

On The Brink Of War

by Abdel Bari Atwan via gail - ICH *Monday, Nov 13 2017, 2:58am*

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We should not let minor details such as Hariri's resignation or the detention of [Saudi] princes and former ministers divert our attention from the real developments that are taking place in secret. Nor should we let these minor details distract us from the more dangerous phase that will follow Prince Mohammad bin Salman 'purge' on the domestic Saudi front. For such 'purgues' are the preliminary move to scenarios for a war that may be the most dangerous in the region's history. And we are not exaggerating here.

All that is currently happening is part of a well-studied and carefully planned scheme. It is the prelude to a sectarian war, conducted under an 'Arab nationalist' guise. And its main target is the rising 'Shiite' Iranian force, aiming at clipping its strike forces in Yemen, Lebanon and Iraq, with U.S., regional, and Israeli backing.

The old Saudi Arabia is no more, and Wahhabism is in its last throes, if it has not already been buried in the dusty tomes and reference books as a passing historical moment. The fourth Saudi state, donned in new modern garb, and with new alliances, is emerging before our very eyes. And when, in a phone call with British Foreign Minister Boris Johnson, Saudi Crown-Prince Mohammad bin Salman (the man of the moment, who wants to be the founder of that state) declares that 'Iran's supply of the factions in Yemen with missiles represents a direct military attack that may amount to an act of war,' and when he is backed and supported by the Pentagon and U.S. UN Ambassador Nikki Haley, this means that an alliance is taking shape in the region under American leadership.

To understand the seriousness or gravity of any crisis or significant political or military move in any region of the world, we need to observe the fluctuation of energy (oil and gas) prices and the stock and financial markets. This is the most important and most accurate thermometer, at least in the Western capitalist world.

On Tuesday, the price of oil reached its highest level in two years. Gulf stock markets continued to fall noticeably, and on Tuesday they lost around 3% of their value in Saudi Arabia in particular. Sales exceeded buying. And all this at point when we are still at shore, and when the ships of war have still not sailed.

Anarchy is marching towards the region. The Houthis fired a highly accurate missile that reached Northern Riyadh, and whose shrapnel fell on King Khaled International Airport. They have also said that they will strike deep inside Saudi Arabia again and at all Saudi and Emirati air and seaports. And, the experience of the past three years has taught us that the Houthis have nothing to lose after three years of destructive war.

The first phase that Prince Mohammad bin Salman has initiated, that of 'purging' the domestic front and that included the detention of eleven princes and tens of ministers and businessmen under the banner of fighting corruption, has proceeded smoothly and without any obstacles so far.

The man now is in full control of four major sectors of the state - the economy, the media, security and the military, as well as the two major religious institutions (the official one - the Council of

Senior Clerics - and the unofficial one - the Awakening Clerics). Moreover, he has thrown all his opponents, and anyone who publicly opposed his rule, behind bars. At first, he imprisoned them in a luxurious hotel; but no one can predict where this may eventually lead. In fact, we believe it unlikely that these detentions are merely the first 'course' and that what lies in wait is much worse for we are facing a 'bulldozer' that levels everything in its path.

In a few days or weeks time, he will move on to what we believe is the second and more dangerous phase; that of military confrontations, the main features of which can be summarized as follows:

- First, the start of a Saudi/Iranian military clash against the background of the crushing siege on Yemen. Saudi Arabia has sealed all Yemeni ground, air, and sea outlets under the pretext of closing all the breaches and preventing Iranian missiles from reaching the Houthis.
- Second, the formation of a new coalition, similar to that of Operation Desert Storm formed by U.S. General Schwarzkopf in 1990 that was aimed at expelling Iraqi forces from Kuwait. The candidates for joining this coalition in addition to Saudi Arabia are: the UAE, Jordan, Egypt, Sudan, and Morocco. (The King of Morocco is currently visiting the UAE's capital in fact, Abu-Dhabi, with reports that he has sought to mediate with Saudi Arabia over the recent detentions; but the message from Riyadh was clear, namely, not to intervene in what is happening inside Saudi Arabia, as we have found out from reliable sources).
- Third, the bombardment of Lebanon and the destruction of its infrastructure based on the pretext of trying to eradicate Hezbollah. The party may retaliate by bombarding the Israeli occupation state with thousands of missiles, in which case the possibility of Iranian and Syrian intervention may be greater than at any previous time before.
- Fourth, the invasion of Qatar by joint Egyptian/Emirati/Saudi forces, overthrowing its regime and clashing with the Turkish forces deployed there whose number now stands at over 30-thousand soldiers, with their heavy equipment. President Erdogan has apparently sensed this danger, which is why he sent his Defense Minister Nurettin Canikli to Doha on a previously unscheduled trip on Sunday. Nothing will prevent this invasion except a sudden change in the Qatari position in response to American pressure.
- Fifth, a U.S./Israeli counteroffensive in Syria, recapturing the areas that the U.S.'s allies have lost there such as Aleppo, Homs, and Deir az-Zour. For the U.S. will not easily forgive its defeat before Russia and Iran. But any U.S./Israeli intervention in Syria is unlikely to pass without a collision with Russia. In this case, we can expect a world war. But, after all, it was the U.S. that foiled the Syrian national dialogue conference in Sochi which Moscow had called for, when it asked the Syrian opposition to boycott it.
- Sixth, moving the Kurdish militias in Irbil and Northern Syria, implicating them in these wars on the U.S.'s side in an effort to hemorrhage Iran, Turkey, and Iraq, and drown them in domestic wars.

The above roadmap lists what may be done by the member states of the new alliance that goes by the name of 'moderate states,' or the 'modernity camp,' or the 'anti-Iranian terrorism camp' - we know not which. But we have not spoken of other possibilities, namely that this alliance will fail to achieve its aims; and we have not considered what shape the region would take in that case.

The counter-scenario may be that of an Iranian/Syrian/Turkish/Iraqi alliance, with which Russia will sympathize at first, even though we do not know whether it may lead it later - since Moscow is dealing with the current developments cautiously, keeping its cards close to its chest.

This new alliance has mighty military missile capabilities; and, according to preliminary assessments, most will be aimed at Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Israel. But these targeted states have effective U.S.-made Patriot anti-missiles that may provide them with partial or total protection.

We asked a military expert in London, and he said that if Hezbollah were to fire thousands of advanced missiles at Israel at one go, and if Hamas were to do the same from the Gaza Strip, this could paralyze Israel's Iron Dome system. But if Hezbollah, which is a junior partner of Iran, has 150 thousand missiles, how many missiles does the senior partner have? And can the Patriot anti-missile system deal with tens-of-thousands of missiles fired simultaneously? And what if Syrian and Iranian missiles were to join their sister missiles that Hezbollah's arsenal is brimming with?

The expert we consulted gave this example: If six Patriot missiles had to be fired to intercept the Houthi Burkan H-2 missile that was aimed at King Khaled Airport in Northern Riyadh, how many Patriots are there in the Saudi and Emirati arsenals? But, he added, the two countries possess powerful air forces consisting of American F-16's and F-15's, as well as British Tornados and the advanced Typhoon Eurofighter.

Experts believe the success of this future, expected, and indeed imminent war lies in the destruction of Iran, regime-change in Qatar, and the eradication of Hezbollah. Its failure lies in the destruction of Saudi Arabia, Israel and the UAE, and Saudi Arabia's partition into a number of states.

We repeat: We are neither soothsayers nor fortune-tellers; nevertheless, we say that this may be the last war, one that will change the region, its states, its borders, and perhaps its peoples as well.

The Arabs will certainly survive it since it cannot destroy 400-million of them. And the Iranians will survive it as well. But will Israel survive in its current form?

"We leave the answer till after the war, assuming it breaks out.

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