

Saudi-Israeli Friendship Is Driving the Rest of the Middle East Together

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Through its top official, Prince Mohammad bin Salman (MBS), Saudi Arabia continues a wave of internal arrests, having seized nearly \$800 billion in assets and bank accounts. A few days later, MBS attempted to demonstrate his authority by summoning Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri to Saudi Arabia, where he was forced to resign on Saudi state TV. Trump tweeted support for Bin Salman's accusations against Iran and Hezbollah, and the future Saudi king even obtained Israel's secret support. Iran, meanwhile, denies any involvement in Lebanon's domestic affairs or involvement with the ballistic missile launched by Houthi rebels towards Riyadh's King Khalid International Airport a few days ago. Meanwhile, Trump, Putin and Xi met recently and seem to have decided the fate of the region in an exercise of realism and pragmatism.

News that upends the course of events has now become commonplace over the last few months. However, even by Middle East standards, this story is something new. The [affair](#) surrounding Lebanon's Prime Minister Hariri generated quite a bit of commotion. Hariri had apparently been obliged to announce his resignation on Saudi Arabia's Al Arabiya news channel while being [detained](#) in Riyadh. His [most recent interview](#) seemed to betray some nervousness and fatigue, as one would expect from a person under enormous stress from forced imprisonment. In his televised resignation statement, Hariri specified that he was unable to return to Lebanon due to some sort of a threat to his person and his family by operatives in Lebanon of Iran and Hezbollah. The Lebanese security authorities, however, have stated that they are not aware of any [danger](#) faced by Hariri.

In an endless attempt to regain influence in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia has once again brought about results directly opposite to those intended. Immediately after receiving confirmation that the resignation had taken place in Saudi Arabia, the entire Lebanese political class demanded that Hariri return home to clarify his position, meet with the president and submit his resignation in person. Saudi actions have served to consolidate a united front of opposition factions and paved the way for the collapse of Saudi influence in the country, leaving a vacuum to be conveniently filled by Iran. Once again, as with Yemen and in Syria, the intentions of the Saudis have dramatically backfired.

This Saudi interference in the domestic affairs of a sovereign country has stirred up unpredictable scenarios in the Middle East, just at the time that tensions were cooling in Syria.

Hariri's detention comes from far away and is inextricably linked to what has been happening over the past few months in Saudi Arabia. Mohammed bin Salman, son of King Salman, began his internal purge of the Kingdom's elite by removing from the line of

succession [Bin Nayef](#), a [great friend of the US intelligence](#) establishment ([Brennan and Clapper](#)). Bin Nayef was a firm partner of the US deep state. Saudi Arabia has for [years](#) worked for the CIA, advancing US strategic goals in the region and beyond. Thanks to the cooperation between Bandar bin Sultan Al Saud, Bin Nayef, and US intelligence agencies, Washington has for years given the impression of fighting against Islamist terrorist while actually weaponizing jihadism since the 1980s by deploying it against rival countries like the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, the Iraqi government in 2014, the Syrian state in 2012, and Libya's Gaddafi in 2011.

MBS has even detained numerous family-related princes, continuing to consolidate power around himself. Even [Alwaleed bin Talal](#), one of the richest men in the world, ended up caught in MBS's net, rightly accused of being one of the most corrupt people in the Kingdom. It is speculated that family members and billionaires are detained at the [Ritz Carlton](#) in Riyadh, with guests and tourists promptly ejected days before the arrests began. Mohammed bin Salman's actions are not slowing down, even after seizing [\\$800 billion](#) in accounts, properties and assets.

MBS is intensifying his efforts to end the conflict in Yemen, which is a drain on Saudi finances, lifting the naval [blockade](#) of the Port of Aden. Not only that, the two main Syrian opposition leaders, Ahmad Jarba and Riyadh Hijab, have [been arrested](#) by Riyadh in an effort to demonstrate to Putin the good will of MBS in seeking to resolve the Syrian conflict. Not surprisingly, King Salman, in a frantic search for a solution to the two conflicts that have lashed his reputation as well as the wealth and alliances of the Saudi kingdom, [flew to Moscow to seek mediation](#) with Putin, the new [master](#) of the Middle East.

MBS has undertaken an anti-corruption campaign for international as well as domestic purposes. At the national level, the collapse of oil prices, coupled with huge military spending, forced the royal family to seek alternatives for the future of the Kingdom in terms of sustainability, earnings and profits. MBS's [Vision 2030](#) aims to diversify revenue in order to free Saudi Arabia from its dependence on oil. This is a huge ask for a nation that has been thriving for seventy years from an abundance of resources simply found under its ground. This delicate balance of power between the royal family and its subjects is maintained by the subsidies granted to the local population that has allowed the Kingdom to flourish in relative peace, even during the most delicate periods of the Arab Spring in 2011. There is an underlying understanding in Saudi Arabia that so long as the welfare of the population is guaranteed, there should be no threat to the stability of the royal family. It is no wonder that after losing two wars, and with oil prices at their lowest, MBS has started to worry about his future, seeking to purge the elites opposed to him.

The Kingdom's reality is quickly changing under MBS, the next Saudi king, who is trying to anticipate harder times by consolidating power around himself and correcting his errors brought on by incompetence and his excessive confidence in the Saudi military as well as in American backing. The [ballistic missile](#) that hit Riyadh was launched by the Houthis in Yemen after 30 months of indiscriminate bombing by the Saudi air force. This act has shown how vulnerable the Kingdom is to external attack, even at the hand of the poorest Arab country in the world.

In this context, Donald Trump seems to be capitalizing on Saudi weakness, fear, and the need to tighten the anti-Iranian alliance. What the American president wants in return for support of MBS is as simple as it comes: huge investments in the US economy together with

the purchase of US arms. MBS obliged a few months ago, investing into the US economy to the tune of more than [\\$380 billion over ten years](#). Trump's goal is to create new jobs at home, increase GDP, and boost the economy, crucial elements for his re-election in 2020. Rich allies like Saudi Arabia, finding themselves in a tight fix, are a perfect means of achieving this end.

Another important aspect of MBS's strategy involves the listing of [Aramco on the NYSE](#) together with the switch to [selling oil for yuan](#) payments. Both decisions are fundamental to the United States and China, and both bring with them a lot of friction. MBS is at this moment weak and needs all the allies and support he can get. For this reason, a decision on Aramco or the petroyuan would probably create big problems with Beijing and Washington respectively. The reason why MBS is willing to sell a small stock of Aramco relates to his efforts to gin up some money. For this reason, thanks to the raids on the accounts and assets of the people arrested by MBS, Saudi Arabia has raised over [\\$800 billion](#), certainly a higher figure than any sale of Aramco shares would have brought.

This move allows MBS to postpone a decision on listing Aramco on the NYSE as well as on whether to start accepting yuan for payment of oil. Holding back on the petroyuan and Aramco's initial public offering is a way of holding off both Beijing and Washington but without at the same time favouring one over the other. Economically, Riyadh cannot choose between selling oil for dollars on the one hand and accepting payment in another currency on the other. It is a nightmare scenario; but some day down the road, the Saudi royals will have to make a choice.

The third party to this situation is Israel in the figure of Netanyahu, Donald Trump's [great friend](#) and supporter right from the beginning of his electoral campaign. Trump's victory brought positive returns to the investment the Israeli leader had made in him. Ever since Trump won the election, the US has employed harsh words against Iran, turning away from the positive approach adopted by Obama that managed to achieve the Iran nuclear deal framework. Nevertheless, the Israeli prime minister has had to deal with numerous problems at home, with a narrow parliamentary majority and several members of his government [under investigation for corruption](#).

Donald Trump pursued a very aggressive policy against Tehran during the election campaign, then went on to [annul](#) the Iran nuclear deal a few weeks ago. The decision is now for Congress to certify, with a difficult mediation between European allies (other than China and Russia), who are opposed to ending the deal, and the Israelis, who can count on the support of many senators thanks to their lobbying efforts. Israel, for its part, sees in Saudi Arabia and MBS the missing link between Saudi Wahhabism and Israeli Zionism. Various [private cablegrams](#) leaked to the press have shown how Israeli diplomats around the world were instructed to support Saudi accusations of Iran interfering in Lebanon's internal affairs.

The interests of MBS and Netanyahu seem to dovetail quite nicely in Syria and Yemen as well as with regard to Iran and Hezbollah. The two countries have a common destiny by virtue of the fact that neither alone can deal decisively with Hezbollah in Syria or Lebanon, let alone Iran. Rouhani himself has said that Iran fears American strength and power alone, knowing that Saudi Arabia and Israel are incapable of defeating Tehran.

Trump's approval of the arrests carried out by MBS is based on a number of factors. The first involves the investments in the economy that will be coming America's way. The other,

certainly less known, concerns the subterranean battle that has been occurring between the Western elites for months. Many of [Clinton's top money sources](#) are billionaires arrested by MBS, with stock options in various major banks, insurance companies, publishing groups, and American television groups, all openly anti-Trump. In this sense, the continuation of Trump's fight with a portion of the elite can be seen with the halting of the [merger of AT&T and Time Warner involving CNN](#).

Trump seems to be accompanying Saudi and Israeli urgings for war with multiple intentions, potentially having a plan for a broader, regional and global agreement between the parties.

At a regional level, Trump first supported the Saudi [crusade against Qatar](#), resolved with Riyadh not getting Qatar to accede to any of its [advanced demands](#). During the crisis, Doha approached [Tehran](#) and [Moscow](#), who immediately took advantage of the situation to establish trade relations and commence negotiations with Qatar to tame its terrorist influence in the region, especially in the Syrian conflict. Turkey and Qatar have practically announced a [military alliance](#), cementing a new front that includes China, Russia, Iran, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Qatar, now potentially all on the same side of the barricades, opposed to Saudi dictates and Israel's efforts to foment war with Iran.

With the US withdrawal from the region, as is increasingly evident from Trump's reluctance to embark on a Middle East conflict, Israel and Saudi Arabia are increasing their desperate cries against Iran, observing how the gains of the resistance axis have led Tehran to dominate the region with its allies. The visit of King Salman to Russia, and the [four meetings](#) between Putin and Netanyahu, give the idea of which capital is in charge in the region. This all represents an epochal change that further isolates Riyadh and Tel Aviv, two countries that represent the heart of chaos and terror.

The Saudi attempt to isolate Qatar has failed miserably, and the continuous effort to paint Iran as the main cause of tension in the region seems to have reached a point of no return, with the latest stunt involving Hariri. Sunnis, Christians and Shiites agree on one point only: that the premier must return home. Riyadh hopes to light the fuse of a new civil war in the region, with Israel hoping to take advantage of the chaos brought about by an attack on Hezbollah. This is not going to happen, and the disappointment of the House of Saud and the Israeli prime minister will not change anything. Without a green light from Washington and a promise from Uncle Sam to intervene alongside his Middle East allies, the Israelis and Saudis are aware that they have neither the means nor strength to attack Iran or Hezbollah.

Trump is playing a dangerous game; but there seems to be some degree of coordination with the other giants on the international scene. The main point is it is impossible for Washington to be an active part in any conflict in the region, or to change the course of events in a meaningful way. The "[End of history](#)" ended years ago. US influence is on the decline, and Xi Jinping and Putin have shown great interest in the future of the region. In recent months, the Russian and Iranian militaries, together with the Chinese economic grip on the region, have shown a collective intention to replace years of war, death and chaos with peace, prosperity and wealth.

MBS and Netanyahu are having a hard time dealing with this new environment that will inevitably proclaim Iran the hegemon in the region. Time is running out for Israel and Saudi Arabia, and both countries are faced with enormous internal problems while being unable to change the course of events in the region without the full intervention of their American ally, something practically impossible nowadays.

The new course of the multipolar world, together with Trump's America First policy, seems to have hit hardest those countries that placed all their bets on the continuing economic and military dominance of the United States in the region. Other countries like Qatar, Lebanon and Turkey have started to understand the historical change that is going on, and have slowly been making the switch, realizing in the process the benefits of a multipolar world order, which is more conducive to mutually beneficial cooperation between countries. The more Saudi Arabia and Israel push for war against Iran, the more they will isolate themselves. This will serve to push their own existence to the brink of extinction.

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