



المعهد المصري للدراسات  
EGYPTIAN INSTITUTE FOR STUDIES

Articles

24 NOV 2017

# Conflict compass in the Middle East

Dr. Said Elhaj



[WWW.EIPSS-EG.ORG](http://WWW.EIPSS-EG.ORG)

 Eipss.EG  Eis\_EG

TURKEY- ISTANBUL

Bahçelievler, Yenibosna Mh 29 Ekim Cad. No: 7 A2 Blok 3. Plaza D: 64  
Tel/Fax: +90 212 227 2262 E-Mail: [info@eis-eg.org](mailto:info@eis-eg.org)

## Conflict compass in the Middle East

Dr. Said Elhaj

Many prefer to describe events in the region as a Sunni-Shiite conflict, in which Iran leads the Shiite axis and Saudi Arabia leads the Sunni axis, stretching over a wide geographical area, including: Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen and the Gulf countries. This approach may seem logical, realistic and justifiable, given the Iranian influence that has been expanding in the region during the past few years, and in the light of the Saudi propaganda in this concern.

However, reconsideration of the developments of events in the region and a current assessment do not support this approach, but provide a different interpretation of the conflict in the region, at least in the last six years.

At the end of 2010, the Arab world was suffering from escalating crises, including authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, injustices, corruption, poverty, economic and social crises, and dependence on the outside. An apparent example for the miserable situation in the Arab world at the time is that in 2008, Israeli former Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni declared war on Palestinians in the Gaza Strip from Cairo, the official capital of joint Arab action. The Arab revolutions began with dreams and demands for dignity, justice and enforcement of the rule of the people. A short period after the outbreak of Arab revolutions, both the "resistance axis" and the "moderation axis" in the Arab world were completely fragmented.

In fact, these revolutions did not please most of the Arab and regional regimes; so they decided to confront and thwart them so that their repercussions would not extend to their countries or affect their interests. Riyadh led the counter-revolution in Egypt, Yemen, Tunisia, and, to a lesser extent, in Libya while Iran led the counter-revolution in Syria in particular. Through a quick reading of events, one can see clearly that both

Saudi Arabia and Iran seem to have succeeded, to a large extent in this pursuit. The deliberate sustainability of the Syrian revolution has stopped the domino effect and the wave of revolutions, while the coup in Egypt has led to the termination of the revolutions and the whole Arab world. These two events still have the most prominent and deepest effect on the developments that have taken place so far in different countries, including the failed coup in Turkey, the siege of Qatar and the Palestinian reconciliation.

It is interesting (and painful) that these two projects, which claim conflict and confrontation, have cooperated and helped each other in fulfilling their goals as if there was a tacit agreement between them in this concern. Tehran betrayed Egypt's revolution and supported the military coup implicitly after Morsi's comments on Syria. Meanwhile, the hostility against the Islamic movements by Gulf countries in general and Saudi Arabia in particular and their support for the coup in Egypt contributed to creating the vacuum that enabled Tehran to expand in the region increasingly.

Moreover, both parties use the same propaganda and rhetoric, although they appear to be on opposite sides. Iran uses sectarian mobilization to ensure the allegiance of "Arab Shiites" and to strengthen their "minority psychology" in order to deepen their ties to the Islamic Republic. At the same time, Saudi Arabia presents itself as the leader of the "Sunni" axis to ensure the support and loyalty of the peoples, Islamic currents, and others in the Arab world.

On the other hand, the idea of a "confrontation" between the two sides requires further scrutiny. Apart from the concept of direct war that is not in the minds or plans of either of them; neither side - specifically Saudi Arabia - appears to be serious about it. Riyadh does not appear to be working on the two most areas where Tehran has dominance - Syria and Iraq - to undermine Iran's control there, amid the Kingdom's unstable internal situation and the divisions among Gulf countries. In addition, most

Arab regimes adopt a declared policy of war on Islamic currents and active powers in the Arab world.

So, in the end, there is no vision and no reliable tools in this supposed confrontation between the two projects (Iran and Saudi Arabia), which means that such confrontation is not existing, and is not likely to occur soon. It also means that the media, rhetoric and political escalation is intended to serve other objectives, including ensuring a smooth transition of power in Saudi Arabia, ensuring popular support and support, and pushing other parties to do the job.

The wish for something to happen does not mean that it will eventually take place, and the wish-oriented analysis has never changed the facts on the ground. Today, there is no Arab or "Sunni" project in the region (with reservations on the label, its background and its context). There are only two projects existing in the region in the strictly literal sense of the word: the Zionist project and the Iranian project. And it seems that the recent developments in the region are in favor of this division, locally, regionally and internationally.

Today, there is a tripartite framework that brings together Russia, Turkey and Iran in Syria; and it seems that it may extend to other issues of concern to the whole region. As for Saudi Arabia, the Saudi government relies on the escalating American rhetoric and Washington's successive sanctions against Iran and its allies. Also, it is very clear that the Kingdom is scrambling towards Israel, which does not satisfy most of the parties in the region, especially the currents that participated in the revolutions and / or supported them and paid for it.

The current situation in the region is intended to be the final scene of the Arab revolutions: by ending the Syrian issue, in light of the stabilized situation of the Al-Sisi regime to a large extent in Egypt, the decline in Tunisia's Al-Nahdha movement situation - in order to preserve its existence - and the situation in Yemen and Libya



after the external interventions that were behind the bloodshed, poverty and internal conflicts.

Therefore, we should not be fooled by the raised slogans or the alleged confrontations, contrary to all facts, reality, and contexts of things. Also, the roles of alleged opponents seem complementary to each other within the largest and most comprehensive framework of events.

In fact, the country (Saudi Arabia) that presents itself as a spearhead in the confrontation (against Iran) has stripped itself of all the cards of presumed power, and repeatedly proved it was a failure in the internal, Gulf, Arab, and various arenas. This raises many questions about the credibility of its intention to confront Iran or to win such war if it started?!

In short, the confrontation in the region is political, not sectarian, though some have tried to describe it as so for several reasons. The conflict compass should be focused on the peoples, their rights and their dignity; and if the peoples failed in the first wave of revolutions, they should not throw themselves into the hands of the counter-revolutions that are trying to deceive them through resonant slogans and alleged confrontation.