

“Unholy Alliance” between Saudi Arabia and Israel. A US-Iran Nuclear Deal Would Trigger Regional Political Re-alignments

By [Salman Rafi Sheikh](#)

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Any probable nuclear deal between the United States of America and Iran is likely to result in giving a new trajectory to their bi-lateral relations; however, it is not the US-Iran relations alone that would enter a new phase of political history. As a matter of fact, this deal is most likely to send political jolts across the entire Middle Eastern political landscape, with Saudi Arabia and Israel standing as the most sensitive areas to bear its shocks; and as such, are most likely to clutch their hands into an alliance against Iran, and by default, against the US ambitions as well.

It is not, however, to suggest that Saudia and Israel would essentially adopt an anti-US strategic posture. What is becoming evident is that these three states will be re-negotiating the terms of their mutual relations to meet changing geo-political realities in a more ‘composite’ manner. This strategic negotiation is not, however, to be manned by the US itself, nor would it be playing the role of a crucial “balancer” between regional players. The US, in the contrary, would itself be a party to this process, and as such, would be more concerned about maintaining its own relations with Israel, Iran and Saudi Arabia than about merely assuring Israel and Saudia about the ‘harmless’ nature of the nuclear deal with Iran.

The process of re-negotiations has already started, and the fact that the US will be re-negotiating its own relations with her key regional allies is quite evident from the agenda John Kerry forwarded during his recent visit to Saudi Arabia. The main reason(s) for Kerry to visit Saudia was not that the US needed Saudi ‘support’ for finalizing this deal; it was necessary because the US wanted to make sure Saudi support in other matters of regional importance. Convincing Saudi Arabia to accept any agreed nuclear deal is important to President Barack Obama because he needs Riyadh to work closely with Washington on a host of regional policies and to maintain its role as a ‘moderating’ influence in oil markets. While the main critics of the US push for a nuclear deal with Iran are Israel and Congressional Republicans, Sunni Muslim powerhouse Saudi Arabia is also concerned that an accord would allow Iran to devote more cash and energy to Shi’ite proxies in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen, and in Saudia itself, which might lead to a serious escalation in regional conflict(s) of religious and non-religious nature.

On the other hand, Saudi concerns with regard to this deal are not based upon the possibility of Iran enjoying better relations with the US; Saudi concerns are largely related to her own position in the region following this deal; for, Iran does have enough politico-military and economic potential to counter-balance Saudi led “Sunni” states in the Middle

East and beyond. It is precisely for this very reason that Saudi Arabia's anxiety about an agreement has fueled a flurry of intense diplomacy in recent days to bolster unity among "Sunni" states in the Middle East in the face of "shared threats", especially those emanating from Iran.

In other words, the central issue between Saudia and USA on the one hand, and the US and Israel on the other hand, is not the deal itself; it is the place Iran would have in the future Middle East. And, the very fact that the US officials are unwilling to outline what strategies might curb Iran's regional influence, and the US record in Iraq, Syria and Yemen – where armed Iranian allies have since flourished and been resisting Saudi backed proxy factions – has caused Saudi Arabia and Israel great anxiety. To this anxiety has added the 'fear' of the US playing a double role in paving for itself a way entry into Middle Eastern politics. As a matter of fact, Saudia's trust in Washington during the Iran talks is still recovering from the sudden move in late 2013 towards a nuclear deal, when Saudi officials, as also Israel itself, were blindsided by the revelation of months of secret talks between the US and Iran. At that time, for Saudia, the main issue was surely preventing Iran from developing nuclear weapons. Now that the deal between the US and Iran is preventing the latter from developing Nuclear weapons, Saudia too has made a re-assessment of the possible threats and challenges Iran can and is causing in the region. Saudia, as such, now sees Iran's involvement in Arab countries, particularly its backing of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, its support for Iraqi Shi'ite militias and its ties to the Houthi group that has seized control in northern [Yemen](#), as a more urgent problem, resolution of which requires a "grand alliance."

It is against this background that the Saudi King Salman is working to forge a "united front" among "Sunni" states against what Riyadh sees as grand threat from Iran. Over the last few weeks, Salman has met the leaders of all Saudi Arabia's Gulf Arab neighbors, the king of Jordan and the presidents of Egypt and Turkey, the two most populous and militarily powerful Sunni states in the region. "The understanding is that we will face a more aggressive Iran if they sign an agreement. All the restrictions on it will be lifted and it will be much stronger. This is an issue that needs some sort of unity," said Mustafa Alani, an Iraqi security analyst with ties to the Saudi Interior Ministry.

However, notwithstanding the significance of forging anti-Iran (and anti-Shia) alliance for Saudia and its allies, Saudi is not hesitating in forging much closer relationship with Israel than it has been having for last many decades. In February 2015, Saudi Arabia reportedly agreed to let Israel use its airspace to attack Iran if necessary, in exchange for "some kind of progress" on the Palestinian issue. The move will reportedly allow Israel to bomb targets in Iran by offering a shortcut, which will save fuel and time. The Saudi position was confirmed during multiple diplomatic talks, according to the report of an Israeli TV channel. "The Saudi authorities are completely coordinated with Israel on all matters related to Iran," the European official from Brussels was also quoted as saying in that report.

Although there are no diplomatic ties between the two states, there have been various reports in the past showing that Riyadh and Jerusalem have been (deeply) cooperating when it came to Iran and its uranium enrichment program. For example, in November, Israel's Mossad and Saudi officials were said to be working on contingency plans that could have included an attack on Iran if its nuclear program was not curbed enough, according to a report. It was also revealed that the Saudis were willing to assist an Israeli attack by cooperating with the use of drones, rescue helicopters, and tanker planes. On the other hand, Israeli behaviour also confirms some "abnormal" policy changes taking place. In February 2015, the White House and the US State Department stated that Israel had

inaccurately provided information and twisted the official US position in nuclear talks with Iran. They also accused Jerusalem of “selectively” leaking details of sensitive talks, thereby casting Israel in the role of a “villain”, unwilling to accept Iran in a ‘new’ role.

The ‘unholy’ alliance taking shape between Saudia and Israel can decisively alter the Middle East’s geo-political landscape because of its potential to serve as the platform for many a state to practice what is otherwise known as “enemy of enemy is my friend.” Not only would it create a seriously hostile situation in the Middle East, but may also create a strong justification for Iran to contemplate going back to nukes. There are many probable scenarios that can take place in the future, given the number of regional and global actors involved in the ME. Therefore, we need not indulge in too much of speculation. However, what appears most certain and what is already on the wall is a grand anti-Iran alliance wherein the US would have minimum role to play; for, as the US takes one step towards Iran, its erstwhile allies seem taking two step backwards, and thereby, creating space for re-negotiating terms of their alliance.

Salman Rafi Sheikh, research-analyst of International Relations and Pakistan’s foreign and domestic affairs, exclusively for the online magazine “[New Eastern Outlook](#)”

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