

# افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نیاشد تن من مباد      بدین بوم ویر زنده یک تن مباد  
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم      از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

[www.afgazad.com](http://www.afgazad.com)

[afgazad@gmail.com](mailto:afgazad@gmail.com)

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

<http://www.ipsnews.net/2013/11/op-ed-saudi-anger-masks-concern-about-loss-of-influence/>

## Saudi Anger Masks Concern about Loss of Influence

By Emile Nakhleh Reprint

11/12/2013

Saudi Arabia's public anger against the United States masks the kingdom's growing concern about its diminishing influence in the Persian Gulf and the wider Arab world.

It has nothing to do with U.S. policy toward the Palestinians, Washington's seeming oscillation toward Syria, or President Barack Obama's support for democratic transitions in "Arab Spring" countries and his hesitancy to support Mohamed Morsi's removal from Egypt's presidency through a military coup.

The Saudis are lashing out because they fear a possible U.S.-Iranian rapprochement would elevate Iran's rightful position as the key power in the Persian Gulf and correspondingly reduce Saudi Arabia to a secondary role. The Saudi Kingdom would resist playing a second fiddle to Iran.

If the P5+1 and Iran conclude a deal on the nuclear issue linking enrichment and sanctions, Iran would no longer remain a pariah state. Once the new agreement takes root, Western countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, and the European Community, would embark on more robust relations with Iran. This prospect terrifies the Saudi regime.

According to the BBC, Saudi Arabia's nuclear agreement with Pakistan goes back years. Under the agreement, Saudi Arabia has financed the production of nuclear weapons and delivery systems, which Pakistan has kept ready to transfer to the kingdom at the request of the Saudi leadership.

This agreement, if accurately reported, would help the Saudis hide a serious possible violation of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which they have signed. If Pakistan has these weapons ready at Saudi Arabia's beck and call, it's rather disingenuous for the Saudi leadership to cry foul over Iran's enrichment programme.

Several fundamental contradictions underpin Riyadh's public spat with Washington. They include Iran, the Palestinians, oil, and Syria.

Iran under the shah in the 1950s-1970s period was the key protector of the so-called security belt in the Gulf. Saudi Arabia, with the acquiescence of the United States and the United Kingdom, played the role of a junior partner in that arrangement.

During most of that period, Britain controlled the foreign policy and in many cases the domestic politics of Gulf Arab Emirates. While Kuwait became independent in 1961, the other Emirates did not follow suit until a decade later.

Saudi Arabia under King Saud solicited Iran's help in thwarting the rising tides of Arab nationalism under Egypt's President Nasser, of Ba'thism and socialism under Michel Aflaq in Syria, and of Communism under the Soviet Union and China.

The establishment of the Islamic Republic under the Ayatollahs in 1979 and the ensuing isolation of Iran in the international community offered Saudi Arabia a rare opportunity to emerge as a pivotal player in the Gulf, especially among the newly independent sheikhdoms, and in the wider Islamic world. This posture, which lasted for over 30 years, is now being challenged by an ascendant Iran.

Saudi anger over Palestine hides another contradiction in the Saudi position on Israel. While they chide the U.S. for seeming callousness toward the Palestinians, the Saudis have been working very closely with the Israelis, according to media reports, against the Assad regime, Hezbollah, and Iran's military involvement in Syria. Over the years, media outlets have reported on active collaboration between the Saudi and Israeli intelligence services against Al-Qaeda and regional terrorist organisations.

One more thing: While Saudi officials have often talked about Palestinian rights and touted Jerusalem as the "Third Qibla" right after Mecca and Medina, the Saudi government has rarely granted Palestinians visas to visit or work in Saudi Arabia. Saudi royals might defend the "Palestinianism" of Palestine, but they balk at dealing with the "Palestinians" of the conflict.

Saudi Arabia has certainly not matched either Qatar's funding of development and housing projects in the West Bank and Gaza or the United States financial aid to the Palestinians.

As a hydrocarbon giant, Saudi Arabia is beginning to lose influence in the oil world. Economic reports in the past two years have postulated that by 2028 Saudi Arabia would become a minor oil exporter. The kingdom would need between six and eight million barrels a day for local consumption, mainly power generation and desalination, which would leave it with much smaller oil exports.

This means that in a decade and a half the Saudi leadership will not have at its disposal huge oil revenues either to spend on purchasing advanced weapons systems or to buy off potential opposition activists as they did in 2011 in response to "Arab Spring" upheavals.

Within the same period, the United States because of growing domestic energy production will no longer rely on Saudi and Gulf oil. The days when the United States would threaten to go to war to protect its access to Saudi and Gulf oil, as some U.S. leaders hinted at in the mid-1970s, are gone.

The contradiction in the current anti-U.S. Saudi posture is more glaring in the case of Syria. The Saudi royal family encouraged and financed Salafi jihadists to go to Syria and join the uprising against the Assad regime not because of deep-seated commitment to democracy, civil rights, equality, or inclusion. They wanted to topple Assad because of his connection to Iran and Hezbollah.

The Saudi regime saw Syria as a golden opportunity to wage a war by proxy against Iran and Hezbollah using anti-Shia sectarianism as a rallying cry in the Arab Sunni world. Their military support of the Al-Khalifa regime against the uprising and the Shia majority in Bahrain belies their exhortations against the Assad regime, vicious as it may be.

The Saudis urged Washington to strike Assad militarily and bemoaned President Obama's decision to forego military action in favour of an international agreement to destroy Assad's chemical weapons. They joined forces with Israel to denounce Washington's refusal to strike Assad and more recently its talks with Iran in Geneva.

What is most appalling about the Saudi support of Salafi jihadists in Syria is the unintended encouragement of terrorism. These Sunni extremists advocate the same radical ideology of Al-Qaeda, which was confirmed in a statement by the Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri broadcast on Al-Jazeera Nov. 8. Zawahiri recognised Jabhat al-Nusra as the true jihadist group in Syria and declared Abu Muhammad al-Julani as its head for one year.

In the name of fighting Iran and Hezbollah, Saudi Arabia is inadvertently proselytising the same radical Sunni Salafi ideology it has preached for decades. Once they finish their job in Syria, these jihadists would fan out in the region committing acts of terror against neighbouring countries, including Saudi Arabia.

The Obama administration should make it clear to the Saudi regime that a possible rapprochement with Iran does not mean an alliance against Saudi Arabia. A curtailment of Iran's nuclear programme in the long run serves the national interest of Saudi Arabia and the region as a whole.

In the meantime, Saudi Arabia should revisit its policy of undermining democratic transitions and genuine political and social reform in the Arab world, including in Bahrain and Egypt.