

Is Saudi Arabia Out To Provoke War Against Iran?

by Hussein Askary

Nov. 8—The Saudi ruling family is clearly enraged by the recent positive developments involving Iran in the region, including diplomatic progress with the United States, advances against the Islamic State (IS) in Iraq, with obvious assistance from the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, and the collapse of the policy of President Obama and his Saudi/Qatari-backed allies in Syria to overthrow President Bashar al-Assad using jihadist terrorist groups.

Furthermore, the Saudis are helplessly watching as Yemen slips from their grasp, with the failure of the Kingdom's plan to deflect the 2011 revolt in Yemen, by creating a government of rival tribal factions and representatives of former dictator Ali Abdullah. Shi'ite Zaydi rebels under Abdulmalik al-Houthi, sworn enemies of the Saudi rulers and Wahhabi clergy and al-Qaeda, descended from their mountain strongholds on the capital, Sana'a, and helped create a new coalition government, while stretching southward to retake the southern regions from al-Qaeda, whose top leaders are Saudis. Al-Houthi's fighters would not be able to execute this massive operation without support from the Sunni population, tribes and other political forces, especially the youth, who saw the peaceful revolution hijacked by the Saudi dirty deal in 2011. Saudi Arabia claims that Iran has played a key role in arming and financing the Houthis, although no real evidence of this has been presented.

Game-Changing Nuclear Negotiations

Just two weeks before the decisive final round of negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 (UN Security Council Permanent Members plus Germany) with a deadline set for Nov. 24, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry will be meeting Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and outgoing EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton, in Oman on Nov. 9-10. This meeting is intended to iron out differences and clarify red lines by both parties. The fact that the meeting is being held

in Oman, which has emerged as Saudi Arabia's disgruntled neighbor in the Gulf Cooperation Council, is further upsetting for the Saudi rulers. In recent years, Oman has rowed against the Saudi-dominated stream in the Gulf and established firm economic and trade relations with Iran. Oman's ruler Sultan Qabus has established a very cordial relationship with Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, who has the final word on the negotiations with the Western powers.

The last time Iran-U.S. relations improved, in September 2013, leading to direct talks and easing of some of the sanctions imposed on Iran, Saudi Arabia withdrew its membership in the UN Security Council, condemned the international community for not bombing Syria, and threatened to go its own way in Syria. "Its own way" is what the world has witnessed in the emergence of the IS plague in both Syria and Iraq.

The success of these negotiations would be a game-changer, as it would lead to lifting the harsh economic sanctions imposed on Iran for years, and to breaking Iran's isolation from the international community, paving the way for economic, strategic, and security cooperation to handle the disastrous situations in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan. Iran's involvement with China and Russia to revive the Silk Road has been well documented in *EIR* (see speech by Mrs. Fatemeh Hashemi Rafsanjani at the Schiller Institute's conference on the New Silk Road, *EIR*, Oct. 31, 2014).

Iran's strategic relationships with Russia and China are key components of these potentially groundbreaking developments. Russia has been involved more than any other nation in moderating Iran's stance in the nuclear negotiations with the P5+1 group. Last week, it was reported (interestingly, first in the U.S.) that Russia may have overcome a big hurdle in the nuclear talks.

The *New York Times* reported on Nov. 3, that Iran has tentatively agreed to ship much of its enriched uranium to Russia, where it would be made into nuclear-reactor

fuel rods, if it reaches a broader nuclear deal with the P5+1. One American deeply involved in the discussions said, “If the Iran-Russia deal works, it could be the cornerstone of something much larger.” Acting Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman, the head of the U.S. negotiating team, said recently, without further details, “We have made impressive progress on issues that originally seemed intractable.” One American expert, Angela Stent of Georgetown, pointed out that if Russia salvages the Iran talks, it would be reprising the role it played in the Syria negotiations last year, when Moscow came up with a formula that led President Bashar al-Assad to give up his chemical weapons stockpiles.

The point is, that if most present and future enriched uranium is removed to Russia, the current disagreement about the number of uranium-enrichment centrifuges Iran is allowed to keep is much less important, and the so-called “breakout time” to achieving a nuclear weapon could become long enough to satisfy the U.S. position.

The most immediate importance of a successful Iran nuclear deal by the Nov. 24 deadline, is that the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff’s plan for a real war on IS (unlike Obama’s fake war), includes reaching a longer-term agreement with Iran over IS, immediately after a nuclear deal is concluded. The appearance of this *New York Times* story on election eve, as U.S. military and Democratic Party leaders are challenging Obama’s policies with an eye to the post-election period, is also significant.

The *Times*’ David Sanger, however, contradicts himself in one paragraph, where he writes that the agreement under discussion would provide that Russia will enrich uranium for Iran. That is untrue: Rather, Russia will receive uranium enriched by Iran and fabri-



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From left: Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif, EU High Representative Catherine Ashton, Omani Foreign Minister Youssef bin Alawi bin Abdullah, and U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, in Oman, Nov. 9, 2014, for talks on Iran’s nuclear program. The Saudi royal family, among others, is determined to block progress in this crucial area.

cate it into fuel rods to ship back, as he writes elsewhere. For some reason, the *Times* has so far refused to correct this obvious error.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry had said, as early as Oct. 22, that it was studying such a Russian proposal, but this was not covered in the Western press. Iran’s right to enrich uranium domestically is considered a red line by Ayatollah Khamenei and the Iranian political elites. It was Tony Blair in 2005, then Prime Minister of Great Britain, who argued that Iran did not need to enrich uranium to produce fuel for its nuclear plants, as that fuel could be imported from abroad. Unfortunately, the EU and the U.S. swallowed this British bait, making it a condition in the negotiations with Iran. In reaction, Iran dramatically suspended the negotiations with the West and its collaboration with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), creating a massive crisis from which the process has not yet recovered.

New Provocations

To sabotage the potential for a final agreement, the Saudis are now provoking both Iran and the Shi’a popu-

lation in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, obviously hoping that Iran (or, at least, extremists among Iran's clergy) will intervene inside Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. On Nov. 3, masked gunmen killed five people in a mostly Shi'a area of eastern Saudi Arabia as they were emerging from a commemoration of the martyrdom of Imam Hussain, a very special Shi'a ceremony. The three assailants fired machine guns and pistols into a crowd in the village of al-Dalwa in al-Ihsa district of Eastern Province.

While the gunmen were not identified, such acts carry the fingerprints of Wahhabi/takfiri jihadists of the al-Qaeda and IS type. Although the Saudi authorities claim that they are victims of al-Qaeda and IS, financial and religious support for these two terrorist group has its origin in Saudi Arabia, and continues to flow from there.

Last week, a leading Saudi Shi'a minority rights advocate, Sheikh Nimr Baqir al-Nimr, was sentenced to death in a Saudi court, accused of sedition and "disobeying the ruler," which is considered a capital crime by Wahhabi jurisdiction, as the ruler is said to be ruling by the will of God, and therefore disobeying the ruler is disobedience against God. Sheikh Nimr was imprisoned and tortured in 2011 for leading demonstrations in support of the Arab Spring. He is held in high esteem by political activists in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. Although the Shi'a in Saudi Arabia are a minority (15-20% of the population), they are concentrated in the oil-rich Eastern Province and are very active in the oil industry's labor unions.

Iranian hard-line clerics have warned Saudi Arabia that if the death sentence against Nimr is carried out, "the Saudi kingdom would pay a very high price," in the words of Ayatollah Ahmad Khatami, Friday Prayer Leader (not to be confused with former President Mohammad Khatami). He mocked Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal, who had said two weeks earlier that Iran was not part of the solution in Syria, but part of the problem. Al-Faisal was responding to calls to include Iran in the international coalition against IS.

"Saudi Arabia is not only part of the problem, but the whole problem entirely, as it is the creator of ISIS, and is its financier," stated Khatami in his Oct. 31 sermon in Tehran. He added sarcastically that he understands the Saudis' frustration, "because you spent bil-

lions to overthrow Assad in Syria but you failed, and spent billions in Iraq but you failed there too. So now you are enraged and frustrated, and therefore you point your hatred against Iran."

From the Saudis' standpoint, creating a security crisis in that strategically sensitive area, threatening the global economy (as most of the Saudi oil production is located in the Eastern Province), might force the U.S. and its allies to shift their policies against Iran again. However, the Iranian leadership has been very restrained in its reactions to such provocations.

Saudi provocations have also been aimed at Bahrain (which has a Shi'a majority), the base of the U.S. Fifth Fleet and a major British banking and financial offshore center. A Bahraini court issued an order on Nov. 4, suspending the activities of the country's main Shi'a opposition group, al-Wefaq, less than a month before parliamentary elections. This ruling prevents the group from organizing rallies and press conferences, issuing statements, or using its offices, said lawyer Abdullah al-Shamlawi, according to the *Guardian*. Saudi troops invaded Bahrain in March 2011, to crush protests by the Shi'a population, which was ruled by the Sunni/Wahhabi-allied al-Khalifa family. The Saudi move was also a preemptive intervention to prevent moderate elements of the al-Khalifa family, from negotiating a new constitution and election rules with al-Wefaq and the representatives of the Shi'a majority in the country.

Al-Saud, the ruling family in Saudi Arabia, is, and has long been, the most important asset of the British Empire in the region. King Abdullah is in poor health, and his heirs are just as old or sick as he is, and are facing a difficult succession process. The Saud family is cornered in the fragile kingdom, and their bombastic schemes seem to be frustrated and failing, although no solution for the bloodshed and destruction in Southwest Asia is in sight.

The greatest fear of what could be called the Anglo-Saudi empire is the emergence of a new, inclusive security structure in the region and the world, such as that which Helga Zepp-LaRouche called for in October, to replace the "divide and conquer" system of the British Empire. The greatest nightmare for the Anglo-Saudis is the United States joining Iran, Russia, and China to eliminate the new religious Thirty Years War and the threat of thermonuclear confrontation among these powers.