

Trump Will Find an Arab Nation Rising to Confront Iran

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Brief Analysis

When President Trump traveled to Saudi Arabia last weekend, he was addressing not just his Saudi hosts but also an ad hoc Arab and Islamic summit conference. Until recently, the Arab world was undergoing a violent crisis inside its own countries, but today it is in a crisis of existence against Iran. To address this crisis, the United States should understand the theory of "central land"; this means that those who control the Middle East can control the world's economy. Besides the Arab states, the greater Middle East includes Iran, Turkey, and Israel. Each of those three nations has its plan for controlling the entire Middle East, while the Arab world is dormant.

But Israel cannot dominate the Middle East because that would require melting into the Arab and Islamic worlds. Therefore, it has moved from dominating territory to influencing the economy. This form of influence resembles what Shimon Peres called for in *The New Middle East*, a book he coauthored with Arye Naor in 1993. Today Israel wants to overcome the Palestinian issue by building bridges with Arab and Islamic states before fulfilling the relevant UN resolutions. Yet Saudi Arabia refuses any normalization before implementing the Arab Peace Initiative whereby Palestinians obtain their rights, as per the late King Abdullah.

As for Turkey, it wants to expand in the Middle East through both economic and cultural investments. Trying to influence everything between Anatolia and the Indian Ocean, its mission came to a halt when it ran into Iran in Syria. They now must grapple with what has escalated into a full-scale civil war there.

That leaves Iran, which through the Shiite crescent has sought to encircle the Arab world with Shiite clients. It now openly flaunts its domination of Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen. Noticeably, however, the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen has been able to stall this expansion and put it on the defensive.

Moreover, in Iraq, Arab Shiites face Iranian colonialism. Many of them have realized that Arab Shiism differs from its Iranian corollary. Arab Shiism does not contradict the Islamic Principles, so they do not worship individuals like Hussain, marry without legislated conditions, or insult the wives of the Prophet or His companions. This is affirmed by Muqtada al-Sadr in Iraq (like the anti-Hezbollah Ali al-Amine in Lebanon), and it was demonstrated by the hosting Arab Shiites in al-Medinah al-Munawara.

Though he has changed his position many times before, Muqtada al-Sadr now openly defies Iranian Shiism. In doing this, he focuses on nationalism. He does not want any foreign power, friend or foe, in Syria, Iraq, or any other Arab

country. As a result, some Arabs in Iraq have gathered around him and begun following his doctrine.

At the founding conference of the King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, I spoke with a prominent Iraqi Shiite thinker, Abdulhassan Shaaban. He told me that when he was young, his mother said every time she took him to school she would then go to the mausoleum of Mohammad bin al-Hassan al-Askari and ask for her son's protection and preservation. Shaaban told his mother: "Al-Askari could not protect himself when he was alive, so how should he keep me safe when he is dead?" I then said he was a Salafist. The Salafi are similar to Puritanism, i.e., getting back to the roots of worship. This is the difference between Arab Shiites and Persian Shiites.

The United States is now aware that Iran wants to dominate the Arab world. The United States, in sharp contrast, has been working to achieve stability in the Middle East and unify Iraqi factions against Daesh. The Iranians were partners to the Syrian regime in the anti-American terrorist incident in Khobar in 1996, and they were the ones who set off the explosions against the Americans in Lebanon in 1983. They were also the ones who trained the Palestinians in Lebanon. The Palestinians returned after they were trained on how to bomb cars and conduct suicidal attacks against Israel. Significantly, neither ISIS nor al-Qaeda bombed cars in Iran, rather in Europe and the Arab world.

The United States has insisted on achieving peace in Syria in the hope of ensuring foreign militias—Iranian, Russian, and Turkish—will follow suit and leave the country. Washington wants to preserve Syria's national unity and sovereignty. However, the Iranian regime is attempting to complicate the equation with forced displacements and ceasefire violations.

Arabs, both Sunni and Shiite, are rising today and revitalizing their nation through Arab and Islamic coalitions. The Arab world looks to Europe and sees how destructively it fought itself, most recently in the Second World War. They also see that when Europe united under NATO, the wars between European powers ended, leading to the progress and stability we see today. We see the Arab world today contemplating this experience as an example and aspiring for an "Arab NATO" to unify the Arab nation in both Africa and Asia, dealing with various domestic and external challenges while seeking the help of European and American expertise.

These issues have surely been discussed during President Trump's trip. Such talks can help achieve peace and lay out the broad outlines for dealing with the challenges facing the world regarding terrorism, and facing the region in terms of Iranian actions. In this case, cutting off the head of that octopus will kill all of its arms. ❖

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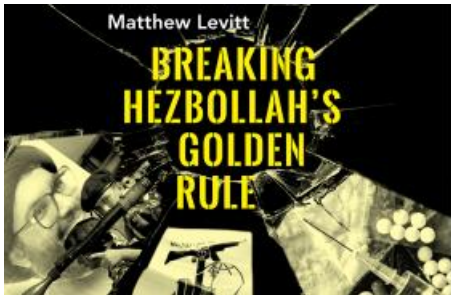


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