

UNITED STATES & SAUDI ARABIA – AN OILY CO-DEPENDENCE

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The history of the Middle East - more appropriately, of course, Western Asia - from the day the Sykes-Picot agreement was signed, until the day the U.S. began bombing I.S.I.S., is filled with lies and half-lies.

AT THE BEGINNING

On 16 May 1916 representatives of Great Britain and France secretly reached an accord, now referred to as the Sykes-Picot agreement - officially known as the Asia Minor Agreement. Under that agreement, made with no consultation with Arab tribal leaders, most of the Arab lands under the rule of the Ottoman Empire were divided among the British and French 'spheres of influence' - in plain English, for their incorporation into British and French empires. Colonel Sir Mark Sykes, 6th Baronet (born Tatton Benvenuto Mark Sykes, 1879-1919) was an English traveller, Conservative Party politician and diplomatic adviser. François Marie Denis Georges-Picot (1870-1951) was a French diplomat during the first world war.

Under the Sykes-Picot agreement, the Syrian coast and much of modern-day Lebanon went to France; Britain would take direct control over central and southern Mesopotamia, around the Baghdad and Basra provinces. Palestine would have an international administration, as other Christian powers, namely Russia, held an interest in this region.

The rest of the territory in question - a huge area including modern-day Syria, Mosul in northern Iraq, and Jordan - would have local Arab chiefs under French supervision in the north and British in the south. Also, Britain and France would retain free passage and trade in the other's zone of influence.

Thomas Edward Lawrence, an archaeologist and British Army officer renowned especially for his liaison role during the Sinai and Palestine Campaign, and the Arab Revolt against Ottoman Turkish rule of 1916-1918, gained international notoriety as

Lawrence of Arabia, a title which was later used for the 1962 film based on his first world war activities.

David Lean's film, *Lawrence of Arabia*, describes the cinematic moment in Lawrence's life, when he hears a description of the Sykes-Picot agreement. In the film, Lawrence has come to the office of British General Edmund Allenby, better known in history as Field Marshal Edmund Henry Hynman Allenby, 1st Viscount Allenby GCB, GCMG, GCVO (1861-1936), an English soldier and British Imperial Governor - but seemingly not too bright. Lawrence intends to resign his officer's commission.

When Lawrence arrives, he finds two other men with Allenby, Prince Feisal ibn Hussein. Feisal was born in 1885, the third of four sons of Sharif Hussein bin Ali, Grand Sharif of Mecca and ruler of the Hejaz Arabs, and would later serve as king of the Arab Kingdom of Greater Syria in 1920, and as king of Iraq from 1921 to 1933. Lawrence had led Arab troops on behalf of Prince Feisal against the Turkish army. The second man with General Allenby is Mr. Dryden, a British diplomat and political leader, the head of the Arab Bureau, who first enlisted Lawrence for work as a liaison to the Arab Revolt, and manipulated Lawrence and the Arabs to ensure Allied dominion over the post-war Middle East.

So this is what passed according to the film scene:

“PRINCE FEISAL: Well, general, I will leave you. Major Lawrence doubtless has reports to make...about my people and their weakness...and the need to keep them in the British interest. And the French interest too. We must not forget the French.

GENERAL ALLENBY: I told you, no such treaty exists.

FEISAL: Yes, general, you have lied most bravely, but not convincingly. I know this treaty does exist.

MAJOR LAWRENCE: Treaty, sir?

FEISAL: He does it better than you, general. But then, of course, he is almost an Arab.

DRYDEN: (Staring at Lawrence) You really don't know?

ALLENBY: Then what the devil's this? (thrusting papers at Lawrence)

LAWRENCE: It's my request for release from Arabia, sir.

ALLENBY: Why? Are you sure you haven't heard of the Sykes-Picot Treaty?

LAWRENCE: No. I can guess.

ALLENBY: Don't guess. (points to Dryden) Tell him.

DRYDEN: (Speaking slowly as he walks around the room, pausing after sentences) Well, now, ... Mr. Sykes is an English civil servant. Monsieur Picot is a French civil servant. Mr. Sykes and Monsieur Picot met, and they agreed that after the war...France and England should share the Turkish Empire, including Arabia.

They signed an agreement, (looking at Allenby) not a treaty, An agreement to that effect.

LAWRENCE: (glaring at Dryden) There may be honour among thieves, but there's none in politicians.

DRYDEN: And let's have no displays of indignation. You may not have known, but you certainly had suspicions. (pauses). If we've told lies you've told half-lies. And a man who tells lies, like me, merely hides the truth. But a man who tells half-lies has forgotten where he put it."

IN PRESENT TIMES

It was only in 2007 that United States foreign policy openly sought to pursue war against Iran, Syria, and Lebanon's Hezbollah, while undercutting pro-Iranian factions in Iraq that at the time the U.S. was still occupying. Failing to accomplish this directly, the U.S. planned a not-so-covert proxy war which would include funding, politically supporting, and even arming groups ranging from the Muslim Brotherhood to militants aligned with Al Qaeda itself.

This is perhaps best summarised by the prophetic 2007 report "The Redirection: Is the Administration's new policy benefiting our enemies in the war on terrorism?" written by Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Seymour Hersh and published on 5 March 2007 in *The New Yorker*.

Wondering whether the American Administration's new policy would be benefitting its enemies in the war on terrorism, Hersh wrote:

“To undermine Iran, which is predominantly Shiite, the Bush Administration has decided, in effect, to reconfigure its priorities in the Middle East. In Lebanon, the Administration has cooperated with Saudi Arabia's government, which is Sunni, in clandestine operations that are intended to weaken Hezbollah, the Shiite organization that is backed by Iran. The U.S. has also taken part in clandestine operations aimed at Iran and its ally Syria. A by-product of these activities has been the bolstering of Sunni extremist groups that espouse a militant vision of Islam and are hostile to America and sympathetic to Al Qaeda.”

Hersh would also go on to chronicle American political and financial support which was being provided to the Muslim Brotherhood, even under then President George Bush. In all, the supposedly ‘spontaneous’ uprisings referred to by the ‘western’ media as the ‘Arab Spring’ in 2011 were being engineered years ahead of time - not in an attempt to promote peaceful pro-democratic aspirations, but to serve as cover for ultra-violent foreign-sponsored insurrections which would leave a trail of destruction stretching along Africa's northern coast, all the way to the borders of Iran, Russia, and even China.

Vali Nasr, a senior fellow at the Council of Foreign Relations who has written extensively on Shiites, Iran and Iraq, told Hersh: “The Saudis have considerable financial means, and have deep relations with the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafis” - Sunni extremists who view Shiites as apostates, commented Hersh. “The last time Iran was a threat, the Saudis were able to mobilize the worst kinds of Islamic radicals. Once you get them out of the box, you can't put them back.”

And Hersh continued: “The Saudi royal family has been, by turns, both a sponsor and a target of Sunni extremists, who object to the corruption and decadence among the family's myriad princes. The princes are gambling that they will not be overthrown as long as they continue to support religious schools and charities linked to the extremists. The Administration's new strategy is heavily dependent on this bargain.”

After denying any role in the ‘Arab Spring’ unrest, the United States would soon not only openly support the protesters in the streets, but also support armed militants who followed in the wake of protests. This support included that of a military

dimension - with militants in Libya being provided air-cover and special forces initially, and eventually the air-dropping of weapons, equipment and other supplies.

Clearly, the rise of the so-called 'Islamic State' or I.S.I.S., did not happen overnight, nor by accident. It was not only the logical result of the United States continuing its strategy of proxy warfare it had carried out against Libya, now unfolding in Syria, it was also the premeditated, documented result of what Hersh had warned about in 2007.

It is a threat that not only Syria understands all too well, but a threat its allies including Iraq, Iran, and Russia fully understand and are mobilising against.

The United States has found itself revising history, attempting to explain the existence of I.S.I.S. lurking in the footprints of its massive support of so-called 'moderates' in Syria's ongoing conflict. The U.S. and its vassals, such as Australia, have attempted to claim that I.S.I.S. has built itself on 'donations,' selling oil to the black market, and by taking hostages for ransom. If only building a multinational terrorist mercenary force were that easy, one could imagine that Syria, Iraq, and Iran would likewise have vast mercenary armies to 'downgrade and destroy' I.S.I.S. in an afternoon.

The reality is that, to explain how the U.S. and its regional partners have provided 'moderates' with billions in aid only to have I.S.I.S. rise up and displace these 'moderates,' one must realise that there were never any 'moderates' to begin with, and that the U.S. intentionally armed and funded terrorists, just as Hersh warned in 2007, to create a terrorist mercenary army that 'espouses a militant vision of Islam' and is 'sympathetic to Al Qaeda'.

Seeking a response to what Hersh had revealed and obviously made available in advance of publication, Amy Goodman of *Democracy Now !*, on 2 March 2007 interviewed General Wesley Clark, the retired four-star former Supreme Allied Commander of N.A.T.O. in Europe.

During the course of a one-hour interview, Gen. Clark said, among other things:

"About 10 days after 9/11, I went through the Pentagon, and I saw Secretary Rumsfeld and Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz. I went downstairs just to say hello to some of the people on the Joint Staff who used to work for me, and one of the

generals called me in. He said, "Sir, you've got to come in and talk to me a second." I said, "Well, you're too busy." He said, "No, no." He says, "We've made the decision we're going to war with Iraq." This was on or about the 20th of September. I said, "We're going to war with Iraq? Why?" He said, "I don't know." He said, "I guess they don't know what else to do." So I said, "Well, did they find some information connecting Saddam to al-Qaeda?" He said, "No, no." He said, "There's nothing new that way. They just made the decision to go to war with Iraq." He said, "I guess it's like we don't know what to do about terrorists, but we've got a good military, and we can take down governments." And he said, "I guess if the only tool you have is a hammer, every problem has to look like a nail."

So I came back to see him a few weeks later, and by that time we were bombing in Afghanistan. I said, "Are we still going to war with Iraq?" And he said, "Oh, it's worse than that." He reached over on his desk. He picked up a piece of paper. And he said, "I just got this down from upstairs" - meaning the secretary of defense's office - "today." And he said, "This is a memo that describes how we're going to take out seven countries in five years, starting with Iraq, and then Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and, finishing off, Iran." I said, "Is it classified?" He said, "Yes, sir." I said, "Well, don't show it to me."

Gen. Clark confirmed that version of facts on several occasions and in a well publicised speech to the Commonwealth Club of California in San Francisco on 3 October 2007.

In the course of that speech, Gen. Clark related how *in early 1991* he paid a visit to Paul Wolfowitz, then Under Secretary of Defense for Policy - and later, from 2001 to 2005, Deputy Secretary of Defense. It was just after a major Shia uprising in Iraq in March 1991. President George H.W. Bush's administration had provoked it, but then did nothing to rescue the Shia from brutal retaliation by Saddam Hussein, who had just survived his Persian Gulf defeat. [Emphasis added]

According to Gen. Clark, Wolfowitz said: "We should have gotten rid of Saddam Hussein. The truth is, one thing we did learn is that *we can use our military in the Middle East and the Soviets won't stop us*. We've got about five or 10 years to clean up those old Soviet client regimes - Syria, Iran (sic), Iraq - before the next great superpower comes on to challenge us. [Emphasis added]

It's now been more than 10 years, of course. But do not be deceived into thinking Wolfowitz and his neocon colleagues believe they have failed in any major way. The unrest they initiated keeps mounting - in Iraq, Syria, Libya, Somalia, Lebanon - not to mention fresh violence now in full swing in Yemen and the crisis in Ukraine. Yet, the Teflon coating painted on the neocons continues to cover and protect them in the 'mainstream media'."

ABDULLAH - DEATH OF A TYRANT

On 23 January 2015 Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz died of complications from pneumonia. He was 90 years old, and had been on the throne since August 2005, although he had been *de facto* ruler since 1995, after his half-brother had a stroke.

A casual viewer/reader of the news would be faced with the customary praise of a king. S/he would learn that Abdullah was the 10th - or maybe the 13th - of forty five sons of Abdulaziz ibn Saud, the founder of the House of Saud, and that he himself had "about" thirty wives and "about" thirty five children. Of Abdullah one would read that he was a "cautious reformer" of a nation which still has "problems" with its treatment of its own population. One would learn that his half-brother, Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, had succeeded his brother as the new king.

But a more curious reader would want to know something more, perhaps starting with the setting up of such kingdom, the relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia, and how it is so crucial in an increasingly interdependent world economy.

To understand the true position of Saudi Arabia in the Middle East, and to attempt to comprehend how in fact it may be responsible for the financing and encouraging the so-called Islamic State and fuel the flames which are currently engulfing the Middle East, one must step back in time to examine the origins of Wahhabism. Wahhabism is the ultra-conservative sect of Sunni Islam, which takes an intolerant view of other forms of Islam and other religions. It first appeared nearly three centuries ago and then later resurfaced shortly after the first world war, after which it was exported around the world thanks to the wave of 'black gold' flowing from Saudi Arabia. The original founder of the sect was a puritanical reformist preacher Muhammed al-Wahhab who was expelled from his home town. Al-Wahhab was an Islamic scholar

from the remote Nadj region of central Arabia. At the time, there were a number of reformist movements sweeping the Middle East. However, his views were so extreme that religious leaders saw him as a threat and duly excommunicated him.

The story goes back to the late eighteenth century.

Al-Wahhab despised the decadent behaviour of the Ottoman nobility as well as local Bedouin Arabs whom he viewed as superstitious. He believed that all Muslims should emulate the austere lifestyle of the time of the Prophet Mohammed. He would eventually go on to declare war on Shias and Sufis, whom he did not consider to be Muslims at all. Al-Wahhab eventually found refuge with Muhammed bin Saud, the man now considered to be the founder of the first Saudi state. Saud soon realised that al-Wahhab's radical teaching could be used to seize control of the region by bringing people into submission and fear. This allowed the Saud tribe to justify what they had always done: raid and plunder, but now in the name of *jihad*.

Conquered people were given a simple choice: either convert to Wahhabism or be executed. It is presently the 'programme' of I.S.I.S.

Taking advantage of such extremism, the Saud Dynasty was able to conquer much of Arabia, as well as parts of modern Syria and Iraq. In time the Saudis would seize control of the Holy Mosque at Mecca and destroyed hundreds of years of Islamic architecture, knocking down ancient shrines that they deemed to be idolatry. Perhaps al-Wahhab's most famous doctrine was the idea of *takfir*, in which fellow Muslims were considered infidels for activities which challenged the authorities. He demanded that all Muslims pledge their allegiance to a single Muslim leader, in this case the king. Those who did not were killed, their daughters and wives raped, and their possessions taken.

Eventually the Ottomans sent in their army to put an end to the ruthless conquest. After that, the Wahhabis retreated into the desert and remained quiet for the next hundred or so years.

Then, at the close of the first world war and at the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, bin Saud's descendent Abdul Aziz united the Bedouin tribes and used al-Wahhab as inspiration to start a religious-military campaign, recapturing much of the region. Eventually, as the Middle East was being carved up by European powers, namely France and Britain, Abdul Aziz made a deal with the British who helped him

establish the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932. It became - and still is - the only country in the world to be named after one family. It was decided that the royal family would run politics and the economy while the Wahhabi clerics would dictate social policy. At that time, many North African Salafists were given refuge in the Kingdom where their fundamentalist beliefs were easily merged with Wahhabism.

In 1938 oil was discovered in the Gulf, which was seen by the Wahhabis as 'black gold' and a gift from God. Why, an otherwise level-headed Saudi Oil Minister said in early May 2015 that "Allah sets oil prices." An endless flow of dollars allowed the Wahhabis to begin exporting their ideology throughout the Muslim world. They built a system of *madrassas*, or religious schools, from sub-Saharan Africa and the Balkans, across the Middle East to India, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia. These Wahhabi-funded institutions teach that all people who do not adhere to their particular views, including other Muslims, are heretics. Scholarships are often awarded to the most radical young students, the brightest of whom are brought to Saudi Arabia to study, only later to return to their respective countries and become purveyors of extremism. The Taliban, which originated from radical teaching of *madrassas* in Pakistan after the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union, is a perfect example of this.

The relationship between Saudi Arabia and the United States was firmed at a meeting between the soon-to-die President Roosevelt and King Abdulaziz ibn Saud, in February of 1945 on the USS Quincy on Egypt's Great Bitter Lake. The meeting was the culmination of a series of events which made the countries' mutual interdependence increasingly apparent. The American owned-and-operated *California Arabian Standard Oil Corporation* - which later became *ARAMCO* - had begun exploration in the country in 1933 and had struck oil near Dhahran. While still quite small as a contribution to America's overall oil supply, the value of the country's potential oil reserves - not to mention its geostrategic location on the Arabian Peninsula - had led President Roosevelt, deeply absorbed in the war effort, to declare in 1943 that "the defense of Saudi Arabia is vital to the defense of the United States."

The Saudis were doubly assured by the implicit promise of American military protection and an explicit promise that, on the worrying problem of Palestine and

Jewish immigration to the region, Roosevelt would “do nothing to assist the Jews against the Arabs and would make no move hostile to the Arab people.”

That promise was reneged on just three years later, in 1948, when the United States supported the creation of the state of Israel - just one of many times in which the relationship would be tested by directly competing interests and broken promises.

The relationship persisted despite a difficult life, aggravated by the dissatisfaction with American military presence amongst the Saudi population.

Things proceeded with a varying degree of discomfort for some 25 years - until, in October 1973, the relationship was seriously threatened by Saudi Arabia's decision to join the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries' oil embargo of the United States due to its support of Israel in the Yom Kippur war. The crisis was double for the U.S. - not only were Americans made painfully aware that they were no longer an energy independent nation, but President Nixon's closing of the gold window and ending of the Bretton Woods system had set off its own crisis in which the American Administration found itself unable to rely on a limitless demand for dollars for the first time since the end of the second world war.

In all of this turmoil, Dr. Henry Kissinger, Nixon's National Security Advisor and Secretary of State was able to solve two crises with one move. After some threatening talk from the United States about viewing its access to O.P.E.C. oil as a national security concern, Kissinger was able to convince the Saudis to accept a deal whereby they would sell oil exclusively in U.S. dollars, and those dollars would be recycled back through U.S. banks for the purchase of U.S. treasuries and U.S. arms - lots of them: in December 2011 the United States sold US\$ 30 billion worth of weapons to Saudi Arabia. Included in the sale were 84 F-15 fighter jets, which are now 'at the core' of the Saudi war in Yemen. In 2014 Saudi Arabia became the world's biggest arms importer. In return, America would continue to extend its security guarantee over Saudi Arabia. And with that one diplomatic stroke, the petrodollar system was born.

Recently, however, there have been numerous signs of a growing rift between the American Administration and the Saudis. The rift has formed over a number of fault lines. The Saudis have been angered by the American government seeming unwillingness to force the issue with arch-rival Iran over their nuclear programme.

They have also been angered by the United States' reticence in launching an all-out assault on Syria. They have been angered by America's abandonment of regional partner Hosni Mubarak during the Arab Spring, which has continually threatened to spread to Saudi Arabia's predominantly Shia - and oil-producing - regions.

The Saudis have indicated their displeasure in some subtle and some blatant ways in recent years. Perhaps most spectacularly, the Saudis turned down a coveted seat on the United Nations Security Council at the end of 2013 out of anger over the U.S.' inaction on Syria and Iran. More subtly, the Saudis have shown signs that they are edging towards a closer relationship with China, from the adoption of a 'look east' approach under the reign of king Abdullah that saw the majority of Saudi oil heading to Asia, to a nuclear energy cooperation pact in 2012, to the recent revelation of China's sale of advanced ballistic missiles to Saudi Arabia.

The United States, meanwhile, have responded by subtly reminding the Saudis of their exposure to numerous threats. The American government seems to think that Saudi Arabia would grossly suffer from the content of the 'classified 28 pages' in *The 9/11 Commission Report*, formally the *Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*, which pertains to Saudi involvement in the attack. Interestingly, the issue has suddenly re-surfaced in the news in recent times, spearheaded by the likes of former Senate Intelligence Committee Chair Senator Bob Graham. And in June 2014 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that 9/11 victims' families can sue Saudi Arabia for their complicity in the attack. The implication is clear: if the Saudis sever the petrodollar relationship, the United States will release the 28 pages.

Another weapon available to the United States, despite its lack of sincerity in lecturing other countries on their human rights abuses, while overlooking Saudi Arabia's awful treatment of women, minorities and political dissidents, would be an emphasis on what takes place in the Saudi kingdom.

For all practical purposes, and in a literal sense of the word, Abdullah *owned* Saudi Arabia - everything over, including people, and particularly under the soil of it: oil, plenty of oil.

How did the owners of Arabia got that way, and how do they keep that old control ? Simply.

In 1932, when King Abdul Aziz Ibn Abdul Rahman Ibn Faisal Al Saud set up Saudi Arabia, it was established as an absolute monarchy, strongly influenced by the ultraconservative Wahhabi school of Sunni Islamic thought. Since then, there have been minor reforms, including the introduction of very limited forms of ‘local democracy’ in 2005, but the system established by Abdul Aziz has largely endured.

As in many Islamic nations, Saudi Arabia’s legal system is based on judges’ interpretation of Sharia Law, subject, however, to ‘one of the strictest interpretations’ of Islamic law in the modern age. In matters which are not clearly defined in the Koran or the *hudud* - a section of Sharia Law on serious crimes - judges have a reasonable amount of discretion, although they must consider precedents set by other judges and laws implemented by the government - such as recent counter-terrorism and cyber-security laws.

This is what Saudi Arabia’s *Basic Law of Governance* prescribes:

- 1) “The King shall rule the nation according to the Sharia.”
- 2) “The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a sovereign Arab Islamic State. Its religion is Islam. Its constitution is Almighty God’s Book, The Holy Qur’an...”
- 3) “Monarchy is the system of rule in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Rulers of the country shall be from amongst the sons of the founder King Abdulaziz bin Abdulrahman Al-Faisal Al-Saud, and their descendants.”
- 4) “The Courts shall apply rules of the Islamic Sharia in cases that are brought before them.”
- 5) “The aim of education is to implant the Islamic Creed in the hearts of all youths.”

Sharia Law runs the country.

According to the Council of Foreign Relations, “The Hanbali school, Islam’s most orthodox which spawned the Wahhabi and Salafi branches, is embraced in Saudi Arabia and by the Taliban.”

And there is more, much more: there are no national elections, no parties, and no parliament - only a symbolic advisory chamber, known as *Majlis al-Shura*.

Criticism is strictly forbidden: only last year, prominent opposition activist Abd al-Kareem al-Khoder joined hundreds of the country's political prisoners, when he was sentenced to eight years for demanding the changeover to a constitutional monarchy. Just days before King Abdullah's death, blogger Raif Badawi was given the first 50 of his 1,000 lashes - for calling for free speech on his blog.

In 2013 a U.S. State Department report placed Saudi Arabia among the 'worst' human rights abusers; and that included citizens' lack of the right and legal means to change their government; pervasive restrictions on universal rights such as freedom of expression, including on the Internet, and freedom of assembly, association, movement, and religion; and a lack of equal rights for women, children, and non-citizen workers.

Saudi Arabia's 'religious police' are employees of the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice. Their duty includes ensuring that men and women do not mix socially, that people - particularly women - do not dress immodestly and that businesses close during prayer time.

Clearly, the strict use of Islamic law and a lack of checks and balances have a very negative effect on human rights in Saudi Arabia.

A January 2015 report by Freedom House, a non-governmental organisation which tracks human rights, classified Saudi Arabia as 'not free' and received the lowest possible score. It was one of only ten countries in the entire world to receive that score: North Korea, Sudan and Syria are three of the others.

On the same month Human Rights Watch published a report which pointed out that "Saudi Arabia imprisoned ... activists on broad, catch-all charges designed to criminalize peaceful dissent, such as breaking allegiance with the ruler and setting up an unlicensed organization."

While Saudi Arabia is dominated by an ultraconservative Sunni ideology, an estimated 15 per cent of the country's Muslims are Shi'ite. Human rights groups have repeatedly said that the Shi'ites face discrimination based on their faith; last year the sentencing of one prominent Shiite cleric to death sparked international criticism. Other non-Islamic religious minorities have also complained of discrimination.

Given that ultraconservative ideology, LGBT rights are severely neglected in the country, too. By law, the punishment for sodomy could be stoning to death. Migrant workers, of whom there are millions in Saudi Arabia - mostly from South Asia, can also face abuse and have little in the way of legal rights. Last year the Saudi government announced it had deported 250,000 in just three months.

Recently, the Islamic Human Rights Commission reported once again that there are an estimated 30,000 political prisoners in Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia is an authoritarian dictatorship.

According to a 2012 United States Department Report, Saudi Arabian courts “continued to use corporal punishment as a judicial penalty, including floggings and amputation, as well as public execution by beheading.”

In 2013 Amnesty International condemned the “disturbing” rise in Saudi Arabia of such practices and executions, including public beheadings and the practice of crucifixion, which “refers to the court-ordered public display of the body after execution, along with the separated head if beheaded.” As the Report showed, there were at least 79 executions in 2013.

People found ‘guilty’ are publicly beheaded. The Saudi ‘justice’ publicly beheaded 19 people in the first half of August 2014 for offenses ranging from drug smuggling to black magic sorcery and witchcraft.

Women are not allowed to leave the house, make a purchase, sign any legal document - in fact perform almost any official action, from signing up to a class to agreeing to surgery, without the consent of a guardian, either the husband or the father. Yet, even these suffocating measures give only scant impression of the status of Saudi women in a society where even their court testimony is worth half of that of a man’s.

More simply, women in Saudi Arabia are not allowed some basic activities, such as driving a car, going for a swim, reading an uncensored fashion magazine, trying on clothes when shopping, competing freely in sports, entering a cemetery and similar moves.

The government failed to enact a 2011 draft law to combat violence against women and children. According to the 2013 World Report by Human Rights Watch, “punishment for domestic violence remain[s] lax.”

In 2014 the World Economics Forum ranked Saudi Arabia 130 out of 142 countries in its annual report on gender equality.

Human rights for Saudi women are among the worst in the world.

In 2009 WikiLeaks made public a confidential document in which Ms. Hillary Clinton, then Secretary of State in the Obama Administration, was reported as saying : “Donors in Saudi Arabia constitute the most significant source of funding to Sunni terrorist groups worldwide...more needs to be done since Saudi Arabia remains a critical financial support base for al-Qaeda, the Taliban, LeT and other terrorist groups.”

Saudi Arabia, and the other Sunni countries in the Middle East, have been financially and politically supporting the growing and evolving Sunni insurgency against Shias in the region for years. They have intentionally bankrolled groups the mission of which is to persecute and dispose of the Shia minority in the region.

In June 2014 *The Atlantic* reported that the success of I.S.I.S. “is in part due to the support they have received from two Persian Gulf countries: Qatar and Saudi Arabia.”

Saudi Arabia finances terrorism.

One may wonder: domestically, has there been any real progress ?

When king Abdullah died, a number of publications referred to him as a “reformer.” Many human rights activists took umbrage with that, and some argued that moves taken by Abdullah, such as appointing women to his *Majlis al-Shura* - which only *advises* the king - or introducing limited local democracy, were cosmetic at best.

On the contrary, there does appear to have been a clear crackdown on free speech over the past year or so. Human rights activists link the shift to two factors: fears emanating from the 2011 Arab Spring protests and pressure from the country’s religious conservatives. It is unclear what direction the new king Salman will take the country.

A CONGA-LINE OF HYPOCRITES

The House of Saud has been written off many times: when Arab nationalism swept through the Middle East; when the mullahs dethroned the Shah of Iran; when *ihadists* turned their suicide-bombs against the kingdom. Yet the sons of Abdel Aziz bin Saud have confounded all challengers.

In January 2015 they staged a smooth transition from king Abdullah to his half-brother, Salman. And, for all the kingdom's harshness at home and fuelling of extremism abroad, the world's leaders flocked to Riyadh. President Obama cut short a trip to India to pay homage to the new king.

This is a craven spectacle from democracies which claim to uphold universal human rights.

World leaders were falling over backwards to pay tribute to king Abdullah.

Here is a Statement by the President of the United States:



The White House

Office of the Press Secretary



For Immediate Release

January 22, 2015

Statement by the President on the Death of King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz

It is with deep respect that I express my personal condolences and the sympathies of the American people to the family of King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz and to the people of Saudi Arabia.

King Abdullah's life spanned from before the birth of modern Saudi Arabia through its emergence as a critical force within the global economy and a leader among Arab and Islamic nations. He took bold steps in advancing the Arab Peace Initiative, an endeavor that will outlive him as an enduring contribution to the search for peace in the region. At home, King Abdullah's vision was dedicated to the education of his people and to greater engagement with the world.

As our countries worked together to confront many challenges, I always valued King Abdullah's perspective and appreciated our genuine and warm friendship. As a leader, he was always candid and had the courage of his convictions. One of those convictions was his steadfast and passionate belief in the importance of the U.S.-Saudi relationship as a force for stability and security in the Middle East and beyond. The closeness and strength of the partnership between our two countries is part of King Abdullah's legacy.

May God grant him peace.

President Obama was mourning a double loss - of Abdullah's "political perspective" and of his "genuine and warm friendship".

Mr. Johann Schmonsees, press *attaché* at the U.S. embassy in Riyadh, announced that: "We adjusted the President's schedule in coordination with the Indian government so that he would be able to depart India on [27 January], to stop in Riyadh during the return trip and meet with King Salman and other Saudi officials, and offer his condolences on behalf of the American people."

President Obama arrived in Riyadh accompanied by a delegation of about thirty members. The Presidential *cortège* was met at the airport by king Salman with a full guard of honour and the playing of the national anthems of the two countries.

King Salman also introduced his senior ministers to President Obama, including Crown Prince Muqrin; Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Naif, who is also Second Deputy Premier and Interior Minister; and Prince Khaled bin Bandar, chief of general intelligence.

Riyadh Gov. Prince Turki bin Abdullah, Saudi ambassador to the U.S. Adel Al-Jubeir and his counterpart in Riyadh Mr. Joseph Westphal were also present at the airport.

According to the U.S. embassy, President Obama was leading a delegation of current and former U.S. officials, which include John Kerry, Secretary of State; John McCain, Senator from the state of Arizona; and Mark Warner, Senator from the Commonwealth of Virginia. The others included Ms. Valerie Jarrett, Senior Adviser and Assistant to the President for Intergovernmental Affairs and Public Engagement; Ms. Susan Rice, Assistant to the President and National Security Adviser; Ms. Jennifer Palmieri, Assistant to the President and Director of Communications; Ms. Lisa Monaco, Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counter-terrorism; and Mr. Peter A. Selfridge, United States Chief of Protocol.

Other members included Mr. John Brennan, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency; General Lloyd J. Austin III, Commander of U.S. Central Command; Mr. James Baker, former Secretary of State; Ms. Condoleezza Rice, former Secretary of State; Mr. Brent Scowcroft, former National Security Adviser; and several other foreign policy leaders from past administrations. Vice President Joe Biden had remained in Washington.

Mr. Baker is highly respected in the Arab Gulf region, particularly in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, for his role in orchestrating the alliance against Saddam Hussein in 1990 and 1991.

During his four-hour stop President Obama attended a dinner with Saudi officials at Erga Palace. Hours before he had spoken at length about the importance of women's rights during an address in India, setting up a jarring contrast with his warm embrace of Saudi Arabia, a country where there are strict limits on women's freedom.

A member of the delegation said that the visit was an opportunity "to pay respects to the legacy of King Abdullah, who was a close partner of the US, and also discuss

some of the issues where we are working together, which include Islamic State, Yemen, the Iranian nuclear negotiations and the broader US-Saudi relationship.”

According to a Royal Court statement, the meeting was significant. During the visit, official talks were held between “the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques [the new] King Salman and President Obama on regional and international issues of common interest in addition to setting out the means to enhance bilateral relations.”

Not to be second in proffering much visceral praise, the British Prime Minister David Cameron mobilised syrupy words: “[Abdullah] will be remembered for his long years of service to the Kingdom, for his commitment to peace and for strengthening understanding between faiths.” and he added: “My thoughts and prayers are with the Saudi Royal Family”, mindless of the fact that in Saudi Arabia being a Christian is forbidden and the Quran is the constitution.

For good measure, Westminster Abbey was even ordered to fly the flag at half-mast to salute the deceased absolute monarch.

The British Prime Minister was not the only one with a sleazy, slick as the Saudi oil, tribute; many other ‘world leaders’ arrived to deliver their two-faced appreciation towards the deceased despot.

In the competition for the single most untruthful tribute, Ms. Christine Lagarde, the managing director of the I.M.F., took the pole position, saying that Abdullah was a “strong advocate for women’s rights.”

It is true that king Abdullah’s time in power appeared to be granting women some rights that half of the population did not enjoy before his ten-year reign - such as chances to study and to attend football matches, but all in all women continue to populate the rungs below men on the ladder of Saudi social hierarchy. But gender equality is non-existent in the laws of the Kingdom based on Sharia Law and, for instance, women need the approval of their male guardian in order to marry, divorce, travel, open a bank account, or to continue their education. Similarly, women are mandated to cover their hair and bodies according to Islamic tradition and they are famously not allowed to drive in the country. There might have been some small movement forward, but it is completely ludicrous to claim that Abdullah was an advocate of any kind for women’s rights, no matter how ‘discreet’ the ways are. After

all, his own daughters claim that he kept them imprisoned in the palace for advocating women's rights.

In attendance at Riyadh were also Prince Charles for the Hanovers-Battenbergs-Windsors, Felipe VI of Spain and the Danish Crown Prince Frederik. They were followed by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif; the leaders of Ethiopia and Sudan joined Gulf rulers for the funeral prayer at the Imam Turki bin Abdullah mosque in the capital.

Not last in representing the obsequious vassalage of client states, Tony Abbott, Prime Minister of Australia, added his voice of condolence from afar.

Little more than one year in power, Mr. Abbott, a staunch monarchist and devoted Papist, is not new to love affairs with tyrants.

Outwardly in the haunt of 'moderate Muslims' with whom he could 'do business' for his 'Team Australia', Mr. Abbott in fact has supported other mass murderers and a king who is partial to a beheading - to many of them in fact.

In June 2014 Prime Minister Abbott glowingly endorsed General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi who, having overthrown the democratically elected government of Egypt, launched a series of massacres of non-violent protesters.

On 14 August 2013 Egyptian security forces raided two camps of protesters in Cairo: one at al-Nahda Square and a larger one at Rab'a al-Adawiya Square. The two sites had been occupied by supporters of ousted President Mohamed Morsi, who was removed from office by the military after mass street protests against him. The camps were raided after initiatives to end the six week sit-ins failed and as a result of the raids the camps were cleared out within hours. The raids were described by Human Rights Watch in a Report titled 'Egypt: Rab'a Killings Likely Crimes against Humanity' as "one of the world's largest killings of demonstrators in a single day in recent history." - much worse than the Tiananmen Square massacre - all things considered and given the fact that China's population is about 15 times bigger than Egypt's.

According to Human Rights Watch, a minimum of 817 people and more likely at least 1,000 were killed in Rab'a Square on 14 August.

And what did Tony Abbott say about that ? “I congratulated [Sisi] on the work that the new Government of Egypt had done to crack down on the Muslim Brotherhood.”

It is not known why no media outlet thought of commenting on Abbott’s warm embrace of a mass murderer.

Abbott’s purported attachment to democratic values continued with his lecture to Muslims on 23 January, in death of king Abdullah.

When asked if there was a problem with Islam, he explained that he was really encouraged by a “devout Muslim ... a very senior figure in the Arab world”, who “called for a religious revolution inside Islam.” Abbott went on: “I think that what everyone should be doing is listening to the sensible people inside the Islamic world, and there are more and more of them.” His favourite ‘devout Muslim’ and ‘senior figure’ in the Arab world is the ‘democratically elected leader of Egypt’ - General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi.

Abbott literally urged intolerant Muslims to lighten up and take a page from Sisi’s book. As it happens, Abbott is correct that his favourite devout Muslim won the elections in Egypt. As noted in an appalling Australian Broadcasting Corporation report, Sisi won the elections in June 2014 with a truly impressive 96.9 per cent of votes.

Nothing is considered striking in Abbott informing Muslims that they should learn from the dictator who imprisons and tortures tens of thousands, having murdered perhaps thousands already. Which is pretty revealing about Australian intellectual life.

Is it any wonder then that for Abbott the death of king Abdullah was a tragic loss ? Abbott immediately put out a press release, offering his “deepest condolences” to the people of Saudi Arabia on the loss of his beloved tyrant.

Abbott explained that “King Abdullah was a key architect of Saudi Arabia’s economic and political development.” Sadly, Abbott only listed some of the king’s “many achievements”, before concluding that “The King was also a strong proponent of *international interfaith dialogue*.” [Emphasis added] Shades of Tony Blair’s here !

Flags, in Australia and of course in the United Kingdom, were flown at half-mast for a week in respect of the soul of king Abdullah. The same A.B.C. described him as a

man with “reforming zeal”. The ‘liberal’ *New York Times* valorised his attempts ‘to nudge’ society forward. The obituaries of mainstream U.S. media were laughingly sycophantic. They portrayed him as a master politician, who had gained a reputation as a reformer without changing his country’s power structure and maintained good relations with the United States while striking an independent course in foreign policy.

No attention was given to Saudi Arabia’s role in supporting and exporting terrorism around the world. The country is among ‘the West’s best friends.

The hypocritical ‘western’ voices continued without even a footnote to assert that the basic democratic elements are non-existent in Saudi Arabia.

And how such display of hypocrisy would proceed in the presence of war criminal Tony Blair ? He too stated that he was a great admirer of king Abdullah. The man who helped ‘to bring democracy’ to Iraq described the monarch as a “staunch advocate of inter-faith relations.” Along the same lines, David Cameron had praised king Abdullah’s efforts in ‘strengthening understanding between faiths’. Both Blair and Cameron, formally highly educated persons, know full well that it is illegal in Saudi Arabia for a Muslim to abandon his or her faith, while Christians are being systematically threatened, for instance, by raiding prayer meetings as happened last September.

Human rights organisations, such as Amnesty International, have expressed their concerns over the state of Saudi Arabian civil society. According to Amnesty, the government of Saudi Arabia executed 79 people mostly by beheading them in public. Torture and deception have been used to gain the confessions necessary for convictions. Additionally, nearly a half of those people executed between 1985 and 2013 were foreign nationals convicted under circumstances involving insufficient legal advice and translation.

No death of a monarch should minimise these severe violations of human rights laws and international standards. No effort to create strategic partnerships should go this far as to pardon public executions and whippings.

A brief excursus of recent events will give a lie to an avalanche of sycophantic expressions.

It is now patently clear that a high stakes proxy war is being waged between the Saudi Arabia and its main rival for influence in the Middle East, Iran. Of course, on a deeper level the United States and Russia are also closely involved behind the scenes.

It is now common knowledge - at least anywhere outside the mainstream media - that Saudi Intelligence has played a frontline role in the Syrian war, financing and directing a wide array of *jihadist* groups fighting against the Assad government. Since 2011 the popular uprising in that country has escalated into a brutal civil war pitting largely Sunni rebels against the secular Alawite government forces. Some resistance fighters became known as the Free Syrian Army. However, most reports show that the F.S.A. is all but non-existent, having been chased out of the country by radical groups such as the I.S.I.S. and Al-Nusra Front.

These Islamist groups now control large swathes of western Iraq and eastern Syria, using extreme violence to terrorise the people of the region. Composed mostly of foreign fighters, they have imposed Sharia Law throughout the lands they control, ruthlessly disposing of anyone who stands in their way, including even moderate Sunni Muslims.

However, it is not just in Syria that Saudi Arabia has been fomenting conflict. Indeed, wherever there is war in the Middle East - which is just about everywhere these days - one can bet that one side is being funded by Saudi petrol dollars.

Since realising that the Assad government would not be easily toppled, the Saudis have redoubled their efforts to bring down Iraq's struggling Shia government. It is no coincidence that the already fragile situation in Iraq reached a new level of violence in 2013 - with an estimated 8,000-10,000 casualties and an average of seventy incidents per week.

The Saudis are also heavily involved in Lebanon where they recently donated US\$ 3 billion to the military.

One can clearly detect a pattern of Saudi interference in almost every country in the region. But why is Saudi Arabia going to such great pains? The answer is that Riyadh is afraid of domestic dissent, internal power struggles, and becoming a marginalised power in the region.

There is growing dissent inside the country both from the Shia minority as well as Sunni intellectuals. The Shia of the Eastern Province, who have long been discriminated against, have been the most vocal opponents since the beginning of the Arab Spring.

The internal power struggle of Prince Bandar Bin Sultan also played heavily into this story. Also known as 'Bandar Bush' because of his close connections to the Bush family, he has been the long time Saudi ambassador to Washington as well as an international arms dealer. Recently appointed as Saudi intelligence chief in a last ditch effort to get rid of the Assad government, Prince Bandar has been the driving force behind the recent regional chaos.

It has been reported that there was an ongoing power struggle between him and the designated successor to the throne, then Crown Prince Salman. Bandar had also made several trips to Russia in the past, once threatening President Putin that if he did not stop supporting Syria, the Chechen groups that the Saudis control in the Caucasus would have hit the 2014 Winter Olympics, officially known as the XXII Olympic Winter Games and commonly known as Sochi 2014 because held in Sochi, Russia from 7 February to 23 February. Before the event Prince Bandar paid a visit to President Putin and told him something like this: "There are many common values and goals that bring us together, most notably the fight against terrorism and extremism all over the world. Russia, the US, the EU and the Saudis agree on promoting and consolidating international peace and security. The terrorist threat is growing in light of the phenomena spawned by the Arab Spring. We have lost some regimes. And what we got in return were terrorist experiences, as evidenced by the experience of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the extremist groups in Libya. ... As an example, I can give you a guarantee to protect the Winter Olympics ... The Chechen groups that threaten the security of the games are controlled by us, and they will not move in the Syrian territory's direction without coordinating with us. These groups do not scare us. We use them in the face of the Syrian regime but they will have no role or influence in Syria's political future."

President Putin is said to have replied rather curtly: "Our stance on Assad will never change. We believe that the Syrian regime is the best speaker on behalf of the Syrian people, and not those liver eaters. During the Geneva I Conference, we agreed with the Americans on a package of understandings, and they agreed that the Syrian

regime will be part of any settlement. Later on, they decided to renege on Geneva I. In all meetings of Russian and American experts, we reiterated our position. In his upcoming meeting with his American counterpart John Kerry, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will stress the importance of making every possible effort to rapidly reach a political settlement to the Syrian crisis so as to prevent further bloodshed.”

There is more, much more indeed, to shake this marriage of convenience, based on security in exchange for a steady stream of oil, between the United States and Saudi Arabia.

Things have changed dramatically in recent years, largely as a result of the hydraulic fracturing or ‘fracking’ revolution. There is little doubt that ‘fracking’ poses a serious long-term threat to the environment, but the United States is determined to make itself energy independent – at literally any cost, including a potentially very messy divorce with Saudi Arabia which could even jeopardise the petrodollar system which has underpinned American global economic dominance over the last fifty years.

Much of what happened over Syria merely compounded Saudi Arabia’s sense of betrayal over the American Administration’s refusal to commit to a military involvement in Syria after the alleged use of chemical weapons - weapons which, many experts now believe, may have been supplied by Prince Bandar himself.

While they see themselves as the guardians of Islamic doctrine and have always generously financed Muslim missionaries, the Saudis’ priority is not to ‘salafise’ the Muslim world. Their real aim is to consolidate their political and ideological influence by establishing a network of supporters capable of defending the kingdom’s strategic and economic interests.

This Saudi royal family’s global network of supporters came to the fore during the recent Arab Spring, which allegedly took Saudi authorities completely off guard. Threatened by a wave of liberal reform sweeping through the Middle East, the Saudis moved quickly into action. In Bahrain they forcefully squashed the protest, while in Egypt they helped to reinstall a military dictatorship. In Libya and the Levant - that is Iraq, Lebanon and Syria - they have chosen a different approach: funding and arming extremist militant groups, which has further destabilised an already strife-plagued region.

The 2003 invasion of Iraq by the ‘Coalition of the willing’ and the co-opting of the Syrian revolution in 2011 have plunged the Middle East into an unending spiral of violence. *Jihadists* from more than fifty countries are now fighting there.

Enter the Islamic State - a group which is deeply Wahhabi in nature and which has distributed al-Wahhab’s writings and teachings in the areas it controls. Its ‘international flavour’ and use of social media is highly seductive to alienated members of the millennial generation, offering simple - albeit deeply flawed - ‘answers’ and a sense of identity, belonging and purpose.

As the world may be reaching the climax of the golden age of oil, Saudi Arabia continues to throw its weight around in the Middle East and beyond. Through the Wahhabis, it has sown the seeds of a brutally intolerant ideology across the Muslim world. Through their schools and charitable organisations, the Saudis have indoctrinated a generation of *jihadists* who are prepared to defend the Kingdom’s interests with their own lives and the deaths of many others.

The ranks of these *jihadists* are filled with embittered young men who have fallen victim to a system built on inequality and racism. While the mainstream media pretend to be perplexed by the Islamic State’s sudden ascent to power, it is clear that the root causes lie at the heart of a corrupt system of greed and inequality. Most worrisome of all, as the world teeters closer to the brink of economic, geopolitical, social and ecological disaster, it is only logical that more young Muslim men - and even women - around the world will be drawn to extremist organisations preaching an ideology of hate and violence.

SALMAN - “a model of stability”

King Abdullah had come to power vaguely promising reforms, but his agenda fell far short of achieving lasting institutional gains on basic rights for Saudi people. Early in his reign, king Abdullah was talked as promoting modernisation of Saudi Arabia’s state apparatus, making it more efficient and transparent; encouraged a modest public re-evaluation of the enforced subservient status of women and religious minorities; allowed greater debate in the media; and promoted some degree of judicial fairness. After 2011 the authorities subordinated the king’s reform agenda to

a campaign to silence peaceful dissidents and activists who called for religious tolerance and greater respect for human rights.

There was hope that king Salman, the new ruler, who is widely reported to suffer from both Alzheimer's and dementia, would move the country forward by ending intolerance for free expression, rooting out gender and sectarian discrimination, and fostering a fair and impartial judicial system.

The early consensus was that the accession of king Salman was going to be a non-event, or at least as close to a non-event as is possible in these circumstances. Without particular reason, he was welcomed as a 'model of stability'. Indeed, the new king used his first public address to stress that there would be no change in direction for the country under his reign. "We will remain with God's strength attached to the straight path that this state has walked since its establishment by King Abdul Aziz bin Saud, and by his sons after him." Salman said in televised remarks.

Still, the new king was facing significant security challenges: I.S.I.S. on its borders in Iraq, the loosening of its grip in Yemen, plunging oil prices and a challenge for regional influence from Iran. But none of these were regarded as existential threats.

In the meantime, a new reality had taken place and led to the absurd conclusion that the United States should fight I.S.I.S. even if that demanded the bombing of Syria's pipelines.

Or at least such was the content of reports on the 'Syrian crisis'.

While logically fallacious, the rationale offered to the public remains that I.S.I.S. is making millions of dollars per day through the sale of the oil taken from the fields in its possession on the black market to a number of different states.

Yet, while the mainstream media do not bother to explain just how I.S.I.S. manages to extract, refine, and ship the oil, or how it is able to procure deals, and complete their transactions outside of the knowledge of 'western' government, military and intelligence agencies to the tune of US\$ 2 million per day, these agencies do provide the solution: bomb the oil pipelines belonging to Syria.

Of course, while it is most likely true that I.S.I.S. is using their commandeered oil sites to support themselves on a number of fronts, and even attempting - with some success - to sell that oil, the suggestion that I.S.I.S. is somehow able to evade the most sophisticated monitoring network in the entire world during the process of obtaining, refining, selling and delivering oil across the region is entirely unacceptable. Indeed, it is about as believable as the claim that I.S.I.S. was able to seize such large swaths of territory across Syria and Iraq without the knowledge of the United States and N.A.T.O.

Regardless, it must be pointed out that, among the countries listed as hosting I.S.I.S. customers, Jordan and Turkey are at the top of the list, both close American allies and the latter a member of N.A.T.O. Even more interesting is the fact that I.S.I.S. has also allegedly sold 'black market' oil to buyers in a number of European Union member states.

According to the American government, the U.S. must fight I.S.I.S. by blowing up the oil pipelines which rightfully belong to Syria so that I.S.I.S. does not fund itself by selling oil to ... Syria. This is both logically absurd and a lie. It is nothing more than a cover to mask the true nature of the funding of I.S.I.S. and other militants operating in Iraq and Syria, namely that the funding is coming from the United States, N.A.T.O., and the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council, predominantly Saudi Arabia.

A bombing of Syria's oil pipelines would subsequently allow the Qataris to rebuild the infrastructure that its allies destroyed and, as a result, weaken Russia even further on the geopolitical grand chessboard.

A top State Department official said on 23 October 2014 that bombing oil pipelines controlled by Islamic State in Syria is now a 'viable option' under consideration by the U.S. military.

Ms. Julieta Valls Noyes, the U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, was in London and her comments were first reported by the British press. In Noyes' estimate, I.S.I.S. was making US\$ 2 million a day off oil sales and the United States would consider airstrikes as well as "kinetic strikes against some pipelines" and "actual physical action to stop the flow." The trouble with this

justification for destroying Syria's oil pipelines, is that I.S.I.S. does not have the capability to use the pipelines to transfer oil. I.S.I.S. transports the stolen oil on the back of trucks, and sells it on the black market in Turkey.

The U.S. agenda behind destroying Syria's pipelines has very little to do with I.S.I.S. oil profits, and far more to do with destroying Syria's oil infrastructure.

According to Prof. Michael T. Klare, who has written extensively on energy resources and U.S. foreign policy "Bombing oil pipelines to get at ISIS's financing would be a very foolhardy move." and he added: "First of all, it would be almost impossible to determine that the pipelines were carrying oil produced by oilfields under ISIS's control, and second, there could be a considerable risk of civilian casualties from the resulting explosions. Bombing pipelines could also lead to massive oil spills and resulting environmental damage." In addition, he said, attacking pipelines in any manner "would provide anti-American groups anywhere in the world with a rationale for bombing pipelines on which we and our allies depend. The result could be global economic havoc."

However, the destruction of Syria's oil infrastructure would also open the door for American and British oil companies to secure contracts to rebuild it, paid for in debt, by the Syrian state. Foreign companies running Syria's oil and gas production would prevent Syria from nationalising their own resources and becoming an independent prosperous country. This would result in the basic 'colonisation' of the country while mitigating the threat it poses to U.S. client states including Israel, Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

In 2009 President Assad refused to sign a proposed agreement with Qatar which would run a pipeline from the latter's North field, contiguous with Iran's South Pars field, through Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria and on to Turkey, with a view to supplying European markets - thus, crucially, bypassing Russia. Assad's rationale was "to protect the interests of [his] Russian ally, which is Europe's top supplier of natural gas."

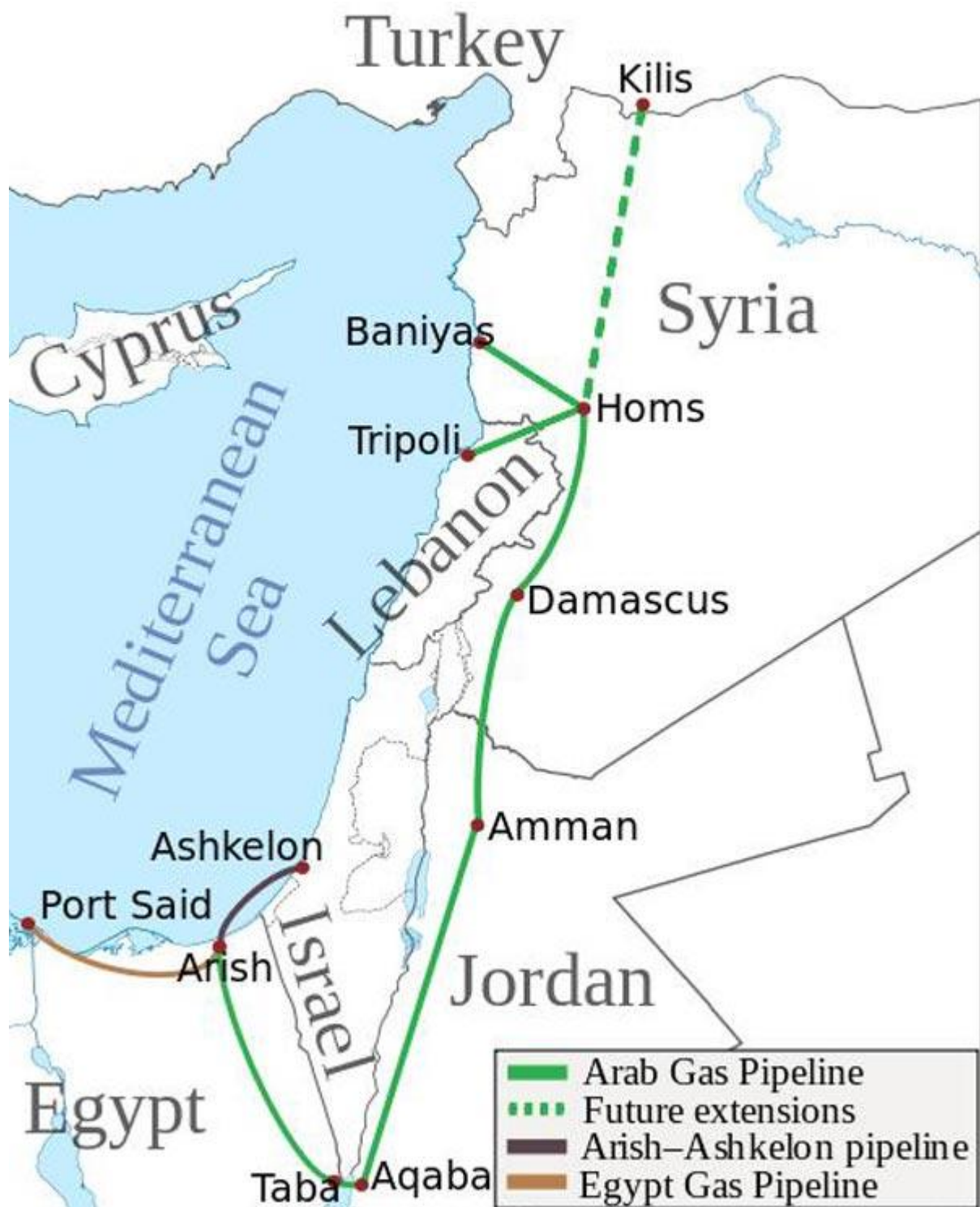
Instead, the following year, Assad pursued negotiations for an alternative US\$ 10 billion pipeline plan with Iran, across Iraq to Syria, which would also potentially allow Iran to supply gas to Europe from its South Pars field shared with Qatar. The Memorandum of Understanding for the project was signed in July 2012, just as

Syria's civil war was spreading to Damascus and Aleppo, and earlier in 2014 Iraq signed a framework agreement for construction of the gas pipelines. The Iran-Iraq-Syria pipeline plan was a 'direct slap in the face' to Qatar's plans. No wonder Saudi Prince Bandar bin Sultan, in a failed attempt to bribe Russia to switch sides, told President Vladimir Putin that "whatever regime comes after" Assad, it will be "completely" in Saudi Arabia's hands and will "not sign any agreement allowing any Gulf country to transport its gas across Syria to Europe and compete with Russian gas exports", according to diplomatic sources. When Putin refused, the Prince vowed military action.

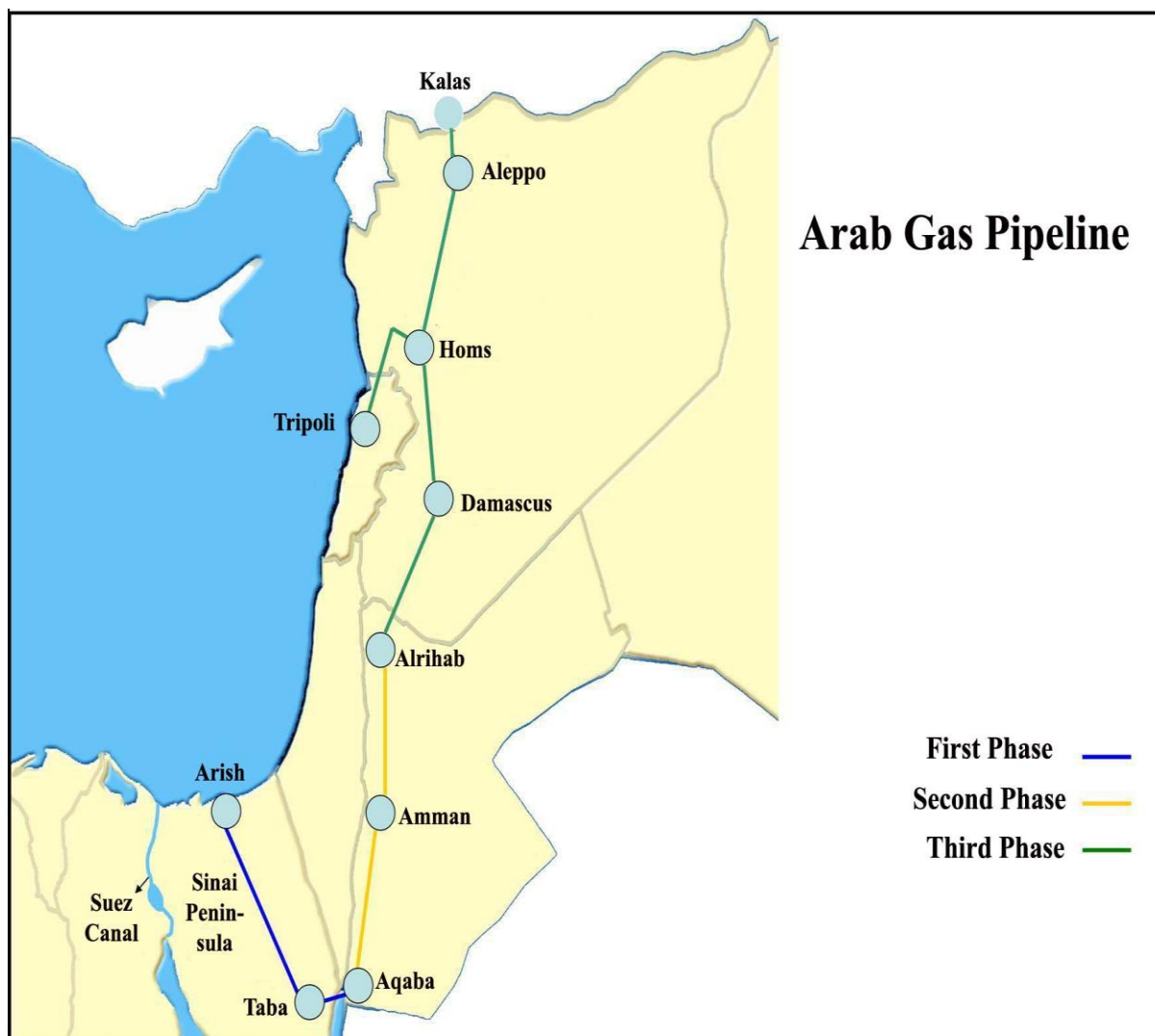
Qatar's interest in funding the insurrection, was to overthrow Syria and install a pliable opposition which would sign Qatar's pipeline agreement. Jordan, Turkey and Saudi Arabia also had a vested interest in this plan. This suited the American government objective of undercutting and weakening Russian influence over Europe.

However they also have an alternative plan for doing so. In the absence of the successful overthrow of the Syrian government, the U.S. would settle for destroying what it cannot control. Perpetual war and the destruction of pipelines would prevent or at least delay any possible pipeline agreement in future.

It is quite interesting that Syria is one of the seven countries the government of which the American *Neocons* had long planned to destroy. Syria figured in the scheme of things as one of the places touched by the proposed 1,200 kilometres Arab Gas Pipeline, which would run up from Qatar through Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria and Turkey and, from there, on to the rest of Europe, as can be seen in the following drawing:



Syria was to have become integral part of a combination which would see a pipeline from Kilis (or Kalas) in Turkey and down 'behind' Lebanon and Israel, as it were, and finally to Aqaba on the Persian Gulf, and from there to Taba and Arish.



The pipeline would be built in three phases: first from Arish to Taba and Aqaba, then from Aqaba to Alrihab in Jordan, and finally from Alrihab to Kalas (or Kilis) in Turkey.

It seems that there was a kind of secret agreement between Saudi Arabia and the United States, whereby the latter would be compensated for bombing the Syrian infrastructure until the hated Syrian leader was toppled, creating a power vacuum in his wake which would allow a 'new Syria', Qatar, Jordan and/or Turkey to divide the spoils of war as they saw fit. Part of this agreement would require Saudi Arabia to force the price of oil down, in an effort to put political pressure on Iran and Russia, according to the President of Saudi Arabia Oil Policies and Strategic Expectations Centre.

To pressure Iran to limit its nuclear programme, and to change Russia's position on Syria, Saudi Arabia would sell oil below the average spot price at US\$ 50 to US\$ 60 per barrel - and if necessary even less - in the Asian markets and North America.

The marked decrease in the price of oil since June 2014 could then be attributed to the Saudis' activity.

With oil demand declining, the ostensible reason for the price drop was to attract new clients, but the real reason is political. Saudi Arabia wants to get Iran to limit its nuclear energy expansion, and to make Russia change its position of support for the Assad government in Syria. Both countries depend heavily on petroleum exports for revenue, and a lower oil price meant less money coming in. The Gulf states would have been less affected by the price drop.

The Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, which is the technical arbiter of the price of oil for Saudi Arabia and the other eleven countries which make up the group, would not have been able to affect Saudi Arabia's decision.

SALMAN'S WORK

Three important events followed the otherwise 'ordinary' accession of king Salman.

The first one was a meeting of the American Secretary of State, John Kerry, with the king at his summer palace on the Red Sea on 11 September 2014. The king had invited Prince Bandar bin Sultan, former head of Saudi intelligence, to attend.

During the meeting an agreement was reached: the Saudis would support the Syrian airstrikes against I.S.I.S. if the American government would support the Saudis in toppling President Assad, who is a firm ally of Russia and, more covertly, of Iran. Treating oil as a weapon, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates would aim at controlling the emerging European Union natural gas market and seriously damaging Russia's lucrative E.U. trade.

As a report in *The Wall Street Journal* noted, there had been "months of behind-the-scenes work by the US and Arab leaders, who agreed on the need to cooperate against Islamic State, but not how or when. The process gave the Saudis leverage to

extract a fresh US commitment to beef up training for rebels fighting Mr. Assad, whose demise the Saudis still see as a top priority.”

For the Saudis the war is between two competing age-old sects of Islam, and two irreconcilable views of it which have brought to conflict with the kind of blindness which characterises religious wars. Saudi Arabia, home to the sacred cities of Mecca and Medina, claims *de facto* supremacy in the Islamic world of Sunni Islam. The Saudi Sunni form is ultra-conservative Wahhabism, and is shared by the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar and Kuwait. In its more extreme expression it is called Salafism and it has become associated with literalist, strict and puritanical approaches to Islam. Iran on the other hand historically is the heart of the smaller branch of Islam, the Shi'ite. And there is where further difficulties arise: Iraq's population is some 61 per cent majority Shi'ite. Syria's President Assad is a member of a satellite of the Shi'ite branch known as Alawite. Some 23 per cent of Turkey is also Alawite Muslim. Sitting across a bridge from Saudi Arabia sits the tiny island country of Bahrain where as many as 75 per cent of the population is Shi'ite but the ruling Al-Khalifa family is Sunni and firmly tied to Saudi Arabia.

The richest Saudi oil region is dominated by Shi'ite Muslims.

The world's largest known natural gas reservoir sits in the middle of the Persian Gulf straddling part in the territorial waters of Qatar and part in Iran. The Iranian part is called North Pars. In 2006 China National Offshore Oil Corporation, the CNOOC Group, which is a major national oil company, signed an agreement with Iran to develop North Pars and build liquefied natural gas infrastructure to bring the gas to China.

The Qatar side of the Persian Gulf, called North Field, contains the world's third largest known natural gas reserves after Russia and Iran.

As already noted, in July 2011 the governments of Syria, Iran and Iraq signed a gas pipeline energy agreement which went largely unnoticed in the midst of the N.A.T.O.-Saudi-Qatari war to remove Assad. The pipeline, envisioned to cost US\$ 10 billion and take three years to complete, would run from the Iranian Port Assalouyeh near the South Pars gas field in the Persian Gulf, to Damascus in Syria via Iraq territory. The agreement would make Syria the centre of assembly and production in

conjunction with the reserves of Lebanon. As Pepe Escobar, an acute analyst, observed in 2012, “The Iran-Iraq-Syria pipeline - if it’s ever built - would solidify a predominantly Shi’ite axis through an economic, steel umbilical cord.”

Shortly after signing with Iran and Iraq, on 16 August 2011, President Assad’s Ministry of Oil announced the discovery of a gas well in the Area of Qarah in the Central Region of Syria near Homs. *Gazprom*, Russia’s largest extractor of natural gas in the world and one of the world’s largest companies, so long as Assad was in power, would be a major investor or operator of the new gas fields in Syria. Iran ultimately planned to extend the pipeline from Damascus to Lebanon’s Mediterranean port where it would be delivered to the huge E.U. market. Syria would buy Iranian gas along with a current Iraqi agreement to buy Iranian gas from Iran’s part of South Pars field.

Qatar, today the world’s largest exporter of liquefied natural gas, mainly to Asia, aims at conquering the same E.U. market which so interests Iran and Syria. For that, they would build pipelines to the Mediterranean. And here is where disposing of the pro-Iran Assad is essential. As already seen, in 2009 Qatar approached President Assad to propose construction of a gas pipeline from Qatar’s north Field through Syria on to Turkey and to the E.U. But Assad refused, citing Syria’s long friendly relations with Russia and commitment to *Gazprom*. That refusal combined with the Iran-Iraq-Syria gas pipeline agreement in 2011 ignited the full-scale Saudi and Qatari assault on Assad’s power, financing al Qaeda terrorists, recruits of *jihadist* fanatics willing to kill Alawite and Shi’ite ‘infidels’ for \$100 a month and a Kalishnikov.

Today the American-supported war in Syria is but a front in the strategic war to cripple Russia and China and to rupture any Eurasian counter-pole to a U.S.-dominated ‘New World Order’. Control of energy pipelines is the name of the game.

The second important event following the otherwise ‘ordinary’ accession of king Salman was the aggression on Yemen.

On 25 March 2015 Saudi Arabia launched ‘Operation Desert Storm’, a series of airstrikes across Yemen - the most impoverished country in the Arab world. The Operation was part of the first major war for Saudi Arabia at its own initiative since its invasion of Yemen in 1934. A Saudi-led coalition including Bahrain, Egypt,

Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Qatar, Sudan and the United Arab Emirates began airstrikes against Houthi forces, also known as Ansar Allah, who effectively ousted the government of President Abed Rabbuh Mansur Hadi in January 2015.

The Saudi war on Yemen is intended to prop up the tottering regime of President Hadi. The war has the full support of the United States, and the latter has materially assisted Saudi Arabia with intelligence sharing, military supplies and logistical support. Indeed, the armaments used by the Saudi military are imports from the United States, Britain, Germany, France and other countries. Saudi Arabia has become the world's leading arms importer, spending an estimated US\$ 6.4 billion on weapons in 2014.

The coalition is using cluster munitions, something rendered more easy by the fact that none of the participants had signed the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions. Cluster munitions contain dozens or hundreds of submunitions. The submunitions are designed to explode after spreading out over a wide area, often the size of a football field, putting anyone in the area at the time of the attack at risk of death or injury. In addition, many submunitions often do not explode, becoming *de facto* landmines.

“Saudi-led cluster munition airstrikes have been hitting areas near villages, putting local people in danger.” said Steve Goose, arms director at Human Rights Watch. “These weapons should never be used under any circumstances. Saudi Arabia and other coalition members - and the supplier, the US - are flouting the global standard that rejects cluster munitions because of their long-term threat to civilians.”

Soon after the airstrikes began, Saudi Arabia denied using cluster munitions in Yemen. At a news conference in Riyadh on 29 March Brig. Gen. al-Assiri told the media: “We are not using cluster bombs at all.”

Yet, in August 2013 the U.S. Department of Defense had concluded a contract for the manufacture by Textron of 1,300 CBU-105 Sensor Fuzed Weapons for Saudi Arabia.

The contract with Textron stipulated that delivery of the weapons should be completed by December 2015. Human Rights Watch was unable to establish when deliveries began, or if they have finished.

In addition to the recent transfer of CBU-105, the U.S. had provided Saudi Arabia with significant exports of cluster bombs between 1970 and 1999.

Additionally, the United Arab Emirates received an unknown number of CBU-105 from Textron Defense Systems in June 2010, fulfilling a contract announced in November 2007.

In March 2015 Human Rights Watch called on all parties to the conflict not to use cluster munitions in the Yemen fighting. Credible evidence showed that Saudi Arabia had dropped cluster bombs in Saada governorate in November 2009 during Yemeni government fighting against the Houthis. Cluster munition remnants from the 2009 airstrikes, including unexploded US-made BLU-97 and BLU-61 submunitions, were reported by a number of sources.

Human Rights Watch chairs the Cluster Munition Coalition US, which in a 30 March 2015 letter to President Obama said that the Administration should review the so-called Gates policy.

In a June 2008 then-Secretary of Defense Robert Gates detailed the U.S. policy on cluster munitions to the effect that the U.S. can only use or export cluster munitions which “after arming do not result in more than 1 percent unexploded ordnance across the range of intended operational environments.” and that the acquiring country must agree that cluster munitions “will only be used against clearly defined military targets and will not be used where civilians are known to be present or in areas normally inhabited by civilians.”

“The Gates policy is providing the US a handy loophole to send cluster munitions to countries like Saudi Arabia, which shouldn’t be using them at all.” Goose said.

Strangely, the Prince Salman who in March 2007 had claimed in a conversation with outgoing U.S. Ambassador James C. Oberwetter that “the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia does not have problems with other creeds or sects” was now, as king Salman, attacking the Houthis in Yemen for the thinly veiled reason that they were Shi’ite under the influence of Iran, the Saudis permanent enemy.

What Salman was using in 2007 is the party line of the House of Saud: in the words of the late king Abdullah, Saudi Arabia would always stand “in the face of those trying to hijack Islam and present it to the world as a religion of extremism, hatred

and terrorism.” Such statements - intended for non-Muslims - are meant to reassure, but they ring hollow in the face of evidence that the roots and spread of violent Sunni *jihad* lead back to Saudi Arabia and its Wahhabi-centered clerical establishment.

When he began conquering Arabia, Abdulaziz ibn Saud - who ruled from 1932 to 1953 - deployed Wahhabism as a religio-political means of uniting the Peninsula’s restive tribes. Submission to Allah’s absolute will, as interpreted by Wahhabi doctrine and upheld by the House of Saud, became a rallying cry. Wahhabism served Saud’s descendants in the ruling family as a bulwark against Arab Nationalist rivals like Egypt, Syria and Iraq, who were turning to the Soviets during the 1960s and 1970s. Faced with that rise of secularism and fuelled by oil money, King Faisal ibn Abdulaziz al-Saud - who ruled from 1964 to 1975 - decided the propaganda of Wahhabism, which proclaims the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as the sole rightful defender of Islam, would become the long-term strategy for the monarchy’s survival. Over the past three years in particular, whether in Lebanon, Iraq or Syria, the Saudi state has been able to utilise *jihadis* to launch ‘proxy Sunni-Shia wars’ aimed specifically against Iran and its Shi’ite and Alawite allies.

But, in such duplicitous behaviour, the third important event was yet to come, and it became the biggest shake-up in Saudi Arabia in many decades.

Without warning, king Salman removed the sitting Crown Prince, Muqrin bin Abulaziz, his half brother, and promoted the third in line, Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, his nephew, to No. 2. Mohammed bin Nayef, who until then had been the interior minister and head of security for the regime, will be the first member of the generation of grandsons of the Saudi kingdom’s, Abdulaziz ibn Saud, to be placed first in the line of succession to the throne. Mohammed bin Nayef had proved himself as the strongman of the regime, spearheading crackdowns on both Islamic fundamentalists opposed to the ruling family, and dissidents of every kind, from liberals to the Shi’ite minority to the vast immigrant workforce that performs most of the country’s labour. Muqrin has since publicly proclaimed his allegiance to the new team, but without providing any explanation for his removal. Rumours circulated that Prince Muqrin, who formerly headed Saudi intelligence operations, was removed at least in part because of opposition to the ongoing Saudi military

campaign against Houthi rebels in Yemen. Muqrin was a *protégé* of Abdullah, but is not close to Salman's branch of the family, the Sudairis, who share the same mother, Hassa bint Ahmad al-Sudairi, the favourite wife of the kingdom's founder.

Salman made his own son, Mohammed bin Salman, the new No. 3 despite his young age - he is only 34 years old - and his lack of experience as a senior policymaker, and the obvious fact that he was being jumped ahead of hundreds of more senior princes of his generation.

Mohammed bin Salman had been named Secretary of the Royal Court and the Defence Minister when his father succeeded to the throne in late January. In the latter position, he is responsible for both theatres of war in which Saudi armed forces are engaged: the bombing of Yemen, which could become a ground invasion; and the bombing of I.S.I.S. targets in Syria, where warplanes from Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf monarchies play a role in support of the predominately American military operation.

King Salman also replaced the ailing Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal, a 75-year-old prince who had held the position for forty years. His replacement is the Saudi ambassador to the United States, Adel al-Jubeir, relatively young at 53, who is the first non-member of the royal family to hold the position since 1962.

The new occupants of the top offices, Mohammed bin Nayef as crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman as deputy crown prince, and Adel al-Jubeir as foreign minister, are all known for their close ties to the United States.

A DYSFUNCTIONAL RELATIONSHIP

Returning to Riyadh on 7 May 2015 U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry appeared with his counterpart Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir and praised Saudi Arabia for its role in the one-and-a-half-month-old war against Yemen. Kerry commended the Saudis for their "initiative to bring about a peaceful resolution through the announcement of their intent to establish a full, five-day, renewable ceasefire and humanitarian pause."

Such words were not surprising, but displayed considerable hypocrisy: the United States has supported Saudi Arabia, the leader of the coalition, to the hilt since the war began, rushing it fresh arms, including deadly cluster bombs, banned by the vast majority of the world's nations because of their murderous effect upon civilians.

A U.S. Command Centre had been set up in Riyadh to supply the Saudi Air Force with targeting intelligence, and U.S. Air Force KC-135 Stratotankers had been dispatched to the region to carry out daily aerial refuelling of Saudi warplanes, so that the airstrikes could continue around the clock.

In 2014 Saudi Arabia spent US\$ 80 billion on arms, making it the fourth largest weapons purchaser in the world. The Obama administration was preparing to sell it and the other Persian Gulf oil potentates even more powerful weapons systems.

Neither Kerry nor al-Jubeir said when the five-day "humanitarian pause" would begin, nor did they provide any specific definition of its terms. Jubeir indicated, however, that it would be dependent on the Houthi rebels laying down their arms.

This is not the first time that Saudi Arabia indicated that it would call a halt to the bloodbath it has unleashed on Yemen. On 21 April, after nearly a month of bombing, it proclaimed that Operation Decisive Storm had ended and a new phase centred on achieving a political resolution of the Yemeni conflict would begin. Instead, the air strikes had only intensified. While the bombing of Yemeni cities continued, the Saudi Air Force, with the knowledge and consent of the United States was dropping arms and supplies to *Al Qaeda of the Arabian Peninsula* forces in Yemen, a movement that the American Administration had previously portrayed as the paramount terrorist threat. As the most rabidly sectarian enemies of the Houthis - inspired by the Saudi state religion of Wahhabi Islamism which animates similar movements, from I.S.I.S. to Boko Haram - A.Q.A.P. has now been recast as Yemeni patriots.

The latest development in this tragic saga has been the Houthi's compliance with a five-day cease-fire, beginning at 11:00 pm on 12 May. In preparation for this ceasefire, Saudi forces terrorised the Yemeni border with an onslaught of air strikes in an attempt to "inflict as much damage as possible" before the mandatory arms rest.

A plea by a United Nations envoy to Yemen, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, that the five-day “humanitarian truce” should turn into a permanent cease-fire fell on deaf ears. The Saudi-led coalition rejected outright any extension of the truce to allow for the shipment and disbursement of further aid.

On 17 May, following the expiration of the five-day cease-fire, the coalition - still supported by the United States - resumed its assault against Houthi militia targets throughout Yemen.

An estimated twenty million people, or 80 per cent of the population, are going hungry as a Saudi-led blockade of Yemen’s harbours together with repeated air strikes which have destroyed runways at the country’s airports have cut off its food supplies.

In a related development, Iran announced that it would be sending an aid ship to Yemen, prompting a fresh war of words with the U.S. Iranian Brigadier-General Masoud Jazayeri warned the U.S. against stopping the ship, after the U.S. said it was tracking its movements. Jazayeri said that if Saudi Arabia or the U.S. “continue to create obstacles on Iran’s aid delivery, a fire might start that would definitely be out of their control.”

Along with the military offensive, a diplomatic one was being tried.

On 2 April President Obama had announced a forthcoming summit with the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, the regional intergovernmental political and economic union consisting of all Arab states of the Persian Gulf, except for Iraq. Its member states are Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. President Obama had made the announcement when disclosing that the United States, the other permanent members of the U.N. Security Council plus Germany and Iran had reached agreement on parameters for a long-term nuclear deal.

The White House had hoped that king Salman would attend the summit but in the end only two heads of state, one from Kuwait and the other from Qatar, from the six-member G.C.C., showed up.

King Salman designated Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef to attend the summit, the state news Saudi Press Agency reported on 10 May, just two days after the White House said the monarch would attend the gathering.

Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir had made the announcement, confirming that he too would attend.

Military cooperation and a preliminary agreement between Iran and world powers on Tehran's nuclear programme and the crises in Syria and Yemen were also likely to be discussed at the summit to be held on 13 and 14 May in Washington and at Camp David, Maryland.

In a statement from the Saudi Embassy in Washington, al-Jubeir said the king deputised the Crown Prince to attend "due to the timing of the summit, the scheduled humanitarian ceasefire in Yemen and the opening of the King Salman Centre for Humanitarian Aid."

A senior American official said that the king's decision not to attend was "not in response to any substantive issue," signalling that the Obama Administration did not regard it as a diplomatic snub.

"We first learned of the king's possible change of plans from the Saudis on the night [of 8 May]," the official said. "This was confirmed by the Saudis on [9 May]. We coordinated closely with our Saudi partners on the alternate arrangement and timing of the announcement, and look forward to welcoming Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef and Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman." On 8 May Secretary of State Kerry had met his counterparts in Paris to discuss what they were expecting from the summit meeting, and to signal what the United States was prepared to offer at Camp David.

A White House spokesman had announced that President Obama would have met on [6 May] with king Salman at the White House ahead of the wider summit. The purpose of this advanced meeting was "to resume consultations on a wide range of regional and bilateral issues." King Salman's absence could only be interpreted as an apparent signal of Saudi Arabia's continued displeasure with the Administration over the United States relations with Iran, the Saudis' rising regional adversary.

The Arab nations were also strongly objecting to some comments that President Obama had recently made in an interview reported on 5 April 2015 in *The New York Times* in which he said that allies like Saudi Arabia should be worried about internal threats: “populations that, in some cases, are alienated, youth that are underemployed, an ideology that is destructive and nihilistic, and in some cases, just a belief that there are no legitimate political outlets for grievances.”

More importantly, the Arab countries would also like to buy more weapons from the United States, but that was facing a big obstacle: maintaining Israel's military edge. The United States has long put some restrictions on the types of weapons that American defence firms can sell to Arab nations, in an effort to ensure that Israel keeps a military advantage against its traditional adversaries in the region.

That is why, for instance, the Administration has not allowed Lockheed Martin to sell the F-35 fighter jet, considered to be the jewel of America's future arsenal, to Arab countries. The plane, the world's most expensive weapons project, has stealth capabilities and has been approved for sale to Israel.

Shorn of any diplomatic fig-leaf, king Salman had decided to have the ministers of the interior and defence to take his place because he opposes the U.S. efforts to reach a diplomatic solution to the nuclear programme of rival Iran.

An American official commented that the absence of king Salman, the most powerful of the Gulf monarchs, would detract from the summit.

The gathering would have coincided with the start of a five-day humanitarian truce in Yemen, proposed by Saudi Arabia and agreed to by the Houthi rebels it is fighting there.

Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, king of Bahrain, would have skipped the meeting to attend a horse show with Queen Elizabeth of Britain at Windsor Castle !

So, in the end, those who met President Obama were: Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan, Bahrain Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad al-Khalifa, the Emir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmed al-Sabah, Oman Deputy Prime Minister Fahd bin Mahmud al-Said, the Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef and G.C.C. Secretary General

Abdullatif bin Rashid al-Zayani. But the really active participants in the summit were low-level government officials.

The previous week a United States source had informed that President Obama was expected to make a renewed U.S. effort at the summit to help Gulf allies set up a region-wide defence system to guard against Iranian missiles.

The offer would be accompanied by enhanced security commitments, new arms sales and more joint military exercises, as an indication of reassurance to the Gulf Arab countries that the Administration was not abandoning them.

According to American media “the president’s goal is building a defense infrastructure and architecture for the Gulf region that also includes maritime security, border security, and counter-terrorism.”

While on one hand the American Administration was further solidifying its reliance on Saudi Arabia as a key pillar of its drive for domination of the strategically vital and oil-rich Middle East, and the United States and other major powers were negotiating an agreement over Iran’s nuclear programme, on the other hand the American government was building up Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states for a possible war against Iran.

G.C.C. Assistant Secretary-General Abdel Aziz Abu Hamad Aluwaisheg said at a news conference on 15 May that the Camp David summit “exceeded the expectations of most of us” by reassuring G.C.C. states of an “unequivocal” commitment to their security. President Obama also stressed, Aluwaisheg said, that an impending nuclear agreement with Iran does not represent a “pivot” towards Tehran.

According to a White House fact sheet, the United States and the G.C.C. agreed to develop “a region-wide ballistic missile defense” including an early warning system, to hold exercises “emphasizing interoperability against asymmetric threats, such as terrorist or cyber-attacks”, and to increase training in special operations and maritime security.

The United States also promised to expedite arms transfers, improve intelligence on the movement of suspected foreign fighters, set up a working group to develop an

Arab rapid response force to deal with regional emergencies and hold another summit to review progress next year.

Aluwaisheg noted that the two sides agreed to describe their relationship as a “strategic partnership” and to follow up on all the pledges which had been made.

But if the Arabs were looking for reassurance that the United States would not simultaneously continue efforts to improve relations with Iran, they did not get it. Instead, at a press conference at Camp David, President Obama stressed that the “purpose of security cooperation is not to perpetuate any long-term confrontation with Iran or even to marginalize Iran. None of our nations have an interest in an open-ended conflict with Iran.”

“If Iran says, ‘we’re not doing anything,’ it’s not happening”, Aluwaisheg said, “The meeting would be adjourned in one minute.” At the same time, he said, if Iran shows a willingness to admit its involvement in regional conflicts and to negotiate disputes such as its occupation of several islands in the Persian Gulf, the G.C.C. will be ready to open a dialogue. If Iran agrees to “de-escalate its destabilizing behavior,” he added, “we all will pivot to Iran.”

One purpose of the talks had been the better to explain the impending nuclear agreement to the G.C.C. states and try to reassure them that easing sanctions would not empower Iran to increase support for proxies in a variety of conflicts roiling the region. Aluwaisheg said the President “made a very good case that this [nuclear] deal is the best deal we can have” and will verifiably prevent Iran from breaking out and developing nuclear weapons.

Colin Kahl, national security adviser to Vice President Joe Biden, told a meeting of the Arms Control Association on 14 May that Iran had lost US\$ 160 billion in oil revenues since 2012 because of nuclear-related sanctions and has “half a trillion dollars” in unmet domestic needs. “Iranian spending [after a nuclear deal] is likely to focus on domestic priorities,” Kahl said, “butter over guns.”

Aluwaisheg conceded that “the most difficult issues have to do with asymmetric threats” but put the onus on Iran for stirring up internal dissent. He called Hezbollah, Iran’s Lebanese partner, which has been active in Syria and Iraq, a “centre of excellence for terrorism.”

During the weeks which followed the declaration of the initial deal with Iran, the Gulf-American relationship remained unsettled and several Gulf officials expressed their anger through direct and indirect messages protesting against the deal and the American standpoint. A diplomatic and media battle erupted between the two sides; President Obama tried to diminish the importance of the Gulf Arabs' objections saying that the deal is rewarding for the Gulf countries and the whole world.

All this increased the anger of the Arab countries which expressed their rejection, sending signals of possible suspension of all further cooperation. The six Gulf countries were all united and they all stood together against the deal; this is what strengthened their objections. They were keen to have a precise stance and made sure not to get drifted behind wide-ranging and unrealistic demands.

The demands of the Gulf countries were not entirely fulfilled but, at the same time, President Obama did not ignore their objections. The United States assured that it would protect the Gulf region from any external attacks, namely from Iran. They all agreed peacefully to resolve the issues; all this was under a new title: The Arab-US Strategic Partnership.

The United States had been keen to explain the nuclear deal being negotiated between P5+1 and Iran. At the end, the G.C.C. side gave a qualified endorsement. In the words of the joint statement, the two sides "emphasized that a comprehensive, verifiable deal that fully addresses the regional and international concerns about Iran's nuclear program is in the security interests of GCC member states as well as the United States and the international community."

At Camp David, the participants discussed how to intensify their cooperation to defeat terrorism, epitomised by the Islamic State, and established a set of principles to address regional conflicts including Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Libya. The parties also agreed to meet again at summit level in 2016, "in order to advance and build upon the U.S.-G.C.C. Strategic Partnership."

No one expected the G.C.C. countries to embrace a nuclear agreement with Iran, given the well-earned animosity and mistrust between Iran and some of the G.C.C. countries, especially Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, and the bloodletting taking place in Syria and Yemen.

But the detailed U.S.-G.C.C. Joint Statement following the 13-14 May Summit should now be the benchmark for the positions of the United States and the Gulf Cooperation Council in addressing Iran and the broader issues of regional security in the Middle East. The summit statement should nullify the tired talking point by U.S. critics that the Obama Administration is somehow surrendering to its Arab allies by pursuing a deal with Iran.

The joint statement “emphasized that a comprehensive, verifiable deal that fully addresses the regional and international concerns about Iran’s nuclear program is in the security interests of GCC member states as well as the United States and the international community.”

While reassuring the G.C.C. that the United States would stand by it, President Obama also made clear that “the purpose of any strategic cooperation [between the United States and the G.C.C.] is not to perpetuate any long-term confrontation with Iran, or to even marginalize Iran.” An annex to the joint statement noted that “the United States and GCC member states reaffirmed their willingness to develop normalized relations with Iran should it cease its destabilizing activities and their belief that such relations would contribute to regional security.”

The annex also mentioned a forthcoming, second meeting of the U.S.-G.C.C. Strategic Cooperation Forum Working Group on Counterterrorism and Border Security.

Despite the snubs received from the Arab potentates, the American Administration announced at the summit that there would be more security assistance and expedited weapons sales for Gulf Arab states as a way of ensuring their strategic position against Iran.

That promise of more arms is not surprising. In recent years, the Gulf Arab states, flush with oil wealth, have bought massive amounts of American weapons. Since 2010 Gulf Arab states have increased their armaments purchases by 70 per cent. Leading the pack is Saudi Arabia, which in 2014 became the world’s largest importer of American-made weapons. One out of every seven dollars spent on weapons in the world comes from the Saudis, according to IHS’ yearly Global Defence Trade Report published on 9 March 2015. IHS Report yearly examines trends in the global defence market across 65 countries.

In the past, weapons sales to Gulf Arab nations have been held up because of Israeli concerns over their 'qualitative military edge' - the notion that Israel should maintain superior military capabilities over their Arab nations. But that reticence to sell weapons to states like Saudi Arabia has eased in recent years because Israel and the Gulf states share a common interest in boxing in Iran.

For the most part, arms sales are designed to beef up militaries in anticipation of any conflict with Iran. But last year the Gulf Arab states have flexed their muscles by joining the U.S.-led coalition against the Islamic State, and by pounding Yemen with bombs, leading to a humanitarian catastrophe. The flow of arms sales is further militarising a region already rife with bloody conflict stretching from Syria to Yemen. The result is human misery.

In its first five years in office, the Obama Administration entered into formal agreements to transfer more than US\$ 64 billion in arms and defence services to Gulf Cooperation Council member states, with about three-quarters of that total going to Saudi Arabia. And new offers worth nearly US\$ 15 billion have been made to Saudi Arabia in 2014 and 2015. Items on offer have included fighter aircraft, attack helicopters, radar planes, refuelling aircraft, air-to-air missiles, armoured vehicles, artillery, small arms and ammunition, cluster bombs, and missile defence systems.

The surge in arms sales under President Obama is rooted in two factors: one political and one economic. The political aspect of President Obama's approach mirrors the path pursued by President Nixon in response to the unpopularity of the Vietnam war. In 1969 Nixon announced that henceforth the United States would supply generous quantities of military assistance to allied regimes, in an effort to "avoid another war like Vietnam anywhere in the world." But it might be the legacy of the 2008 economic crisis, as much as the unfinished Iraq disaster, to drive the present American Administration's arms sales. The Obama Administration clearly wants to create jobs in the defence industry and boost the bottom lines of major defence contractors. The Pentagon's 2010 announcements of offers to Saudi Arabia involving tens of billions of dollars' worth of F-15 fighter planes, Apache attack helicopters, armoured vehicles, and other equipment listed the prime beneficiaries as Boeing, Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, General Electric, the Sikorsky Helicopter unit of United Technologies, and I.T.T. Aerospace. But these are just the major contractors;

thousands of subcontractors across the United States will gain a piece of the action as well. For example, in announcing the deal for selling 84 Boeing F-15s to the Saudis, Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs Andrew Shapiro proudly asserted that the deal would create 50,000 jobs in 44 states, most notably in St. Louis, Missouri, the site of the main assembly plant for the plane.

Foreign sales are particularly critical for keeping alive weapons production lines which otherwise would be forced to close down as the Pentagon moves towards buying next-generation systems. Absent new domestic orders, Boeing's F-18 production line will have to close in early 2017.

The Gulf States' purchases are making one American industry very productive and profitable. U.S. arms companies are striking contracts with the Department of Defense to supply states like Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates with missiles, helicopters and fighter jets.

The Obama arms sales boom has bolstered the 'bottom lines' of corporations like Boeing, Lockheed Martin, Raytheon and Sikorsky Aircraft.

A short examination of the four U.S. arms makers' profiting from the Gulf States' fear of Iran yields the following picture:

1. Boeing. This aerospace corporation makes aircraft and helicopters designed to be used in military conflict. Members of the Gulf Cooperation Council have been frequent Boeing customers. In 2013 Boeing received part of a US\$10 billion contract to give Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates high-tech missiles which can be launched from airplanes over 135 miles from the target. Two years before that deal, Boeing was awarded a US\$ 29.4 billion contract to supply Saudi Arabia with 84 F-15 fighter jets and upgrade older aircrafts. Boeing is also the maker of the Apache attack helicopters. The biggest weapons deal of 2014 was a US\$ 23 billion agreement with Qatar, in which Boeing will supply 24 Apache helicopters to the small nation. Other weapons firms were also involved in the agreement. Early in 2015 the United Arab Emirates announced it would be spending US\$ 618 million on two C-17s, military transport aircraft made by Boeing. This purchase was in addition to one made in 2009, when the company was awarded a contract to supply the United Arab

Emirates with six C-17s. In 2010 Boeing made nearly US\$ 700 million by supplying Kuwait with a C-17.

2. Lockheed Martin. This corporation is another major player in the U.S. weapons industry. It has had extensive dealings with Oman. In 2011 it signed a US\$ 600 million deal to supply the Gulf state with 12 fighter planes. In 2013 the corporation entered into an agreement with the United Arab Emirates to build them a defence system called Terminal High Altitude Area Defense, meant to combat missile strikes. Lockheed Martin cashed US\$ 3.9 billion for the deal, which also included armaments for the U.S. military. In a conference call with investors in late January 2015 Lockheed Martin C.E.O. Marillyn Hewson suggested that continued 'volatility' in the Middle East and Asia make them 'growth areas' for the firm. And like other corporations, it has also profited from sales to Saudi Arabia. It won a US\$ 22 million deal in 2014 to give the Saudis specialised support for Apache helicopters. The deal includes deliveries of equipment for 'long range precision engagement' and flight safety for the helicopters. In 2013 Lockheed Martin corporation, alongside Northrop Grumman, received a US\$ 90 million contract to supply the Saudis with a radar system for the Apache helicopters the Saudis possess.

3. Raytheon. This corporation is best known for manufacturing missiles. It has won a number of contracts to supply Gulf states with high-tech missiles. Raytheon also struck gold in 2012 when it won a deal to supply the Saudis with a US\$ 600-million Command, Control, Communications, Computers and Intelligence system, a centralised decision-making system. In 2013 Raytheon signed a US\$ 1 billion contract to supply Saudi Arabia with 15,000 anti-tank missiles. Middle East analysts saw the move by Saudi Arabia as connected to their support for Syrian rebels battling against the Assad government. While it is against U.S. law for American-made weapons to be transferred to an unauthorised third party, Middle East observers said it is possible that the Saudis were shipping old stocks to the rebels and replenishing their own with U.S.-made weapons. The Saudis are not the only ones enriching Raytheon. The corporation was included in the massive US\$ 23 billion deal with Qatar in 2014. It is supplying the country with Patriot missiles - a defence missile which shoots down other missiles - valued at US\$ 1.7 billion. Raytheon also won a contract in 2008 to supply the United Arab Emirates with Patriot missiles, which will net it US\$ 3.3 billion. And in 2013 Oman announced it would be paying

Raytheon over US\$ 2 billion for a ground-based defence system designed to counter air attacks.

4. Sikorsky Aircraft. This subsidiary of United Technologies makes Black Hawk helicopters, another type of military helicopter. It has delivered the Black Hawks to Gulf Arab states. In 2011 Sikorsky Aircraft received US\$ 270 million to upgrade the United Arab Emirates' supply of Black Hawk helicopters. In August 2014 the corporation won a US\$ 30 million contract to supply Saudi Arabia with 12 Black Hawks. Earlier in 2015 year *Reuters* reported that the corporation is looking to sell 400 helicopters to Middle Eastern countries over the next five to ten years.

For all the talk of an Iranian threat, the Gulf monarchies spent some US\$ 100 billion on armaments last year, compared to US\$ 15 billion for Iran, which has three times as many citizens as all the Gulf Cooperation Council countries combined.

The Obama Administration can definitely do better - but not by hawking top-of-the-line weaponry to Middle Eastern regimes. That approach has already proved disastrous.

In 2011 the U.S.-supported security forces of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates intervened to help put down the pro-democracy movement in Bahrain. In the summer of 2014 the United Arab Emirates conducted bombing raids against Islamist forces in Libya, further inflaming the situation in that country.

Most recently, Saudi Arabia, armed with U.S. planes and bombs, has launched a devastating assault on Yemen which has killed at least 700 civilians, displaced hundreds of thousands, and sparked a humanitarian emergency by blocking access to food and medicine.

As if there was not enough violence in the Middle East already, all countries from the Gulf Cooperation Council were recently promised more weapons by the United States.

New evidence has recently emerged proving what alert persons have known for years: the United States and allies such as Saudi Arabia have been providing money

and weapons to extremist groups, including Al Qaeda and I.S.I.S., fighting against the Syrian government or just about everywhere.

One shudders trying to imagine what comes next after the President sets aside billions more dollars worth of arms sales at Camp David. If the entire Middle East will go on fire it will be because of the 'policy' of the United States.

How can the United States pretend to protect democracy and human rights, liberty and the 'American way of life' while waging wars with and selling deadly weapons to terrorists and the most oppressive regimes on earth ?

Why does the United States, the self-anointed beacon of liberty and freedom, maintain such close ties with such an oppressive regime as Saudi Arabia ?

Less than a week after the Camp David meeting, Saudi Arabia advertised to hire eight new executioners. A surge in executions has been witnessed under king Salman's rule. The job description published online on 19 May 2015, when beheadings have reached 85 under king Salman 'a model of stability', said that no special training is required from applicants. The executioners would be required to behead condemned criminals in public as well as carry out amputations on those convicted of lesser offenses, *Reuters* reported. The executioners would be considered as 'religious functionaries', since they would be serving religious courts and be on the lower end of the civil service pay scale, the ad said. On 19 May 1536 Anne Boleyn was beheaded in by King Henry VIII in London. On 19 May 2015 king Salman was 'headhunting' for eight new executioners. One king is criticised in 'the West' for his injustices; another king, running 'neck-and-neck' with I.S.I.S., is praised as an ally of 'the West'. Is it for his oil ?

Saudi Arabia is widely believed to have bankrolled the Pakistani nuclear weapons programme. In exchange, Riyadh reportedly expects Islamabad to provide missiles in times of trouble to defend the kingdom.

This had been known for some time, and was confirmed on 17 May by American officials, Saudi Arabia has taken the 'strategic decision' to acquire 'off-the-shelf' atomic weapons from Pakistan, risking a new kind of arms race in the Middle East. American officials confirmed the news. The move by the 'oil kingdom' comes amid growing anger among Sunni Arab states over a deal supported by President Obama,

which they fear could allow their arch foe, Shi'ite Iran, to develop a nuclear bomb. The agreement, which is due to be finalised by the end of June 2015 and involves the permanent members of the U.N. Security Council and Germany, is designed to roll back part of Tehran's nuclear programme in return for an easing of U.N. sanctions.

On 22 May 2015 I.S.I.S. has claimed that it is 'infinitely' closer to buying a nuclear bomb from Pakistan. I.S.I.S. claimed to have at its disposal billions of dollars in the bank and to be close to an operation involving the purchase of a nuclear bomb 'through weapons dealers with links to corrupt officials' in Pakistan. The ultimate purpose seems to be smuggling the device into North America.

CONCLUSIONS

Not long time ago, a President of the United States who had a personal contact with God as his adviser, embarked upon a mission against the monster he had made and his terroristic organisation: the war to bomb Afghanistan back to the stone age had been born. G. W. Bush turned on to his former client Saddam Hussein and decided to teach him a lesson. He called it 'shock and awe' - a type of military doctrine based on the use of overwhelming power, dominant battlespace awareness and manoeuvres, and spectacular displays of force to paralyse the enemy's perception of the battlefield and destroy its will to fight. Blair of Great Britain had supplied the 'enabling lie'; Howard of Australia would join with the 'maximum enthusiasm' which distinguishes servants from 'downstairs'. Out of this war crime came the destruction of Iraq's infrastructure first (minus the Ministry of Oil in Baghdad !), and the devastation of Iraqi society later. It was not G.W. Bush who started the Middle East on fire - he just added more fuel to it. 'Dubya' fundamentally believes in The Bible, particularly the Book of Revelation.

He 'sees' the language that Revelation used as being of necessity bleak and destructive - a 'death-product' which would save only those who believe in Christ, and his definitive 'victory over evil'. The others, 'the infidels', would succumb to the *Apokalypsis*. It all sounds familiar and much as another form of contemporary madness; this is the 'war cry' of I.S.I.S., except that this time the destruction is real. It is also progressively revealed as organised and/or financed by the United States and its partner Saudi Arabia.

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