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Fmr. diplomat: Regional dilemmas should be solved through dialogue

Tehran, June 7, IRNA – An Iranian Middle East and nuclear policy specialist believes that the only way out of the ongoing dispute among the Persian Gulf’s southern littoral states is that they should admit the era of hegemonic aspirations is over and problems should be solved through dialogue.

Former member of Iran’s nuclear negotiating team and current researcher at Princeton University Hossein Mousavian made the remarks in his latest article titled “Hate Industry Inflaming Middle East Insecurity”, written jointly by an Egyptian scholar about the ongoing regional dispute underway among the Persian Gulf southern littoral states.



“An alternative path exists for the region, for all states to acknowledge that the era of hegemonic aspirations is over and work towards resolving their security dilemmas through the formation of regional dialogue and cooperation forums. To achieve this, the zero-sum mentalities exemplified by Trump’s visit to Saudi Arabia and Riyadh’s subsequent actions, must be abandoned,” Mousavian said in the article a copy of which was exclusively sent to IRNA on Wednesday.

The full text of the article follows:

Two weeks after US President Donald Trump’s visit to Saudi Arabia to shore up US regional alliances, a political earthquake has ravaged the Persian Gulf. In an unprecedented move, US regional allies led by Saudi Arabia have severed diplomatic ties and imposed a blockade on Qatar, another close partner of Washington and host of a major American military base.

In an official statement, Saudi Arabia has all but accused Qatar of seeking regime change in the Kingdom, stating Qatar aims to create “strife among Saudi internal ranks.” Meanwhile, an official Qatari statement accuses its presumed Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (PGCC) partners of having hegemonic aims over Qatar, proclaiming the diplomatic row is aimed at the “imposition of guardianship over Qatar.”

Of the six PGCC states, only the UAE and Bahrain joined Saudi Arabia in severing relations with Qatar. All three have for years denounced Qatar’s relatively more tolerant attitudes towards Islamist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Iran. Notably, Oman and Kuwait, which share Qatar’s more balanced approach towards Iran, have not joined the Saudi effort to isolate Qatar. Egypt and Israel, however, have enthusiastically supported the action, with the Israeli Defense Minister stating that it creates an opening for a “unified” effort between Israel and Arab nations against “Qatar-financed terror.” Egyptian media have been raging against Qatar as “a financial feeder of terrorism in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Syria, and Yemen. An indication of the collapse of Trump’s fancied edifice of an Arab grand alliance.

Many in Israel have lauded efforts by the Trump administration to create a “regional security alliance” against Iran comprised of states including Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the UAE, and Israel. Immediately after Trump’s escalatory speech in Riyadh blaming all regional ills and terrorism on Iran, a series of events took holding creating the ground for Saudi Arabia cutting ties with Qatar, starting with a Saudi media attack on Qatar for alleged statements by the Qatari emir regarding Iran and the region, which Qatari media denied and attributed to hacking.

The media hysteria was followed by a letter by the al-Shaykh family, the descendants of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and co-rulers of Saudi Arabia along with the al-Saud family, accusing the Qatari royal family of falsely claiming lineage from the puritanical 18th century religious leader. Former CIA official Bruce Riedel has said of the letter: “The letter is from the heart of the clerical establishment in Saudi Arabia and amounts to an indictment of the legitimacy of the Qatari ruling family. It is unprecedented in PGCC politics for one state to dispute the legitimacy of another’s royal family.”

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In his trip to Saudi Arabia, US President Donald Trump propagated a historical lie by blaming terrorism largely on Iran. His saber-rattling came in a country where the perpetrators of 9/11 had been domiciled and Wahhabi-schooled. It is not clear that with his Riyadh address, Trump has given license to Saudi leaders to carry out their most aggressive ambitions.

The reality is that even if Saudi claims are accurate and Persian Gulf countries are concerned about Iran's supposed quest for hegemony, after Iran these same countries are also concerned about Saudi attempts to establish hegemony in the Persian Gulf.

Furthermore, since the rise of Al-Qaeda in 1998, an Iranian has never been counted as a suicide bomber. The whole lot of those criminals have been the students of Wahhabi-Salafist schools. It thus translates into a proficient lie to hold a so-called Arab-Islamic summit to have President Trump issue a vacuous call for purging "foot soldiers of evil" from their societies.

Based on imagined religious excuses, Wahhabi Saudi Arabia promotes the claims that Iran has geographic expansionist plants in the Persian Gulf, in Iraq and in Syria. The fact that Baghdad, Damascus and Lebanon have, especially since the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, as Shii oriented governance was not through any Iranian scheming. These were demographic facts in both Iraq and Lebanon, and governance facts in Syria through the Assad family (Alawites/Shiis).

If Iran supports Shii majoritarian communities in Bahrain and Yemen (the Zaidis -now referred to as the Houthis), so has been the case with Saudi petro-wealth vying for the support and empowerment of their proffered strand of "Sunni Islam" everywhere else. It is a strange phenomenon to have Riyadh convulsed by Tehran condemnation of the Saudi liquidation of Sheikh Al-Nimr, a Saudi Shii opposition leader. The strangest part of that phenomenon is the Saudi characterization of that humanitarian revulsion as Iranian interference in Saudi internal affairs. But when was the last time that we read that Iran, a multi-faiths country, has hanged till death a Sunni leader? It has never happened.

Despite destabilizing rhetoric and actions by Saudi Arabia and the Trump presidency, one issue comes into clear focus. States achieve strength from within. Such strength flows from primarily the popular will, so clearly manifested in Hassan Rouhani's recent resounding victory in Iran's presidential elections. More than 70% of Iran's 56 million voters had cast their ballots. Those voters included women, whereas women in Saudi Arabia are kept by Wahhabism from view, behind walls and niqabs.

On Saturday, May 20, 2017, millions of Iranian women poured out open-faced and mingling with men in public squares in celebration of the success of moderation in a second term for Rouhani. Immediately after his re-election, Rouhani adroitly mocked Trump support for a "monarchy that has never seen a ballot box."

Saudi Arabia has now taken two steps that have increased hatred and instability in the region, its anti-Iran sword dance with Trump and now its seeming attempt to overthrow a neighboring Arab government. For Saudi Arabia to be at the center of American hopes for peace in the region, through an attempted isolation of Iran, Qatar, Iraq and Syria is akin to the US anchoring Middle East security on a doomed-to-failure hate industry.

An alternative path exists for the region, for all states to acknowledge that the era of hegemonic aspirations is over and work towards resolving their security dilemmas through the formation of regional dialogue and cooperation forums. To achieve this, the zero-sum mentalities exemplified by Trump's visit to Saudi Arabia and Riyadh's subsequent actions, must be abandoned.

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