

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind



April 21, 2018

Saving Mother Earth

Tomorrow, i.e. April 22 is going to be celebrated internationally as Mother Earth Day so as to emphasize the importance of the earth and its environment and highlight the challenges it is facing by the growing population, pollution and degradation.

The United Nations General Assembly decided to reserve April 22 as International Mother Earth Day in 2009, with resolution A/RES/63/278, after recognizing that Mother Earth is a common expression for the planet earth in a number of countries and regions, reflecting the interdependence that exists among human beings, other living species and the planet we all inhabit, and noting that Earth Day is observed each year in many countries. However, the Earth Day was first celebrated in the United States in 1970 and it is organized by the Earth Day Network. Its mission is to extend and diversify the environmental movement worldwide and to activate it as the most effective vehicle to build a healthy, sustainable environment, address climate change, and protect the Earth for future generations.

This year, the theme of the day is 'End Plastic Pollution'. It is important that there should be awareness and information that can help in changing human attitude and behavior about plastic, its use and its threats for the environment.

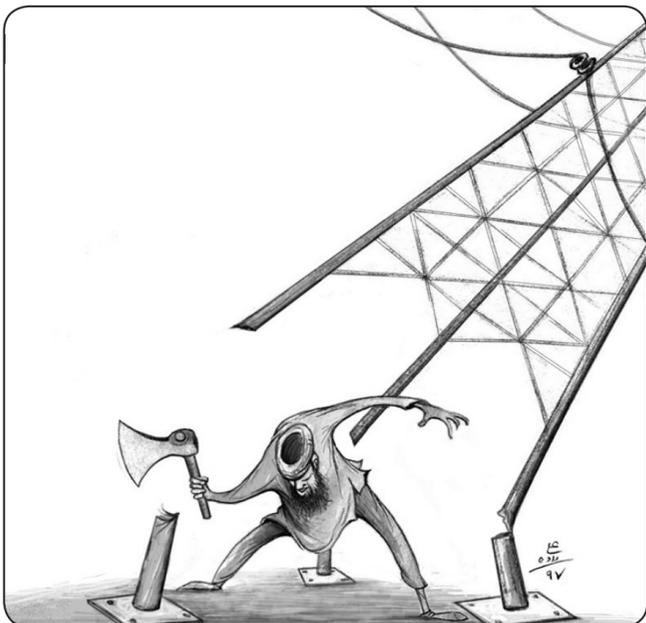
For all the inhabitants of the earth, it is crucial to understand that our earth's environment has been experiencing large scale degradation due to addition of excessive pollutants. These pollutants are basically the result of chemicals and products that are being invented and used with a great speed in the modern world. These evils have the ability to disrupt our environment and introduce disorder within the ecosystem which is crucial for the life to exist on earth. It is of vital importance to note that the possibility of life to exist within the known universe is limited to the planet earth alone. The distance of the earth from the sun, its temperature and other physical conditions exist in such an ordered manner that life is guaranteed here. Furthermore, the dependence of living beings on one another, their interactions and their reaction and influence over the environment have certain proportional arrangement, which is termed as eco-system by the scientists. If this eco-system is disturbed in some way or the other, the life is disturbed and the contaminants that are let loose by human beings in the environment has the capacity to disturb it greatly and has the capacity to endanger existence on earth.

The contaminants basically form pollution, which can influence environment in many different ways. Pollution does not affect the air alone, there are different types of pollution that include; light pollution, littering, noise pollution, soil contamination, thermal pollution, visual pollution, water pollution and some others. Though from the very inception of human beings' civilized life, pollution has been influencing human beings, nonetheless, in today's world of ours, there has been extensive increase in it. With the industrial revolution, the release of pollutants within the natural environment has kept on increasing. Today, we are standing at a stage where many serious minds think that we have to be serious about saving our earth from the menace of pollution.

There are some important concerns that most of the environmental scientists believe should be pondered upon extensively. The first one is the degradation of natural environment to the extent that can prove fatal for most of human beings. Already, the pollutants within the environment have been able to introduce different kinds of diseases in the living beings, which, if left unchecked, can go out of control.

The other concern is regarding the overall warming up of the globe; this concept is known as "global warming". This concept suggests that with the increase in pollution, there will be considerable rise within the average temperature of the world that may, at maximum, result in the liquefying of the glaciers on the poles and may drown the whole world. Moreover, considerable rise in temperature may disturb the conditions of living on earth and may disrupt the eco-system and jeopardize the existence. However, there are scientists and thinkers who believe that the climatic changes may take thousands of years. There has been cycle of changes and there will be such changes in the future as well. The climate of the earth will not keep on rising rather it will keep on experiencing fluctuations after certain years. In fact, they do not seem much convinced regarding the theory of global warming. Nevertheless, it must never be forgotten that the uncontrolled release of pollution can cause serious damage to earth and its environment.

The need of time is to save the earth by adopting appropriate policies. Any effort in this regard needs to be two-dimensional. Firstly, every individual must feel his/her responsibility towards the earth and must make sure that he/she does not become a reckless being and must prove helpful for the environment. However, extensive awareness programs in this regard can be really helpful. Mother Earth Day can be used very positively in this regard and much can be taught to the people through different sorts of programs and techniques. Secondly, there have to be efforts on national level as well. The governments in different countries can adopt strict laws regarding the safeguard of the environment and can make sure that different industries and enterprises adopt atmosphere-friendly attitude.



The Saudi Export of Ultra-conservatism in the Era of MbS - an Update

By James M. Dorsey

Edited remarks at The Middle East and the Geopolitics of Religious Soft Power, Schar School of Policy and Government, George Mason University and the Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, Washington DC 18-19 April 2018

There has long been debate about the longevity of the Saudi ruling family. One major reason for doubts about the Al Sauds' viability was the Faustian bargain they made with the Wahhabis, proponents of a puritan, intolerant, discriminatory, anti-pluralistic interpretation of Islam.

It was a bargain that has produced the single largest dedicated public diplomacy campaign in history. Estimates of Saudi spending on the funding of ultra-conservative Muslim cultural institutions across the globe and the forging of close ties to non-Wahhabi Muslim leaders and intelligence agencies in various Muslim nations that have bought into significant, geopolitical elements of the Wahhabi worldview are ballpark. With no accurate date available, they range from \$75 to \$100 billion.

It was a campaign that frequently tallied nicely with the kingdom's deep-seated anti-communism, its hostility to post-1979 Iran, and the West's Cold War view of Islam as a useful tool against Arab nationalism and the left - a perception that at times was shared by Arab autocrats other than the Saudis.

The campaign was not simply a product of the marriage between the Al Sauds and the Wahhabis. It was long central to Saudi soft power policy and the Al Saud's survival strategy. One reason, certainly not the only one, that the longevity of the Al Sauds was a matter of debate was the fact that the propagation of Wahhabism was having a backlash at home and in countries across the globe. More than ever before theological or ideological similarities between Wahhabism or for that matter Salafism and jihadism were since 9/11 under the spotlight.

The problem for the Al Sauds was not just that their legitimacy seemed to be wholly dependent on their identification with Wahhabism. It was that the Al Sauds since the launch of the campaign were often only nominally in control of it. They had let a genie out of the bottle that now leads an independent life and that can't be put back into the bottle.

That is one major reason why some have argued in the past decade that the Al Sauds and the Wahhabis were nearing a crunch point. One that would not necessarily offer solutions but could make things worse by sparking ever more militant splits that would make themselves felt across the Muslim world and in minority Muslim communities elsewhere in multiple ways including increasing sectarian and intolerant attitudes in countries like Indonesia, Malaysia, Bangladesh and Pakistan.

The rise of Mohammed bin Salman clearly challenges these assumptions. For one, it raises the question to what degree the rule of the Al Sauds remains dependent on religious legitimization as Mohammed moves de facto from consensual family to one-man rule in which he anchors his legitimacy in his role as a reformer. Saudi officials have spoken of a possible halt to the funding internationally of religious institutions although an apparent agreement to pump \$1 billion into the building of hundreds of mosques and religious centres in Bangladesh would suggest otherwise. The failure in Brussels and the fact that there is little reason to believe that the religious establishment has experienced a true change of heart or that Saudi Arabia has satisfactorily com-

pleted a revision of its text and religious books suggests that the kingdom is ill-prepared to propagate a truly moderate form of Islam in Bangladesh or anywhere else.

In some ways, the question is whether this matters as much outside the kingdom as it does domestically. The parameters have changed with Mohammed's grip on power but the fact that the religious establishment was willing to ultimately compromise on its theological principles to accommodate the political and geopolitical needs of the Al Sauds has been a long-standing fixture of Saudi policy making.

For the Wahhabi and Salafi ulema, the public diplomacy campaign was about proselytization, the spreading of their specific interpretation of the faith. For the government, it was about soft power. At times the interests of the government and the ulema coincided, and at times they diverged.

The result of all of this is that four decades of funding has created an ultra-conservative world that lives its own life, in many ways independent of Saudi Arabia, and parts of which have turned on its original benefactor. A study of Pakistani madrassas published earlier this year concluded that foreign funding accounted for only seven percent of the finances of the country's thousands of religious seminaries.

There is moreover no doubt that Saudi funding in the era of Mohammed bin Salman is unlikely to revert to what it once was. The Saudi-funded Bangladeshi plan to build moderate mosques, the relinquishing of control of the Grand Mosque in Brussels, and the World Muslim League's newly found propagation of tolerance and inter-faith dialogue as well as its effort to reach out to Jewish communities would suggest that Saudi money may be invested in attempting to curb the impact of the kingdom's decades-long funding of ultra-conservatism.

Yet, there are also indications that Mohammed bin Salman is not averse to funding militants when it suits his geopolitical purpose. The US Treasury last year designated Maulana Ali Muhammad Abu Turab as a specially designated terrorist on the very day that he was in the kingdom to raise funds. Abu Turab is a prominent Pakistani Islamic scholar of Afghan descent who serves on a government-appointed religious board, maintains close ties to Saudi Arabia, runs a string of madrassas attended by thousands of students along Balochistan's border with Iran and Afghanistan and is a major fund raiser for militant groups.

Abu Turab's visit to the kingdom came at a time that Saudi and UAE nationals of Baloch heritage were funnelling large amounts to militant anti-Shiite and anti-Iranian Islamic scholars in Balochistan. It is unclear whether the funds were being donated with Mohammed bin Salman's tacit blessing.

What is clear, however, is that the funding and Abu Turab's visit coincided with the drafting of plans to destabilize Iran by exploiting grievances and stirring unrest among Iran's ethnic minorities, including the Baloch. Those plans have not left the drawing board and may never do so. The funding nevertheless raises the question how clean a break with support of ultra-conservatism Mohammed bin Salman is contemplating.

Dr. James M. Dorsey is a senior fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, co-director of the University of Würzburg's Institute for Fan Culture, and co-host of the New Books in Middle Eastern Studies podcast. James is the author of The Turbulent World of Middle East Soccer

The West's Crisis of Confidence

By Carl Bildt

In an age defined by US President Donald Trump's rage, Russian President Vladimir Putin's revisionism, and Chinese President Xi Jinping's unbridled ambition, the international order is becoming increasingly disorderly, dysfunctional, and even dangerous. How did we arrive at this state of affairs? And how can we leave it behind? Until recently, the era following World War II was a time of benevolent liberal internationalism. The postwar order had begun to take shape as early as 1941, when US President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill drafted the Atlantic Charter on a ship anchored in Canada's Placentia Bay. Though Hitler had been victorious on the battlefields of Europe, Churchill and Roosevelt were determined not only to defeat the Nazi onslaught, but also to lay the groundwork for a future of peace and democracy.

They succeeded beyond what they probably imagined was possible. After the Atlantic Charter came the United Nations, the Bretton Woods institutions, the global trade system, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and much more. During the postwar decades of decolonization, many new countries emerged, and former enemies united under new alliances and an overarching structure of integration.

China's great "opening up" and the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991 marked the start of a quarter-century of truly remarkable global progress. In fact, judging by standard economic, political, and social indicators, it might well have been the best quarter-century in human history. There were no major wars between superpowers, global trade expanded and drove economic growth, poverty was more than halved, and rapid advances in science and technology delivered benefits to every corner of the world.

In recent years, however, the world has entered a new phase. The politics of idealism and hope have been replaced by the politics of identity and fear. This trend took root in one Western country after another, but its most notable manifestations have been in the two Anglo-Saxon countries that made the previous period of miraculous progress possible in the first place.

Today, the confused political debates in the United Kingdom are tragic to behold. Since the June 2016 Brexit referendum, Britain has searched in vain for an illusory concept of sovereignty that might prevent the massive loss of international power and influence that awaits it after its departure from the European Union. The kind of global statesmanship that the UK once offered the world has

given way to parochial bickering.

But the confused politics of Trump's White House are of even greater consequence. For decades, the White House was a font of global leadership; today, it is a source of belligerent rhetoric that does not even pay lip service to the idea of a global order. Indeed, the Trump administration's official National Security Strategy portrays US efforts to safeguard the global order as counterproductive and self-defeating. The future it envisions will be defined wholly by conflicts between sovereign countries.

Revisions to America's strategic posture would be a reasonable response to Russian aggression and rule-breaking, particularly in Eastern Europe, and to China's growing assertiveness on the world stage. But the US president's first instinct should be to defend the international order against rising threats, while making adjustments to account for new realities. Addressing climate change, increased migration, and the revolution in information and communication technologies (ICT) will require new, comprehensive international agreements to protect the interests of sovereign countries.

Sadly, the pronouncements from Trump's White House seem to be aimed at undermining any sense of order, with the hope that the US will come out on top in some future Hobbesian struggle for total global dominance. By this logic, international trade should be regulated not by rules and institutions, but through unilateral protectionist measures and arm-twisting. And institutions like the EU - which aims to ensure order and stability through integration - are treated with indifference, if not disdain.

From China's perspective, the Trump administration's Hobbesian vision could prove appealing, provided that its economy continues to grow, and that it avoids serious domestic social or political upheaval. After all, with fewer global rules, China will face even fewer obstacles when asserting its growing influence abroad.

In this scenario, the loser would undoubtedly be the wider West, meaning not just Europe but countries like India, which will remain committed to liberal democracy, economic openness, and the values underpinning that miraculous quarter-century after the Cold War. Even barring worst-case scenarios, the West will be facing a new world with new aspirants making new demands about the future. It would thus be a fateful mistake for Western powers to abandon the ideas and institutions that delivered prosperity and stability in previous decades. Above all, the two countries most responsible for creating the postwar international order must not turn their backs on it now.

Carl Bildt is a former prime minister and foreign minister of Sweden.

Chairman / Editor-in-Chief: Moh. Reza Huwaida

Editor: Moh. Sakhi Rezaie

Email: outlookafghanistan@gmail.com

Phone: 0093 (799) 005019/777-005019

www.outlookafghanistan.net



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