

Saudi Arabia Is Weakening US Influence in the Middle East

As widely anticipated, tensions between members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) are slowly corroding the unity of Washington's allies in the Middle East

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In a series of almost unprecedented events among Washington's regional allies, the [crisis](#) between Saudi Arabia and Qatar seems to worsen by the day. The long-awaited [list](#) of demands presented to Doha by Riyadh seem to be intentionally impractical, as if to oblige Qatar to plead guilty to the crimes alleged by the Saudi kingdom or face the consequences, still unknown.

The surreal requests start with demands to close the international television network Al Jazeera, as well as halt the financing of the Muslim Brotherhood. At the heart of the issue remains the question of political and diplomatic relations with Iran, the bane of the Saudi royal family's existence. The House of Thani that controls Qatar has until July 3 to accept all the demands presented. At the moment, Doha seems to be sending mixed messages, announcing that it wants to evaluate the Saudis' proposals, but also letting it be known that most of the demands are "[not reasonable](#)".



Prince Mohammad bin Salman and former crown prince Muhammed bin Nayef (Photo from PressTV)

Another interesting tidbit concerns the removal of Muhammed bin Nayef by the Saudi king as his successor to the throne. Prince Mohammad bin Salman, the young 31-year-old nephew, replaces Muhammed bin Nayef, the former Crown Prince and major ally of the CIA and European and American governments. Mohammad bin Salman is currently the most controversial figure in the Middle East. Responsible for the devastating war in Yemen and the desperate financial state of Riyadh's finances, he oscillates between his [Vision 2030](#) and an anti-Iranian preoccupation that is likely to bring his kingdom to bankruptcy. In Yemen, he

waged a military campaign costing in the tens of billions of dollars, only to lose against the poorest Arab country in the world. His irrational anti-Iranian stance has even led him to risk a conflict within the GCC (thanks to the precious [lobbying role](#) of the UAE ambassador to the US, Yousef al-Otaiba) over the excessive freedom of Doha's foreign policy.

Initially, this disaster appeared to be limited only to the two Gulf nations, with Trump's Twitter account [signalling](#) Washington's immediate backing of Mohammad bin Salman's crusade against Iran and Qatar. The severity of the situation was immediately perceived by Turkey. Ankara and Doha have always played a leading role in the Muslim Brotherhood, a religious group that Riyadh considers to be terrorist organization and a threat to their Salafi realm.

Turkey reiterated its support for the House of Al Thani by deploying about 3,000 military personal to Doha in the country's new military base, at the same time dismissing as "useless and unresponsive" the Saudis' requests to abandon the base and [withdraw](#) their troops. In a series of unprecedented moves, bin Salman mooted the possibility of [supporting](#) Kurdish troops in Iraq and Syria if Ankara should continue to support Doha. What once seemed to be an indissoluble union between Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia today presents far more than fracture and tension, all to the benefit of the likes of Iran and Russia fighting terrorism in Syria alongside the legitimate government in Damascus. It is a nightmare for those like the United States who hoped to continue to impose their will on the Middle East through the blind obedience of certain vassals like Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. With each one battling the other, the US's role becomes much more complicated to influence events.



An aerial overhead view of "Ops Town" at Al Udeid Air Base (AB), Al Rayyan Province, Qatar (QAT), taken from a US Air Force (USAF) KC-135 Stratotanker during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. (Source: US Gov / [Wikimedia Commons](#))

Tensions between Washington's allies are creating a situation of all against all, indeed a sense and feeling that is all too commonly reflected in Washington these days. After days of silence, the [State Department](#) and the Pentagon expressed their support for Qatar, contradicting the President's indications that Qatar was a terrorist-financing state. Confusion

and contradictions in the United States are increasingly having a destabilizing effect, showing a country without a strategic direction. The State Department has strongly criticized Saudi Arabia for its attitude towards Qatar over the last two weeks. This is by no means surprising, as the US Department of State is still infiltrated by former Obama administration loyalists, who themselves are [heavily tied](#) to the Muslim Brotherhood, as was the former nominee Hillary Clinton together with her trusted assistant Huma Abedin. The Pentagon, in this deep-state civil war, considers Qatar primarily from a tactical perspective: 90% of US aircraft directed against Syria take off from the Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar. The sale of [\\$12 billion](#) worth of jets to Qatar is evidence that Qatar is one of the military-industrial complex's best customers. The contradictory messages emanating from this US administration, unable to speak with one voice, continues to destabilize America's closest allies in the region.

Another move that has certainly not gone unnoticed concerns the [deployment](#) of several Israeli tactical and operational aircraft in Saudi Arabia. The process of rapprochement between these two nations continues unabated, creating even more distrust in the region.

What now seems irreversible is the attitude of Doha's authorities, who seem to have decided to use this opportunity to chart their own course independently of Riyadh. The Qatar Airways CEO, when [interviewed](#) by Al Jazeera, reiterated that, thanks to Iran, there is a chance for the operator to circumvent the skies illegally closed to it by the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. The CEO, when questioned on how he would proceed given the expected huge losses, stated that the company intends to broaden its horizons towards new routes so far unexplored.

Saudi tactics are likely to create difficulties and problems for Qatar, even with support from Iran and other regional countries. For the moment, Doha's ships carrying liquefied natural gas (LNG) continue to operate freely. In a country that receives almost 90% of its revenue from the sale of LNG, blocking its ships would mean pushing Qatar into a corner, a state of affairs that would closer resemble conventional warfare. Bin Salman's inexperience and bungling will end up creating problems with Egypt, which currently allows transit of Qatar's LNG through the Suez Canal to reach the Mediterranean and deliver gas to European customers. A request from Riyadh to Cairo to block Qatari ships would hardly be accepted, creating further fractures and tensions among those participating in the blockade of Qatar.

Perhaps Trump has only now realized how unhelpful these rifts are to his Arab NATO plan. If Turkey and Israel are on opposite sides, and Qatar and Saudi Arabia are on the verge of a war, it is unlikely that Washington could continue to try impose its strategic vision in all the Middle East in the intention of safeguarding its interests.

In this chaotic mess for the US and its allies, as always, the axis of the Shiite resistance benefits the most, especially in Syria with the [advancement](#) of Assad's troops in the province of Deir ez-Zor, after almost five years of its absence there. Where Turkey, Iran and Russia have achieved ceasefire agreements, signed in Astana, the majority of remaining problems lie with the terrorist groups supported by Qatar and Turkey or Saudi Arabia. In addition to a series of skirmishes a few days ago, mistrust and the swapping of sides seem to be on the agenda, with Syria decreasingly under the control of terrorists and the prospect of the entire country being liberated coming into vision.

Washington is once again getting itself into an almost unprecedented situation. Whether or not Trump has given his blessing to Saudi Arabia's actions against Qatar, what matters are

the consequences for the region. Iran seems to play more and more the role of a moderate force ready to engage in dialogue with all parties. The Saudi attitude is likely to disaffect two strategic partners, Turkey and Egypt, with the latter ready to abandon the Saudis if pushed too far. Turkey, after intense Russian diplomatic efforts, seems to be on the verge of abandoning its support for anti-Assad forces, but prudence dictates that it carries awhile before proceeding with these changes. Erdogan has often played a double or triple game.

Bin Salman's strategy began with the Yemen war, continued with hostility against Qatar, and is now culminating with his appointment as Crown Prince. Trump seems to have climbed onto the chariot of losers, and now it is harder than ever to support a loose cannon like bin Salman who seems to show little hesitation in destroying his kingdom as well as undoing fundamental relations among Washington's allies.

It is a struggle against time for the American deep state in fight against itself and spinning around in conflict. The risks of Bin Salman's disruptive actions and Trump's incompetence could have unimaginable consequences, as the possible collapse of the whole Anglo-American Middle East architecture constructed over a hundred years of wars and abuses.

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