

Lebanon: The Next Battleground of Saudi Arabia?

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The Middle East has been descending into a turbulent situation and it has been a normal trend since a while that one crisis is succeeded by another political flashpoint. While Saudi Arabia's feud with Qatar is still beating the drum, a new turmoil this time in Lebanon is looming. Almost certain, the Lebanon fiasco is the result of confrontation and power-play between two ideological and religious poles – Saudi Arabia and Iran.

According to The Guardian, midway through the meal with the visiting French cultural minister, Françoise Nyssen, Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri received a call and his demeanor changed. He excused himself and left for the airport, without his aides. Later on November 4, Hariri appeared reading out his resignation in Riyadh. It was instantly assumed by the people of Lebanon and others that he was forced into stepping down and possibly held under house arrest.

In his resignation speech, Hariri blasted at Iranian influence in his country and revealed that he resigned to escape falling into the same fate his father, Rafik Hariri, faced in 2005 when he was assassinated by a car bomb allegedly guided by agents associated with Iranian-backed militant group Hezbollah. Yet, Hariri didn't look panicked about Hezbollah before. In his remarks, he surprisingly blamed Hezbollah for imposing itself on the country and doing the bidding of its main backer, Iran in Lebanon and elsewhere in the region.

As Hariri settled back into Riyadh, the Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas – [whose administration last month reconciled with Hamas](#), which has received support from Iran – was also summoned to Riyadh to meet King Salman.

The chances are low for a possible hot war between two rivals. Although the two nemesis adversaries might walk back from the cold war, Lebanon would have to bear the brunt of possible economic sanctions by Saudi Arabia.

Now the reason why Lebanon is unable to mop up the government from Hezbollah's presence even though Saad Hariri is a dual Saudi-Lebanese citizen and intimate to Saudi Arabia's Government is that the Lebanese Political System necessitates different religious groups to share power: Lebanon's prime minister must be a Sunni Muslim, the President must be a Maronite Christian and the Parliamentary speaker must be a Shiite Muslim.

Iran bears measurable power and stake in the Lebanese political base that supports Hezbollah, the country's most powerful military and political organization. Saudi Arabia and Hezbollah dislike each other: Saudi Arabia once referred to Hezbollah as "the party of the devil", and in revenge words, Hezbollah's leader Hassan Nasrallah termed it "more evil than Israel".

Saudi Arabia is emboldened to take the lead of a string of regional crises especially after the US President Donald Trump acceded to the presidency last year. Trump's offensive words against Iran in the September UN General Assembly and anti-Iranian sentiment is delivering a boost to Saudi Arabia's conspiracies in the Middle East.

Israel and Saudi Arabia both aspire to subvert Hezbollah which is constitutes a strong ally of Iran. A great deal of force that fought the ISIS to death in Syria and Iraq was mobilized by Hezbollah which turned into a nightmare for Israel and Saudi Arabia, both of which supported ISIS-Daesh.

Hezbollah keeps sending reinforcements into Houthis ranks in Yemen to stand up to Saudi Arabia's incursion. Two days after Hariri's resignation, Saudi authorities blamed Hezbollah and Iran for a rocket fire from Yemen that struck Riyadh airport.

To obscure the reality and sidestep a mass of criticism, Saudi Arabia accused Lebanon of plotting the assassination of Hariri. Saudi Arabia knew that Hariri hadn't "done enough" to counter Hezbollah. The latter could be supported by Hezbollah leader Nasrallah's response to Hariri's forced resignation and detention in Saudi Arabia which he called an insult and asserted that he be returned to Lebanon.

The ISIS was wiped out owing in part to Hezbollah with the support of Iran.

Israel and Hezbollah had a deadly clash in 2006 when the two exchanged rocket fires and left hundreds of dead on the both sides. Israel shares role with kindred Saudi Arabia to get Hezbollah out of their way. Robert Malley, the vice president for policy at Crisis Group, [wrote in The Atlantic](#):

"For months now, [Israel] has been sounding alarm bells about Hezbollah's and Iran's growing footprint in Syria, and more particularly about the Lebanese movement's soon-to-be-acquired capacity to indigenously produce precision-guided missiles — a development Israeli officials view as a potential game changer they must thwart"

Saudi Arabia and Iran's frayed ties further soured in 2016 when Saudi Arabia's embassy in Tehran was stormed by an angry mob. Saudi Arabia's resentment compounded towards Iran after it struck the "nuclear deal" with the US with a view to curbing its "international isolation". Breaking off with Qatar over warmness to Iran also contributed to duo's polarity.

Israel wouldn't attempt for another ambitious plot unless Hezbollah is shattered. The Lebanon conspiracy seems to be economic rather than warfare. Saudi Arabia may unleash a flurry of sanctions such as boycotting and blocking of economic corridors with other Arab states to dry out the militant group's ramifications in and out of Lebanon. By possibly cutting off diplomatic relations, air and ground corridors and other sanctions just like Qatar went through, Saudi Arabia might want to force Hezbollah into downhill.

Mr. Hariri's resignation ruined a political deal among rival factions that contributed almost totally into making Hariri the Prime Minister and Michel Aoun – a political ally of Hezbollah – the president of the State last year. The coalition Government included Hezbollah.

Lebanon's cul-de-sac has not happened at random or suddenly, it is rather the outcome of a sequence of events that came to a head. Saudi Arabia's crown prince Mohammad Bin

Salman is in quest of kicking out every obstacle out of his way to succeed King Salman. He and the UAE's crown prince Mohammad bin Zayed believe that the time is ripe to play power –in close liaison with Washington?– against Tehran. They realize that Iran's influence has reached out to Baghdad, Damascus, Gaza and Beirut, while also seeking inroads into Yemen and Bahrain. Saudi Arabia's crown prince has accused Iran of direct military aggression.

Saudi Arabia's crown prince as a young indoctrinated prospective ruler would assume the kingship with a ton of crises instigated by the same rule. He's demonstrating that he will be proactive and confrontational. His endorsement of authorizing women to drive in Saudi Arabia is a bid to garner support among Saudis. He ordered the arrest of almost 50 Saudi royals, military officials and dignitaries as well as 11 princes under the guise of anti-corruption crackdown. It is all meant for new waves of unrest and disorder in years to come.

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