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## *The U.S., Saudi Arabia, and Israel (vs. Iran and the World)*

The increasingly embattled and reviled, soon to fall Donald Trump withdrew the U.S. from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (the “Iran nuclear deal”) in May.

He did so in order to fulfill a campaign promise, and express his pathological resentment for his predecessor by undoing an Obama achievement. That’s how the whole world understands it—especially as his idiocy becomes widely acknowledged— even by his inner circle of frustrated leakers in an unfolding drama of White House chaos.

Trump is a very unusual U.S. president, pursuing peace with North Korea, for example, while seeking regime change in Iran. Where’s the consistency, ask foreign leaders? They understand that the U.S. leader is not guided by any coherent ideology and is hence unpredictable and often irrational. They also know that the conditions Mike Pompeo set for the U.S. to return to the agreement were outrageous, humiliating and designed for rejection.

Trump has not only withdrawn the U.S. from the agreement but sought to block its implementation by imposing secondary sanctions on countries trading with Iran. These infuriate European officials and have produced strong protest. It’s preposterous to demand that Daimler AG cancel plans for Mercedes-Benz manufacture in Iran until Tehran ceases support for Hizbollah or the Syrian army. Europeans vow to find ways to escape U.S. efforts to sabotage trade. The Chinese will surely continue to purchase Iranian oil; so will the Indians, South Koreans, Turks, Italians, and Japanese. These are Iran’s top petroleum customers.

Who in the world supports the U.S. in its efforts to sabotage of the JCPOA? Who supports it in its drive to inflict economic pain, and then, according to the plan, the overthrow of the regime making use of MEK and other proxies? There are two countries whose leaders do, emphatically: Saudi Arabia and Israel. Unlikely bedfellows, would they not seem, even though united in hostility to Tehran?

Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy governed by harsh Sharia law. It is the land of two of Islam's holiest sites, the homeland of Sunni Islam. Its royals view the Islamic Republic of Iran as a bastion of (Shiite) heresy and rival for regional influence. They see it as operating through any other Shiite forces in the region: various political parties and militias in (primarily Shiite) Iraq; the Alawite-led but secular government of Syria, commanding as it does the continuing loyalty of the Syrian Arab Army; the (Shiite-based) Hizbollah political party and militia in Lebanon; the mass movement of the Shiite majority in Sunni-ruled Bahrain; the Houthis of Yemen, etc.

The Saudi government does not publicly target Shiism; there is a significant (rather oppressed) Shiite minority in Saudi Arabia itself. It does not represent itself as defender of the truth faith, at war with the heretical Shiites, but as a U.S. and British ally (and huge arms customer) concerned with “maintaining stability” in the region—stability of the status quo constantly threatened by Persian trouble-making.

Israel is of course a unique sort of parliamentary republic, a democracy of sorts (it being understood that Palestinians are second-class citizens). Religious law does not pertain as it does in many Islamic countries (although Jewish rabbinical courts are part of the justice system). Israeli leaders don't care about Sunni-Shiite differences as they care about Iran's support for numerous Arab enemies of Israel. And of course, they've said for years that Iran wants to wipe Israel off the map. (The Iranian president had quoted the late Ayatollah Khomeini as saying that “the occupation of Jerusalem will vanish from the page of time” but this was distorted and the misquote used to this day endlessly to justify the baseless charge that Iran plans to nuke Jerusalem.)

Iran, they keep saying, is an “existential threat” to Israel. It supports Assad, Hizbollah, at times Hamas. The Shah overthrown in 1979 had been a friend, but his successors call for “Death to Israel!” Binyamin Netanyahu has for decades shrieked about the immanent likelihood of an Iranian nuclear test; but it was all a ploy to get the U.S. to bomb Iran. Neither George W. Bush nor Barack Obama took the bait. (Dick Cheney probably would have. Or John McCain.)

Their joint efforts to urge U.S. action against Iran have brought Saudi Arabia and Israel into what is now an openly admitted relationship, a de facto anti-Iranian alliance. It is also an alliance against the Syrian regime that is aligned with Iran, Hizbollah, (sometimes) Hamas, and contests Israel's occupation of the Golan Heights. With the U.S., these two countries constitute what we can call an axis—an axis opposed to the rest of the world's right to deal with and trade with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

In Syria, the Syrian Arab Army with its international allies (including of course Russia) has largely won the conflict initiated in 2011, fueled by foreign jihadis. Al-Qaeda (Tahrir al-Sham) forces are concentrated now in Idlib Province—perhaps 10,000 according to Staffan de Mistura, UN special envoy on Syria. There are tens of thousands of others in aligned groups. They've been corralled there and now the Army is closing in. The pacification of that province could mark the end of the war and perhaps the end of the neocon project of region-wide regime change. (But again, Trump is unpredictable.)

It's not clear that U.S. efforts to sabotage of the Iran Deal will work (and bring down the mullahs). But in the meantime, the U.S. may try to sabotage the reconquest of Idlib. When someone like Pompeo depicts this final chapter to a tragic conflict as a humanitarian catastrophe, it raises the prospect of U.S. force to prevent that humanitarian capacity. (Remember Libya?)

Now Trump warns Russia (in a tweet) against “recklessly” attacking Idlib. And the Israeli press reports that the U.S. is identifying Syrian government chemical weapons centers to strike, if necessary (as though there are such centers). RT reports a false-flag operation is probably being planned. There may be some release of sarin that the U.S. will use as a pretext for strikes—to protect the civilians of Idlib, of course.

The Saudis have been big supporters of some of the groups in Idlib; the Israelis continue to bomb Syrian army forces; the U.S. insists on its right to intervene and has thousands of troops in the country. They're all there, probably coordinating strategy with Washington, towards both Syria and Iran.

The Exceptional Nation (that elected an idiot); the Nation-State of the Jewish People (that named a square and a high-speed train station after Trump); the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia headed by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques (who awarded Trump a gold medal). Such a fine Axis of Evil! But the axis pivots on Trump, who may not be long on his throne.

Of course the evil that men do lives after their impeachments or whatever ignominious end. Pence who never dines with women other than his wife might have a fine time with

the Saudis, and since he believes God gave Israel to the Jews (Gen. 12:3 etc.) he'll have a fine time with the Israelis. But he may be perceived just as Trump is perceived by the world now: as an idiot incapable of providing positive leadership to anything, an abject bootlicker so outclassed by the likes of Merckel, Putin, Xi, Macron, Abe, etc. that he will not be able to put Humpty Dumpty back again.

May the Axis shatter on the rocks of defeat in Syria, Iranian resistance, world powers' rejection of U.S. hegemony, Israeli isolation and a crippling U.S. political crisis.