

The Collapse of Obama's Geo-Political Equilibrium in the Middle East



Yemen President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi, left, meets with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi at Sharm El-Shaik Summit , March 27, 2015. Source: AP/MENA

This weekend, less than 72 hours before the deadline for P5+1 political framework for Iran's nuclear program, President Obama's "offshore balancing" act in the Middle East collapsed. In a January 27, 2014 *New Yorker* [interview](#) with editor David Remnick President Obama revealed:

It would be profoundly in the interest of citizens throughout the region if Sunnis and Shiites weren't intending to kill each other ... And although it would not solve the entire problem, if we were able to get Iran to operate in a responsible fashion – not funding terrorist organizations, not trying to stir up sectarian discontent in other countries, and not developing a nuclear weapon – you could see an equilibrium developing between Sunni, or predominantly Sunni, Gulf states and Iran in which there is competition, perhaps suspicion, but not an active or proxy warfare.

His naive paradigm of a geo-political equilibrium between Shia Iran and Sunni Arabs led by Saudi Arabia foundered with the dramatic intervention by the Saudi Air Force on Wednesday March 25, 2015 attacking Houthi rebels in northern Yemen , the capital, Sana'a and targets near Aden. Operation "determination storm" has begun. The Saudis gave less than 1 hour notice to the Pentagon and the White House of the launch of the air campaign. The Administration wasn't consulted.

That effrontery to the leader of the free world was in evidence at the 26th Summit of the Arab League in the Egyptian resort of Sharm El-Shaik. Abed-Rabbo Mansour Hadi, The ousted US- backed President of Yemen, who had fled from Aden to Saudi Arabia, [accused](#) the Houthi of being “stooges” for Iran. He refused any offer of a cease fire while the Saudis and Emirati air units continue attacking Houthi forces. Iran [warned](#) the Saudi and Emirate allies of “bloodshed,” if attacks continue. The Saudi have mobilized 150,000 ground forces for possible action. The US may provide aerial refueling, bombs and air search and rescue for downed pilots as they did for two Saudi pilots on Thursday.

In a statement released today, Secretary General of the Arab League Nabil Al-Araby [said](#) the Arab states would “join ranks and look into taking pre-emptive and defensive arrangements to maintain the Arab national security.” The Declaration went on to point out:

the “conflict between the concept of a modern state and destructive projects that detract the idea of a national state and employ the ethnic, religious and sectarian variation in bloody conflicts, sponsored by external parties.” It cited recent developments in Yemen and the slide the country almost fell into as a flagrant example of these challenges and stressed the dire need for “necessary measures to counter them.”

The Washington Post [reported](#) Arab leaders had effectively announced a “joint military force to intervene in neighboring states grappling with armed insurgencies.”

David P. Goldman in an Asia Times column, [“The Middle Eastern Metternichs of Riyadh](#)”, noted the stunning assertion of the Saudi leadership in the confrontation with Iran over the US policy collapse in the Middle East and failures in Yemen:

A premise of the “realist” view that American policy in

the region should shift towards Iran was that the Saudi monarchy would collapse and Sunni power along with it. All of us underestimated the Saudis.

Now the Saudis have emerged at the top of a Sunni coalition against Iran—limited for the moment to the Houthi insurgency in Yemen, to be sure, but nonetheless the most impressive piece of diplomacy in the Sunni world since Nasser, and perhaps in modern times. That attributes a lot of importance to a coalition assembled for a minor matter in a small country, but it may be the start of something important: the self-assertion of the Sunni world in response to the collapse of American regional power, the threat of Sunni jihadist insurgencies, and the Shi'ite bid for regional hegemony.

There was more drama in Lausanne, Switzerland, when an Iranian journalist Amir Hossein Motaghi, a former election aide to Islamic Republic President Rouhani defected. The *UK Telegraph* [reported](#) Motaghi saying: “The US negotiating team is mainly there to speak on Iran’s behalf with other members of the 5+1 countries and convince them of a deal.” Meanwhile Secretary of State Kerry and the US team are endeavoring to have the P5+1 approve a verbal outline of a political framework with the intransigent Iranians, who demand immediate lifting of financial sanctions while denying compliance with IAEA requests for background information on past military application developments.

These developments gave rise to further criticism by Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu who [warned](#) at a Sunday cabinet meeting that:

Iran is trying to “conquer the entire Middle East” as the West appears close to signing a pending nuclear deal with Israel’s arch-enemy.

“This deal, as it appears to be emerging, bears out all of

our fears, and even more than that," Netanyahu told his cabinet in Jerusalem,