

Preventing a Middle Eastern Gordian Knot

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The situation in the Middle East is beginning to resemble the Balkans: either the Balkans in the early 1990s, before Washington woke up and played its role as security leader, or the Balkans before World War I, when no one woke up.

The crescendo of ever more shocking and destabilizing events from the Middle East, taken individually, can hide the underlying trends that are pushing this region into a potential cataclysm. The longer we ignore the Middle East, the more frequently regional actors will take matters into their own hands, confront each other in conflictual situations, and become committed enemies. This makes it almost impossible for us to build meaningful working alliances and find partners without an ax to grind against each other when the time comes for Washington to engage in the Middle East.

Most recently, these underlying trends are becoming more visible with the execution of Shia cleric Nimr al Nimr by Saudi authorities, then in the subsequent attack on the Saudi embassy in Tehran, and finally in the breaking of relations between Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states with Iran. Interaction effects among these individual events generate conceivable scenarios ranging from a major Russian military presence to a Shia-Sunni regional conflagration...

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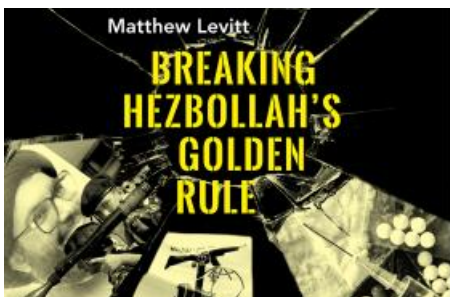
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