

### The Saudi Proxy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

-Judith Bello

The United States relationship with Saudi Arabia is, on the surface, a mystery. Saudi Arabia has been a U.S. proxy and a protectorate for nearly 100 years, yet it remains a very foreign entity, which consistently engages in activities uncomfortable for US public sensibilities. Wahabism, the state religion of Saudi Arabia, deeply meshed with the government, is the narrowest and most radical fundamentalism in the Muslim world. Strict social limitations on women and a particularly harsh form of Sharia law are maintained by the Saudi regime.

Despite the fact that the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center was largely financed in Saudi Arabia, and 19 out of 21 hijackers were Saudi nationals, U.S. officials quietly flew a number of Saudi officials and some members of the bin Laden family out of the country while the airspace was still technically closed. In fact, Saudi Arabia is the single most generous financier of al Qaeda across the globe to this day. Currently, the United States is supporting a barbaric Saudi bombing campaign against neighboring Yemen that has tkilled large numbers of civilians, destroyed much of the infrastructure and created severe shortages of food, water and medicine.

Salman bin Abdul Aziz al Saud, a long time U.S. ally connected who raised money to suppot the mujahideen in Afghanistan along with Osama bin Laden, ascended the throne in January amid rumors that he suffers from Alzheimers disease. Shortly thereafter, he changed the succession and named his 30 year old son, Muhammad Defense Minister, a shocking change of program in a country long ruled by elders. Within 2 months, they initiated the bombing campaign against Yemen. Since such a campaign requies significant planning, young Mohammad bin Salman must have been very busy.

### The War on Yemen

For 4 months, the Saudi Air Force has been raining US bombs on Yemen from US manufactured planes. In 2013, the United States sold Saudi Arabia \$60 billion worth of high

tech weapons, weapons they cannot use without logistical and technical assistance from the United States. These are the weapons being unleashed on Yemen today. More than 4,000 people have died, tens of thousands have been wounded, 1.2 million displaced, and entire cities have been razed. Hospitals, schools, factories and water purification facilities have been destroyed.

The U.S. government claims to be concerned about the Saudi aggression, while U.S. engineers and technicians maintain the Saudi attack force, and US military advisors use US satellites to provide logistics support. Shortly after the campaign began, the United States wrote and passed a resolution in the United Nations Security Council condemning the Houthis. 'Houthis' is a reference to the tribe providing leadership to a broader movement called Ansarullah which has spear-headed a populist Yemeni insurgency. The resolution was written and passed while Saudi war planes rained death and destruction on the civilian population of Yemen.

### **What Precipitated these events?**

After three years of participation in a National Dialog with no government response, the people of Yemen rose up against a president who came to power in an election where he ran unopposed, and stayed after his temporary mandate had expired. Ansarullah led a bloodless march across Yemen into the capital Sana'a to demand a place at the table from President Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi. Hadi fled to Riyadh during negotiations, thereby triggering the Saudi bombing campaign.

Claiming to 'support' the 'legitimate' government of Yemen against an insurrection, the newly elected Saudi king and his young son who he appointed to the position of defense minister initiated a massive bombing campaign on the country, which has continued for months, with no end in sight. Ansarullah, who had members participating in the National Dialog, were not satisfied with Hadi's interpretation of the consensus, but they were open to a power sharing government in which all regions of the country would have a voice.

Yemen, a desert nation, is not self-sustaining with food and water even in the best of times. But, the United States and other western states have sent ships to the Gulf of Aden to help enforce a Saudi blockade that has turned back all attempts to deliver aid to Yemen, even by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent. Aid has been rerouted to a US base in Djibouti where there is a United Nations center to receive it, but no UN aid has been delivered to Yemen for weeks.

The United States has killed over 1,200 people in Yemen, many of them civilians, with drone strikes and an occasional cruise missile aimed at Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). However, the Saudi bombing campaign has easily surpassed that record. Ansarullah, the indigenous Yemeni force against which the Saudi Campaign was launched, has been successful at driving back AQAP, but since the war began Ansarullah has had to move its focus to the Saudi enemy. AQAP has made significant gains since then despite a surge in U.S. drone strikes. Recently, a wealthy backer of Al Qaeda in Yemen has been invited to peace talks intended to end the war on Yemen.

### **Roots of Saudi Arabia**

Saudi Arabia, which currently bears the name of the Al Saud family, was ‘Arabia’ for millennia before Abdul Aziz ibn Saud declared himself the monarch of ‘Saudi Arabia’ in 1932 shortly after the discovery of the largest, most accessible reserve of oil on the globe there, making his and his family’s allegiance to the U.S. indispensable.

Prior to that, the al Saud family governed a smaller part of the Arabian peninsula from the late 18th to the mid 19 century when they were supplanted by the Hashemite family, favored by the British at that time. During that period, the al Saud family lived in exile in Kuwait. Following World War I, the Hashemites, who had fought the Ottoman Empire along side the British, had exhausted their resources and were once again overcome by the now US backed Abdul Aziz bin Saud and his army who had not participated in the war. The Hashemites were rewarded with royal thrones in Syria and Jordan, and later, in Iraq. Arabia became ‘Saudi Arabia’, the kingdom of the House of Saud.

The Saudi family was selected by Western imperialists for the same reasons they chose they chose ruling families for other dependent neo-colonies including the Gulf Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Qatar though the latter were more like statelets, and did not achieve independence until the second half of the 20th century.. These Royals were selected for their aggressive, greedy and socially regressive characteristics along with their fealty to western interests, to control and defend the oil rich areas where the United States has investments. Like the branches of al Qaeda the U.S. now nurtures, the House of Saud destroyed many historical and sacred sites in Arabia when Abdul Aziz first came to power.

In fear of the wave of revolutionary nationalism sweeping the Middle East where Iraq, Syria, Libya, Algeria, Egypt and finally Iran seized and nationalized their resources from Western owned oil companies, Saudi oil was nationalized in in the 1970s, but there were

strings. In return for titular ownership of Arabian resources, the House of Saud committed to the purchase of billions of dollars in weapons from the U.S. which it uses to support U.S. policy objectives in the region, and to store their money in U.S. banks and to take loans from the IMF.

Saudi Arabian oil money is channeled directly into the coffers of the Saudi Royal family, while the rest of the country remains largely undeveloped and the majority of people live in poverty. Saudi Arabia gets high grades from the IMF, with a debt at around 20% of GDP, while the royals accumulate fortunes in western banks.

### **Mercenary Proxies for the U.S.**

By the early 1980s the United States was working together with the Saudi Princes to build an army of fanatical warriors in Pakistan and Afghanistan. These mujahidin, warriors, recruited throughout the Middle East and South West Asia, were originally organized by a powerful Saudi interlocutor who was recently crowned King of Arabia, Salman bin Abdulaziz ibn Saud. We know them now as Al Qaeda. After the Afghan war, they were deployed to Chechnya and Dagestan in Russia to destabilize a critical oil pipeline. They have since spread into China and Malaysia, and throughout the Middle East where we know them as Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), Jabhat Al Nusra and the Islamic State. They are the mercenary forces driving a string of US proxy wars in the Middle East, SW Asia and Northern Africa.

Under the cover of Wahhabism, a dark fundamentalist interpretation of Islam, the House of Saud spends billions to support terrorism around the globe. Meanwhile their close ally and patron, the United States, carries on a 'Global War Against Terror'. This war between the United States and its barbaric proxy enemy, managed and maintained by the United States closest ally in the Middle East undermines the sovereignty and destroys the infrastructure of the countries that are targeted.

The people of Afghanistan lost a secular socialist government interested in building the infrastructure of civil society to Saudi educated fundamentalists and warlords with U.S. backing. Iraq and Libya are in ruins. Syria's secular socialist government and its religiously tolerant, multi-ethnic, poly sectarian society is the object of a vicious foreign attack led by fundamentalist militants. Lebanon is continually targeted for destabilization, as are the secular governments of Pakistan, Egypt and Turkey. The Saudis now have formed an alliance with

Israel against their regional neighbors including the people of Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Iran, Palestine and Yemen.

### **Brutal Oppression is the Norm in Saudi Arabia**

To this day, Wahhabi preachers in Saudi Arabia openly recruit young men to join Al Qaeda and now the Islamic State, collecting money from wealthy patrons to support these organizations and arm them with U.S. weapons to further the agenda of controlling the surrounding region and line the pockets of western weapons manufacturers and oil brokers. These men are powerful and constitute the closest approximation to civil society that exists in Saudi Arabia. They advocate a brutal formulation of Sharia law which is enforced by the regime, where amputation, lashing and beheading are standard penalties. Thieves lose their hands, while murders, drug dealers, apostates and so-called witches are beheaded. Those who speak against the state are imprisoned and beaten with lashes.

About 10% of the indigenous population is Shia. They are unemployed or poorly paid for the lowest levels of labor, and have no civil rights. There is persistent economic, religious and educational discrimination against them. Shia are blocked from building Mosques and celebrating Ashura, a focal Shia religious holiday. Meanwhile, the educated oil workers are foreign contractors with no civil rights and no option to obtain citizenship.

Saudi Arabian women have no rights at all They are be under the guardianship of a male relative who must sign for them to marry, travel or work. Women aren't allowed to drive in the Saudi Kingdom, and Saudi women must cover their faces as well as their hair in public. The House of Saud has expanded rapidly to more than 4000 through an extreme form of polygyny where Abdul Aziz ibn Saud, the founder of the current Saudi dynasty in Arabia had 22 wives and many of his 35 sons had more.

Most westerners don't expect the Saudi Princes to behave in a civil manner. Our government and the corporate media don't complain of their barbaric governance or their thinly veiled covert aggression in the Middle East. The U.S. government and mainstream media now support them even in a vicious unilateral assault on neighboring Yemen. Even human rights NGOs rarely note the abysmal oppression of the majority of Saudi people. In a context of global dominion, the Saudi regime is a useful tool – if there is some collateral damage – well – that is the cost of war.

### **What Now?**

The Saudi regime, like Netanyahu in Israel, is dismayed by the Obama plan to reintegrate Iran with the global community through a comprehensive nuclear agreement. And rightly so. Hassan Nasrallah, the charismatic and powerful Director General of Hezbollah in Lebanon, nailed it in his first major address regarding the Saudi aggression against Yemen. He said that although Iran was not actively supporting Ansarullah in Yemen, Iran would gain in popularity from the war because it was supportive of the wellbeing of the people. He said that the reason the Saudi Regime would never be able to compete with Iran for regional leadership is that the Saudi Princes do not recognize the existence of 'the people'. All of their actions are geopolitical power plays with no reference to the existence, much less the wants and needs of, the people. Even within their own country, their actions are self serving and oblivious to the requirements of the population except where it is necessary to do something to avoid discomfort for themselves.

Today, the United States appears to be supporting the Saudi bombing campaign in Yemen so as to alleviate Saudi concerns about the peace deal being negotiated with Iran and the possibility of lifting sanctions on Iran. Or maybe they are just doing it to distract and pacify the Saudi rulers while they forge new alliances for the future. What are a few thousand lives in the context of the grand policies of an increasingly hemmed in hegemon on a shrinking chessboard. And the desperate act of destroying a country without any end game is the best response the Saudis have to maneuvering on a chessboard that is beyond their comprehension.

Today, Saudi Arabia is losing money through dumping their oil in large quantities at low prices, while spending a fortune dropping bombs on neighboring Yemen. On June 12, 2015, Saudi Arabia opened a stock exchange valued at nearly \$600 billion to foreign investors. It is open to the same investors who fleeced the rest of us a few years ago and walked free; the same free traders that cannibalized the economies of Russian and other Eastern European states after the fall of the Soviet Union and has suppressed the welfare of the indigenous peoples of Latin American and Africa while draining off their resources.

Meanwhile, Jabhat Al Nusra, ISIS and AQAP, descendents of al Qaeda, the inheritors of their most narrow minded sectarian project, are planning the next Middle East Empire. But will they succeed?

*(Courtesy: countercurrents.org)*