

Has Biden Now Lost Saudi Arabia?

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The ignominious US withdrawal from Afghanistan has blown a global hole in the post-1945 American Century system of elaborate world domination, a power vacuum that likely will lead to irreversible consequences. The immediate case in point is whether Biden’s Washington strategists—as he clearly makes no policy—have already managed to lose the support of its largest arms buyer and regional strategic ally, The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Since the first days of Biden’s inauguration in late January, US policies are driving the Saudi monarchy to pursue a dramatic shift in foreign policy. The longer-term consequences could be enormous.

Within their first week in office the Biden Administration indicated a dramatic shift in US-Saudi relations. It announced a freeze in arms sales to the Kingdom as it reviewed the Trump arms deals. Then in late February US intelligence issued a report condemning the Saudi government for the killing of Saudi Washington Post journalist Adnan Khashoggi in Istanbul in October, 2018, something the Trump Administration refused to do. That was joined by Washington’s lifting the anti-Saudi Yemeni Houthi leadership from the US terrorist list while ending US military support to Saudi Arabia in its Yemen war with Iran-backed Houthi forces, a move that emboldened the Houthis to pursue missile and drone attacks on Saudi targets.

Post-911 Pentagon Policy

While Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has so far been careful to avoid a rupture with Washington, the motion of his feet since the Biden regime shift in January has been significant. At the center is a series of secret negotiations with former arch-enemy Iran, and its new President. Talks began in April in Baghdad between Riyadh and Teheran to explore a possible rapprochement.

Washington geopolitical strategy for the past two decades has been to fire up the conflicts and bring the entire Middle East into chaos as part of a doctrine first endorsed by Cheney and Rumsfeld after September 11, 2001, sometimes referred to by the George W. Bush Administration as the Greater Middle East. It was formulated by the late US Admiral Arthur Cebrowski of Rumsfeld’s post-911 Pentagon Office of Force Transformation. Cebrowski’s assistant, Thomas Barnett, described the new strategy of deliberate chaos in his 2004 book,

The Pentagon's New Map : War and Peace in the Twenty-first Century, just after the [unprovoked](#) US invasion of Iraq. Recall that no one ever found evidence of Saddam's Weapons of Mass Destruction.

Barnett was a professor at the US Naval War College and later strategist for the Israeli Wikistrat consultancy. As he described it, the entire national boundaries of the post-Ottoman Middle East carved out by the Europeans after World War I, including Afghanistan were to be dissolved, and present states balkanized into Sunni, Kurd, Shiite, and other ethnic or religious entities to ensure decades of chaos and instability requiring a "strong" US military presence to control. That became the two decades of US catastrophic occupation in Afghanistan and Iraq and beyond. It was deliberate chaos. Secretary of State Condi Rice said in 2006 that the Greater Middle East aka New Middle East would be achieved through 'constructive chaos'. Because of a huge backlash from Saudi Arabia and other countries in the region the name was buried, but the [chaos strategy remains](#).

The Obama "Arab Spring" Color Revolutions, which were launched in December 2010 with the CIA and Clinton State Department destabilizations of Tunisia, Egypt and Libya by US-backed networks of the Muslim Brotherhood, were further implementation of the new US policy of chaos and destabilization. The proxy US invasion of Syria then followed, as did Yemen with the covertly US-backed Houthi revolution against Yemen President Ali Abdullah Saleh in 2012.

The ongoing Teheran vs Riyadh conflict has its roots in that Cebrowski-Barnett Pentagon-CIA strategy. It marked and fed the split between pro-Muslim Brotherhood Qatar and anti-Brotherhood Riyadh in 2016, after which Qatar sought support from Iran and Turkey. It has marked the bitter proxy war in Syria between forces backed by Saudi Arabia against forces backed by Iran. It has marked the Saudi vs Teheran proxy war in Yemen, and the political stalemate in Lebanon. Now the Saudi regime under MBS appears to be embarking on a major turn away from that Shiite-Sunni war for domination of the Islamic world by pursuing peace with its foes including Iran.

Teheran is key

Under the Trump Administration, policy shifted from an apparent US backing of Iran under Obama with the 2015 nuclear JCPOA, and to the disadvantage of Saudis and Israel, over to a one-sided Trump-Kushner backing for Saudi Arabia and Israel, exiting the JCPOA, and imposing draconian economic sanctions on Teheran and other moves last embodied in the ill-conceived Abraham Accords aimed against Teheran.

MBS and the Saudis are clearly reading the handwriting on the wall from Washington and are moving to defuse multiple zones of conflict which had led it down a US-scripted dead end. Washington under Trump had fed MBS with arms galore (paid for with Saudi petrodollars) to fuel the conflicts. It has been a catastrophe for the Saudis. Now as it became clear that a Biden Administration also means no good for them, MBS and the Saudis have begun a strategic pivot towards ending all its conflicts within the Islamic world. The key to it all is Iran.

Back-channel talks

In April the Saudis began the first of what now have been three bilateral negotiations on stabilizing their relations with Iran, back-channel secret talks first in Iraq, then Oman.

Baghdad has a major stake in such a peace as US policy in Iraq since 2003 has been to create chaos by pitting a majority Shiite against a 30% minority Sunni to sow civil war. In July Prime Minister al Kadhimi secured a Biden pledge to end US troop presence by year-end.

The Teheran-Riyadh back-channel talks reportedly involve Iran's stance towards Washington under Biden Pentagon policies, as well as Iran's willingness to de-escalate military presence in Syria and Yemen and Lebanon. Indirect talks between the US and Iran about a return to the 2015 nuclear deal were suspended after the Iranian elections in June. Iran also announced it was stepping up uranium enrichment.

The Saudi-Iran talks have included high-level persons from both sides, [including](#) Saudi chief of General Intelligence Directorate Khalid al-Humaidan and Iranian Deputy Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, Saeed Iravani. Ongoing protests inside Iran over the economic costs of deployment of troops and aid to groups such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and Syria and Houthis in Yemen, are reportedly growing. This, at a time economic hardships caused by the US sanctions are severe, creates a strong incentive for Teheran to eventually compromise in a rapprochement with Riyadh. If it happens it will be a huge blow for US regional chaos strategy.

While no agreement is yet at hand, a fourth talk has just been announced which indicates a will to forge a compromise as soon as the government of newly-elected Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi is approved by the Majlis or parliament. A deal will not be easy, but both sides realize the status quo is a lose-lose proposition.

At the same time Iran under Raisi is playing hardball with Biden negotiators. Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei is reportedly demanding that the Biden administration lift all sanctions on Iran and compensate it for the damage they caused, and have Iran recognized as a nuclear threshold state with the ability to [produce a nuclear bomb](#) within a short time. The US sanctions imposed in 2018 have caused a 250% annual rise in food prices and a free fall in the currency as oil revenues have plunged. Raisi is under enormous domestic pressure to change this, though Biden's Washington to date refuses to lift sanctions as precondition to resuming JCPOA talks.

For Teheran the question is whether it is better to trust a rapprochement with the Saudi-led Arab Sunni Gulf states, or rely on Washington whose track record of broken promises is underscored by their catastrophic exit from Kabul.

Most recently Teheran has mended relations with the Afghan Taliban and US military equipment from Afghanistan taken by Taliban reportedly has been seen in Iran, suggesting a close Iran-Afghan cooperation that further works against Washington. At the same time Iran has agreed a \$400 billion, 25-year economic strategic cooperation with China. However so far Beijing is apparently being cautious not to challenge US sanctions in any major way and is also pursuing closer ties with Saudi Arabia, Gulf Arab states as well as Israel. A Saudi-Iran rapprochement would further ease pressures on Iran.

The dramatic collapse of US presence in Afghanistan gives all parties a clear idea that, regardless of who is US President, US institutional powers behind the scenes pursue an agenda of destruction, and can no longer be relied on to be true to their promises of support.

The implications of a genuine Saudi-Iran agreement would be a major pivot in geopolitical terms. In addition to ending the Yemen war and the proxy Syrian war, it could end the destructive stalemate in Lebanon between Iran-backed Hezbollah and major Saudi interests there. Here is where the recent arms talks between Riyadh and Moscow become more than interesting.

Russia's pivotal role

Into this geopolitical cocktail of competing interests, the role of Russia becomes strategic. Russia is the one major foreign military power that has aimed at ending the Sunni-Shiite proxy wars and creating stability across Eurasia into the Middle East, a direct challenge to Washington's Cebrowski-Barnett strategy of deliberate instability and chaos.

In April this year Russian President Vladimir Putin and a delegation of business leaders made a rare visit to Riyadh, the first by Putin in 12 years. It was billed as an energy partnership meeting, but clearly was far more. Deals worth \$2 billion were reported with agreements covering oil, space and satellite navigation, health, mineral resources, tourism and aviation. Both countries agreed to cooperate to stabilize oil prices, a major step. Putin and MBS stressed that oil and natural gas would continue to play a major role for years to come, a slap in the face of the Davos Great Reset green agenda. Russia's RDIF Sovereign Wealth Fund also opened its [first foreign office](#) in Riyadh.

Taken alone it was interesting, but the fact it has been followed four months later by a visit by Saudi Arabia's Vice Minister of Defense Prince Khalid bin Salman to Russia to the annual International Military Technical Forum (ARMY 2021) near Moscow, gives new significance to growing Saudi-Russian ties as well at a time Biden & Co. are "recalibrating" US-Saudi ties as the State Department put it, whatever that means. Khalid tweeted, "I signed an agreement with the Russian Deputy Minister of Defense Colonel General Alexander Fomin between the Kingdom and the Russian Federation aimed at developing joint military cooperation between the two countries." Bin Salman also added, "Met with Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu to explore ways to strengthen the military and defense cooperation and discussed our common endeavor to preserve stability and [security in the region](#)." Notably, Russia has conducted joint military exercises with Iran for the past several years and is also well suited to foster a Saudi-Iran detente.

The Moscow talks came only weeks after the Pentagon and Biden Administration announced it was removing eight Patriot anti-missile systems from Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Kuwait, and Iraq, as well as removing a Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system from the Saudi Kingdom, and accelerating the withdrawal of US troops from the region, moves that hardly boost [confidence](#) in Washington as protector of Saudi Arabia. The world's finest anti-missile defense technology, the S-400 air defense system, happens to be made in Russia, as do a broad array of other military equipment.

All these moves by the Saudis are clearly not going to lead to an overnight break with Washington. But clear is that the Saudi monarchy has understood, especially in the wake of the abrupt Biden abandonment of Afghanistan to the Taliban, that continued dependence on a US security umbrella it has enjoyed since the 1970's oil shocks, is a fading illusion. MBS clearly realizes that he has been played by both Trump and now Biden. The tectonic plates of Middle East and Eurasian geopolitics are shifting and the implications are staggering.

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