USA and Saudi Arabia: a Rider and Horse Alliance

US President Donald Trump made it loud and clear that he wants Saudi Arabia to pay more at a rally in Wisconsin on Saturday 27 April, reports the Daily Caller. The ardent champion of democracy said that he likes the Saudi leader, but the oil-rich Kingdom needs to pay more, considering that Washington ensures the personal protection of King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and his son Mohammed bin Salman: “Look, Saudi Arabia, very rich country, we defend them, we subsidize Saudi Arabia. They have nothing but cash, right? ... And they buy a lot from us, $450 billion they bought.”

It should be said that American society is clearly divided into two unequal parts when it comes to US relations with the Kingdom. After the CIA released statements about the key role played by the Crown Prince who could be the next Saudi King in the brutal murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in Turkey, Donald Trump said that the United States would be “foolish” to call off arms deals with Saudi Arabia. At the same time, Trump noted “it could very well be that the Crown Prince had knowledge” of the plan to kill Jamal Khashoggi in advance, but the United States, or rather the President of the United States, intends to remain a “steadfast partner” of Saudi Arabia.

Meanwhile, Congress members have criticized Donald Trump for acting as a Saudi protégé, and insist that the Saudi rulers should not only be punished for the brutal murder of Jamal Khashoggi, but also for the unprovoked bombing of neighboring Yemen, which has killed tens of thousands of innocent Yemenis, including many children and elderly people. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have laid Yemen to waste, but they are still a long way off victory, writes international policy specialist Michael Horton in his article in The American Conservative. The country’s infrastructure has been left in ruins and the most strategic regions are occupied by the invaders, yet after four years of war, Yemen has become a new “Vietnam” for troops from Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Both monarchies
have spent billions of dollars and pumped significant military resources into what eventually turned into a military quagmire of catastrophic proportions, and the intervention has only served to strengthen the legitimacy of the Houthis and Iran's position behind them.

The shadow boxing taking place between Donald Trump and Congress has only been met with laughter. Many members of Congress criticize President Trump in the media, they set up various committees and commissions that allegedly investigate what their President has gotten up to, and threaten him with all kinds of punishments. For example, the U.S. House Committee on the Judiciary recently launched a new investigation which looks at Donald Trump election campaign, the activities of his presidential transition team after he had won the election, as well as the American leader's business dealings. "Today, Chairman [of the U.S. House Committee on the Judiciary, Jerry] Nadler [a Democrat from New York] opened up a disgraceful and abusive investigation into tired, false allegations already investigated by the Special Counsel [Robert Mueller] and committees in both Chambers of Congress. Chairman Nadler and his fellow Democrats have embarked on this fishing expedition because they are terrified that their two-year false narrative of "Russia collusion" is crumbling." - said White House Press Secretary Sarah Sanders.

However, it should be noted that Donald Trump did not waste any time in vetoing the bill Congress had passed against Saudi Arabia to prevent him from supporting the Saudis in war with Yemeni rebels. The US President explained the veto, calling the resolution taken by both houses of Congress "an unnecessary and dangerous attempt to weaken [his] constitutional authorities." According to Trump, the resolution by members of Congress endangers the lives of American citizens and military personnel, reports Reuters. Thus, the President has clearly shown members of Congress and everyone else who is boss in the White House.

In general, Donald Trump's diplomatically friendly relations with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman have raised a lot of questions among those who truly value democracy. As the saying goes, a man is known by the company he keeps. For some reason or another, the democratic United States has some rather close friends who are kings, sheikhs, sultans and other monarchs, despite the fact that these countries are being run by dictatorial regimes. And Donald Trump, who is interested in proactively imposing sanctions against many countries (Russia and Iran are at the top of the agenda for America's policy in this area), apparently discerned something in Saudi Arabia and the other monarchies which must resemble a model of democracy, freedom and clear implementation of basic human rights.

So what does Saudi Arabia's absolute monarchy do? The Crown Prince is feeling solid support that Donald Trump has personally expressed and is taking advantage his father's illness, clamping down even further on their ancestral lands. The news has just broke that one of the largest mass executions has taken place in Saudi Arabia's history - the authorities have given 37 people death sentence, the majority of whom are minority Shiite Muslims. One of them was crucified, which Saudi Arabia only uses to punish the most serious crimes. Among those executed were men who were charged with the murder of security officers using explosives, forming terrorist cells and spreading terrorist extremist ideology. But there were juveniles among those who were executed for crimes they had allegedly committed, which is prohibited by international laws.

The Western media published stories about some of the men and teenagers who were executed. For example, Abdulkareem al-Hawaj was just 16 years old when he used WhatsApp to spread information about protests, who was later publicly beheaded. Mujtaba al-Sweikat was 17 years old when he took part in the protests. He was arrested at the airport while he waiting for his flight to attend University in the United States. Munir al-Adam was 23 when he was detained, who was already deaf in one ear since the age of five, and was left completely deaf after being tortured.

CNN, referring to court filings it had been leaked, reported that some of those executed had protested their innocence in court, and that their confessions of guilt had been written by investigators and signatures were only obtained through torture. In some cases, the suspects said that they did not even need to sign the confession, and their thumbprints were used. According to Amnesty International, 11 of those who were executed were accused of espionage for Iran, and another 14 were executed for participating in pro-democracy protests in the country's Eastern Province. According to British human rights organization Reprieve, all the suspects were forced to confess through torture, on the basis of which they were sentenced to death. The executions were carried out in Riyadh, Mecca and Medina.

In fact, the Saudi "horse" really has been rather capricious and unpredictable lately. The Crown Prince is now threatening Washington that if it does not change its course (?!), then the Kingdom will refuse to sell oil for dollars. What will happen if the Saudis do go ahead and refuse to accept payments in US dollars? - This decision would
undoubtedly greatly weaken the dollar's overall position as a universal currency and global unit of payment. Saudi Arabia's move would surely be followed by other countries. The Kingdom currently produces about a tenth of the world's oil. The Saudi Corporation Saudi Aramco is the world's largest exporter of black gold. Of course not all Saudi oil is sold for dollars, but at least 60% of crude oil from Saudi Arabia is supplied to the world market by tankers and through pipelines, and most transactions are made in dollars.

However, given the present situation, it is quite clear that it does not matter what kind of resolution Congress comes up with; Donald Trump does not want to offend the Saudi "horse" with a veto, as the Saudis could easily buck the American cowboy off. In this context, Trump is the President of a democratic country, but he does not care what kind of regime is in place in Saudi Arabia. What Trump cares about is the money in Saudi Arabia, and the Saudis buy a huge amount of American military equipment, so they support the American military-industrial complex. What use is it to sentimentalize democracy and other nonsense here?

As the saying goes, he may be a son of a bitch, but he's very rich and that's why he's our son of a bitch! Therefore the rider and horse alliance between Saudi Arabia and the United States only looks set to grow stronger in the near future.

*Viktor Mikhin, corresponding member of RANS, exclusively for the online magazine "New Eastern Outlook".*