Has the US Launched a Hunt for Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince?

The United States has now increasingly engaged in a disinformation efforts through media under its sway, national intelligence agencies, and numerous other avenues, with the express purpose of bringing Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud into disrepute.

Prince Mohammed’s alleged involvement in the assassination of Jamal Khashoggi, a Saudi dissident, journalist, has already been made public in a US National Intelligence Report. And now he is being reminded of this as part of another scandal fed by the British, apparently, in agreement with Washington, namely the purchase of the British football club Newcastle United, whose new chairman, Yasir Al-Rumayyan is accused of receiving assets seized as part of the fight against corruption. Moreover, the primary beneficiary of this scheme is said to be the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia. He allegedly gave the appropriate orders to the country’s Public Investment Fund (PIF) head, also Yasir Al-Rumayyan.

Britain is claiming that the interest in the Saudi Crown Prince’s schemes was sparked by the purchase of Newcastle United by the Kingdom’s Public Investment Fund and British discontent with the deal, accusing Riyadh of a range of human rights violations. However, a very active role of the USA in spinning this scandal is evidenced by the fact that Areej Al-Sadhan, a resident of San-Francisco, asked the fans of the British football club to keep in mind the principles of Riyadh’s domestic politics in dealing with the sale of the club.

Further impetus to this scandal, again not without the apparent involvement of the United States, was given by a meeting held in the Civil Court of Canada, where internal documents of PIF were declassified, showing that Yasir Al-Rumayyan is only a formal manager, while the actual owner of the organization is allegedly Mohammed bin Salman.
Another scandal promoted by the United States with the main culprit, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, was his accusation of allegedly wanting to kill the former Saudi King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud with a poisoned ring from Russia (and the mention of Russia by the initiators of this scandal was planned as the “cherry on top” for strategists from Washington). The details of this information campaign were presented at some point by the American television channel CBS and expounded by The Washington Post, providing accusations by Saad Aljabri, a former senior Saudi intelligence officer. Saad Aljabri has been an adviser to another Saudi Prince, Mohammed bin Nayef, who led the fight against al-Qaeda (a terrorist group banned in Russia) in Saudi Arabia in the early 2000s and who is Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman’s main rival to the Saudi throne. Saad Aljabri was the main link in contacts between Saudi Arabia’s intelligence agency and the United States, Canada, Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand. So it comes as no surprise that US intelligence agencies are using him to spin this latest scandal involving Mohammed bin Salman.

Saad Aljabri’s attempt to hit the Crown Prince’s reputation has already been responded to by the Saudi Embassy in the US, stating that the former assistant Interior Minister is unclean, making his remarks unlikely to enjoy public trust. “Saad Aljabri is a discredited former government official with a long history of fabricating and creating distractions to hide the financial crimes he committed, which amount to billions of dollars,” the Kingdom’s Embassy in Washington stated.

The question naturally arises: why has the Biden Administration pounced so vehemently on the Crown Prince lately?

The 46th US President Joe Biden began his strategy to rein in recalcitrant states by taming one of the youngest and most uncooperative Arab representatives - Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who is actually trying to conduct an independent policy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, including the United States. In recent years, he began to show irrepressible agility in radically changing the archaic and corrupt way of life of Saudi society that had developed over decades, which suited the United States very well. Having initiated the “Saudi transformation,” Mohammed bin Salman has developed a flurry of activity inside and outside the Kingdom, beginning to introduce various reforms that have become part of the “shock therapy” whose meaning he described in his interview with The Washington Post in February 2018. Outside Saudi Arabia, the young heir to the Saudi throne has already gained considerable prestige, including at the highest political levels in Russia and China, which the Biden Administration has been very jealous of.

Realizing what a threat to the well-being of the current US Administration Mohammed bin Salman could pose, Joe Biden decided to “break the map.” From his first days as US President, he demonstrated his intention to remove Crown Prince Mohammed from active contact with the White House. Besides, the scenario where the Saudis start buying weapons from Russia and China and making friends with Hezbollah and Iran hardly appeals to anyone in Washington and Tel Aviv.

And in this regard, given the challenging situation in the top Saudi circles in the struggle for the throne, Washington hopes to use this factor in curbing Mohammed bin Salman. Many members of the ruling dynasty in Saudi Arabia, including about 25,000 people (about two hundred of them are princes), have a negative attitude towards Mohammed bin Salman. The relationship has escalated since the 35-year-old prince announced his claim to power in 2017. The fact is that Crown Prince Mohammad ibn Salman, although considered a “grey cardinal” and the real ruler of Saudi Arabia, is publicly heavily dependent on his father. Once King Salman is removed, Muhammad will be pounced upon by all his resentful relatives, eager to promote their clan as high as possible.

One should also not forget that back in 2018, several members of the Saudi royal family opposed Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud becoming heir to the throne and attempted to remove the Prince from the throne with US involvement. The alleged reason was, very pleasantly to Washington, the Prince showing an apparent interest in purchasing Russian weapons, including S-400. If Reuters and other US media sources are to be believed, “dozens of princes and cousins” were then planning to confront the prince. Some analysts, including the Central Intelligence Agency, believe that one of the Saudi princes Mohammed bin Salman should be particularly wary of, is Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, who has been a favorite of the CIA for years. In 2017, Mohammed bin Salman arrested Nayef and forced him to hand over the title of Crown Prince. As for Washington, already in 2018, it was seriously considering another candidate for the Saudi throne in opposition to the Crown Prince: King Salman’s only brother, Prince Ahmed, to whom the royal family members who are willing to be in opposition are also loyal.

Back in January of this year, security and military analyst, Jonathan Broder revealed in an article for SpyTalk his survey of former CIA experts who have worked in West Asia for decades, on whether the Biden government would support a possible plot against Mohammed bin Salman. CIA agent Douglas London, whose activities for 34 years
have been associated with the region, admits the likelihood of a “hard” scenario for the US to change the government in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Former CIA analyst Bruce Riedel, a senior fellow, and director of the Brookings Intelligence Project, who serves as a senior fellow in the Center for the Middle East Policy, argued in early 2021 that the Mohammed bin Salman “elimination” situation could unfold under two scenarios. According to the first, Biden may try to find a way to convince King Salman that the Prince’s behavior has undermined the royal family’s reputation to the point that Saudi Arabia’s position in foreign policy has been seriously damaged. Riedel called assassination the second option, specifying that Saudi dissidents may want to assassinate Mohammed bin Salman with US support.

However, if the coup is destined to happen, its arrangement will prove to be quite tricky, both for the Saudis and US intelligence agencies. James Clapper, the former Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency who also served as Director of National Intelligence under the Obama Administration, believes it will depend on several factors, such as which princes will participate in the plot. Some are more influential than others, so if the CIA decides to help in a coup, it is vital to choose someone who will be the “best US envoy.”

But Gregory Gause, Head of the International Affairs Department at the Bush School of Government and Public Service, Texas A&M University, thinks a much more rational solution for the Biden Administration would be to reach an agreement with the Crown Prince rather than eliminate him.

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