

The Saudi Bull in Arab China Shop. The Saudi-Israeli Marriage of Convenience against Syria and Iran

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Obsessed with the “Iran threat,” which leads to its warmongering in Syria, Saudi Arabia is acting like a bull in a china shop, wreaking regional havoc in an already Arab fragile political environment and creating what George Joffe’ of Cambridge University’s Centre of International Studies, on last December 30, called the “second Arab cold war,” the first being the Saudi-led cold war with the Pan-Arab Egypt of Gamal Abdul Nasser since the 1960s.

The kingdom stands now almost isolated politically. Its “going it alone” in the Syrian conflict has cornered Saudi Arabia into a self-inflicted foreign policy no-win deadlock, to be at odds with three super powers, including its strategic U.S. ally as well as Russia and China, in addition to regional heavy weights in Iran, Iraq, Egypt and Algeria, all who advocate a political settlement of the conflict.

Within the six-member Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC), the kingdom navigates no better.

It is at loggerheads with Qatar over the latter’s sponsorship of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and consequently over the two countries’ disagreement over the removal of the MB-led Mohammad Morsi’s presidency.

Saudi Arabia’s hostility to the MB and its support of their removal from power in Egypt have reflected negatively on the Saudi-Turkish relations as well and had repercussions in Syria, leading to a restructuring of the insurgent political and military competing leaders who claim the representation of the Syrian people: Qatari and Turkish-supported leading figures and organizations were replaced by Saudi loyalists and accordingly, for example, the “Free Syrian Army” has simply disappeared to be replaced by the Islamic Front.

In the last GCC summit meeting in Kuwait , the other five members of the GCC, Oman in particular, rejected the kingdom’s proposal to develop the “cooperation council” into a confederation.

Despite the Saudi bailing out of the post-Morsi interim government in Cairo with a few billions of US dollars, Egypt doesn’t see eye to eye with Riyadh neither on Syria , where it joined the political solution advocates, nor on relations with Russia , which Egypt is now reviving to balance its US ties.

According to Wall Street Journal online on this January 5, the ensuing situation “is placing the White House in a growing diplomatic quandary as its regional allies fall into competing camps.”

The fact that the United States has chosen diplomacy instead of military confrontation with Tehran and Damascus has politically isolated the kingdom, which had hedged its bets on a western military intervention led or blessed by the United States . It feels betrayed by its American strategic ally. For a long time it relied on a long mistaken understanding that the US marines will be always available as mercenary soldiers ready to fight Saudi wars as long as the wealthy kingdom would pay for it, not aware of the US understanding of the vice versa.

However, instead of maneuvering wisely to backtrack to steer in harmony with the US , the kingdom stubbornly decided to “go it alone.”

In an op-ed published by The New York Times on last December 19, Saudi Ambassador to the UK, Prince Nawaf bin Abdulaziz al-Saud, said his country “will go it alone” against Syria and Iran, because it “will not stand idly by” while the US compromises Saudi Arabia’s security and “risk[s] the region’s stability.”

However, “in spite of its great wealth, the kingdom is not able to confront significant threats in its strategic environment on its own,” former Iran Coordinator in Israel’s National Security Council, Yoel Guzansky, wrote in Haaretz on last December 25, adding that as regards the Saudi “deterrence of and protection from Iran, ... no other major power is currently interested in or capable of filling the role played by the United States.”

As of late this summer, Saudi Arabia had given \$400 million in arms and other equipment to Syrian Salafi Jihadists, the Wall Street Journal online reported on last December 29.

True, Saudi warmongering over Syria and Iran could abort the Geneva II conference on Syria, scheduled to convene on this January 22 in Montreux, Switzerland to wrap up a political settlement, but in the end of the day the Saudi kingdom is more likely to end up the only loser in the face of a regional and worldwide consensus on political settlement as the only possible exit out of the Syrian conflict.

Logic dictates that Iran should be in and Saudi Arabia out, but the Geneva II guest list includes warmongering Saudi Arabia, but excludes Iran, which has been calling from the start for a political solution. Such an arrangement warns of including the only “spoiler-in-chief,” in the words of the Assistant Professor of International Studies at Arcadia University , Pennsylvania , Samer N. Abboud, writing in the Qatari www.aljazeera.com on this January 5.

The US and Russian top diplomats, John Kerry and Sergey Lavrov were scheduled during a meeting ahead of Geneva II to decide on Iran’s participation, according to Martin Nesirky, spokesperson for UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon.

There is no way the kingdom could succeed in Syria where a US-led Qatari, Turkish, French and British alliance failed. Saudi former intelligence chief, former ambassador to the US and an influential member of the royal family, Prince Turki bin Faisal Al Saud, admitted their failure when he told CNBC on this January 7 that the United States failed in its dealing with the Syrian conflict.

Thanks to Saudis, Syrian Conflict Spills over

The three-year old conflict in Syria has somewhat been contained within its own borders, but Saudi Arabia’s ongoing warmongering threatens to perpetuate the conflict and, more

importantly, to spill it over regionally without achieving the Saudi proclaimed goal of changing the regime in Damascus at any cost.

The protracted Syrian conflict is already spilling over into neighboring countries through the Saudi sectarian agitation and incitement.

In the east, Iraqi officials had already appealed to the Saudi and other GCC governments to stop their intervention in Iraq 's internal affairs by arms and political, financial and logistical support to insurgents whose terrorism claimed the lives of some ten thousand overwhelmingly civilian Iraqis in 2013.

West of Syria, "Lebanon is paralyzed right now," Gen. Michel Aoun, leader of the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), the second largest bloc in Lebanese parliament, told www.al-monitor.com on last December 13. After a two-week power vacuum, a prime minister-designate was nominated last April, but he has yet to form his government. His efforts have reached a dead end. The country since then was administrated by a caretaker government. No breakthrough seems imminent.

Saudi Arabia is the reason. It is exploiting its historical influence with loyalists and allies to prevent any inclusive government. It insists on the exclusion of Hizbullah as a precondition. The dead end polarized the country between pro-Syria and pro-Saudi camps. Riyadh , to guarantee a no-return by its loyalists, has recently fueled this polarization with a three billion "gift" over five years to arm the Lebanese army with French weapons in the hope of creating a counterbalance to Hezbollah, thus qualifying Lebanon for a civil war.

Meanwhile the northern and eastern parts of the country have slipped out of the control of the central government in Beirut and became a bastion of a Saudi-supported training camp, safe haven, manpower reservoir and a host of foreign Jihadists, fueling the Syrian conflict with arms and fighters.

Deterred by the military successes of the official Syrian Arab Army against them and falling back on Lebanon, those "Jihadists" are retaliating with the escalation of suicide bombings inside Lebanon, which are claiming more and more Lebanese civilian lives of all sects.

In the south in Jordan, where the kingdom succeeded for three years to keep balance between its geopolitical links with Syria and its strategic alliance with the US and Saudi Arabia, warnings against a mounting Saudi pressure to change course have been voiced recently.

For example, former premier and member of the upper house, Ma'arouf al-Bakhit, quoted by www.ammonnews.net on last December 30, warned that the disparity between the US and Saudi approaches to solving the Syrian conflict is pressuring Jordan, which is now facing the "challenge" of the possibility that Saudi Arabia "might act to impose its vision on Jordan," indicating that "Syria no longer views Jordan as neutral" and accuses the kingdom of "hosting a Saudi - Israeli operations room to run military operations in Syria." If Syria decides to act on this accusation, al-Bakhit added, it is "possible" to "move part of war" to "the interior of the kingdom's territory." Al-Bakhit should have cited Lebanon and Iraq as live precedents.

Further away, in Russia , the latest terror attacks in Volgograd were interpreted as an integral part of and attributed to the same terror network and mastermind in the Middle

East , thus alienating the emerging Russian world polar. Russian media reports were implicating Saudi Arabia as responsible.

Saudi Strategy Fails in Syria

Since the so-called “Arab Spring” sprang out in Tunisia three years ago, the Saudi-led GCC monarchies succeeded in defending themselves against the tidal popular protests by a preempting financial bailout (Oman, Bahrain) or by direct military intervention (Bahrain) and by financial, political and indirect, but public nonetheless, military intervention to hijack the burgeoning revolutions in the “republics,” which have become more like china shops, either stateless or failed states, breathlessly in a life or death fight against “Islamist” terror organizations, which are armed and financed by none other than this same Saudi-led petrodollar monarchies and sheikhdoms.

This Saudi-led strategy is best manifested in Syria , where it met its first failure. Internal, regional and international consensus on political settlement and anti-terror campaign is gaining momentum to put an end to this strategy. Saudi Arabia has no other option but either to backtrack or being isolated. It either changes course or changes its leadership.

Its warmongering in Syria is portraying the kingdom in public opinion as the regional mastermind of violence and instability, vindicating American accusations, fueled by Israeli incitement, in the aftermath of the terror attacks in US on September 11, 2001 that the Saudi sectarian ideology is an incubator nurturing violence and terror, despite the kingdom’s long war against its own Islamist terrorists.

This sectarian ideology is creating a sectarian clash across the Middle East between two theocracies, the “Shiite” theocracy of Iran and the Sunni theocracy of Saudi Arabia , thus blurring the real dividing line of the regional battle between the US-protected Israeli occupation of Arab lands in Palestine , Syria and Lebanon and the self-proclaimed Iran - Syria axis of resistance. The survival of a secular Syria will be the first regional step towards the containment of this destructive sectarian clash.

Within this context it is noteworthy that Saudi Arabia, the godfather of the “Arab peace initiative,” postures as a peace maker against the Israeli occupying power, but insists on military solution in Syria whose Golan Heights is occupied by Israel since 1967.

Ironically, Saudi - Israeli crossroads seem to meet as the only regional relief for the kingdom. This approach of “the enemy of my enemy is my friend” is creating a fait accompli of a Saudi-Israeli marriage of convenience against Syria and Iran , which places the two countries on a higher moral ground among the overwhelming majority of Arabs and Muslims.

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