

To: jeevacation@gmail.com[jeevacation@gmail.com]
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|----------------------------|--|
| | |
| Article 1. | Ahram Online <u>The Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty: To change or not to change</u> Abdel Moneim Said |
| Article 2. | The National Interest <u>Could Turkey Beat Syria?</u> Aaron Stein , Dov Friedman |
| Article 3. | Wall Street Journal <u>Iran's Mullahs Blame Mahmoud</u> Ilan Berman |
| Article 4. | The Washington Post <u>A conservative split over the Middle East</u> Fareed Zakaria |
| Article 5. | World Politics Review <u>The U.S. Must Limit Saudi Influence in Syria</u> |

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| | Frank J. Mirkow |
| <u>Article 6.</u> | The National Interest <u>The Kingdom Boils</u> <u>Steven Miller</u> |
| | |

Article 1.

Ahram Online

The Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty: To change or not to change

Abdel Moneim Said

10 Oct 2012 -- Some forces who participated in the revolution object to the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, although many add that their objection does not mean going to war. They of course realise that war, like love, must be between two sides and decisions are not taken unilaterally. Also, that the other party will decide whether it is in their interest to live with a no-war no-peace status once again, or go to war before Egypt regains its strength and the revolution succeeds in its development process, making it the “strong Egypt” Abdel-Moneim Abul-Futouh talked about.

That is what happened to Egypt after the Czech arms deals, and

Israel participated in the tripartite aggression against Egypt in 1956 to stifle Egypt's military might before it could progress it. Some of revolutionaries do not reject the treaty in its entirety but want to amend it so Egypt can regain complete sovereignty over Sinai. This would mean revising the security protocol appendix which divides Sinai into areas of limited arms in zones A, B and C and a corresponding Zone D in Israel. This is closely linked to a comprehensive monitoring system of troop movements by multinational forces present in Sinai.

The aim was to create a security system that prevents both Egypt and Israel from performing a strategic surprise against the other, as Israel had done in 1967 and Egypt against Israel in 1973. The real surprise for both sides came from a third party, the Islamist jihadists, who began during Mubarak's regime to carry out terrorist attacks in Sinai as well as breaching its border with Gaza through tunnels.

After the Egyptian Revolution, jihadists began attacking military and civilian targets, and then used Sinai to attack Israel.

This was not the image in the minds of those who signed the peace treaty and the security protocols, but this is the direct outcome of the military vacuum that was manipulated by other forces to directly threaten the security of both sides on a daily basis. There are ongoing battles with the Egyptian army which took a strategic decision to stamp out terrorist forces and close tunnels and single-handedly control decisions of war and peace with Israel.

Meanwhile, the Israeli army also battled the same forces which destabilised Sinai and is unacceptable for Egypt, because a precious part of its territories is under a dual threat. First, the threat of force against Egyptian security troops; second, the possibility of Israel giving chase to jihadists into Egyptian

territories which threatens Egypt's security and puts Egyptian territories at risk of being occupied once again. This would mean that Egypt has no other choice but to go to war with Israel once again.

This is not all happening in a vacuum. Some domestic revolutionary forces want to renounce the peace with Israel, and while they do not discuss the future of development under such a scenario the natural conclusion would be that development will be postponed indefinitely. Representing this current in political circles is Mohamed Esmat Seif El-Dawla, who has repeatedly said that revising the peace treaty is only a matter of time.

This angered the Israelis, and President Morsi's spokesman Yasser Ali quickly responded that the president's advisers are expressing their personal opinions and Egypt's position of upholding the peace treaty has not changed.

These contradictory statements in top political circles are the result of contradictions on the ground in Egypt that need to be addressed with determined seriousness, so we can decide our agenda of discussions about Egypt's national priorities. Today, we want to develop Sinai from corner to corner and for this reason and others we must secure it from corner to corner, whether from a variety of terrorist groups or an attack by Israel. Achieving these goals is not possible without revising the security protocols of the peace treaty to allow Egyptian troops to enter with necessary forces to end the current threat. The problem here is that Israel, and perhaps even the US, must first agree to these revisions. Thus far, they have done so on a temporary basis because of current conditions.

This is perhaps the first serious national security issue that President Morsi has to deal with and should rely on his well-

known trait of prudence. This position cannot be subject to revolutionary bartering or party manoeuvring. Perhaps the president should form a group of national security and foreign policy officials to manage the issue and negotiate with foreign parties responsible for implementing the security protocols. One other matter remains, which the president himself raised, which is the relationship between the peace treaty and the Palestinian cause which is an integral part of the Camp David agreement that is linked to Egypt's peace with Israel and guarantees the Palestinian people are given their legitimate rights.

This is an even more complex issue because so far there has been no specific Egyptian approach in dealing with the issue, and it is unknown if Cairo is willing to exert a special effort to relaunch the peace process after the US elections. Or whether Egypt's approach is to leave the matter to the key players, the Palestinians and Israelis, to decide. It is a subject that requires a lot of thought and clear direction, because for seven decades this issue has been a priority for Egypt's national security.

Article 2.

The National Interest

Could Turkey Beat Syria?

Aaron Stein, Dov Friedman

October 10, 2012 -- As the first news broke last week that a second Syrian artillery shell had struck Akcakale and killed five

civilians, Turkey had already begun taking decisive action. Turkey immediately returned fire, and the following day, parliament approved the prime minister's request to conduct cross-border military operations. The armed forces have since responded to every errant Syrian artillery strike by shelling military targets inside Syria. Having met both the shooting down of a Turkish F-4 and the first artillery shell fired at Turkey with a mix of stern words and troop deployments on the border, Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) government determined that this time Syria had gone too far. Or—to crib an old adage—Assad's army had committed its third strike.

If military action seemed a natural response, the manner in which Turkey retaliated proved telling. In response to a Syrian artillery shell, Turkey fired numerous rounds of artillery back, claiming to have used radar to hit the source of the deadly Syrian shell. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan stressed that the strikes were not acts of warfare; they were merely intended to reestablish deterrence. In words and actions, it would seem, proportionality inspired Turkey's underlying military approach.

Just-war theorist Michael Walzer long has argued that proportionality works to counteract the aims—and not just the actions—of an opposing hostile force. Yet Turkey's proportional response may stem less from high-mindedness and more from a startlingly limited array of options. Turkey's intelligence-collection capabilities are limited, making target selection difficult and the possibility of air strikes remote. While it could have sent military aircraft to strike Syrian sites, Syria's capable air defenses complicated the decision. Turkey remembers very well what Syrian air defenses can do to a

Turkish fighter jet, and the potential for casualties factored into Turkey's response.

Erdogan and other AKP officials have periodically floated a buffer zone, and in theory, Turkey might have taken advantage of this opportunity to follow through on its oft-repeated threat. Turkey could have argued it needed to invade to push Syrian artillery out of range of Turkish cities and villages. However, deploying ground forces over five civilian deaths would have thrust Turkey even deeper into the Syrian conflict and risked moving too far out in front of its Western and Arab allies. The Erdogan government alone simply could not risk igniting full-scale conflict with Syria, nor could it risk being reined in by the intervention-wary members of NATO.

The Turkish response likely will continue to be tit-for-tat artillery strikes alongside interventionist rhetoric—feinting to help reestablish deterrence. The response fits neatly into a narrative of proportionality and helps assuage domestic frustration with the AKP's handling of the crisis. Turkey appears intent on managing tensions with Syria and preventing them from dragging Turkey into Syria's internal conflict. Thus, Turkey may have wisely cloaked its narrow retaliatory options in the language of proportionality.

Though the threat of escalation remains remote and the government seems committed to avoiding war, Turkey still faces an impossible situation: its involvement in the Syrian conflict deepens as its policy options fail to broaden. In part, this reflects forces outside Turkey's control. Within NATO, Turkey invoked Article IV, and the ambassadors released a joint statement condemning Syrian aggression. However, the alliance has shown

little appetite for intervention, and Turkey has refrained from invoking Article V, which would obligate NATO to aid in Turkey's defense, though not necessarily result in a NATO decision to use military force. The United States, for its part, has refused direct Turkish appeals to support the Syrian conflict militarily.

However, Turkey's precarious situation stems in part from circumstances of its own making. Caught up in its growing regional stature and increasingly fond of liberal internationalism's Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine, the AKP government miscalculated deeply in threatening independent action in Syria earlier this year. Such bluster without the considerable tools necessary to carry out its threats constituted a major error in the AKP government's foreign policy. Turkey's wisely tempered response to Syria's brazen downing of the Turkish F-4 merely accentuated the incongruity of its threats and capabilities. Thus, when Syria struck again and killed civilians, Turkey's unexecuted threats necessitated a response—if only to maintain a shred of credibility.

Ankara's options were limited from the outset, but breakdowns in relations with regional neighbors have exacerbated the problem. Deteriorated relations with Israel—a major and motivated seller of advanced arms—have hampered the Turkish military's modernization efforts. If Ankara continues pursuing its liberal R2P policy, rapprochement with its former military partner would help Turkey transition from vision to action. But absent significant technological upgrades, Turkey's ability to achieve its political goals through the use of force remains limited. Israel fashioned Turkey with advanced avionics for its warplanes and drone technology (Turkey already owns six

Israeli-made Herons), and the two collaborated closely on intelligence sharing.

Since the Mavi Marmara incident in which Israeli forces clashed with Turkish civilians—killing nine—aboard a ship attempting to break the Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip, Turkey has downgraded relations, primarily over Israel’s unwillingness to apologize. The AKP government has at times gone out of its way to remind Israel that frosty relations have costs, ensuring Israel’s absence from Chicago’s NATO summit and demanding that the early warning radar system on Turkish soil supply no intelligence outside the NATO alliance. Yet the costs to Turkey have mounted as well. Without access to Israeli military technology, Turkey relies even more heavily on the United States, which contributed minimally in the latest flare-up between Turkey and Syria.

The lack of military systems needed to carry out Turkey’s numerous threats has undermined Ankara’s attempts at coercing Assad to make concessions. While military confrontation was always unlikely, Assad has appeared unconcerned with Turkish threats on numerous occasions. Damascus quietly dismissed Turkey’s loud proclamations on possible unilateral intervention—eroding the threat of credible action and undermining Ankara’s overall policy objectives. The shelling, therefore, should not be viewed as the precursor to war but as Turkey enacting the most limited means of reprisal.

Recent months have underscored a long-standing problem for Turkey: it remains reliant on multilateral action and on U.S. assistance to carry out military operations. While Turkey’s ability to carry out sustained air operations will remain limited

for some time, it has worked to develop independent capability to carry out quick, retaliatory strikes against well-defended targets. The government has focused these efforts on purchasing front-line fighter aircraft from the United States and drones from the United States and Israel, while concurrently developing a more capable domestic arms industry. Yet U.S. reluctance to sell Turkey armed drones, the ongoing diplomatic stalemate with Jerusalem and the slow pace of procurement have stymied Turkey's progress.

In the coming years, the pace and scope of Turkey's arms purchases will indicate what lessons the AKP government learned from its experience in Syria. Will Ankara continue its slow military-modernization reforms, or will the current crisis prompt the Turkish armed forces to expedite purchase of weapons systems coveted for nearly a decade? Conversely, will the limits of military solutions prompt the government to tack away from its liberal-internationalist, R2P-tinged rhetoric? The answers to these questions will reveal how Turkey views its future role in the region.

Aaron Stein is a doctoral candidate at King's College, London. Dov Friedman is a research associate in foreign policy at the SETA foundation in Ankara.

Article 3.

Wall Street Journal

Iran's Mullahs Blame Mahmoud

Ilan Berman

October 10, 2012 -- You've got to feel a little sorry for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. With his nuclear brinksmanship and inflammatory public rhetoric, Iran's firebrand president is accustomed to hogging the international spotlight. But recent days have seen him making news for a different reason entirely. Ahmadinejad is now fighting for his political life against domestic opponents who blame him for the country's current fiscal crisis.

The trouble began on Oct. 1, when Iran's national currency, the rial, plummeted some 17%, collapsing to a value of 34,700 to one U.S. dollar. The devaluation was not totally unexpected: The rial had been in steady decline over the past year as Western sanctions began to bite. Even so, the Oct. 1 plunge was unprecedented in its scope and devastating in its socioeconomic impact. Mass protests erupted in Tehran, forcing authorities to deploy riot police and resulting in skirmishes between civilians and security forces.

Since then, regime officials have announced a plan to crack down on speculators and black-market money changers in an effort to discourage a run on the rial. Illegal currency traders have been rounded up as cautionary examples.

But the long knives are out for Iran's president as well. Most recently, some 93 members of Iran's legislature, the Majlis, have issued a motion summoning Ahmadinejad to appear before them for a public accounting of his response to the economic crisis. Regime officials have also taken aim at the president, accusing

him of firing competent ministers and playing politics with key government posts under his control.

For the Iranian regime, desperately trying to get a handle on the plummeting national currency, Ahmadinejad makes a convenient scapegoat on several fronts.

First, Iran's president is no longer a favorite of the country's clerical establishment. The past two years have seen the emergence of a real rift between Ahmadinejad and his onetime political protector, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, on a range of social, economic and political issues. So profound has this rupture become that Ahmadinejad and his followers are now pejoratively referred to as the "deviant current." Calls for their ouster from national politics were commonplace even before the rial crisis.

Ahmadinejad, secondly, has a long track record of ruinous fiscal policies—ones that almost certainly have made the current crisis worse, perhaps significantly. During his nearly eight years in office, Iran's president has increased government spending, doubled down on the regime's extensive and costly domestic economic subsidies, and promoted "Islamic" banking rates that have made the country's financial institutions increasingly uncompetitive. He has done so, moreover, against the advice of domestic experts and leading economists alike, generating no shortage of popular ill will in the process.

Lastly, Ahmadinejad is already on his way out. He is nearing the end of his second term and cannot run for a third in next summer's elections. And thanks to his very public falling-out with the Supreme Leader, Ahmadinejad is no longer a serious

contender for any government appointments or political posts following his presidency. This means, in political terms, that making an example out of him will likely prove cost-free.

None of this will help to ameliorate Iran's current crisis, or to solve the dire economic straits that ordinary Iranians find themselves in as a result of the regime's nuclear ambitions. But scapegoating Ahmadinejad—and administering a healthy dose of domestic repression—may help the regime to quell popular discontent as it tries to right the economy. The ayatollahs, at least, are banking on it.

Mr. Berman is vice president of the American Foreign Policy Council in Washington, D.C.

Article 4.

The Washington Post

A conservative split over the Middle East

Fareed Zakaria

10 October -- Mitt Romney's speech on foreign affairs this week was surprisingly moderate. Rhetorically it was full of sound and fury but, on closer examination, it signified no major change of policy. Romney affirmed the timetable for withdrawal from

Afghanistan; he did not propose sending troops back into Iraq and did not advocate military strikes on Iran. He pledged to work toward a two-state solution in the Middle East. He even left out the belligerence toward China that had been a staple of his speeches in recent months.

Romney proposed one policy shift, toward Syria. But even there — in a carefully worded, passive construction — he did not announce that as president, he would arm the Syrian opposition, merely that he would “ensure they obtain the arms they need.” The “they” is “those members of the opposition who share our values.” So, Romney’s sole divergence from current policy is that we should try harder to find non-Islamists among the Syrian rebels and encourage Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar to give them more arms.

Romney’s moderation is partly a continuation of his pivot to the center. But it also reflects the lack of consensus among conservatives on what to do about the turmoil in the Middle East. Romney’s most spirited rhetorical attack was against President Obama’s policies in the wake of the Arab Spring. Referring to the murder of U.S. Ambassador Chris Stevens in Benghazi, Romney asserted that “the attacks on America last month should not be seen as random acts. They are expressions of a larger struggle that is playing out across the broader Middle East.” The problem is, conservatives are deeply divided about this struggle.

Recently, Intelligence Squared, a feisty forum in New York, held a debate on the proposition “Better Elected Islamists Than Dictators,” referring to the choices the United States confronts in the Middle East. The lead speaker for the proposition was a

prominent conservative intellectual, Reuel Marc Gerecht. The

lead speaker against was . . . a prominent conservative

intellectual, Daniel Pipes. That's a reflection of the state of conservative thought on the issue.

On the one hand, we see commentators such as Romney adviser John Bolton and TV anchor Sean Hannity, who believe that the Obama administration should have tried to keep Hosni Mubarak in power in Egypt. Last month Hannity described the emerging democratic system in Egypt as "the rise of violence, hate, Islamic extremism, madness and death." On the other hand, we see Paul Wolfowitz and others celebrate the fall of Arab tyrannies, wishing only that Obama had been quicker to support the transition to elections.

This debate is important. Over the next few decades, the Middle East could become home to the rise of "illiberal democracy" — countries with many elections but few individual rights — or to a gradual evolution toward pluralism and the rule of law. But as Hannity's comments suggest, this discussion is being superseded on the right by a visceral reaction to Islam and Islamism that is neither accurate nor helpful in understanding what is happening in the region.

The heart of the problem in the Arab world is that the old order was highly unstable. Repressive regimes such as Egypt's had, over decades, created extreme opposition movements. That opposition often became violent and attacked the United States

for supporting those dictatorships. In other words, U.S. support for Mubarak, the Saudi monarchy and other such regimes fueled the terrorist groups that attacked us on Sept. 11, 2001.

Al-Qaeda understands that if the Arab world democratizes, it loses the core of its ideological appeal — which is why al-Qaeda's leader, Ayman Zawahiri, wrote a book condemning the Muslim Brotherhood's decision to support and participate in Egypt's democratic process.

We might despair over a particular statement or policy from the new Egyptian president. But the larger reality is that the Arab world now has elected leaders with real legitimacy — and many of them have denounced al-Qaeda and other jihadist groups and are trying to reconcile Islam and democracy. Should we oppose them? That's why Romney, in the end, proposes that we work with elected governments of Libya and Egypt and try to push them in the right direction.

There is one place where a resolutely secular dictatorship is in trouble — from an opposition movement that has within it radical Islamic forces. So, those who truly believe that it is better to back secular dictators than to gamble on the prospects of political Islam should be supporting the regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria.

The U.S. Must Limit Saudi Influence in Syria

Frank J. Mirkow

10 Oct 2012 -- As the civil war in Syria becomes more acute, the United States must reassess its strategy toward that key Middle Eastern state, in particular, its stance on the role that Saudi Arabia has been playing in the Syrian conflict. Continued Saudi influence in Syria will only further destabilize the situation on the ground, undermine U.S. interests in the region and dim the prospects for a future democratic Syria.

In the wake of the Bush administration's interventions in Afghanistan and, more disastrously, in Iraq, the Obama administration has been circumspect in its involvement in the Middle East. It has lent rhetorical support to the Arab Spring, while calibrating its policies to circumstances on the ground and U.S. interests. It has properly been reticent to add a third armed conflict in the Muslim world to the U.S. agenda. The administration acted militarily in Libya only with a mandate from both the United Nations Security Council and the Arab League, and then allowed others, notably France, to do the heavy lifting. This approach has been criticized as "leading from behind," but it reflects a proper understanding of the limits of U.S. power and influence in the region.

In Syria, too, the Obama administration has been cautious. It has led the effort in the U.N. to impose sanctions on the Syrian regime and been active in providing nonlethal support to the Syrian opposition. On the ground, however, it is Saudi Arabia,

and to a lesser extent, Qatar, that have been supplying the anti-Assad forces with weapons and financing. Whether as a U.S. proxy, in coordination with U.S. intelligence agencies or purely on its own initiative, Saudi Arabia is positioning itself as the primary source of financial, political and military support for the anti-regime forces in Syria. At a recent Gulf Cooperation Council summit, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal went so far as to call the arming of the Syrian opposition a “duty.” Such a policy may serve the interests of the Saudi kingdom by undermining a key ally of its strategic adversary, Iran, but the results could spell disaster for U.S. interests and the future of Syria.

As it has in other conflicts throughout the Muslim world, Saudi Arabia is expanding its influence in Syria by arming and funding those elements of the opposition whose aims are limited to the establishment of a narrowly defined Sunni, Salafist government, one that takes its religious inspiration from the Wahabi government in Riyadh. Such an approach will only alienate the secularly oriented segments of the Syrian opposition as well as those religious minorities -- Christians, Shiites and others -- that are already wary of the opposition’s goals for a future Syria. Though these religious minorities often find the Assad regime distasteful, they see the minority Alawite government in Damascus as the last layer of protection between them and the Sunni mass movements taking control throughout the region. In addition to narrowing the base of support for the Syrian opposition, Saudi support for the religious extremist segments of the opposition will strike a blow against the future prospects for Syrian democracy. No government is more singularly unsuited to the fostering of a pluralistic democracy in Syria than the tribal absolute monarchy of Saudi Arabia. The nature of the Saudi

regime guarantees that when it comes to postconflict reconstruction in Syria, the Saudis will be hostile to any form of government that does not hold a narrowly defined version of Sunni Islam at its center.

Last, a Syrian government brought to power and buttressed primarily by Saudi support would likely become an immediate target of Iranian meddling. Tehran's overt and covert interference in Lebanese and Iraqi politics suggests that the Islamic Republic would not hesitate to intervene in the affairs of a post-Assad Syria if it perceived that its interests were threatened in the region.

Each of these outcomes would be a direct result of Saudi Arabia's current policies in Syria, and each is inimical to U.S. interests. U.S. policy in Syria should shift to a more active footing to counter Saudi influence. With or without Security Council support, the U.S. should work closely with its European and regional allies, Turkey in particular, to create a safe corridor through which to supply select secular elements in the Syrian opposition. More than anything, the U.S. must make its presence felt with the Syrian resistance and must, within the limits of its resources, influence the composition and tenor of a future Syrian state.

While the administration's reticence to escalate its involvement in Syria is understandable, Saudi Arabia's unobstructed interference in the Syrian conflict is likely to produce a political outcome that undermines both American interests and the prospects for a democratic Syria.

Frank J. Mirkow is a Washington, D.C.-based international attorney. He has lived for several years in Saudi Arabia and has

worked and traveled extensively in the region.

Article 6.

The National Interest

The Kingdom Boils

Steven Miller

October 10, 2012 -- The coat of arms of the House of Saud. Nearly a month after a crude film caricature of the Prophet Muhammad made headlines, protests in response to it continue across the Muslim world. Yet in the ultraconservative Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, home to the holiest sites in Islam, people are protesting over more fundamental issues and setting their sights on the government itself.

Nowhere is unrest more evident than in the Eastern Province, home to the country's key oil installations and most of its minority Shiite population. According to Saudi activist Ali Al Ahmed, the largest protest ever in the Eastern Province happened last weekend, when tens of thousands of angry mourners carried [3] the bodies of three young Shiite men slain [4] by Saudi security forces through the streets of Awwamiya as they chanted [5] "Death to al-Saud."

For decades, the downtrodden Shiites have agitated now and then against Saudi repression, but protests in the Eastern Province assumed new urgency in mid-July, when security forces shot and wounded, then arrested [6] popular Shiite cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr for instigating “sedition.”

Daily protests in Qatif Province continued throughout July and August, ultimately prompting incursions [7] by Saudi security forces that further escalated the tensions. Then, on September 2, security forces arrested Hussain al-Rabia, a young man in Awwamiya whom they contend [8] was responsible for “killing and injuring a number of innocent people and security men.” When al-Rabia allegedly injured his foot in a shootout, Saudi authorities transported him to a military hospital for treatment, but his whereabouts are now unknown. Following the recent escalation, Shiite anger is simmering.

It is no accident that the growing Shiite agitation follows [9] the death, in June, of Crown Prince Nayef bin Abdul Aziz, the interior minister who notoriously commanded the kingdom’s brutal internal-security apparatus for decades. Shiites in the Eastern Province hated Nayef for his repressive policies and even burned pictures of him [10] in the streets. As it turns out, they also dislike Nayef’s successor, his younger brother Ahmed. Although Ahmed is quickly becoming the new public enemy, he lacks Nayef’s strongman reputation, which has emboldened activists to challenge the regime.

Much to the chagrin of the monarchy, unrest in the Eastern Province has proven contagious, spreading all the way to Sunni activists in Riyadh. Last month, authorities put prominent human-rights activists Mohammed al-Qahtani and Abdullah al-

Hamid, cofounders of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association, on trial for inciting public opinion, breaking allegiance to the king and turning international organizations against the country, among other charges.

The trial sparked heated debates online and drew heavy criticism from Saudi social-media users, some of whom even live tweeted the proceedings. In a country that conducts many political trials in secrecy, this marked a real shift and one of the first significant protests against human-rights abuses outside of the Eastern Province.

The courtroom scene quickly became a media circus, at least by Saudi standards. When asked to give statements in their defense, both men lashed out at the government for silencing human-rights defenders. Hamid even directly challenged the judge—who was also the prosecutor—for simultaneously claiming judicial independence and asserting that peaceful protests are only acceptable with the permission of the king.

Indifferent to their defenses, the judge barred spectators from future hearings and ordered Qahtani and Hamid to rewrite their statements. The two men refused and walked out of the courtroom. When the trial resumed this past Saturday, they tried persuading the judge to allow publicity of the trial. The judge rebuffed their requests, and again, the men walked out. They still await a verdict in the case.

But the outrage over this trial pales in comparison to the anger of Saudi prisoners' families, who have been demonstrating against arbitrary detentions and torture in the kingdom's prisons

since early June, when packs of young Sunni men marched through the Sahara [14] and Hayat [15] shopping malls in Riyadh—another rare scene in the country’s capital.

Later that month, riots [16] broke out inside the massive al-Ha’ir Prison near Riyadh, where the Saudi government houses many inmates accused of security offenses, which can range from jihadi activity to legitimate human-rights activism. Throughout Ramadan, from late July into August, prisoners’ families began congregating outside of the prison to demonstrate [17] for their release. Similar protests also spread to Buraida [18] and Dammam [19].

Of course, indefinite detention [20] and torture [21] in Saudi prisons is nothing new. But the relentless protests against them are truly extraordinary in a country that bans protests outright. Despite the restrictions, activists seem to grow bolder by the day.

On September 10, dozens of prisoners’ relatives descended upon [22] the public prosecutor’s office in Riyadh, where they staged a two-day sit-in until the prosecutor agreed to meet with them on the spot. Only days later, for the first time ever [23], banners sprang up [24] throughout the capital that read “Al-Ha’ir Political Prisoners in Danger,” “Stop Torture . . . Inside Prisons” and “Families of Prisoners [demand] . . . Release Our Relatives.”

On September 24, more than one hundred people congregated [25] in the desert outside of Tarfiya prison in Qassim Province to demand justice for relatives they claim are unjustly imprisoned. In response, police blockaded them without food or

water and refused to let them leave. The same day, dozens more protesters gathered in front of the Human Rights Commission in Riyadh with similar complaints.

As the unrest continues, Saudi officials deny [26] that any wrongdoing occurs inside the country's prisons and scoff at reports that the kingdom holds thousands of prisoners of conscience. And even amidst the calls to release the prisoners, the Shura Council, an all-appointed legislative body, recently supported [27] amending a law that would lower the legal standards for carrying out executions and allow Saudi courts to approve indefinite periods of detention for prisoners.

That's business as usual for the House of Saud. But in a kingdom that frequently denies citizens basic rights, ordinary Saudis are showing they need little Western provocation to spark their rage.

Steven Miller is research associate at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies and coauthor of Facebook Fatwa: Saudi Clerics, Wahhabi Islam and Social Media.