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The Pentagon-Arab Spring love story

By Pepe Escobar

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Anyone who hoped the Arab Spring might eventually take over the Persian Gulf and those lands once known as Arabia Felix has enough reason to drown in sadness.

The Arab counter-revolution is stronger than ever - led by the House of Saud and its monarchy minions at the Gulf Counter-revolution Club (GCC), officially known as Gulf Cooperation Council. And their most precious ally is the Pentagon.

The New York Times made it official by relaying related White House/Pentagon spin. Considering the NYT can hardly pose as an icon of credibility since those months in 2002/2003 when its front page peddled outright lies about Iraq's nukes and/or its carnal ties with al-Qaeda, the spin must be translated.

The further militarization of the counter-revolutionary Persian Gulf - especially via more boots on the ground in Kuwait, and more warships - is being sold as a response to "a collapse of security in Iraq or a military confrontation with Iran".

Note that both are pure wishful thinking. The NYT's martial sources insist, "the withdrawal [from Iraq] could leave instability". The fact is the Nuri al-Maliki government in Baghdad effectively booted the Americans out (the Pentagon wanted at least 20,000 US boots on the ground after late 2011).

Thus the necessity of revamped Pentagon Central Command (Centcom) newspeak, as well as a

Plan B, a grand new "security architecture" for the Persian Gulf crammed with air and naval hardware and even missile defense sold as a bland "post-Iraq footprint in the region".

As for "the threat of a belligerent Iran", very precise interests - sections of the industrial-military complex, the Republican party as a whole, the Israel lobby, the majority of corporate media - have been cheerleading for a strike on Iran for years.

Major General Karl R Horst, Centcom's chief of staff, is a big fan of "commitment in building partner capability and partner capacity" (translation; what we say, goes). He sold the firepower increase in the Persian Gulf to the NYT as a bland, Hollywoodish "back to the future" strategy, focused on "smaller but highly capable deployments and training partnerships with regional militaries".

Translation: lots of special forces, lots of weaponized drones and an inflation of those "partnerships" the Pentagon and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) are so fond of. This is spun as "more efficient ways to deploy forces and maximize cooperation with regional partners"; or the best way to "expand security relationships", especially when there will be a "steep decrease in the number of intelligence analysts assigned to the region" (translation; let the towel heads do the footwork).

It also helps that Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) proved their unlimited love for NATO in the Libya war (while Bahrain and the UAE have boots on the ground in Afghanistan). That Arab willingness to please the masters goes a step further than the standard mantra, "the United States will not abandon its commitments in the Persian Gulf."

To sum it all up; think of all this as the GCC as a de facto annex to NATO.

Behind the 'security architecture'

Out there in Tajikistan - where she was examining the non-proliferation of the Arab Spring in Central Asia - US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton encouraged what was later leaked to the NYT as "a robust continuing presence" throughout a region that "should be freed from outside interference to continue on a pathway to democracy."

So this means the further militarization of the Persian Gulf comes as a response for US/Saudi interference preventing democracy? That can't possibly be; somebody's got to rewrite the script.

This whole scenario was predictable ever since Washington struck a deal with Riyadh for the consolidation of the Arab counter-revolution; you get us an Arab League vote so we take Muammar Gaddafi out, and we leave you alone to do what you want in the Persian Gulf (see [Exposed: The US-Saudi deal](#) Asia Times Online, April 2, 2011).

This led to the House of Saud invading Bahrain; Qatar training Libyan NATO rebels in their own territory while also sending Qatari special forces to Libya; and now a "stronger, multilateral security alliance" between the GCC and the Pentagon.

Lost in space US senators spinning that the US withdrawal from Iraq will be interpreted as a "strategic victory by our enemies in the Middle East", is business as usual. But it's another thing to see the NYT being gullible enough - or basically treating its readers as idiots - as it swallows the Saudi propaganda line that Iran is "the most worrisome threat" to all GCC members "as well as to Iraq itself". It's as if the paper was edited in Riyadh.

As a matter of fact, the Barack Obama administration's foreign policy in the Middle East seems to be edited in Riyadh. One just had to follow the US corporate media falling over themselves to kiss the hem of the gown of the new crown prince (the next in line for the throne) at the House of Saud, Prince Nayef bin Abdul Aziz.

Nayef, 78, supported by the *nec plus ultra* of medievalism and counter-revolutionary, damn-this-Arab Spring forces, is essentially the House of Saud's inquisitor-in-chief. Since 1975 he has presided over the security apparatus at the Ministry of Interior, which along with the US-trained National Guard, faithful to frail King Abdullah, 87, are the best weaponized bodies in Saudi Arabia.

Nayef is the Darth Vader of a 130,000-strong paramilitary force, all the national and local police, customs, immigration, the coast guard, the border guard and the dreaded religious police. His ministry's response to the Arab Spring has been a non-stop crackdown. Anyone who's even suspected of trying to start a political demonstration, not to mention a movement, is arrested; that includes young people uploading YouTube videos.

There are at least 20,000 political prisoners in Saudi jails. Since April, it's illegal to "threaten national security" or "insult Islam"; Nayef was responsible for the vagueness of the new law and all that implies. Anyone trying an Occupy Riyadh or Occupy Jeddah would be beheaded.

Yet for his countless Washington fans, who beam at this 36-year counter-terror CV, Nayef is a "conservative pragmatist". This is his official denomination since revealed by a WikiLeaks 2009 State Department cable.

No wonder they love Nayef in Washington. His Holy Trinity is Washington-Riyadh joined at the hip; his hatred of Iran and Shi'ites in general (even Saudi Shi'ites); and his war on terror commitment against al-Qaeda.

No one talks about his visceral hatred of women's rights and his visceral hatred of all things democratic; that's when the label "social conservative" comes handy. At the start of the Arab Spring, Nayef dismissed Tunisians as "basically French", and Cairo residents as "louche urbanites". The only true Arabs were Saudis; democracy, as they see it (or as the House of Saud sees for them) is for sissies.

In internal House of Saud politics, that palace intrigue realm of desert macho men who love to dye their moustaches black, Nayef's top opponents are not his brothers, the powerful Sudayri seven, who are now five (after the death of King Fahd and recently Prince Sultan), named after the tribe of their mother Hassa, Ibn Saud's favorite wife.

Still gerontocracy is the name of the game; brothers Bandar, Musaid and Mishaal's health conditions are appalling. As for brother Salman, the governor of Riyadh, he likes to pose as a journalist, as owner of the Asharq al-Awsat newspaper.

Nayef's top opponents are the nephews of Ibn Saud, starting with wily former Washington ambassador Bandar bin Sultan, aka Bandar Bush; Prince Talal, father of billionaire prince al-Waleed; Vice Minister of Defense Khaled bin Sultan; and Prince Turki al-Faisal, former head of intelligence in the 1980s and former Osama bin Laden pal.

None of these will threaten Nayef; what matters for the House of Saud is the dynasty's survival. As King Abdullah prepares to meet his maker, the Pentagon could not find a more reliable regional partner: Grand Inquisitor Nayef.

NATO will soon rule over the whole Mediterranean as a NATO lake. Africom is implanting itself deeper and deeper in Africa. Centcom rules the Persian Gulf with the GCC in tow. Democracy is for sissies; there's no business like the "security architecture" business.