It’s curious that all through the last year as the presidential elections in the United States were approaching, Donald Trump was harassed by virtually all Saudi media sources. Now, just a few days ago, he was received with incredible honors in Riyadh at the start of his first overseas tour. The result of this first visit turned out to be impressive with the final total of contracts signed exceeding 109.7 billion dollars. In it we can find deals that would allow the extensive modernization of the Saudi Armed Forces along with the development of its own air defense capabilities. There’s reports that state that Trump’s adviser Jared Kushner personally demanded American arms manufacturers to make a discount on the THAAD air defense system for Riyadh. Additionally, Saudi Arabia is going to receive at least 150 Blackhawk helicopters produced by Lockheed Martin.

The purely economic deals look equally impressive. In a bid to support the plan of the Deputy Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Mohammed bin Salman boldly called Vision 2030, put forward as a way of diversifying the Saudi economy, the parties signed a deal worth 15 billion dollars. Now General Electric is going to assist Riyadh in developing such areas as oil and gas production, petrochemistry and medicine. Additionally, a number of deals were signed in such areas as joint investment projects, high-tech development, infrastructure and the housing sector. Saudi Arabia is going to improve its transportation capabilities, therefore it’s planning to buy new airliners for Saudi Airlines from Boeing. And the list goes on with such companies as Neibors, McDermott, Honeywell, Schlumberger, Halliburton, Weatherford, Baker Hughes and Emerson all getting involved in the Vision 2030 program.

Saudi Arabia has gone as far as to announce plans to invest up to 40 billion dollars in various infrastructure projects in the US. In total, as President Trump announced, both countries agreed to carry on cooperating in various areas, investing up to 400 billion dollars in bilateral deals in the foreseeable future.

The results of the political discussions held during the visit look equally optimistic. In the Joint Saudi-US Declaration adopted at the end of the visit to Riyadh it’s been announced that Washington will confront joint challenges together with the Kingdom, especially extremism that presents a threat to the stability and security of the Middle East. The parties confirmed their alleged desire to start implementing a new initiative to develop defense cooperation, fight extremist ideology and put an end to terrorism financing in the region.

Suddenly, the renewed friendship between Washington and Riyadh looks exceptionally bright. There’s an explanation for this fact, since during the Obama administration Saudi Arabia was considered the weak link in the line of Washington’s satellite states. Unsurprisingly, the Al Saud royal family regarded Barack Obama as a traitor who turned his back on the strategic partnership between the decades-old allies. He refused to launch an invasion of Syria back in 2013 and held behind-the-scenes negotiations with Tehran in Oman in 2015 about the future of its nuclear program. For sure, the ruling Al-Saud clan hesitated to propose all-out cooperation with President Trump, since he made a number of harsh anti-Muslim statements during his election campaign, yet Riyadh needed a powerful ally in its rapidly evolving geopolitical confrontation with Iran. But it’s safe to say that the parties are
equally interested in cooperating with each other since it was imperative for Trump needs to secure Saudi Arabia as an important geopolitical ally of Washington, while selling the maximum amount of US-produced weapons to it. These steps fit perfectly in the so-called Make America Great Again program, which means the constant creation of US jobs.

By bringing billions of dollars to the table Trump expects to silence his domestic enemies who have already sharpened their knives in a bid to impeach him under the pretext of him undermining national interests. Similar steps did not save Richard Nixon back in the days, but the deals will make him an number of powerful allies among US military contractors. As for Saudi Arabia, it’s imperative for its own survival that Washington renews the security guarantees that appeared to unravel during Obama’s days in office.

Of course, Riyadh and Washington will sacrifice some positions and temper their appetites, which involves some risk. When the Al Saud clan decided to bet big on Trump it knew that the sitting American president could lose the internal political battle with the globalist elites, so it must sacrifice certain positions and do it quick. After all, Trump has already announced that Saudi Arabia was not always honest with the US and that he now awaits it to take the toughest stance in the fight against terrorism. This constitutes a 180 turn from the positions occupied by the Obama administration.

And it seems that Riyadh is willing to pay the price. As it’s been announced by the Foreign Minister of the Saudi Arabia, Adel al-Jubeir, in the course of a joint press conference he held with US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, the strategic partnership between Riyadh and Washington would strengthen the resistance to extremist groups operating in the Middle East region. Al-Jubeir stressed that the parties agreed to strengthen anti-extremism efforts and make every effort to put a stop to the financing of various terrorist organizations.

After all, the US president has said during his visit what the Saudi royal family wanted to hear the most. He has not just dissociated himself from Obama’s policies of imposing democracy across the globe, but has also labeled Iran as the breeding grounds for terrorism. His criticism of Tehran was harsh and unrestrained in the typical Trump style. He went as far as to accuse Iran of spreading violence on religious grounds across the region, namely in Lebanon, Iraq, Yemen, and pointing to the conclusion that Arab and Muslim countries must work together to “isolate” Iran.

Of course, the American president will also have to repay the broad gestures on the part of the Keepers of the two Muslim shrines. It is clear that American companies will be banned from doing business with Iran in the coming years, which eliminates a lot of competition for both China and Russia.

It’s also not evident that all the Arab countries will obediently follow Saudi policies of opposing Iran, which are being perceived by the Arab world as an example of “Israeli meddling”. The so-called Sunni coalition remains to be torn apart by internal disputes and contradictions. Turkey and Qatar defend the Muslim Brotherhood, while the Saudis themselves and the UAE, as well as Egypt, oppose this group categorically. There are also Iran’s neighbors, such as Iraq, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, who will not want to spoil relations with Tehran for the sake of following somebody else’s lead. It is next to impossible to assemble a joint military force under these conditions.

In addition, the American president will be forced to provide lip service to the ill-planned and overall inhumane Saudi aggression in Yemen, covering up the war crimes of the anti-Houthis coalition, while trying to distract international attention away from the humanitarian catastrophe that is unraveling in Yemen, with millions of its residents being on the brink of starvation.

The big question is; have the Saudis succeeded in persuading Trump into the continuation of an anti-Assad posture in exchange for generous military contracts? If not, did they agree on joint actions in Syria that will be aimed at limiting Iran’s influence by pursuing the balkanization of this battered war-torn country?

While the pros from the Trump-Al Saud alliance are obvious, there’s a long list of disadvantages to be found within this union. Yet, Riyadh wields a lot of influence in the Arab World, which means it can assist Washington into returning in the anti-terrorist struggle in the region and the world, which is being led by Moscow these days. Such services are not to be forgotten easily...

Maxim Yegorov, a political observer for the Middle East, exclusively for the online magazine ‘New Eastern Outlook’.