

After the Saudi-led airstrikes on Sanaa, Yemen's capital, on October 8, pressure on Western nations selling weapons to Saudi Arabia will be mounting. Recently, the United States Congress passed into law the Justice Against State Sponsors of Terrorism (JASTA) bill, aimed at the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). These are two of the latest signs that the KSA is becoming a little more isolated and losing some crucial allies, writes Olivier Guitta on the next page.

The uproar in the West against the selling of weapons to the KSA has been growing louder, in particular in light of the escalating Yemen campaign. From Canada, under fire for a 2014 15-Billion-dollar contract that the government said it won't cancel, to Sweden cutting off military co-operation that had been going on since 2005 to the UK where talk of halting arms exports if humanitarian laws are broken in Yemen. In light of the historical close relationship with the UK, Saudi Arabia didn't take these threats well: for proof, the Saudi Ambassador in London hinted that there could be less co-operation on terrorism .

The situation is serious because even the United States take a tough stance on the KSA. The Kingdom now understands this and has hired an additional 5 lobbying firms in Washington DC since September to defend its interests in the US and alter its image. Whether as a PR stunt or as a real change of heart Saudis have acknowledged they misled the West. In the meantime, the KSA is pondering if and how to retaliate: Will it make good on its threat to sell hundreds of billions of dollars of U.S. assets?

This unfavorable treatment of Saudi Arabia would have been utterly unthinkable just even 2 years ago.

The Obama Administration's decision and strategy to pivot towards the Shia world and Iran have left the KSA in the dust. It looks like archenemy Iran has won the Public Relations war against Saudi Arabia at least in the West. Iran became all of a sudden the nice kid on the block because of the nuclear deal and de facto Saudi Arabia became the bad one. Proof of this is how after 15 years of preventing the publication of the 28 pages pertaining to the KSA in the 9/11 Commission report, the U.S. finally yielded. An additional sign of this meltdown in U.S.-KSA relations is that it took a full 6 weeks in February 2016 for U.S. Defense Secretary Ashton Carter to return the call of Deputy Crown Prince/Defense Minister Mohammed bin Salman al-Saud. Something that would not have happened before.

Not only the West has been distancing itself from Saudi Arabia. In fact, tensions with close allies have increased especially since the arrival to power of King Salman in January 2015. The main contention point is the renewed support of the kingdom to the Muslim Brotherhood and some Salafi-Jihadi groups. First, the rapprochement with the Muslim Brotherhood is driving a wedge with both the UAE and Egypt. Both countries view the Muslim Brotherhood as a mortal danger. A new lenient policy towards the Muslim Brotherhood under King Salman is all the more bizarre that the organization is still on the list of terrorist groups in Saudi Arabia. Also Saudi Arabia has been the destination of choice for Muslim Brotherhood leaders such as Hamas' Khaled Meshaal, Tunisia's Rachid Ghanouchi, Jordan's Said and Yemen's al Zindani.

Second and even more problematic is the alleged funding and material help Saudi Arabia is providing to the ex/present/future al-Qaeda franchise in Syria, the former al Nusra front. This de facto alliance is something against nature since one of al Qaeda's main enemies remain the Saudi regime. This fits in a new realpolitik from Riyadh that has embraced the Middle East policy that the enemy of my enemy is my friend. In Syria, Assad is much more of an enemy than al-Qaeda.

This policy that has angered several of Riyadh's classical allies and the fact that Al Nusra has supposedly cut the cord with al-Qaeda is not changing anything.

The most hurtful recent challenge to Saudi Arabia status took place at a UAE-financed worldwide conference of Sunni religious figures that included leaders such as Cairo's Al Azhar imam. The clerics concluded that Wahhabism- the principal tenet of the Saudi regime- was not part of Sunni Islam. This is very significant because it is jeopardizing Saudi's legitimacy as the Custodian of Islam's holiest sites.

Pakistan, another historical ally of Saudi Arabia is also turning its back. Indeed, despite the huge Saudi investments including allegedly financing Pakistan's nuclear program, Pakistan has refused to send soldiers in Yemen to participate in the Saudi-led coalition and also didn't take part in the large Muslim anti-Islamic State coalition.

While on the surface Saudi Arabia's position has been stable, there is a growing opposition to the country in the West and even from allies in the Muslim world. While relations with some states have worsened, realism still prevails: For instance, the UAE still needs its Saudi brother to be a protector against the Iranian threat and for Egypt Saudi's investments are vital for its declining economy.

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