

Polar Reorientation In the Middle East. The Russia-Saudi Relationship

Part II

By [Andrew Korybko](#)

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In-depth Report: [SYRIA](#)

(Please read [Part I](#) before this article)

The second part of the article series speaks upon the [Russian-Saudi relationship](#) that's emerging in the Mideast, and it proves that it's really not all that surprising in retrospect when one considers the motivating factors (energy, ISIL, and the Iranian deal) that affect both sides.

US-Saudi Energy Scheme Backfires

The oil price plunge that marked the end of 2014 wasn't incidental, as it was really a calculated move by the US and Saudi Arabia to bring Russia and Iran to their knees. F. William Engdahl [wrote](#) about this back in late October, and his article on the topic painstakingly describes the strategic thought that went into this massive asymmetrical offensive against dual Russian-Iranian interests. [Another piece](#) released around that time also draws attention to what a foolhardy gambit this entire venture is, since it risks blowing up the US' shale oil bubble and precipitating fears of a resultant economic collapse. The geopolitics of 1986, when such a move was first attempted against Moscow, are different than those of 2014-2015, and no matter how 'well thought out' the plan was, however, it failed to be the economic 'knockout punch' that the US and Saudi Arabia hoped it would be for both Russia and Iran.

It was at this point that the US likely asked the Saudis to reverse the plan and return back to pre-plot production levels, but somewhat surprisingly to some, Riyadh refused, and instead increased output to [record levels](#) (before scaling down [just slightly](#)) in order to ostensibly meet [growing demand](#) and [widen](#) its market share. But what's really happening, [Engdahl writes](#), is that the Saudis have turned on the US and are out to destroy their shale oil competitors, using their nearly [\\$800 billion in reserves](#) as a far-reaching buffer to any resultant social and economic problems associated with this policy. On the other hand, it could be that the US is the one on the economic offensive, seeing the entire situation as a [game of chicken](#) in forcing the Saudis to blink first. The US could, if it comes to it, print more money and 'indefinitely' prolong its shale oil loans (an unsustainable band-aid 'solution') so as to ward off the same negative consequences that Saudi Arabia would inevitably experience if it keeps [bleeding tens of billions](#) every year and [running a budget deficit](#). The reason behind this asymmetrical aggression against a tried-and-tested American ally might be that Washington wants to establish more control over its client state as a run-

up to geopolitically engineering its collapse per the [Ralph Peters' model](#).

No matter what the reason behind the American-Saudi oil war, it's clear that it represents a classic (energy) security dilemma. The US fears that lower oil prices could eventually burst the shale credit bubble, while it believes it stands to gain by continuing their levels for now in order to capsize the Saudi economy and create avenues for more American control over the country. Looking at the Saudis, it's the inverse - the potential for their economic decline is a negative that they'll deal with for now, but it's being sucked up in order to crash the US' shale oil companies. Both sides, however, have a mutual fear over what the effect of Iran's full return to the global energy market will be, but as was previously stated, the US can 'indefinitely' prolong its fake 'remedy' for dealing with this, while the Saudis will eventually run short of money sooner or later, which could lead to real repercussions for its economic, social, and eventually, political stability. One of the unstated but obvious aftereffects of the American-Saudi oil war is that Riyadh critically damaged its relations with Moscow because of it (since low energy prices inflict real damage on the Russian budget and economy), which is why this single issue, by itself, did not bring the Saudis to talk, let alone turn, to Russia. However, when combined with two other simultaneously occurring ones that will be examined right after this, the Saudis' suspicions of American intentions towards them reached the boiling point where they spilled over and compelled Riyadh to enter into secret talks with Moscow, Washington's New Cold War foe.

The ISIL Boomerang



Concurrent with the oil competition between the US and Saudi Arabia, ISIL struck back at one of its creators by bombing Saudi mosques in [May](#) and at the [beginning of this month](#). Attacks had been [threatened](#) even before then, but the first mosque bombing really opened the Saudis' eyes to the fact that their spawn has grown out of control and might even have been strategically corralled by the US into attacking the Kingdom directly. In the beginning, Saudi Arabia might have thought that ISIL would remain a loyal proxy actor in between Syria and Iraq, but the [miscalculated](#) War on Yemen that the new king commenced proved to make [fertile breeding ground](#) for the terrorist group's newest nest of [operations](#) along the country's exposed southern border. Approaching ISIL from the standpoint that it's an American-Saudi proxy gone bad, and that the US currently exercises the greatest degree of power in 'guiding' the group towards targets of mutual benefit, then it makes sense that Washington would deploy such asymmetrical pressure against Saudi Arabia in the midst of the heated oil war just like it does against the Syrian Arab Army during the ongoing regime change war.

The Saudis are already a paranoid lot, seeing conspiracies everywhere (especially those of an Iranian-Shiite nature) even if they don't really exist, so they're receptive as it is to any possible indication of a plot against them. Given this preconditioning, it's understandable why they'd view ISIL's threats and attacks as being part of an American plan, especially since it coincides with a period of publicly distrustful relations between the two (motivated by the oil war and the Iranian nuclear deal). The Saudis aren't alone in this assessment either, since [some Russian analysts](#) also agree that [this is the case](#) and that the US has finally decided to move forward with Ralph Peters' plan for taking down the Kingdom. It looks like the US wants to cripple, control, and then usher in the collapse of Saudi Arabia, and that it may have decided to initiate this power move since it saw a favorable window of

opportunity with the rise of the '[Alzheimer King](#)'. It's known that others are really behind the scenes (and [shuffling things up](#) while they're at it), but still, the US might have seen the ascension of an incoherent king and the palace infighting and further successionist intrigue this would lead to as the destabilizing trigger for unleashing their long sought-after plans for the Saudis (although it's not yet known how committed they are to this or how far they'll ultimately go).

The existential threat that Saudi Arabia is facing from its [fellow American-driven Wahhabist co-confessionals](#) (even before their first attack in May) was likely what drove the Kingdom into pondering a Russian outreach, but they refrained from doing so right away because breaking the country's fake "isolationism" would have really upset the US even further than it already was, and it might have created the energy/terrorist security dilemma that it wasn't yet sure was actually in existence. However, the decisive moment that made the Saudis want to reach out to the Russians came when they saw that the US was insistent (practically begging) to reach a deal with Iran. Feeling strategically abandoned by their decades-long ally (despite the [billions](#) in military hardware that the Kingdom bought from it [over the years](#) and the complex interdependent relationship between the two [similar on a smaller scale to US-China]) and under the foreboding threat of an economic/terrorist assault against it by its former friend (however ironic this might be), the Saudis felt that it was time to finally make a turn towards Russia and see if they could salvage their relatively deteriorating geopolitical situation for the better.

Iran Deal Leads To Secret Talks

It was around the springtime that Saudi Arabia realized that the US really wanted to seal a deal with Iran, and this was the final straw that pushed it past the edge and into initiating secret talks with Russia. The Saudis know that they are tied much too close to the US via their military and surface political relations to ever think about abandoning this relationship right now (no matter how tense and ugly it gets), but their main objective in speaking with Russia was to see what kinds of strategic benefits it could gain by doing so (other than making the US 'jealous'). It's likely that nothing was off the table and that the talks were very comprehensive and actually quite fruitful, since their secrecy was publicly dispelled during the [Saint Petersburg International Economic Forum 2015](#) when both sides announced major deals with the other. Russia will help Saudi Arabia build [nuclear power plants](#) (remarkably symbolic since the Iranian nuclear crisis was actually all about Tehran's pursuit of the same), the Saudis will invest [\\$10 billion](#) into the Russian economy, and both sides' highest leaders (President Putin and King Salman) will exchange visits to the other. It can thus be inferred that this secret round of diplomacy, unbeknownst at the time to the rest of the world, was successful enough to have set the stage for these goodwill agreements, and that the current relationship can be built upon for further mutual benefit (as [recognized](#) by Lavrov himself).

Let's use educated reasoning to deduce the most probable topics and content of their talks:

Saudi Arabia Clarifies The Energy War Gone Wrong:

The elephant in the room is obviously the oil war, so this was likely the first thing that Russian and Saudi diplomats thoroughly and honestly discussed once they entered into secret contact with the other. The article earlier explained how something went terribly wrong with the US/Saudi oil war against Russia/Iran in that it now turned its two protagonists against one another, so the Saudis must have had some explaining to do to the Russians in

detailing how this came to be (if they disclosed its origins, that is).



Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov meets with Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Adel bin Ahmed Al-Jubeir in Moscow, August 2015. © Kirill Kallinikov / RIA Novosti

At any rate, the two sides obviously discussed the oil war to some level of depth, and this could have very well included a conversation about Russia's resiliency in the face of Saudi Arabia's offensive against the US (example: how long can Russia hold out for in order to sink the US' shale oil industry once and for all?), if indeed it is the Saudis that initiated it. Should they be on the 'victim' receiving end of things, then they correspondingly held a probable conversation about what both sides can do to help the other out in the name of shared budgetary/economic interests.

Somewhere in the mix of things, it was then decided for the Saudis to invest \$10 billion in Russia's economy, which given the examined discussion scenarios, could either be interpreted as a goodwill gesture of trust (to stick it out with the Saudis while they work on tanking America's oil dreams) or as a symbolic token of 'guilt' for helping initiate the energy war that they've both fallen victim to. After getting past their mutual oil differences (which the \$10 billion investment sure helped happen), the two sides likely turned the conversation towards talking about how they'll deal with Iran's future energy disruption once all of its resources eventually reach the global market.

If the topic was brought up in the first place, then it would have of course touched upon what both sides plan to do if the US risks the pyrrhic victory of sinking its own shale oil industry in order to have Iran emerge as the world's main energy disruptor and be the reason for permanently offsetting Russia and Saudi Arabia's budgetary and economic forecasts. The US can sustain this somewhat self-inflicted wound a lot better than energy-dependent Russia and Saudi Arabia, so the scenario of Washington pushing Tehran to pump the world full of cheap resources in order to bring down both of their economies must definitely scare them and is by all means an issue of mutual interest.

Collaborative Anti-ISIL Measures Discussed:

Saudi Arabia is so afraid of ISIL that it's constructing a [massive 600-mile-long wall](#) along the Iraqi border in order to keep the terrorist group from formally expanding its 'caliphate' into the Kingdom, but its main oversight was that it never occurred to it that: it could be flanked from the Yemeni side; and ISIL can 'spawn' its own cells within the country via internet social networking. When the first attack happened in May, it threw the Saudis into a mild panic, and they finally woke up to the problem they've created. It doesn't mean that they'll stop supporting other terrorist groups, but that they're done doing so with ISIL, especially since it could be that the US is now strategically 'guiding' it towards attacking Saudi Arabia. With such a mindset, it makes sense for Riyadh to entertain Moscow's notions of an anti-ISIL coalition, even if they [don't agree](#) with one another about Syria's formal participation. However, because it's been [clarified](#) during the joint meeting of Russia and Saudi Arabia's Foreign Ministers that Russia is more interested in coordinating presently existing anti-ISIL activity and not creating a brand new coalition, it's possible that Saudi Arabia could play some passive role in this format by withdrawing its support for regime change terrorist groups in Syria, which will be expanded on more below.

Syrian Resolution Talks/Iranian Nuclear Deal:

The capstone of the secret (and ongoing) negotiations and the aspect most relevant to the Mideast's geopolitics deals with the interrelated topics of resolving the War on Syria and Riyadh's response to the imminent (now actual) Iranian nuclear deal. Saudi Arabia is fully cognizant of the "race to the finish" in wrapping up the Wars on Syria and Yemen, and assessing its interests (as it defines them) back to back, it recognizes that it's much less likely to 'succeed' in the former during that timeframe but has a more heightened chance of doing so in the latter. Also, Saudi Arabia really wants to parade its new partnership with Russia in front of Iran and the US, believing that this can make a strong statement in a post-sanctions reality that sees the US chumming up with the Kingdom's ideological and geopolitical rival. Thus, if pressed to choose, the Saudis could 'trade' their failed War on Syria (i.e. withdrawing their support of regime change terrorist groups) in a 'face-saving' manner in order to 'win' a publicized and positive relationship with Russia, as well as resources and time that could be 'invested' into 'winning' the War on Yemen before the "race to the finish" ends in six months' time.

Before dismissing such talk as 'speculation', one should consider the recent [shuttle diplomacy](#) Russia's partaken in to save Syria, as well as a couple other strategic facts that further this thesis. Firstly, Syria has obviously become a quagmire for the proxies that are fighting against it, and Saudi Arabia clearly can't 'win' (or secure its 'win' from being [taken over](#) by Turkey) in this relatively short timeframe. From its perspective, it's much better to cut its losses and [focus on Yemen](#) instead, and Russia could help 'sweeten' the deal by offering to throw in some (discounted) [advanced weapon systems](#) to calm the Kingdom's fears about the Islamic Republic. Russia, after all, is known for juggling its military relationship with both Armenia and Azerbaijan, fierce enemies, while still retaining positive ties with both, so it's foreseeable that it might think of attempting something similar (albeit on a much more grand scale) with Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Also, it must be pointed out that the [BRICS Ufa Declaration](#) doesn't contain a single word whatsoever pertaining to the War on Yemen, despite addressing lesser significant conflicts such as the unrest in Burundi, the civil war in South Sudan, and the situation in Somalia, and given Russia's [UNSC history](#) of supporting the Hadi government as it is, it's probable that it already has 'all its ducks in a row' to facilitate this 'grand bargain' to save Syria at Yemen's expense. But, before detractors accuse Russia of 'multipolar treason', they must first consider to what extent Russia is even capable of influencing the on-the-ground course of events in Yemen to the Houthis' favor in the first place, and whether or not swapping Saudi Arabia's failed War on Syria for Russia's failed support of the Yemeni people is actually quite pragmatic (if unethical to some) in terms of the bigger geopolitical picture.

[To be continued...](#)

Andrew Korybko is the political analyst and journalist for [Sputnik](#) who currently lives and studies in Moscow, exclusively for *ORIENTAL REVIEW*.

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About the author:

Andrew Korybko is an American Moscow-based political analyst specializing in the relationship between the US strategy in Afro-Eurasia, China's One Belt One Road global vision of New Silk Road connectivity, and Hybrid Warfare. He is a frequent contributor to Global Research.

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