, "[Saudi Arabia Is Opening a New Front Against Iran, and Wants Israel to Do Its Dirty Work](#)," helps to reveal part of a still concealed agenda:

"As the days passed, the resignation seemed more like a Saudi dictate, stemming from Saudi Arabia's displeasure at the way Hariri was compelled to cooperate with Hezbollah in Lebanon's government."

It's unclear if the Saudis will necessarily make do with these moves. The royal house is particularly close to the Trump administration and Saudi Arabia was one of the few countries, along with Israel, which enthusiastically welcomed Trump's election, this time last year. Over the past year there have been a growing number of reports around the world of increasing diplomatic coordination between Riyadh and Jerusalem, accompanied by cooperation in intelligence matters. Israel and the Saudis see Iran as a common enemy, and both are frustrated at the West's incompetence in dealing with Iran's growing influence in what is known as the "Shi'ite Crescent" in the region."

If Lebanon and Hezbollah do not pose a direct threat to Saudi Arabia, then what's really going on? Is this really an American-led stage-managed drama that we are watching unfold now?

While the liberal Israeli press may be taking a stand-offish position in relation to recent events, you can be certain that Israel is very much involved in this process, albeit working diligently behind the scenes through an Israeli-friendly White House in Washington, and Netanyahu and Trump's shared personal assistant, wunderkind Jared Kushner. Indeed, it's through Kushner that we can track the real agenda which is in motion right now, as these latest events between Saudi Arabia and Lebanon are directly linked to Donald Trump's big-ticket item - the Israel-Palestine "[Two State Solution](#)" peace deal - which he had promised on the campaign trail. It's happening as we speak.

Make no mistake about it: this 'peace deal' will become Trump's major *pièce de résistance* for his first term, and his ticket to redemption heading into the 2020 election cycle. The question is, who in America will resist it?

Here Haaretz lets the cat out of the bag as to how this will be used to leverage Israeli interests:

"The string of events, starting with the Qatari crisis last summer, strengthens the assumption that this is part of a wider Saudi move, an ambitious attempt to reach a new regional order. On the diplomatic front this is linked to the internal Palestinian reconciliation, led by Cairo but which also requires financial backing by the Saudis and the Emirates. This won't be all, apparently. The defense establishment and political circles in Israel are preparing for the likely possibility that the Trump administration will soon present Israel and the Palestinian Authority with a new document, in an attempt to jumpstart the stalled peace process. Such a move may be pursued in a coordinated way between the United States and the Saudis. Saudi ambitions may have other results as well."

There it is. The *Art of the Deal*, and it's not going to be Camp David style this time. It will be a *transactional* deal – most certainly with large strings attached for Lebanon and which will be designed to first isolate Hezbollah and then evict Iranian influence from the region. Be sure of one thing though – if this 'deal' is being drafted by the US and Israel then you can be certain that it will *not* be well-thought out, and it will surely discount the interests of Syria, and the Shia majorities in Lebanon and Iraq.

And what about the Palestinians? It's also a safe bet that any 'deal' drafted by the US and Israel will not be a very good deal for the Palestinians – who will be the *last* party considered in all of this high-flying talk of 'peace and stability' in the region. Will they get the right of return? Will their current situation really improve from such a deal? Looking at Israel and the US track record of running the 'peace process' in this part of the world, I'd say it's highly doubtful.

What about Mohammed bin Salman's purge and all of the detained Saudi billionaires and officials detained in the Ritz Carlton Hotel in Riyadh? What is the Crown Prince angling for out of this three-way deal? For starters, how about cash from the west, and cash from China, needed for the Kingdom to attain its lofty 'Vision 2030' goals and the Kingdom's vast privatization scheme? Trump already let that cat out of the bag when he declared that Saudi's biggest state-run oil and construction firm, Saudi ARAMCO, should do its IPO and be listed on the New York Stock Exchange. That would mean an initial cash injection based on 5% of ARAMCO market cap – around \$100 billion (that's a total market cap of \$2 trillion for this company!) to Saudi Arabia *via* western stock exchanges, and more to come if each year Saudi keeps gradually milking its state-owned golden cash calf. This money will be used to help finance the Crown Prince's new [NEOM](#) futuristic 'smart city' – but also ARAMCO will be the main contracting firm charged with building the new city – which means guaranteed returns for ground floor investors. Who will those *preferred* initial share holders be? Trump's friends, and the Chinese? Your guess is as good as mine.

So there you have it – now we know it's the US, in conjunction with Israel, who are maneuvering behind the scenes, and who will observe a mutual Saudi-Israeli-American desire to keep Iran weak and mitigate its influence throughout the region. Easier said than done. These factors are what's really driving events that we see rapidly unfolding in the Middle East.

And, no all is still not well in Arab wonderland:

“An article in Haaretz this week by former U.S. ambassador to Israel Dan Shapiro asked whether the Saudis were pushing Israel into a war with Hezbollah and Iran.”

So which will come first – the *war*, or the *peace*?

It's difficult to tell. Certainly, avoiding the war should be everyone's first priority.

And how long with the west continue to ignore Saudi and the UAE's (with US-UK military backing) mass atrocities in Yemen?

In the meantime, Lebanon is still in the dark as to when they will get their Prime Minister back.

Should Lebanon (once again) consider itself a target in the crosshairs of the great powers in their latest plans to reshape the region?

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