

Fear And Loathing in the House of Saud

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Desperation does not even begin to describe the current plight of the House of Saud. Riyadh was fully aware the beheading of respected Saudi Shi'ite cleric Nimr al-Nimr was a deliberate provocation bound to elicit a rash Iranian response.

The Saudis calculated they could get away with it; after all they employ the best American PR machine petrodollars can buy, and are viscerally [defended by the usual gaggle](#) of nasty US neo-cons.

In a post-Orwellian world “order” where war is peace and “moderate” jihadis get a free pass, a House of Saud oil hacienda cum beheading paradise — devoid of all civilized norms of political mediation and civil society participation — heads the UN Commission on Human Rights and fattens the US industrial-military complex to the tune of billions of dollars while merrily exporting demented Wahhabi/Salafi-jihadism from MENA (Middle East-Northern Africa) to Europe and from the Caucasus to East Asia.

And yet major trouble looms. Erratic King Salman’s move of appointing his son, the supremely arrogant and supremely ignorant Prince Mohammad bin Salman to number two in the line of succession has been contested even among Wahhabi hardliners.

But don’t count on petrodollar-controlled Arab media to tell the story.

English-language TV network Al-Arabiyya, for instance, based in the Emirates, long financed by House of Saud members, and owned by the MBC conglomerate, was bought by none other than Prince Mohammad himself, who will also buy MBC.

With oil at less than \$40 a barrel, largely thanks to [Saudi Arabia’s oil war](#) against both Iran and Russia, Riyadh’s conventional wars are taking a terrible toll. The budget has collapsed and the House of Saud has been forced to raise taxes.

The illegal war on Yemen, conducted with full US acquiescence, led by — who else — Prince Mohammad, and largely carried out by the proverbial band of mercenaries, has instead handsomely profited al-Qaeda in the Arabic Peninsula (AQAP), just as the war on Syria has profited mostly Jabhat al-Nusra, a.k.a. al-Qaeda in Syria.

Three months ago, Saudi ulemas called for a jihad not only against Damascus but also Tehran and Moscow without the “civilized” West batting an eyelid; after all the ulemas were savvy enough to milk the “Russian aggression” bandwagon, comparing the Russian intervention in Syria, agreed with Damascus, with the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

US Think Tankland revels in spinning that the beheading provocation was a “signal”

to Tehran that Riyadh will not tolerate Iranian influence among Shi'ites living in predominantly Sunni states. And yet Beltway cackle that Riyadh hoped to contain "domestic Shi'ite tensions" by beheading al-Nimr does not even qualify as a lousy propaganda script. To see why this is nonsense, let's take a quick tour of Saudi Arabia's Eastern province.

All Eyes on Al Sharqiyya

Saudi Arabia is essentially a huge desert island. Even though the oil hacienda is bordered by the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, the Saudis don't control what matters: the key channels of communication/energy exporting bottlenecks — the Bab el-Mandeb and the Straits of Hormuz, not to mention the Suez canal.

Enter US "protection" as structured in a Mafia-style "offer you can't refuse" arrangement; we guarantee safe passage for the oil export flow through our naval patrols and you buy from us, non-stop, a festival of weapons and host our naval bases alongside other GCC minions. The "protection" used to be provided by the former British empire. So Saudi Arabia — as well as the GCC — remains essentially an Anglo-American satrapy.

Al Sharqiyya — the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia — holds only 4 million people, the overwhelming majority Shi'ites. And yet it produces no less than 80% of Saudi oil. The heart of the action is the provincial capital Al Qatif, where Nimr al-Nimr was born. We're talking about the largest oil hub on the planet, consisting of 12 crisscrossed pipelines that connect to massive Gulf oil terminals such as Dhahran and Ras Tanura.

Enter the strategic importance of neighboring Bahrain. Historically, all the lands from Basra in southern Iraq to the peninsula of Musandam, in Oman — traditional trade posts between Europe and India — were known as Bahrain ("between two seas").

Tehran could easily use neighboring Bahrain to infiltrate Al Sharqiyya, detach it from Riyadh's control, and configure a "Greater Bahrain" allied with Iran. That's the crux of the narrative peddled by petrodollar-controlled media, the proverbial Western "experts", and incessantly parroted in the Beltway.

There's no question Iranian hardliners cherish the possibility of a perpetual Bahraini thorn on Riyadh's side. That would imply weaponizing a popular revolution in Al Sharqiyya. But the fact is not even Nimr al-Nimr was in favor of a secession of Al Sharqiyya. And that's also the view of the Rouhani administration in Tehran. Whether disgruntled youth across Al Sharqiyya will finally have had enough with the beheading of al-Nimr it's another story; it may open a Pandora's box that will not exactly displease the IRGC in Tehran.

But the heart of the matter is that Team Rouhani perfectly understands the developing Southwest Asia chapter of the New Great Game, featuring the re-emergence of Iran as a regional superpower; all of the House of Saud's moves, from hopelessly inept to major strategic blunder, betray utter desperation with the end of the old order.

That spans everything from an unwinnable war (Yemen) to a blatant provocation (the beheading of al-Nimr) and a non sequitur such as the new Islamic 34-nation anti-terror coalition which most alleged members didn't even know they were a part of.

The supreme House of Saud obsession rules, drenched in fear and loathing: the Iranian "threat".

Riyadh, which is clueless on how to play geopolitical chess — or backgammon — will keep insisting on the oil war, as it cannot even contemplate a military confrontation with Tehran. And everything will be on hold, waiting for the next tenant of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue; will he/she be tempted to pivot back to Southwest Asia, and cling to the old order (not likely, as Washington relies on becoming independent from Saudi oil)? Or will the House of Saud be left to its own — puny — devices among the shark-infested waters of hardcore geopolitics?

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