Saudi Arabia: Who is Responsible for Rising Tensions?

It is well known that on the night of 14 September some drones attacked two of the largest Saudi facilities: one of them is an enormous oil processing site in Abqaiq (with a capacity of 7 million barrels per day), and the other the Khurais oil field with deposits of 20.1 billion barrels of oil, according to experts. An official spokesperson for the state company Saudi Aramco stated that the strike had reduced Saudi’s oil generating capacity by 5.7 million barrels per day. This accounts for 58% of all the oil produced by the Kingdom and approximately 6% of the global supply. Petroleum producers have noted that this is the first breakdown of this scale in the 70-year history of oil production in this country. Afterwards, a group of Yemeni insurgents (Houthis from the Shia Ansar Allah movement) claimed responsibility for the attack.

This incident signals the start of a whole new chapter (a fairly ominous one) for the Persian Gulf region. First of all, Houthis proved not only to Saudi Arabia but the entire world that they are capable of a successful military response against the Saudis, who initiated the bloody war against their neighbors. Violence that civilians in Yemen have experienced has increased to unprecedented levels, and as Lise Grande, the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator in Yemen, has written in her Twitter feed such a situation is untenable. She also condemned yet another air strike conducted by the Arab Coalition, headed by Saudi Arabia, in the Yemeni governorate of Hajjah, which resulted in the death of 12 people, including 6 children, on 12 August. According to Lise Grande, 320,000 people have been killed and approximately 3,000,000 have been displaced as a result of the conflict in Yemen. “We must put an end to this tragedy. It is heart-breaking that during Eid Al-Adha, families are mourning the death of their loved ones instead of celebrating together in peace,” wrote the UN Coordinator on Twitter.

In response to Saudi Arabia’s barbaric actions, which Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman Al Saud personally spearheads, Houthis from the Ansar Allah movement, who had claimed responsibility for the drone attack on 14 September, threatened the Saudis with another strike. “We warn companies and foreigners not to be present in the facilities that were hit in the strikes because they are still within range and may be targeted at any moment,” said Yahya Saria, a spokesperson for the Houthi movement, to the Al Masirah TV channel. “We assure the Saudi regime that our long arm can reach any place we choose and at the time of our choosing,” he added and also warned Saudi Arabia to stop the aggression and the blockade against Yemen.

The Saudi economy has also suffered a severe blow, since it is yet unclear when Riyadh will again be able to export enough oil to its regular customers, who have already incurred financial losses because of the attack. Besides, the expectation that Saudi Arabia would always deliver required amounts of oil faltered. Moreover, shares of Kingdom’s giant Saudi Aramco have declined in value, and some of them are being prepared for a sell-off. In such a climate, the price of “black gold” immediately skyrocketed on the global oil market that has already begun running amok.

Incidentally, as is typical, the increase in oil prices has benefitted the United States and Donald Trump, personally, who authorized the release of oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve amounting to 648 million barrels (for sale on the world market at the increased price).

Unsurprisingly, there were immediate comments and accusations from Washington. At first Donald Trump, and then U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who is now alone after the departure of John Bolton, blamed not the Houthi rebels but Iran as usual for the attack. Based on photographic evidence that only Americans know about, a statement was then issued saying that Tehran had launched 20 drones followed by a missile strike against Saudi oil facilities. Washington’s “writers” appeared to have composed this chilling crime story, seemingly inspired by works of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie.
However, in truth Washington’s officials conveniently forgot to mention that “modern” American missiles installed at the Saudi oil sites had for some reason been unable to defend the facilities against mere drones. After all, during a recent visit by Donald Trump to Riyadh, not only had Saudi Arabia quickly signed $100 billion worth of agreements but also promised to make $300 billion purchases in the near future. As it turns out, these were not modern weapons but useless junk that Donald Trump personally sells to ignorant “savages”.

President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin aptly addressed this issue at a joint conference at the end of the trilateral summit focusing on the conflict resolution in Syria, held in Ankara. He said: “As for assisting Saudi Arabia, it is also written in the Quran that violence of any kind is illegitimate except when protecting one’s people. In order to protect them and the country, we are ready to provide the necessary assistance to Saudi Arabia. All the political leaders of Saudi Arabia have to do is take a wise decision, as Iran did by buying the S-300 missile system, and as President Erdogan did when he bought Russia’s latest S-400 Triumph anti-aircraft system. They would offer reliable protection for any Saudi infrastructure facilities.”

Incidentally, the newly minted Crusaders, i.e. the USA, ought to take Russia’s stance on these issues into consideration. This would be especially timely right now, as “Donald Trump & Co.” (sure on the brink of bankruptcy) is planning to dispatch with Iran under any pretext whatsoever and causing continuous deterioration of the situation in the Persian Gulf region. It is quite obvious that the reason for accusations against Iran stems from the need to maintain pressure against this nation, which continues with its diplomatic efforts that include dialogue with European allies of the USA. Politicians have noticed another noteworthy aspect to this story. The White House seems intent to demonstrate, in particular to its Congress, that even after the departure of chief hawk John Bolton the foreign policy course of the current U.S. administration has not become dovish, especially in relation to Iran.

Accordingly, if we know who is behind the attack on Saudi oil facilities, we can then say: “Is it not a good idea to find out who ordered it?”. If we were to use the ancient tenet “Who benefits from this?” as a springboard, a conclusion can be drawn that Donald Trumps is the biggest beneficiary of all of these events. After all, U.S. elections are coming up soon and he needs a “win”, and there is nothing that would work better for him than the “Iran card”, on which a lot of propaganda dollars have been spent. Increased prices of “black gold” will allow U.S. oil producers to cover their costs of extracting shale oil, and will then encourage them to jointly vote for Donald Trump. Moreover, Saudi Arabia’s inability to maintain oil supplies at former levels will enable the United States to challenge it on the global markets. And the worsening situation in the Persian Gulf region will allow Washington to continue selling its outdated weaponry in even larger amounts to its Arab followers. Finally, the United States will be able to continue criticizing Iran by blaming them not only for the current events but also for any future escalations in tensions, which we are sure to witness.

Viktor Mikhin, corresponding member of the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences, exclusively for the online magazine “New Eastern Outlook.”