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The Saudi Project Has Failed

Rannie Amiri

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Books will be written on the designs of the Saudi regime to reshape the greater Middle East. Entire chapters could be dedicated to the depth of United States and Israeli involvement and their shared partnership with the House of Saud and other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member states to do so. The titles may even stipulate it as a *Saudi-U.S.-Israeli Project* for emphasis. That said, the role played by Saudi Arabia within this alliance is not insignificant.

The undertaking has directly touched nearly a half-dozen Arab countries, unified largely by their common effort to resist the import of radical, extremist groups unleashed in retribution for not abiding by the diktats of the Gulf dynasties. Others opposed monarchical rule, their royal proxies or a Saudi-directed foreign policy and attempts to impose a uniform media narrative.

The scope of such a discussion is certainly worthy of a comprehensive and detailed analysis but only a summation is given here. Consider it the last page of the last section of the last chapter.

The Saudi Project has failed. Utterly.

Iraq

With the fall of Saddam Hussein, alarm bells sounded in Riyadh and other GCC capitals. He was an unpredictable ally yet one perceived to be adept at stemming ostensible Iranian and hence

(according to the sectarian mindset), Shia influence from reaching the Arabian Peninsula. Many Gulf states have sizable Shia Arab populations, marginalized politically and socioeconomically particularly in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. Suddenly, a popularly-elected government assumed power on their doorstep. Imperfect as it was, the Iraqi government reflected the demographics of the war-torn, Shia-majority country. The creation and rise of the Islamic State (IS) was part and parcel of their plan to make sure it would not succeed and indeed, implode. Islamic State funding came primarily from Saudi Arabia. Its Wahabi textbooks were published in the Kingdom. As the former imam of the Grand Mosque in Mecca said, IS leaders, "draw their ideas from what is written in our own books, our own principles." With the liberation of Mosul and the eviction of IS from other Iraqi cities, it was clear there would be no "caliphate" or return of an authoritarian, presumably Sunni, strongman to Baghdad. Banking on Iraqi exasperation with corruption, poor security and endless terrorist attacks, the people did not take the bait and turn on the government.

Syria

There is no greater example of the failure of the Saudi Project than in Syria. Syria is seen as the Arab conduit between Iran and Hezbollah in Lebanon, a key logistical player in the alternatively described "axis of Resistance" or "Shiite crescent." Rival sponsorship of al-Qaeda and IS by Qatar and Saudi Arabia respectively, and infighting among all factions including the so-called "moderate" rebels backed by the U.S., was a part of its undoing. Witnessing the abhorrent crimes committed by IS in Iraq and their country, the Syrian people also had no appetite or desire to play hosts to *takfiri* extremists. Neither the Sunni majority nor Christian and Alawite minorities saw the armed groups as a viable alternative to Bashar al-Assad. Islamic State has nearly been driven out of their stronghold in Raqqa and has already from the Lebanese-Syrian border region. The territory they do hold, as in Iraq, is rapidly dwindling. Assad, contrary to all initial predictions, remains firmly in power.

Bahrain

The al-Khalifa family's intensified crackdown on human rights activists, religious figures and ordinary citizens protesting their absolute rule, the dismantling of civil society and restrictions placed on free expression sends an important signal. Such measures, including revoking the nationality of citizens and imprisoning those who tweet on the regime's abuses (as has been the fate of the indefatigable Nabeel Rajab), are unsustainable over the long-term. The will of the people has not been broken. They have yet to succumb to the fear the monarchy and its security services, renowned for their torture techniques, desperately want to instill. The despotism of the Saudi-backed regime has not halted the call by Bahrainis for equitable, representative government in the least.

Yemen

The humanitarian crisis Yemen is testament to the devastation brought about by the disastrous foray of Saudi forces into the poorest of Arab countries. The Houthis, a Zaidi political-religious movement, ousted Saudi-sponsored president Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi and assumed control of the capital in Sept. 2014. While Gulf and Western media would lead one to believe it was Iran who intervened and provided material support to the Houthis, there is little evidence of such. The

ceaseless Saudi air campaign has so decimated Yemen that widespread malnutrition, famine and even cholera have emerged. But after three years, the Houthis have not been displaced from Sanaa and Hadi's government has not been reinstated.

Qatar

It is ironic that one of the GCC states instrumental in fomenting discord and strife in Syria through support of al-Qaeda and Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated groups was not spared the intrigues of Saudi royals. Unable to tolerate independence from the leadership of King Salman and his designated successor, Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman, Qatar and its flagship news station Al Jazeera deviated from the program and went their own way. Whether by funding groups at odds with those backed by Riyadh or competing with the Saudi-owned media outlet Al Arabiya, Qatar was an outlier. Simply, it was not to be a subservient client state like Bahrain. Hence, an economic and travel blockade was imposed. In the face of the embargo, politically astute Qatar proved good relations with Turkey and Iran had its benefits. The emir was not deposed, Qatar survived economically and there is no indication they will bow to Riyadh's list of demands anytime soon.

But the destruction wrought, the lives taken, the people displaced, the villages/towns/cities/provinces/countries destroyed, the refugee camps created, the misery inflicted, the Israeli occupation ignored, the sectarianism incited ... the toll exacted by the failed Saudi Project for the Middle East is incalculable.