



## **The Crisis in and Around the Persian Gulf: Business as Usual in a New Era**

**Yossef Bodansky**

**May 2019**

### **Executive Summary**

---

- \* The crisis in and around the Persian Gulf continues to unfold as a growing number of local leaders try to untangle and defuse the situation before it is too late. In order to increase the pressure on her foes, Tehran intensified the hints of a possible use of nuclear weapons against the US and Israel.
- \* Arab leaders now dread a possible US operation ostensibly for their protection that will surely elicit a wrathful Iranian response against them. They no longer fear a major attack to be initiated by Iran because they know this is unlikely to happen.
- \* Iran is focusing on consolidating the on-land access to the shores of the Mediterranean and is increasingly apprehensive that it is there that a direct clash with US forces will take place. To meet the challenge, Soleimani recently completed the build-up of large Iranian and Iran-Proxy forces in Syria and Iraq, including ballistic missiles.
- \* For the Arabs, the crisis in the Persian Gulf constitutes a distraction from the real fateful development – the threat stemming from “the Middle Eastern Entente” of Iran, Turkey and Qatar to the tapestry of power and legitimacy in the greater Middle East.
- \* The greater Middle East returns to the routine crises – from the Turkish and US support for the Jihadists in Idlib; to the Turkish-Iranian destruction of the Fertile Crescent of Minorities; and, for Israel, the blocking of the Iranian surge to the Mediterranean and the build-up in the Gaza Strip and South Lebanon. As for the Saudis – they continue to implode because of their own inherent weaknesses and erratic policies.

### **About ISPSW**

---

The Institute for Strategic, Political, Security and Economic Consultancy (ISPSW) is a private institute for research and consultancy. The ISPSW is an objective, task-oriented and politically non-partisan institute.

In the increasingly complex international environment of globalized economic processes and worldwide political, ecological, social and cultural change, which occasions both major opportunities and risks, decision-makers in the economic and political arena depend more than ever before on the advice of highly qualified experts.

ISPSW offers a range of services, including strategic analyses, security consultancy, executive coaching and intercultural competency. ISPSW publications examine a wide range of topics connected with politics, the economy, international relations, and security/ defense. ISPSW network experts have held – in some cases for decades – executive positions and dispose over a wide range of experience in their respective fields of expertise.



## Analysis

---

The crisis in and around the Persian Gulf continues to unfold as a growing number of local leaders try to untangle and defuse the situation before it is too late.<sup>1</sup> In order to increase the pressure on her foes, Tehran intensified the hints of a possible use of nuclear weapons against the US and Israel.

Iran continues to signal its firm political and strategic positions as Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States continue to capitulate. The Arab leaders now dread a possible US operation ostensibly for their protection that will surely elicit a wrathful Iranian response against them. They no longer fear a major attack to be initiated by Iran because they know this is unlikely to happen.

\*

Throughout, Tehran's position remains unchanged.

Iranian senior officials, mainly senior commanders, continue to reiterate Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's basic stand – no war and no negotiations. Tehran continues to emphasize both the country's resolve to withstand US pressure and determination to avoid war with the US under Iran's conditions. Iran is ready to show flexibility only if this will not be at a cost of giving up vital and sacred objectives – particularly the very survival of the Islamic Republic and its regional ascent to the shores of the Mediterranean and the eastern and southern shores of the Arabian Peninsula.

Significantly, Tehran started to hint about the possible use of nuclear weapons against both the US and Israel in case of a marked escalation of the confrontation in the Persian Gulf.

The first such hint, back on 10 May, was probably unintended. Ayatollah Yousef Tabatabai-Nejad, the representative of Isfahan Province in the Assembly of Experts, addressed a prayer meeting in Isfahan where he boasted about what he had learned in a recent special secret briefing in Tehran about Iran's ability to confront the US. "Their billion-dollar fleet can be destroyed with one missile," Tabatabai-Nejad declared. "If they [the Americans] attempt any move, they will [face] dozens of missiles because at that time government officials won't be in charge to act cautiously, but instead things will be in the hands of our beloved leader [Khamenei]." Khamenei is in direct command of Iran's means of "special strategic deterrence" – which are the country's nuclear-tipped ballistic and cruise missiles.

On 25 May, the threat was repeated by Brigadier General Morteza Qorbani, a special adviser to the High Command. The US "is sending two warships to the region. If they commit the slightest stupidity, we will send these ships to the bottom of the sea along with their crew and planes using two missiles or two new secret weapons," he warned.

However, the most explicit and credible allusion to the possible use of nuclear weapons came on 17 May from Mujtaba al-Nur, "the Head of Iran's Nuclear Committee", in a closed meeting with senior commanders of the Iranian Army. "The war against Iran will pave the way for a third world war and any attack on Iran would mean the destruction of Israel within half an hour," he asserted. "Before the dust of any attack on Iran eases, Iranian missiles will hit the heart of Tel Aviv." He reassured the attendees that "Iran will not start the war, but it will

---

<sup>1</sup> For details and background see: Yossef Bodansky, Khamenei's War, ISPSW Issue No. 617, May 2019; Yossef Bodansky, The US-Iran Face-Off, ISPSW Issue No. 616, May 2019; Yossef Bodansky, Escalation – Iran Against the Regional Order, ISPSW Issue No. 614, April 2019; Yossef Bodansky, The New Bloc: "The Middle Eastern Entente", ISPSW Issue No. 612, March 2019.



cut off the hand of any country that attacks it.” Mujtaba al-Nur concluded that if attacked by Iranian missiles, only “hills of ash” will remain of both Israeli cities and US military objectives throughout the Middle East.

Major General Seyyed Abdolrahim Mousavi, the Commander-in-Chief of the Iranian Army, echoed the warning. “Today, thank God, all units of the Army have full combat and psychological readiness and if the enemy dares to make a miscalculation or a strategic mistake, it will receive a response that would make it regret it,” he told the commanders on 17 May. “In the current situation, maintaining and boosting the vigilance and readiness of the Army units is an inevitable necessity and would deter the enemy threats.” On 22 May, Mousavi repeated Mujtaba al-Nur’s strategic principles during a meeting with senior officers. “We are not seeking any war, and we will not start it, but we are fully ready to defend [the Islamic Republic].” He advised Arab leaders to “break [their] alliance with the enemies of [their] national interests and follow in the footsteps of Iran in pursuing dignity and independence.” Should they join the US in attacking Iran, they’ll suffer “unimaginable devastation,” Mousavi warned the Arab leaders.

On 27 May, the Islamic World News (an Iranian front) posted a video showing the launch of a Qiam-1 ballistic missile from an underground bunker hidden in the mountains. The missile is fitted with a warhead identical to a North Korean nuclear warhead.

Tehran is meanwhile seeking new modalities for dealing with both the US and Europe. On 22 May, Khamenei openly criticized President Hassan Rouhani and Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif for the way they originally negotiated JCPOA back in 2015. Khamenei explained that “the way the [nuclear deal] was handled, I did not really believe in it, and mentioned this to the president and the foreign minister and had warned them several times.” He elaborated that the negotiations thus created the vulnerabilities the US is currently exploiting and that the Europeans are incapable of reversing or ignoring. Khamenei implied that the legacy of the original negotiations process, given the performance of the senior officials in charge of the negotiations, proves that Iran’s interests cannot be realized in a similar manner, and that a new process is required in order to solve the current crisis.

Meanwhile, Tehran continued to deliver “signals” of the military capabilities of Iran and its proxies. Among these “signals” was the rocket launched at a building very close to the US Embassy in the Baghdad Green Zone and later claimed by a bogus Shiite entity. As well, the Houthi Ansarullah Movement continued their drone and ballistic missile strikes on Najran and beyond. The Jizan military airbase has been the target of repeated drone attacks. On 26 May, Muhammad Ali al-Houthi, the President of the Supreme Revolutionary Committee, explained that the Ansarullah’s attacks were a response to Saudi Arabia’s rejection of “peace initiatives” even though the Houthis even agreed “in good faith” to stop their attacks while negotiations would take place. “But unfortunately, the aggressor countries misinterpreted these efforts [as weakness] and regarded them with contempt and indifference,” al-Houthi explained. Although al-Houthi stressed, as he always does, that the Ansarullah’s policies have nothing to do with Iran’s – his logic for the escalating strikes echoes Iran’s message to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States.

\*

Meanwhile, with the threat of an imminent escalation and a major war with the US in the Persian Gulf receding, Tehran returns to focusing on the original surge – the ascent as a regional power and the consolidation of the on-land access to the Mediterranean. Major General Qassem Soleimani is personally in charge of this endeavor – a reflection of its great importance for Khamenei. The Qods Force was allocated



additional Pasdaran elements – from ballistic missile units to special forces – and quality proxy forces mainly in Iraq and Syria-Lebanon for the surge to the Mediterranean. Soleimani still anticipates the possibility of clashes with US forces in both Syria and Iraq in the pursuit of this mission.

In mid-May, the Iranians for the first time established military presence on the shores of the Mediterranean – in the base of the Syrian 110th Brigade not far from Latakia. The IRGC Qods Force deployed a combined force comprised of a few hundred Pasdaran troops, a slightly smaller Shiite Iraqi force of the Imam Muhammad al-Baqir brigade and the Iraqi Revolutionary Guards militia, and slightly over one hundred troops of the Afghan Fatemiyoun militia. They are undergoing a special training course and participate in “a naval combat exercise” along with the Syrian Marines and “the Syrian Revolutionary Guards”. The Iranian and Iran-Proxy troops are being concealed as Syrian forces. “Alongside its own headquarters, the IRGC shares many positions with the [Syrian] regime’s forces, and its officers and members wear the uniform of the regime’s soldiers and raise its flags.”

Concurrently, the IRGC expedites the construction of permanent storage infrastructure some 2.6km/1.6miles from the official border crossing between Al-Bukamal (Syria) and Al-Qaim (Iraq). The new facilities will enable large-scale movement of weapon convoys and troops between Iran-Iraq and Syria. The overall area is under the control of the Shiite Iraqi Al-Hashd al-Shaabi forces. Their commander, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis who is a very close protégé of Soleimani, has visited the area repeatedly since mid-2018. On the Syrian side, there are a small Syrian Army garrison, an IRGC combat unit and military engineers, and, more recently, a unit of the Qods Force’s Afghan Fatemiyoun militia.

In response to the growing importance of the Al-Bukamal-Al-Qaim border crossing, the US started arming Sunni Arab tribes in al-Anbar and other provinces in western Iraq. Although the official pretext for arming the tribes, as reported to the Iraqi Government, is “preparing them for fight against terrorism,” local Kurdish and Arab notables insist that the US is preparing proxy forces to interdict the Al-Hashd al-Shaabi forces in the vicinity of the Iraq-Syria border areas, and particularly the Al-Bukamal-Al-Qaim area. Significantly, the new tribal militias include former Islamic State Jihadists originally from western Iraq who ostensibly repented and rejoined their tribes. In mid-May 2019, US “diplomats” started bribing tribal leaders and told them to demand the enduring presence of US forces and bases in the area so they can operate along the Syrian-Iraqi border. The Iraqi Government strenuously objects to the revival of “the era of tribal militants” by the US, as do Kurdish leaders.

On 19 May, a bus carrying troops of the 20th Brigade of the Al-Hashd al-Shaabi was hit by a roadside bomb (an IED) while traveling in eastern Diyala. Seven fighters were killed and 26 fighters were wounded. Although the official communique attributed the bombing to “remnants of the Islamic State militant group,” Kurdish security officials noted that the IED was identical to the type used the by US-controlled Sahwa forces (the Sunni “Awakening”) a decade ago.

Indeed, on 21 May, Nasr al-Shimri, the Deputy Secretary General of the Harakat al-Nujaba (a Qods Force controlled entity that is part of the Al-Hashd al-Shaabi coalition) warned that if “America attacks Iraqi groups or targets [them] for the excuse that they are tied to Iran, [this action] would have bad consequences ... even for countries from which [American] missiles are launched.” Iran and its allies (proxies) will go to great length to avenge US-led attacks. “If America targets Iraqi groups,” he reiterated, “all American bases and objectives in the region will be targeted by us.” Al-Shimri vowed that “America would be the big loser” of such a confrontation.



Meanwhile, starting mid-May, the Syrian military and the IRGC Qods Force markedly expanded the string of Sunni Arab tribal militias along the road between Al-Bukamal and Deir ez-Zor along the Euphrates. Most important are the militia forces run by the three Al-Qatraji brothers – Baraa, Hussam and Muhammad. Since early 2019, they operated two major units in Deir ez-Zor and Subikhan. In mid-May, they established a third unit in the Al-Bukamal area – thus completing their presence along the major highway. The Qatraji militia in the Al-Bukamal area cooperates closely with the local garrison of the IRGC Qods Force. Significantly, the Qatraji family has long had strong ties with the Assad and Makhlouf families, and with the senior commanders of the IRGC Qods Force.

Important as it is, the road from Al-Bukamal to Damascus via Deir ez-Zor is not the preference of the Iranians and their allies. Far more efficient is the road traversing from Iraq via southern Syria to Damascus. This road passes through the al-Tanf area not far from the Syrian-Jordanian border. However, the largest US military base in Syria is in al-Tanf – blocking the local border crossing with Iraq and the road to Damascus. Moreover, the US established a 55km/34mile “exclusion zone” around the base that “allows US troops to claim self-defense in striking Iranian or other forces moving through that area”. The US maintains in al-Tanf a large training base for mostly Sunni “Syrian rebels” who, according to official Washington, “are not terrorists.” These forces conduct raids against Syrian Government forces throughout the Euphrates Valley – in areas where the recognized US proxy – the SDF – cannot operate for political reasons.

Virtually all the intelligence services operating in the region – including Russian, Israeli and Jordanian intelligence – have a different opinion about the training camps in al-Tanf. “Apart from the so-called opposition that is linked to al-Qaida, Daesh terrorists brought from Raqqa, western Deir ez-Zor and the Golan Heights [border areas] are being trained in the Tanf camp,” explained a Turkish senior intelligence officer in late May 2018. These US-trained and -equipped Jihadist forces are to be used as deniable US proxies against Iran and Syria. In late March 2019, Syrian intelligence sources reported that “US officers offered Jihadists a deal, giving them a task to attack a number of settlements in eastern Syria in exchange for amnesty and ensuring security of their wives and children [who were] transferred to SDF-held al-Hawl refugee camp in Hasakah province. The deal stipulates that the extremists must capture Jazal, Shaer, Tweinan and Maghara gas and oil fields, Khneifis phosphate field and force the Syrian Army to leave checkpoints located along [the] Damascus-Deir ez-Zor highway.”

As the northern route to the Mediterranean – the one passing through the Al-Bukamal-Al-Qaim border crossing – was getting operational, Tehran became increasingly worried that the US might use the al-Tanf-based Jihadist forces in order to attempt and disrupt this route as well – particularly along the long desert stretch between Deir ez-Zor and Damascus and the adjacent T-4 or Al-Tiyas Airbase that is most important for both the IRGC and the Syrian Air Forces. The US concurrent support for the tribal/Jihadist forces in western Iraq reinforced Tehran’s apprehension. Khamenei and the upper-most leadership in Tehran resolved not to permit the US to disconnect the Iranian on-land access to the shores of the Mediterranean. Hence, in April, Soleimani was convinced, and so warned his commanders, that a clash with the al-Tanf-based forces over the control of the roads to Damascus was only a question of time. Should the US forces intervene in order to save their proxies, Soleimani instructed, the Iranian and Iran-Proxy forces were to clash with the US forces and defeat them. Iran is ready for any escalation ensuing from such clashes.

Between mid-April and early-May, Soleimani and his team wrote new up-dated combat plans and deployed the necessary forces. The key to the Qods Force’s plan is launching a major attack on al-Tanf from the rear –



that is, from western Iraq – should the US and US proxy-Jihadist forces attack the Iranians and their proxies to the north of al-Tanf. While Soleimani is in command of all operations and forces in the Syria-Iraq theater, the actual attack will be under the command of one of his closest friends and protégé – Qais al-Khazail, a Shiite Iraqi. He will be in command of two distinct militias operating under the Al-Hashd al-Shaabi – the Kataib HizbAllah and the Asaib Ahl Al-Haq. Qais al-Khazail allocated over 15,000 fighters and heavy weapons for the al-Tanf offensive. A new element in the Iranian preparations was the deployment of dozens of tactical ballistic missiles – Fatah-110, Zalzal-2, Zalzal-3 and Zulfiqar SSMs – into the Shiite areas of southern and central Iraq. These missiles are to be used against US and other military bases, mainly airbases, throughout the entire theater should they attempt to intervene and either support al-Tanf and/or attack other Iranian and Iran-Proxy forces. In early-May, Soleimani reported to Khamenei and IRGC Commander Major General Hossein Salami that the deployment was completed and the forces ready for any eventuality.

Jerusalem, that had warned Washington about the Iranian focusing on a surge westwards and consolidation on the shores of the Mediterranean, is alarmed anew by the Iranian ascent. Israel dreads a war in the Persian Gulf that will destroy the region's delicate correlation of forces. An Iranian victory means the blocking of the Bab al-Mandab that is crucial for Israel. The use of Iran-proxies in Gaza and Southern Lebanon in order to launch thousands of rockets against the Israeli rear is a proven threat. The new Iranian threats to destroy Israel within a few minutes through a strategic attack unnerved Jerusalem because they imply the use of nuclear warheads.

In mid-May, Israel refocused on the Iranian surge in Iraq-Syria-Lebanon and resumed active interdiction of Iranian forces and supplies. The crisis in the Persian Gulf diverted US attention and resources from the real threat to Israel – making the Iranians more confident in their ability to safely deliver reinforcements and supplies. On the night of 17/18 May, Israeli SSMs launched from the Golan Heights struck three IRGC sites south and south-west of Damascus. The first site was a complex of warehouses belonging to the IRGC in the vicinity of the International Airport in al-Mazzah, Damascus. The second site was a cluster of IRGC warehouses near the area of Saboura, west of Damascus. The third site included Iranian and HizbAllah storage facilities and air defense batteries, as well as the headquarters compound of the First Division of the Syrian Army – all near the Al-Kiswah area south of Damascus. The next night – 18/19 May – Israel struck a forward base of the Syrian 90th Brigade near Quneitra, just east of the Golan Heights' demilitarized zone. The strike took place shortly after Pasharan and HizbAllah officers showed up in the base, wearing Syrian uniforms. Israel delivered a clear message - that no Iranian and HizbAllah presence will be tolerated near the Golan Heights border.

\*

For the Arabs, the crisis in the Persian Gulf constitutes a distraction from the real fateful development – the threat stemming from “the Middle Eastern Entente” of Iran, Turkey and Qatar to the tapestry of power and legitimacy in the greater Middle East. Presently, the Sunni Arab Tribes of the central Arabian Peninsula have disproportionate influence through their role as custodians of Islam's Holy Shrines in Mecca and Medina. Their exploitation of the oil riches located under the Shiite-inhabited zone adds to the power of the small Sunni elites. But comes Spring 2019, two non-Arab powers with Imperial heritage – Iran and Turkey – are striving to become prominent regional powers, as well as assert their dominance of the Holy Shrines through suzerainty, with the Arab tribes of both Qatar and Jordan providing semblance of legitimacy. Of these, Mahdist Shiite Iran is more menacing, but neo-Ottoman Sunni Turkey is perilously close to attaining the goal.



Hence, Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman al-Saud (aka MBS) and his close partner the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Muhammad bin Zayed al-Nahyan (aka MBZ) organized the Arab Gulf Summit to address the Iranian threat. The summit is scheduled for 30 May in Mecca in order to emphasize that the religious-political issue of who controls the Holy Shrines is of paramount importance – far more important than the presence of Iranian forces along the shores of the Persian Gulf or in Syria-Iraq. Alas, 31 May is Al-Quds Day – the all-Muslim day of remembrance of “the occupation of Palestine” established by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini back in 1979. Hence, official Tehran now argues that self-survival is far more important for the Arab royal families than “the sacred Palestinian cause”.

At the same time, the conservative Arab leaders dread any direct confrontation with Iran. While they are eager to see the Mullahs’ regime vanish – they want the US and Israel to do the deed. Back in April 2008, King Abdallah urged the US to “cut off the head of the snake” by launching military strikes to destroy Iran’s strategic and nuclear programs. Riyadh offered to cover some of the US costs. This basic percept hasn’t changed and will not change.

Indeed, on 16 May, the *Arab News* urged the US to bomb Iran in response to the sabotage in Fujairah, as well as in order to protect and shield Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States. “The next logical step,” the Editorial read, “should be surgical strikes.” The US bombing of Syria “set a precedent” that had “a telling effect” on the entire region. The US should repeat and now bomb Iran. The *Arab News* advocated that the Iranians “must be hit hard. They need to be shown that the circumstances are now different.” The Editorial called for “a decisive, punitive reaction to what happened so that Iran knows that every single move they make will have consequences. The time has come for Iran not only to curb its nuclear weapon ambitions – again in the world’s interest – but also for the world to ensure that they do not have the means to support their terror networks across the region.” This is for the US to undertake and for the Arab royals to cheer from afar.

Indeed, in the current crisis, the Saudis and their UAE allies launched vast area bombings of Sanaa after the drone attacks – hitting mainly residential areas. But not a single bullet was fired at Iran despite the sabotage of the tankers and the sponsoring of Shiite insurgency and terrorism throughout the eastern Arabian Peninsula. There is even a growing reticence to permit the US to deploy more forces to the Arab states in order to confront Iran for fear of Iranian retribution – initially through Jihadist insurrection and terrorism (both Sunni and Shiite), but ultimately through heavy artillery and missile strikes that will completely destroy the region’s vast hydro-carbon infrastructure.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia continues to collapse from within. The purges by MBS of members of the House of al-Saud and other loyal elites continue. Desperate measures against the Sunni Islamists are considered. These include the planned beheading, soon after Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr (in early/mid June) of three prominent Islamist scholars and leaders – Salman al-Odah, Awad al-Qarni and Ali al-Omari – on charges of “terrorism”. The real dread in Riyadh is the Islamists’ delegitimization of the House of al-Saud as the Custodians of the Holy Shrines – thus opening the door to the Hashemite Shariefs of Mecca and their neo-Ottomans patrons. The leaders of the House of al-Saud are convinced they have the support of the Trump White House for these desperate moves because of their promises to spend money in the US.

\*

And so, Washington cynically manipulated legitimate intelligence warnings about Iran’s regional activities in order to insert the US as the center of the regional dynamics. The US did so by making the Persian Gulf the



likely point of regional explosion/eruption. The Trump White House intends to pressure Tehran further to accept negotiations with the US on a new nuclear deal (North Korea-style with summits and all). Qatar, Oman, Iraq, Switzerland and Germany are all desperately trying to defuse the face-off and establish communications and/or negotiations of sorts. In the process, the US is diverting attention from the ascent of “the Middle Eastern Entente” bloc, and especially Iran’s relentless push to the shores of the Mediterranean, to the chagrin of the US friends in the region.

For a few days, the Americans scared everybody. But then, the Iranians signaled indirectly, as they always do, their resolve to focus their wrath on the local powers – Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States – because they cheer and encourage the US and because they are most vulnerable. So now, the Arab “allies” are backing away from supporting the US undertaking ostensibly in their defense and shielding. Hence, the number of additional US troops to deploy to confront Iran and shield the Arabian Peninsula has dropped from 120,000 to 10,000 to 1,500 mainly because there are no local takers for these troops.

On 26 May, Tehran offered Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States a “non-aggression pact” and received a lot of positive interest from them. The gist of the Iranian offer is simple: Why should you Arabs pay the high price for the forthcoming clash between Iran and the US? If the Arabs stay out of the conflict by refusing to aid and abet the US – they will not get hurt by the Iranians, and their power, riches and hydro-carbon infrastructure will survive. There is a lot of interest in the offer from Tehran in both Riyadh and Abu Dhabi. As well, Saudi Arabia’s King Salman personally invited the Emir of Qatar Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani to the Mecca Summit in order to guarantee a direct channel of communications with Tehran.

Meanwhile, the US is desperate to find an honorable way out – by starting negotiations with Tehran – but Khamenei refuses adamantly to help the Americans in any shape and form. Iran is in no rush to end the conflict in the Persian Gulf. Tehran needs a little noisy crisis against the Great Satan so that the Mullahs can unify and mobilize the patriotic populace behind the flag despite the collapsing economy, growing hardships, the horrendous aftermath of the floods, and the increasingly rumbling minorities. The royal families of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States also need a crisis to divert attention from their own internal implosion and near collapse. They also yearn for a clear demonstration of Washington’s attention, protection and shielding – so as to scare the opposition into not attempting their overthrow because the US will prevent this from happening. The rise of oil prices as a result of a crisis in the Persian Gulf helps both sides, and is therefore welcome by everybody. Hence, a little provocation and crisis are great – that is, until the US takes them seriously and threatens to blow up the region to the detriment of the Saudi and Gulf States’ elites.

Meanwhile, the greater Middle East returns to the routine crises – from the Turkish and US support for the Jihadists, especially non-Arab, in Idlib; to the Turkish-Iranian destruction of the Fertile Crescent of Minorities, especially the Kurds; and, for Israel, the blocking of the Iranian surge to the Mediterranean and the build-up of Iranian proxy forces and their arsenals of rockets/missiles in the Gaza Strip and South Lebanon. As for the Saudis – they continue to implode because of their own inherent weaknesses and erratic policies.

\*\*\*

**Remarks:** Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author.





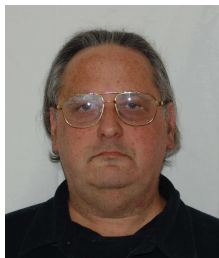
### About the Author of this Issue

---

Yossef Bodansky has been the Director of Research at the International Strategic Studies Association [ISSA], as well as a Senior Editor for the *Defense & Foreign Affairs* group of publications, since 1983. He was the Director of the Congressional Task Force on Terrorism and Unconventional Warfare at the U.S. House of Representatives between 1988 and 2004, and stayed on as a special adviser to Congress till January 2009. In the mid-1980s, he acted as a senior consultant for the U.S. Department of Defense and the Department of State.

He is the author of eleven books – including *Bin Laden: The Man Who Declared War on America* (New York Times No. 1 Bestseller & Washington Post No. 1 Bestseller), *The Secret History of the Iraq War* (New York Times Bestseller & Foreign Affairs Magazine Bestseller), and *Chechen Jihad: Al Qaeda's Training Ground and the Next Wave of Terror* – and hundreds of articles, book chapters and Congressional reports.

Mr Bodansky is a Director at the Prague Society for International Cooperation, and serves on the Board of the Global Panel Foundation and several other institutions worldwide.



Yossef Bodansky