

Is Saudi Arabia Doing America's Bidding by Sanctioning Canada?

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Saudi Arabia's sovereignty-supporting sanctions against Canada in response to Ottawa's criticism of the Kingdom's internal affairs are grossly hypocritical but nevertheless in defense of objectively valid principles, though it needs to be considered whether Riyadh's acting independently in this respect or doing so at Washington's urging in order to pile economic pressure on Canada during Trudeau's NAFTA renegotiations with Trump.

Background Basics

Saudi Arabia surprised most observers by reacting in a disproportionately fierce manner to Canada's criticism of its recent arrest of a women's rights activist last week. The [latest developments](#) in this fast-moving spat are that the Kingdom expelled the Canadian Ambassador and ordered all of its students in the North American country to leave as soon as possible, announcing that the government will no longer fund their studies there. It will also stop its [medical treatment programs](#) in the country and [freeze all trade and investment deals](#) with it as well. Furthermore, Riyadh will halt its purchase of wheat and barley products from the agricultural powerhouse and will suspend all flights to and from Toronto next week. There's also a [looming chance](#) that Saudi Arabia might stop selling oil to Canada, too, and that a massive \$11,5 billion arms deal between the two [will also be jeopardized](#).

Sovereignty Double Standards

Riyadh justified its moves in an [uncharacteristically harsh response](#) that slammed Canada's "blatant interference in the Kingdom's domestic affairs, against basic international norms and all international protocol" that attempts to "meddle with Saudi sovereignty". The official condemnation of Ottawa's actions also said that Saudi Arabia "categorically rejects any intervention in its domestic affairs and internal relations with its citizens".

On the surface, the Saudis should be applauded for their valiant defense of state sovereignty in such strong language that one would be forgiven for thinking that it came from a Russian diplomat had they only read the abovementioned passages, but the fact of the matter is that the Kingdom's principled defense of sovereignty is grossly hypocritical because it's guilty of everything that it accuses Canada of.

Saudi sponsorship of countless Mideast militant groups over the decades is well known, as are Riyadh's rants against the democratically elected and legitimate government in Syria, so it's the highest degree of chutzpah for the Kingdom to talk so valiantly about its defense of state sovereignty when it's criticized by Canada.

Even so, overlooking the messenger's hypocrisy, the message itself is a valid one and the Saudis do indeed have a point that would certainly find them common ground with their [newfound Russian partners](#), even if they're selectively applying their sovereignty-related standards in this case. Accordingly, the Kingdom has the right to react however it pleases to Canada's interference in its domestic affairs. What's surprising, though, is that they chose this trigger event to do so and not any previous others.

Timing Is Everything

Governments across the world have voiced criticism of Saudi Arabia's internal policies all throughout the years and to varying extents, though it's only now that the Kingdom sought to make an example out of one of them.

While it can't be discounted that the Saudis simply felt insulted that such an internationally insignificant country like Canada sought to go on a social justice warrior crusade against this Mideast Great Power by virtue signaling its liberal opposition to their sharia law, it also can't be excluded that larger strategic considerations were also at play, such as those relating to their top ally's NAFTA renegotiation talks with Ottawa. The US is already putting a lot of pressure on Canada as it is, and Saudi Arabia's sovereignty-supporting sanctions are poised to hit it even harder.

Trump made it no secret that he personally detests Trudeau and considers him to be what popular parlance would describe as a "snowflake", and the American leader has been trying to very aggressively twist his counterpart's arms during this sensitive time. It doesn't seem to have worked, though, or at least not yet, but that might change with the unexpected introduction of the Saudi economic factor, which still hasn't reached its full potential.

Despite their discrete differences in some respects such as concerning Saudi Arabia's strategic relations with multipolar Great Powers Russia and [China](#), America and the Kingdom are pretty much marching in lockstep with one another when it comes to most other issues, so it wouldn't be a startling revelation if Riyadh conspired with Washington to undermine Ottawa using the latest sovereignty-supporting pretext.

Concluding Thoughts

Canada can't exactly back down from its criticism of Saudi Arabia's human rights situation because it would deal an irreparable blow to its liberal soft power across the world and delegitimize Trudeau's government, especially among its base, so it's unlikely that it'll reverse its position in order to receive sanctions relief from Saudi Arabia.

Instead, the most likely outcome is that the sanctions spat between the two continues in parallel with Trump twisting the screws on Trudeau in order to force him into complying with the US' envisioned outcome of the NAFTA renegotiation talks. Given that Canada's EU allies [capitulated](#) to Trump's trade terms last month, Ottawa is now all alone and will probably end up giving in sooner or later as well, with this defeat - no matter how it's euphemistically framed- being in due part to Saudi Arabia.

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