

Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince MBS' "Nuclear Ambitions"?

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Global Research, November 23, 2018

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Militarization and WMD](#)

Saudi crown prince Mohammad bin Salman (MBS), de facto kingdom ruler, is involved in negotiating a nuclear power plant deal with Trump's Energy and State Departments – worth a reported \$80 billion dollars or more.

In a country with the World's largest reserves of crude oil, this multibillion dollar initiative sounds contradictory to say the least. Is there a hidden agenda?

Anti-nuclear expert Helen Caldicott explained that any country operating nuclear power plants "can theoretically manufacture 40 (nuclear) bombs a year" by producing plutonium, the fuel for nukes.

It's also the most toxic known substance. One-millionth of a gram is carcinogenic. Minute amounts are deadly. Only 5kg are needed to produce a nuke. Nuclear reactors produce over 200kg per year.

Uranium is also used to produce nukes. Enriched to 4% purity, it's for power generation alone. At 90% purity, it can produce a bomb.

Washington's intelligence community is concerned about whether Riyadh's interest in nuclear power plants goes beyond wanting another energy source.

Does MBS have nuclear ambitions? Does he want weapons along with power generation? Israel is the region's only nuclear armed and dangerous state, its open secret long ago revealed.

Permitting a reckless de facto Saudi ruler to have his finger on the nuclear trigger would be madness – a nightmare extending well beyond the region.

A deal he's negotiating with the Trump regime involves the kingdom producing its own nuclear fuel, able to be diverted for nuclear weapons production.

Earlier he said if Iran "developed a nuclear bomb, we will follow suit as soon as possible" – knowing the Islamic Republic abhors these weapons, wanting them eliminated.

Iran's legitimate commercial nuclear operations are intensively monitored. MBS rejects the notion of IAEA inspectors examining Saudi nuclear facilities anywhere in the kingdom.

Israel operates secretly, banning anyone outside the country from monitoring its nuclear facilities – used mainly for weapons production, not power generation.

It's unclear where US negotiations stand with the kingdom on this vital issue. Under US law, Congress has final say on deals of this kind.

Undemocratic Dem Rep. Brad Sherman was quote saying

"(i)t is one thing to sell (Riyadh) planes, but another to sell them nukes, or the capacity to build them," adding:

"A country that can't be trusted with a bone saw shouldn't be trusted with nuclear weapons."

Former senior Energy Department official William Tobey said:

"We have never before contemplated, let alone concluded, a nuclear cooperation agreement with a country that was threatening to leave the nonproliferation treaty, even provisionally."

The landmark Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty includes safeguards to verify compliance through IAEA inspections.

Sherman is sponsoring the nicknamed "No Nuclear Weapons for Saudi Arabia Act of 2018," aiming to block a US/Saudi nuclear deal, Sherman saying:

"I don't think this bill would've passed prior to the events in Istanbul. Now I think we have a chance" – likely with GOP co-sponsors. Its main provisions include:

- assuring no consummation of a deal without House and Senate approval;
- requiring the kingdom to agree to IAEA inspections; and
- requiring the Trump regime to investigate Khashoggi's murder, along with reporting on other Saudi human rights abuses.

Depending on adopted legislative language, the measure could block the sale of US nuclear technology to the kingdom.

Dem Senator Edward Markey and GOP Senator Marco Rubio requested Trump suspend nuclear negotiations with Riyadh. It's unclear if they or other senators intend drafting legislation similar to Sherman's.

Under Section 123 of the 1954 US Atomic Energy Act, nuclear related sales to other countries require buyers to meet strict conditions.

They include assuring the safety of materials sold, prohibiting the transfer of classified data without US permission, and most important – prohibiting materials used for nuclear weapons or any other military purpose.

Nations aren't prohibited from enriching uranium to the purity needed to produce nuclear weapons.

If congressional legislation blocks a US nuclear deal with the kingdom, MBS will likely get one from Russia, China, or another country – though it's unclear what safety restrictions they'd require.

The Saudis and other Arab countries don't need nuclear power plants for energy generation. Their sunny desert climates are ideal for solar power – far cheaper (once installed and operating for some time) and safer than nuclear.

MBS' hellbent desire for nuclear power plants may be for his covert aim to develop nuclear weapons, despite claiming otherwise.

House legislation and possibly a similar Senate bill won't likely be debated and voted on until the new Congress convenes in early January.

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