

# America's Foreign Policy Pivots in the Middle East: Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Wahhabi Salafism

By [Zayd Alisa](#)

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The Egyptian army, issued a stern ultimatum, on July 1, 2013, which was ostensibly a stark warning to both, Morsi, the first democratically elected president of Egypt – who represents the Muslim Brotherhood MB – and on the other side the Tamarod Movement and the National Salvation Front – which is a loose coalition of secular parties. However, in reality, it was nothing short of a thinly veiled threat to, Morsi, stressing that, unless he conceded a significant portion of his powers within 48 hours, the army would oust him. Although the army overthrew, Morsi, on Jul. 3, nevertheless its ruthless crackdown – which caused the death of over 100 MB followers on July.27 – since then, has bolstered the MB and dramatically escalated its increasingly defiant protests.

While, it is incontestable that Qatar – headed by its previous Emir, Hamed bin Khalifa Al Thani and his Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Hamed Bin Jassim, – was at the forefront of unequivocally backing the popular uprisings that swept the region, however, the bulk of its support went to propping up the MB.

The Saudi regime, by contrast, gave its emphatic support to tyrannical regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and Bahrain. The Saudi king made frantic efforts to forestall the pervasion of the uprising to Saudi Arabia, by offering billions of dollars in benefits, strictly prohibiting protests, rewarding the Wahhabi Salafi religious establishment and, most ominously, instructing the Saudi army to invade and occupy Bahrain.

What is indisputable is the pivotal role played by the radical and regressive Wahhabi Salafi religious establishment in giving religious legitimacy to the Saudi regime, which in turn provides it with the vital funding to propagate and export its violent ideology. According to the Wahhabi ideology it is strictly forbidden to oppose the ruler. Thus, in the Saudi regime's eyes the MB's explicit endorsement of political Islam – which underlines explicitly that legitimacy to rule stems only from democratic elections – is undoubtedly an existential threat to the very legitimacy of the Saudi King's absolute power. To make matters even worse, Qatar has enthusiastically embraced and even offered citizenship to the influential and highly controversial spiritual leader of the MB, Yusuf Al Qaradawi.

As the protest in Syria, became increasingly militarised, the Qataris ramped up their full-blown support to the MB. However, the Saudi regime – which has consistently considered the Syrian regime, since the days of the late, Hafiz Al Assad, Bashar's father, a major thorn in its side and an irreplaceable strategic ally to its principal adversary Iran – moved swiftly to shore up the armed insurgents, by utilising its intelligence service's – whose instrumental role in establishing and funding Jabhat Al Nusra JN was highlighted in an online intelligence review released in Paris in, Jan. 2013 – huge influence and leverage – on, not only Sunni

tribal leaders in Western Iraq, but also Saudi members of Al Qaida in Iraq AQI, who according to an NBC report in, Jun. 2005, formed a majority ( 55 % ) of the suicide bombers and foreign fighters converging on Iraq – to convince AQI that its principal battlefield must be Syria and its ultimate goal should be deposing Bashar Al Assad Alawite regime, since its overthrow would break the back-bone of the Iraqi Shia-led government and inevitably loosen Iran's grip on Iraq.

Creating a new branch of Al Qaida in Syria under the new label of JN, which was not yet designated a terrorist organisation, was, not only an unmissable lifeline to AQI – which was on the back foot, in 2011 – but also, it provided Saudi Arabia and Qatar with a window of opportunity to bolster AQI and JN – under the perfect pretext of supporting democracy in Syria – to destabilise both countries. So AQI scrambled to send Abu Mohammed Al Jolani, in, Jul. 2011, to form JN, while, Aymen Al Zawahri, the overall leader of Al Qaida, instructed all of his fighters in, Feb, 2012, to converge on Syria. The New York Times reported, on, Oct. 14. 2012, that most of the weapons shipped by Saudi Arabia and Qatar are going to hard-line jihadist in Syria. Thus, explaining how JN swiftly turned into the best armed group in Syria. It also reported on, Feb. 29, 2013, that Saudi Arabia has dramatically stepped up support for the rebels by financing a large purchase of weapons from Croatia.

However, its article on, Apr. 27, 2013, was – even though indirectly – far more scathing about, Saudi and Qatari, arming and funding, by asserting ominously, that nowhere in rebel-controlled Syria is there a secular fighting force.

The Guardian, meanwhile, reported on, Jun. 22, 2012, that Saudi Arabia is in the process of paying salaries to Syrian rebels. But, in a rare admission, by a well informed source – in an article, on, Apr. 13, 2013, in Al Arabia, a mouth-piece of the Saudi regime – confirming the purchase and shipment of Croatian weapons to Syrian rebels, and acknowledging that appointing, Bander Bin Sultan, in, Jul. 2012, as intelligence chief was to ratchet up Saudi Arabia's faltering efforts in Syria. Even more revealing, however, was the assertion that, Bander, was firmly behind the steering wheel, so the Qataris must have been told to take a back seat. In essence, all this funding, arming, and paying salaries to militants by Saudi Arabia and Qatar have, not only turned JN – which according to Abu Baker Al Baghdadi's, head of AQI, declaration in early, Apr. 2013, is merely an extension of AQI – Salafi Wahhabi group into the most ruthless and potent force among the opposition groups, but also dramatically reinvigorated AQI.

Without a doubt, the recapture of the strategic city of Qusair, in early, Jun. 2013 by the Syrian army backed up by its Lebanese allies ,Hezbollah, marked a major turning point in the Syrian conflict, prompting, Obama's, startling decision on, Jun. 13, 2013, to arm the rebels. This was followed menacingly; by Saudi Arabia's king sudden return from his holiday. Last time he returned to invade and occupy Bahrain. This time, he was back to assume his new role as the undisputed leader of the Arab World after the U.S. verdict: Saudi Arabia not Qatar, must lead the Arab World. Thus, Qatar's Emir, was pushed, by the U.S. on, Jun. 25, 2013, to abdicate power to his son, Tamim Bin Hamed.

And, in stark contrast to what many experts predicted, the new Qatari foreign policy has increasingly been shifting towards toeing the Saudi line or keeping a low profile. This has been manifested by the following: First, Qatar's new Emir, made it abundantly clear, in his first speech, that Qatar would respect all political directions and fiercely rejected sectarianisms. Second, the highly conspicuous absence of any mention of the Syrian crisis. Third, and far more significant, replacing, Hamed Bin Jassim, who was Prime Minister and

Foreign Minister by, Abdallah Bin Nasser Bin Khalifa, who has been appointed PM and Interior Minister, reflecting an inward looking policy. Fourth, the appointment of, Khalid Al Atiyah, who has far less clout, since he is not a member of the royal family. Fifth, the new Emir swiftly congratulated the interim Egyptian president, Adly Mansour, who was appointed by the Egyptian army. This was in stark contrast to the Fatwa issued on, Jul. 6, 2013, by, Al Qaradawi., who openly called on the Egyptian people to defy the army and back up, Morsi.

Even though, Egypt's MB was the first casualty of Saudi Arabia's uncontested leadership of the Arab World, nonetheless, hot on its heels came the dramatic take over of the leadership of the Syrian National Coalition – which the Qataris, had been fighting viciously to retain – by the Saudis candidate, Ahmed Jerba, on Jul. 6, 2013, which was swiftly followed by the resignation of the Qatari backed interim PM, Gassan Hetto. Soon afterwards, came the closure of the Taliban's political office in Doha. And, most recently, protest erupted in Tunisia against the Ennada party – which is Tunisia's MB – accusing it of assassinating a prominent secular politician.

The principal reasons behind the U.S decisive verdict were the following: First, the high degree of confusion amongst its allies in the Middle East, which gave the Syrian regime the edge. Second, the sheer arrogance and recklessness of the Qatari leadership. Third, the hope that the Saudis would learn from the lesson taught to the Qataris. Fourth, having the Qataris in the back seat, would give the U.S. added leverage over the Saudis. Fifth, pushing the Qatari Emir to abdicate to his son sends an unmistakable message to the Saudi king. Sixth, the U.S. increasing worry about Saudi Arabia's weakening internal front, especially after its patently deceitful myth of being the guardian of Sunni Islam has unraveled, largely due to the Saudi regime's full-blown support to tyrannical regimes against the Sunnis in these countries. Seventh, giving the U.S. the golden opportunity to point the finger of blame at the previous Qatari leadership if a new 9/11 – similar to the terrorist attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi – took place, rather than blame Saudi Arabia or indeed itself for allowing the Saudis to send anti-aircraft missiles to Syrian rebels.

As part of the Saudi regime's strenuous attempts to stave off an internal uprising, it has relentlessly been seeking to ignite a regional sectarian war to demonstrate to its increasingly disenfranchised people that it is heavily engaged in combating an existential threat from the Shia, namely Iran.

But, with the Saudis leading the Arab world, the risk of such a war has never been higher. Indeed, if such a war erupts, both sides of sectarian divide would undoubtedly blame the U.S. It is, therefore, high time for the U.S. to promptly start off by acknowledging that its unwavering support to Saudi Arabia – where the vast majority (15 out of 19) of the 9 / 11 suicide bombers, never mind, the mastermind, Osama Bin Laden, came from – has played a major role in turning the war on terror into an irrefutably the most successful enterprise for its promotion and undeniably vaulting Al Qaida into prominence through countless new countries. Then it is imperative for the U.S. – if it genuinely strives to halt the menacingly fast-spreading avalanche of extremist Wahhabi Salafi ideology and avoid an all out confrontation with an increasingly radicalised Muslim world – to forestall Saudi Arabia's relentless export of its hard-line Salafi Wahhabi ideology and extremist jihadist fighters, by putting immense pressure on the Saudis, to push them to expand the protection for oil deal into protection for oil, concrete political reform and democratic change deal.

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