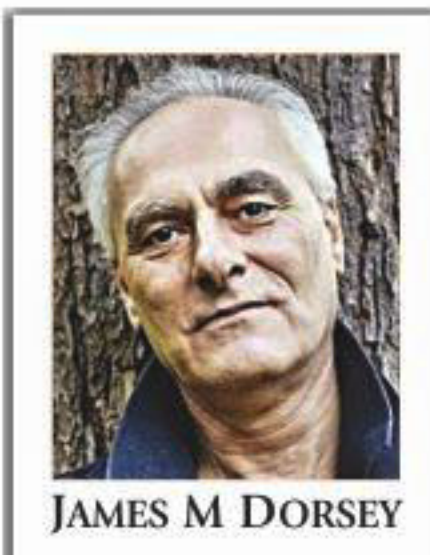


Cracks in Saudi hold on the Muslim world



JAMES M DORSEY

SAUDI conduct of its ill-fated war in Yemen coupled with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's alignment with the Trump administration and Israel, and his often coercive approach to diplomatic relations, has opened the door to challenges of the kingdom's moral leadership of the Sunni Muslim world, a legitimising pillar of the ruling Al Saud family's grip on power.

The cracks in Saudi legitimacy are being fuelled by the escalating humanitarian crisis in Yemen, described by the United Nations and aid organisations as the world's worst since World War Two; shocking civilian deaths as the result of attacks by the Saudi-led coalition; electoral successes by populist leaders in countries like Malaysia, Turkey and Pakistan; and the kingdom's inability to impose its will on countries like Qatar, Jordan, Lebanon, Kuwait and Oman.

An attack this week on a bus in the heartland of Iranian-backed Houthi rebels that killed at least 43 people, including 29 children returning from a summer camp, dealt a significant body blow to Saudi moral authority.

The coalition said it would investigate the attack that has sparked international outrage.

The attack was but the latest of multiple incidents in which weddings, funerals and hospitals have been hit by coalition forces in a war that has gone badly wrong and demonstrates Saudi military ineptitude despite the fact that the kingdom's armed forces operate some of the world's most

sophisticated weaponry, according to military sources.

Trump reversed a decision by his predecessor, Barack Obama, to halt the sale of air-dropped and precision-guided munitions until it had better trained Saudi forces in their targeting and use of the weapons. An Obama official said at the time that there were "systemic, endemic" problems in Saudi targeting.

"Malaysia and other Muslim nations can no longer look up to the Saudis like we used to. They can no longer command our respect and provide leadership. The Saudis have abandoned the Palestinians, just like the Egyptians. The Saudis have moved much closer to Israel who are suppressing and killing the Palestinians," said Raja Kamarul Bahrin Shah Raja Ahmad, a member of Malaysia's upper house of parliament and the head of the ruling Pakatan Harapan (Alliance of Hope) coalition in the Malaysian state of Terengganu.

"Perhaps Malaysia under the leadership of Dr Mahathir Mohamad should take the lead again in speaking up for the oppressed Muslims of the world. It is about time Malaysia again show the leadership that was once so much admired and respected worldwide," Bahrin added.

Malaysia has sought to distance itself from Saudi Arabia since the return to power in May of Mahathir, whose past Islamist rhetoric and stark anti-Israeli and anti-Jewish statements propelled him to prominence in the Islamic world.

Malaysia has in recent weeks withdrawn troops from the 41-nation, Saudi-sponsored Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition (IMCTC) and closed the Saudi-backed King Salman Centre for International Peace (KSCIP) in Kuala

Lumpur. Mahathir's defence minister, Mohamad Sabu, long before taking office this year, was already highly critical of Saudi Arabia.

In anticipation of investigations into allegations of corruption against former prime minister Najib Razak and his recent indictment, Seri Mohd Shukri Abdull, Mahathir's newly appointed anti-corruption czar, noted

backing of US President Donald Trump's staunch support of Israel and pressure on Palestinians; its 14-month old economic and diplomatic boycott of Qatar in cooperation with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Qatar; and the war in Yemen.

Like Mahathir in the past, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, despite his evolving autocracy, has

Erdogan to release American evangelist Andrew Brunson.

Brunson has been detained in Turkey for the past two years on charges of having been involved in the failed 2016 military coup against Erdogan and seeking to convert Turkish Kurds to Christianity.

Erdogan has in recent years consistently thought to thwart Saudi policy in the region by positioning himself as the leader of a Muslim world opposed to Trump's Israel-Palestine approach and a de facto Arab alliance with Israel, maintaining close ties to Iran and defying US sanctions against the Islamic republic, supporting Qatar, and expanding Turkish influence in the Horn of Africa in competition with the UAE, Saudi Arabia's closest regional ally.

Erdogan has portrayed Prince Mohammed's vow to return Saudi Arabia to an unidentified form of "moderate Islam" as adopting a Western concept.

"Islam cannot be either 'moderate' or 'not moderate.' Islam can only be one thing. Recently the concept of 'moderate Islam' has received attention. But the patent of this concept originated in the West. Perhaps, the person voicing this concept thinks it belongs to him. No, it does not belong to you. They are now trying to pump up this idea again. What they really want to do is weaken Islam...We don't want people to learn about religion from foreign facts," Erdogan said.

Echoing former US president George W Bush's assertion of an axis of evil, Prince Mohammed charged in March that Turkey was part of a triangle of evil that included Iran and Islamist groups. The crown prince accused Turkey of trying to reinstate the Islamic Caliphate, abolished nearly a century ago when the

Ottoman empire collapsed.

Similarly, Pakistan's prime minister-in-waiting appeared to be charting his own course by saying that he wants to improve relations with Iran and mediate an end to the debilitating Saudi-Iranian rivalry despite the fact that the kingdom has so far ruled out a negotiated resolution and backs US efforts to isolate the Islamic republic.

In a bow to Saudi Arabia, Jordan has backed the kingdom in its row with Canada over criticism of Riyadh's human rights record and refrained from appointing a new ambassador to Iran, but has stood its ground in supporting Palestinian rejection of US peace efforts.

Similarly, Lebanese prime minister Saad Hariri has reversed his resignation initially announced in Riyadh last year under alleged duress while Oman and Kuwait, alarmed by the Saudi-UAE campaign against Qatar, have sought to chart a middle course that keeps them out of the firing line of Riyadh and Abu Dhabi.

For the time being, Saudi Arabia is likely to successfully fend off challenges to its leadership of the Muslim world.

However, responding viscerally to criticism like in the case of non-Muslim Canada or, more importantly, two years ago to Muslim leaders who excluded Wahhabism and Salafism, the religious worldview that underpins the Al Sauds' rule, from their definition of Ahl al-Sunnah wal-Jamaah or the Sunni people, is unlikely to cut ice in the longer term.

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The war in Yemen has killed thousands of people, half of them civilians, and spread disease and hunger across the impoverished nation.

PHOTO: AFP

barely a week after the May election that "we have had difficulties dealing with Arab countries (such as) Qatar, Saudi Arabia, (and the) UAE."

Speaking to Al Jazeera last month, Mahathir said that "we are disappointed that Saudi Arabia has not denied that the money was given by Saudi," referring to USD 681 million in Saudi funds that were allegedly gifted to Razak.

Malaysia is but the latest Sunni Muslim nation to either challenge Saudi Arabia or at least refuse to kowtow to the kingdom's foreign policy as it relates to its bitter rivalry with Iran; Prince Mohammed's tacit

emerged as an Islamist populist counter pole, his credibility enhanced by his escalating disputes with the United States, his often emotional support for the Palestinians, and opposition to moves by Trump like his recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

Erdogan's Turkey this week became the latest target of Trump's wielding of trade and economic sanctions as a means of bullying countries into submitting to his demands. Trump doubled metals tariffs on Turkey after earlier sanctioning two senior Turkish ministers in an effort to force

Rape news should trigger more resistance

DIBARAH MAHBOOB

IT'S no secret that Bangladesh has long been plagued by violence against women and children. Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (BMP), an organisation working for the protection of women's rights, reported 592 incidents of rape that occurred across the country in the first six months of 2018. But what is more disturbing is how we are getting to hear more and more about incidents of rape of females of atypical age range—and how we are getting used to hearing them.

In 2017 alone, the number of headlines about girls as young as four years old being raped was disturbingly high. According to BMP, at least 2,063 women and children became victims of various types of violence, including rape, sexual harassment, physical torture for dowry, etc. Recently, an 80-year-old was raped by her neighbours, which shows the increasingly uncertain nature of the psychology behind rape.

Are we simply hearing more news because of the increased access to information, or are there additional factors that have contributed to the rise in sexual violence? True, social media has increased access to such news, but the number of rape incidents actually reported still remains low, at around 2 percent.

Therefore, it stands to reason that rape, used as a tool to establish social dominance and control, is on the rise in new and twisted ways. New factors in this age of technology are contributing to an already prevalent rape culture and violent extremism while the legal system is failing to provide protection to the victims.

Let's look at how technology is contributing to the rising rape culture. The avail-



Covering their faces with black cloths, activists of Bangladesh Adivasi Nari Network in a procession in Dhaka protest against incidents of rape in the hills.

PHOTO: STAR

ability of smartphones and cheaper computers has led to an increased consumption of a wide range of pornography. According to Hola, a free VPN service that enables users to mask the location they are using their web browser from, the most visited website in Bangladesh is one of the world's largest pornographic video sharing websites.

Yes, pornography is viewed all over the world, but when graphic content is made widely available in a conservative, sexually repressive culture, it serves to increase the over-sexualisation of women. Most men here are still used to having women seated

separately, or can only meet them playing hide-and-seek from society. And when they do get "access" to them in public spaces, including the cyberworld, their curiosity turns into a feudal psychosocial tendency to dominate over women—a class of people they have grown up hearing is inferior. A great example is the recent rape, mutilation and murder of a minority girl in Khagrachari, which reaffirms our belief that sexual homicide is intended to establish male dominance, and show women "their place".

Over the last few years, Bangladesh has made significant progress in improving gender parity and participation of women

in the workforce. However, there is a noticeable correlation between women not getting protection and being engaged in spaces outside the domain of what is considered the "right place" for them. Thus, the hypocrisy of our patriarchal society protects men who stare lewdly or catcall at women in the streets, and tries to disregard women who speak out against such practices.

Violence against women—especially violence in private spaces—is not always seen as a crime but a private matter. The result is, domestic violence and marital rape remain the most underreported crimes. In the majority of Bangladeshi

family units, even when a woman is a bread-earner, she is rarely the decision-maker or considered equal to the male members of the family.

As long as the climate in which rapists are confident of "getting away with it" exists, the vicious cycle of perpetration will not cease to exist. Bangladesh also has no specific laws related to femicide (*Whose City*, ActionAid, 2017). The appropriate authorities that are meant to prevent such incidents from taking place often fail to do so, thanks to a culture of corruption, misogyny and negligence of the police authorities, as well as an inbuilt tendency to assume that the fault is probably the victim's—not the perpetrator's. Most often cases are not accepted, and conviction rate is even lower. Aside from outside court settlements, police often don't want to report rapes to improve their crime-prevention statistics. Women in Bangladesh still feel unsafe and are concerned about the implications of reporting, as evidenced by the reluctance among women to go to the police to report a crime: 65 percent of women surveyed felt the police would rather blame them than the perpetrator, and 57 percent felt that the crime would not be taken seriously.

If we can bring positive shifts in early childhood education both in schools and at homes of both girls and boys, then prevention of violence will be possible. Boys should be taught that being strong doesn't mean hurting or disrespecting women/girls—it's the opposite of strength. But we should remain alert so that such messages do not get drowned out by the culture of misogyny that they might be exposed to as they grow up into adults.

Dibarah Mahboob is an author and artist.

ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY



AUGUST 13, 1961

EAST GERMANY BEGAN CONSTRUCTING THE BERLIN WALL

The East Germany Government began to seal off all points of entrance into West Berlin by stringing barbed wire and posting sentries—a task followed by the construction of a concrete wall, which separated the two sections of Berlin.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Delighted

5 Judicious

9 Kitchen gadget

11 Christmas Eve traveler

12 Game leader

13 Choir group

14 Lincoln nickname

15 Slogan

17 Of the highest quality

19 Crooner Torme

20 Position

21 Cardinal

22 Baseball's Satchel

24 Wt. units

26 Wanders

29 Dolphin's home

30 Waterskiing need

32 Beach bum's marking

34 Indulgent

35 Brat's opposite

36 Frighten

38 Publicity act

39 Radio part

40 Brewery need

41 Appointment

DOWN

1 Tremendous

2 Passes the bar?

3 Take willingly

4 Scottish river

5 Mural's place

6 Eventually

7 High

8 Canvas holder

10 Eye part

11 Cook's mint

16 Firewood holder

18 Trips around the track

21 Authentic

23 Advice to a young man

24 Crude shed

25 Excellent

27 La Scala city

28 Traps

29 Secret store

30 Incline

31 Bring to bear

33 Eye part

37 Trophy

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

A	R	A	B	I	A		O	M	I	T
S	O	L	O	N	S		H	A	R	E
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BEETLE BAILEY



DID YOU FIX THE TANK? I DON'T THINK IT CAN BE FIXED BUT I MADE A SUBSTITUTE

BY MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES



HURRY! WE'LL BE LATE FOR SCHOOL! SLAM! SCREECH

BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT