A Wreck of a Week for Pro-US Allies, A Hell of a Week for Iran

Surprisingly enough, last week introduced drastic changes in the balance of powers existing across the Middle East. There has been a whole series of both unexpected and predicted events, which have left many analysts utterly puzzled.

You can judge for yourself, as we mention seemingly unconnected events that have affected the state of affairs in this volatile region: the murder of the former Ali Abdullah Saleh committed in Yemen was almost immediately followed by the announcement by the Trump administration that Washington is going to transfer its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. On the next day Russia would announce that ISIS has suffered a crashing defeat on the field of battle with the forces supporting Damascus that was made just a day before the announcement that the influential Gulf Cooperation Council fell victim of irresolvable internal differences which led to a new alliance being signed by Saudi Arabia and the UAE almost immediately.

Attempts to explain such a week so tightly packed with various events have all but failed so far. Those highbrow analysts attempting to approach the task at hand have either tried to rank those events in accordance with their importance, or come up with conspiracy schemes about the attempts to bring closer the "end of history" and the "ultimate battle between good and evil" on the eve of Armageddon.
However, it seems that if one wants to escape mentioning gloomy Masonic prophecies in his analytical piece, which is always a good decision, then he must admit that the said period of time marked a qualitative shift in the situation on the ground, both bringing the region closer towards a major face-off and a new balance of powers that must sooner or later grant stable relations for all regional players.

As for the murder of the brilliant politician who would dominate Yemeni political landscapes for almost five decades, the dangerous game of a brilliant tactician and visionary politician Ali Abdullah Saleh ended with a bullet to the head. The sniper that finished the brilliant politician was hired by a sniper that could be hired by the Houthi resistance movement or Iranian supporters of this movement who must have been afraid that at a certain stage which was inevitable the Yemeni leader would attempt to normalize relations with Saudi Arabia.

With a single pull of a trigger Yemen has been submerged even deeper in the bloody "all versus all" kind of conflict that would block the path for peace negotiations in this country for years to come, while sharply reducing the chances of Saudi Arabia and the UAE to secure a victory, thus preventing the consolidation of the GCC countries around Riyadh, which suits Tehran's agenda perfectly.

For sure, one would have a hard time arguing with highly-qualified experts that are convinced that Saudi Arabia received a major advantage with the death of Ali Abdullah Saleh, since this event has pretty much outlawed the Houthi movement that would have a hard time fighting against Yemeni troops while being isolated. There's been announcement that the Yemeni resistance is about to suffer an imminent defeat, but there's way too much uncertain variables for someone to make such a prediction. This can happen if the son of the murdered former President, Ahmed Saleh would be able to regain control over his father's party and then receives support from the current runaway President Abd Rabbo Mansur Hadi. Then, they young Saleh must succeed in "integrating" the Muslim Brotherhood movement in his coalition, and this idea has already been bitterly opposed by the UAE. Additionally, al-Qaeda and ISIS militants operate in the south of the country can provide a major distraction for the young Saleh that would try to hunt down the Houthi movement all across the mountainous north of the country. So it's highly unlikely that Saudi Arabia could achieve anything of substance in Yemen in the foreseeable future.

Against this background the failed attempt to created a united anti-Iran Sunni front against Iran that Saudi Arabia has made can be regarded as a piece of the same puzzle. The latest GCC has made it clear for pretty much everyone that the disagreements between the Persian Gulf states are too numerous to overcome, especially in a situation when Qatar is standing in opposition to Saudi Arabia. Therefore, the young ambitious yet non-official ruler of Saudi Arabia, Prince Mohammad bin Salman has found himself alone with his fellow "brother" Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Crown Prince of the UAE, in the trench against Iran. It's safe to say that he's been dreaming for a much more advantageous position.

Now let's examine two other major events - the victory over ISIS in Syria and Iraq, which has already been officially declared by Russia and Iraq, and, in fact, is really close, despite both the latent and sometimes not-so-latent attempts of the United States to prevent this victory from coming to fruition. In the regional context, this victory, coupled with the failed project to create an independent Kurdistan, is beneficial for Tehran, since it removes obstacle for the creation of the "Shia arc", stretching across Tehran-Baghdad-Syria-Lebanon. This victory manifests a major blow cast against Washington and Tel-Aviv's designs that were aimed at fragmenting the Middle East, which were put into action with the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and then aggravated with the triggering of the "Arab Spring" in 2011.

This stormy December week has made it clear that a major war against Iran that was predicted by many experts is at least seriously delayed. As a matter of fact, there's nobody to start it... Tel Aviv and Riyadh can only hope that the US will be dumb enough to bite the bullet. But Washington is too absorbed with its face-off with North Korea and is simply unable to concentrate the forces necessary for the war against such a formidable adversary as Iran. Additionally, Washington's latest modus operandi that can be described as "leading from behind" leaves little hope for Israel and Saudi Arabia.

That's where the final piece of the puzzle comes into play - the recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel by Donald Trump? Yes, as a matter of fact, like all the previous factors mentioned above this step is also strengthening the positions enjoyed by Tehran. As is known, Iran has resolutely opposed this decision, as well as its allies in the region, namely the Hezbollah. If before the announcement of Donald Tramp of his decision, a possible Israeli attack against Shia forces could be attributed to the struggle with the Iranian agents in the region, now it would be an aggression of the anti-Muslim forces occupying Jerusalem. Moreover, since the Arabs themselves at the extraordinary meeting of the League of Arab States condemned the decision of the Trump administration, it will now be much pretty much impossible for this very assembly to classify the Hezbollah as terrorists, as Saudi Arabia would
like them to, especially if Israel decides to invade Lebanon. Therefore, the recent air strikes against the positions occupied by Hezbollah in Syria carried out by the Israeli air force looks like a manifestation of Tel-Aviv's...

Opponents will say: but Israel has scored a fantastic victory, as Trump's decision undermines the existing consensus of non-recognition by the international community of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. However, this is a superficial judgment. First, Moscow first violated this consensus by recognizing West Jerusalem as the capital of Israel last April. So, Tel Aviv should be thanking the Russian leadership instead, by recognizing the rights of Russia on its once lost property in this state. Additionally, Donald Trump's decision has been pretty half-hearted - he did not recognize Jerusalem as the single and indivisible capital of Israel, and the boundaries of the city, judging by his statement, should be determined in the course of direct Palestinian-Israeli negotiations. And the transfer of the embassy has been postponed for several years. So, the actual situation doesn't really change. But Tehran received an excellent propaganda slogan, and even in such a unique moment when the anti-Iranian Sunni alliance going down in flames.

Summarizing this turbulent week in the Middle East, one can say that the picture on this large chessboard has cleared up: Iran has improved its positions considerably, largely due to the ill-calculated steps of its geopolitical opponents, as well as the overall dynamics that favors it.

This does not mean that in this complex chess game players have made all the moves, but it seems we're about to see the endgame ....

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