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Obama and the Royals: Human Rights Aren't a Concern, When Oil is at Stake

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While pandering to the most repressive regimes on Earth with the finest American hospitality last week, President Obama came out with some outlandish, ludicrous statements.

Barack Obama was hosting the royal rulers of the six Persian Gulf Arab states in Washington. First there was the VIP treatment and photo-ops on the White House's South Lawn, then a fireside chat in the Oval Office, followed by a private meeting at the president's mountain retreat at Camp David in Maryland, some 100km north of the capital.



The oil-rich Arab guests hailed from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Oman and Bahrain. These sheikhdoms — historically carved out of the Arabian desert by the British Empire — are among the most wealthy and the most repressive regimes in the world.

Their rulers are pampered hereditary scions who systematically curtail free speech and public gatherings, ruling with an iron-fist. In all of these despotic regimes, people are routinely flung into dungeons for daring to make public comments that might be deemed critical of the ruling elite. In Qatar, for example, a young poet was jailed for 15 years because he wrote a poem that was mildly critical of the ruling Al Thani family, whose emir, Tamim bin Hamad al Thani, was in Obama's company this past week.

In Saudi Arabia, the ruling House of Saud has publicly beheaded 80 people this year alone; their blood-stained corpses were then dangled from helicopters as a warning to would-be offenders. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef was also among those enjoying Obama's hospitality.

Furthermore, the warped version of Islam espoused by the Gulf despots — called Wahhabism — is rabidly intolerant of any other form of religion, including more conventional forms of Sunni or Shia Islam, let alone Christianity and other faiths. All are condemned as "infidels" by the Gulf Arab rulers in their obscurantist, backward ideology.

This extreme intolerance under Wahhabism was encouraged by the British imperialists when Saudi Arabia was first formed as a state in 1932. It proved back then to be an efficient tool for imposing tyranny and crushing any dissent toward the rulers and their imperial master.

The same holds today. Washington has replaced London as the main international patron of the Gulf Arab dynasties. But their extremism still continues to serve as a tool for exerting geopolitical control in this vital oil-rich region.



That explains why the Arab sheikhs in Washington this past week are among the foremost treasurers and arms suppliers for the myriad terror groups ranging from Al Qaeda to ISIL. These groups continue to threaten the Middle East, inciting sectarian conflicts in Iraq and Lebanon, destabilizing governments and fomenting regime change, as in Libya and Syria.

The financial and armaments links between the Saudis, Qataris and other Gulf despots on the one hand and terrorist mercenary groups on the other is well documented. Even US officials have acknowledged this; for example, former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was revealed through WikiLeaks disclosures to be well aware of the role of Saudi Arabia in supporting Al Qaeda-linked terror networks. So too was the former US ambassador to Iraq, Christopher Hill, who is also on record in 2010 as saying that the Saudi regime was instrumental in fuelling sectarian violence in that country.

Yet Obama regaled the Arab tyrants in Washington last week, saying that the US and the sheikhdoms are the "cornerstone of peace, stability and security in the Middle East."

The president added: "The United States and Saudi Arabia have an extraordinary friendship and relationship that dates back to Franklin Roosevelt [in 1945]."

All this was said by Obama with a straight face and sincere intonation. Which raises the question: is he a very good liar, or is this guy just really stupid? Why does the US continue to funnel billions of dollars of weapons every year to the Gulf dictatorships in the hopes that this will ensure peace and stability if these regimes are complicit in the terrorist activity that threatens the tranquility of the Muslim world?

Right now and for the past nearly seven weeks, the Saudi-led Gulf states have been pounding the people of Yemen day and night with American-supplied warplanes and bombs, including internationally banned cluster bombs that kill everything in their blast radius. Thousands of Yemeni women and children have been slaughtered in this US-backed campaign against the poorest country on the Arabian Peninsula.



The Saudi-led aerial bombardment has blockaded Yemen from air and sea routes delivering food, fuel and medical aid. The country depends on exports for 90 per cent of its food and fuel. Some 80 per cent of the Yemeni population of 24 million are now feared to be facing starvation and extreme privation. Children are dying from wounds and diseases because there is no transportation. Families are huddling in sewers to avoid air strikes.

In this desert country, diesel fuel is essential for drawing drinking-water from wells. Because of the Saudi-imposed blockade on Yemen, people are left without any drinking-water. This

Saudi-led and American-backed barbarity breaks every precept of international and humanitarian law under the baseless, contemptible pretext of "protecting Yemen from Iranian-supported rebels."

This barbarity of collective punishment meted out to civilians was condemned this week by United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator Johannes van der Klaauw.

On April 28, American-supplied Saudi fighter jets bombed the runway and traffic-control tower of the international airport in Yemen's capital, Sanaa, in order to prevent an Iranian civilian cargo plane from landing with humanitarian aid. An Iranian cargo ship, coordinated with the International Red Cross Committee, is due to dock in Yemen next week with food and medical supplies. The vessel may again be blocked by Saudi forces, thus provoking a possible war with Iran.

These are the kind of maniacal, lawless regimes that Washington considers "extraordinary friends", who together, allegedly, maintain peace, stability and security in the Middle East.

We, of course, shouldn't exempt Israel from condemnation; right up until last year it has been jumping at every excuse to fight one-sided wars of annihilation against its Palestinian neighbors. The 2014 Gaza conflict claimed over 2,100 Palestinian civilian lives; despite deafening state propaganda in the social and traditional media promoting the state's response to the Gaza menace, only six civilians died on the Israeli side.

While it can be argued that American support for Israel has both religious antecedents and is based on an extremely powerful pro-Israel lobby in Washington, elsewhere in the region, the supply of oil, the propping up of the petrodollar, and lucrative contracts for arms dealers continue to drive ongoing conflicts and regimes which at times seem centuries behind the rest of the world.

If American activity in the region seems confusing, it's instructive to view it as a reaction to Arab nationalism and the British experience in the region. When British assets were nationalized in countries like Iran and Egypt, the British and the Americans were made to understand that local leaders such as Mohammad Mosaddegh answered to their citizens and could not rely upon to facilitate the transfer of oil to companies like the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (now BP). As long as the US had a reliable local regime to work with which was fundamentally anti-communist, it would be ensured that the oil would continue to flow. The establishment of monarchies in the region as client states was a modern-day Metternich-style solution.

Unfortunately, the establishment of OPEC and other similar events eventually revealed to the US that it couldn't control the region completely; the Saudi monster it had helped to perpetuate was one that was easier to appease than to tame. President Obama was compelled, for example, to cut a major state visit to India short earlier this year to attend the funeral of Saudi King Abdullah, and was joined by Vice President Joe Biden as well as Secretary of State John Kerry, CIA Director John Brennan, former Secretaries of State James Baker and Condoleezza Rice, not to mention Senator John McCain. Perhaps the question shouldn't be whether or not Obama is ignorant to praise the Saudis; maybe we should ask how much power the Saudis really have.