

[Transcript] Genstart / Mellemøstens dødsfjender

Iran has blamed Saudi Arabia for being behind the first terrorist attack.

Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince has blamed Iran for a series of attacks on oil tankers in a vital Gulf shipping channel.

This morning Iranian officials are denying that they're behind a series of brazen drone attacks against a pair of giant oil facilities over in Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Crown Prince said and I quote,

The Kingdom does not want war in the region.

We don't want the new Hitler in Iran to repeat what happened in Europe in the Middle East.

In the past, they have been better rivals.

The tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran continue to echo throughout the Persian Gulf.

Their enmity pierces the entire Middle East.

The war in Yemen, the war in Syria, Iraq and Lebanon.

But now the conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia is also being called the Cold War between the Middle East.

Maybe it will dry up.

The two major powers have rejected and reaffirmed the diplomatic bond.

Saudi Arabia has recently invited the Iranian president to official visit.

So can Iran and Saudi Arabia's agreement create a more peaceful middle east?

It's starting again today.

My name is Thomas T. Iranzen.

Hilla, did you in your wildest imagination imagine that Iran and Saudi Arabia would suddenly change color?

They have been one of my dreams, but I was very surprised.

The conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia has been called the Cold War between the Middle East.

What does it mean?

It is cold in this way that the two countries have been rivaled in autism, but without being a direct war on their territory.

Instead, they have fought on other territories.

And then it is also a cold war in this way that Denmark has dealt not only with weapons, but also a kind of propaganda.

While trying to get mobilized more support in the people and the government on each side.

Helem Malmvi is a senior researcher at the Danish Institute for International Studies.

I have lived and travelled in the Middle East for the last 30 years.

Where she works with international politics in the Middle East.

And researched in it maybe, I should say the last 20 years.

So you also have a great love for this surrounding world?

Yes, I have. Right after I was very young when I travelled down the world to Israel and Palestine and Egypt.

What did you do in the Middle East that made you fall in love?

There were so many things.

What is it about?

Now we are completely back after the gymnasium.

I was 18 years old and a little naive, I think.

Where I came up with an idea that we had already been able to go. And then I met some Egyptians

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who saw it completely different.

And started to wonder how they would throw Western imperial troops out.

And we had a long discussion about that, where we sat in a small urban town.

And for me it was a huge open eye, because it was the first time I met that there were actually some who saw it on us.

And saw the world in a completely different way than I had learned.

The fascination of the Middle East does not stop in the Middle East.

Quickly she begins to be interested in two of the most powerful countries of the region, Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Yes, but that is the part of the world's two biggest strengths. You could say that in general, it is the two superpowers that fight for influence and define what should be the cause of ideology.

So the two have not only fought this Cold War in the conflicts, but also fought for where it is good to lie in relation to the West and imperialism.

Which number is it that should be linked in relation to issues of Islam, but also in relation to how revolutionary one is.

How do you feel about this bad relationship between these two superpowers that they have worked?

The part of my work is also about meeting foreign ministers and diplomats.

The conflict has been clear and has always been on the agenda. When a Saudi Arab minister comes to visit, he has not done much other than talking about Iran, Iran, Iran.

And when I have been in Tehran, Saudi Arabia has also felt a thing.

But in such a way, I would say, a kind of honey, where these diplomats sit and think like this and say, Saudi Arabia is obsessed with us.

And they are a piece of paper, and they are a little brother.

You have been in both countries yourself. What is Iran's capital, Tehran, for a city?

First of all, it is a huge city. About double the size of Copenhagen.

It is also a city that is quite well cleaned.

And then it is surrounded by mountains.

And then it is the prey of the many and ten with strange sanctions.

For example, it is the old cars and many of them that drive around. And if you take such an open tax, then it can be something that drives from the 50s to the 60s.

But it is also a city where there is a lot of street life.

And in the northern part of the country, there is a lot of memory of what we know from one of the most western big cities.

There you go straight out of some of the northern parts of the country.

There can be women with good health, who are at home and with dry clothes hanging. Or maybe it is not.

And how does Saudi Arabia's capital react so from Tehran?

It is quite different.

Even though they are both a little bit sad that Islam and some conservatives are dying, it is really more like Los Angeles.

It has been made out of grit with big eight-speed motorways and huge exhaust pipes.

And then it is spread out.

It is more than the American model, where you are all the time in your car. And these cars, that has nothing to do with the 60s and the 60s.

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It is a huge SUV that drives around.

Even though it was really opened up and the women do not need to have clothes on.

But it is still so far away that most of them have it.

So they have this whole sort of clothes and then they have dry clothes on.

And then on some stretches they are really a little more conservative clothes than you would see in Tehran.

Generally, it is so properly filled with clothes, shoes and big magazines filled with all these generic clothes.

Good shoes, massage shoes and so on.

It is not only in the street picture that the two countries are fighting each other.

In turn, they have criticized each other as political opponents in the Middle East.

Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince has blamed Iran for a series of attacks on oil tankers in a vital Gulf shipping channel.

But earlier in the month, representatives from the two countries suddenly smiled at each other.

Iran and Saudi Arabia are announcing that they will be restoring diplomatic relations after seven years of estrangement and tensions.

For the time being, the two countries have presented such a fair and six-packed deal.

What exactly is the deal going on?

We do not know all the details of the deal, but more and more elements have come forward.

The first part is that they will re-establish their diplomatic relations, which was used back in 2016.

And already now we have heard that there has been invited to visit.

I think it is Riyadh who has invited Iran to visit.

King Salman of Saudi Arabia sent him an invitation to visit Riyadh.

Why was it so unexpected that these two rivals attacked the war?

Because they have a long history of kindness.

And their writing has been defining for the entire region.

It has been meaningful for all the conflicts and fire points we know and what to keep in mind.

To understand the conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia, we must go back to 1999.

It was the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979 that fundamentally changed the relationship.

Here Iranians are streaming in the streets in protest against the Iranian monarch Shah.

The dissidents end up in a revolution.

And since the fall of Halakzah, Iran is an Islamic republic with a press government.

Why is the relationship so central if you need to understand their rivalry?

The revolution in Iran is an Islamic revolution.

Because it was an initiative that was closely aligned with the West.

And in that way, Iran and Saudi Arabia are one another.

And now suddenly a revolutionary rule is coming.

Both monarchies, including Saudi Arabia, became a key target.

Because Mecca and Medina are in Saudi Arabia.

And now suddenly another state is coming and saying that we have another revolution in Islam.

And we will not only appeal to Shia Muslims, but also to Sunni Muslims.

So Iran is throwing their Shah on the board.

And then they say that our Islamic revolution is the right way to understand Islam.

To look out in the rest of the Middle East, to look at Saudi Arabia, they do not feel the right standard

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that we now show you.

Yes, but I am a little bit on the sidelines, you can only do it in Islam.

And that's why I have this revolutionary element with me.

Because for Iran it is so important that they talk to the masses.

And that they also talk against imperialism, against Western integration and against military alliances with the West.

But the West is just as much what it is about.

And it is not to say that Islam also has a place to play, but it is just not alone.

So it is also the criticism that Saudi Arabia has a close relationship with the West.

Yes, and also that it is regimes that are dictatorial, that are illiterate,

that do not give the final part in, for example, oil wells.

That there is such a big class difference in the Middle East.

Ironically, of course, Iran has also developed itself into a regime that is dictatorial and has stood on the side of the repressive regime.

And where there has also been a lot of power over the class that has come close to a regime.

How much has this political rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia

experienced in the Middle East's many other conflicts since then?

Yes, but there is almost nothing to say about it.

The conflict between the two has put a pressure on all the major conflicts that we almost know in the world.

It is the war in Yemen, the war in Syria, Iraq and Lebanon, as a medium.

In the cold water on the Arabian side, there are conflicts in several of the Middle East countries.

And that puts the rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia,

which is leading instead of fighting against each other in several of the areas of the region.

So they have been involved in the conflicts on each side.

Have they given weapons and gave money or given them political support?

It is something that has been involved in keeping a conflict in place.

So this creates an extra layer on all the local conflicts.

And it has also caused the conflicts to be very difficult to solve,

because you would not just have to have local parties to talk about a gold compromise.

But you would also have the next level of Iran and Saudi Arabia.

If we look at Yemen, how specifically can you see that this long-term conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia is playing in here?

Yes, it is partly a place for the third world war, but Saudi Arabia is directly involved in the war.

And the bombings in Yemen have been carried out since 2015 on the road,

which is what is called the central government.

And among other things, they fight the hostages,

who have gradually developed to support Iran with weapons, money and political support.

This means that the conflict has not only become a local and ethnic conflict,

but also a place for the third conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Which interest does the country have in entering such a place for the third war?

Why does Iran have an interest in supporting the hostages?

Yes, it can be a way to get Saudi Arabia banked in place,

and get less of their regional market. It is something that we have actually seen both in Syria and in

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Yemen.

Just before Iran, it also means that it is a way for them to lead security policies, so that they can use what they have their local allies.

The hostages, for example, in Yemen or different Shia militias in Iraq, they can use it if they are attacked by the USA, so they can get their local allies to attack again. For example in Saudi Arabia, which they have done several times.

So, without Iran and Saudi Arabia's friendship, would many of these other conflicts of the Middle East have developed as violent as they have done? Yes, it would be my thesis that they would not have been so far away and so violent.

Today Saudi Arabia cut ties with Iran, giving Iranian diplomats 48 hours to leave the kingdom.

In 2016, the whole of Qatar, Iran and Saudi Arabia ended their diplomatic relations. What is happening?

There is a Saudi Arabist Shia teacher who is being threatened.

It's been a tense 48 hours since Saudi Arabia executed 47 prisoners on terrorism charges, including a prominent Shia cleric Nimr al-Nimr.

He has triggered the more revolutionary issue of Islam.

And that leads to enormous protests in Iran.

Video footage shared via social media, as the Saudi Arabian embassy in Tehran is set ablaze.

You should imagine that when there is a protest against the Saudi Arabian embassy, it can only happen because the Iranian regime has sent someone to the city.

And they run the embassy inside the ransacked embassy, fires burn and furniture lies smashed from the siege.

And that's why Saudi Arabia is trying to cut ties with their diplomatic relations.

But it could have been a heavy burden.

It was just the drugs that got it to happen.

At this point in time, you are actually part of a project that is about getting Saudi Arabia and Iran together.

It sounds like a difficult task. How is it going?

The project is actually about getting rid of anything related to the war in Syria.

And then there were me and some of the members of the British think tank.

But then we have to get into Saudi Arabia and Iran first.

I hope that there could be an arrangement where there will be some connections and you can talk a little bit together.

And we get some representatives to Copenhagen.

But it can't be any better than when we start talking about Syria, and then some of the others are in Iran with Iran on one side and Saudi Arabia on the other side.

When we get to the middle of it, it's like the Saudi representative doesn't meet us at all.

My heart is sad, of course, and we also try to call the hotel, but we can't get him.

The Syrian opposition is more or less talking about one of the Iranian representatives.

So you felt that you had a hand in the web, and it didn't go well?

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Yes. When I look at it today, I think that we just got a little bit deeper. The subsequent years are connected between Iran and Saudi Arabia at a zero point. This Saudi leadership much more than its predecessors is obsessed with the Iranians. The war in Yemen continues, and the relationship between the two major powers is fixed. But in March, suddenly, there is a conclusion. Iran and Saudi Arabia are announcing that they will be restoring diplomatic relations after seven years of estrangement and tensions. The two countries present a diplomatic agreement with China as a measure. The deal was negotiated though with the help of the guy in the middle, China. It seems, when you talk about the relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia, that it is a rather unconvincing conflict. Why is it so now that there is just beginning to be such a gap between them? Well, there will be more people who have been sitting and lying in the pan, or in the hair, or wherever you are lying. And then, in the after view, you can of course find some explanations here. For Iran, I think it has been a lot about the economy. They are international press, because of the sanctions, and because these atom negotiations have gone completely dead. And there are also a lot of internal protests about an economy that is in laser. So they want to be happy for something more, and be happy for the poor money China has given us to write. And when it comes to Saudi Arabia, it is a bit more moody. I have several reasons why. The only thing is enough about Yemen. Now Saudi Arabia would like to have the war ended, and that is always the first thing that happens between them and Iran. The other thing, and maybe hang a little bit with it, is that Saudi Arabia has this modernization strategy called Vision 2030. And with that, they would like to open Saudi Arabia for foreign investments, and also do it for tourism. A bit like Dubai. And that requires that they work with their image. So I came to think about it. I think it's just a year's time when they had a Formula 1 race, and it was the day before, or two days before, there was an attack from the U.D. A missile attack on an oil depot just kilometers from the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix. It doesn't really matter with the story about the exciting Formula 1, and the new modern Saudi Arabia, but also risking getting a rocket in its head. So Iran is on the brink of a lot of things, and also very economically. And Saudi Arabia, they can't really hate that there are conflicts

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just like their coast,
so these two things are a good explanation
of why you look at each other and say,
we actually have a field of interest in getting this solved.
It gives them both some instruments to go into a conversation,
and then there is a huge international power in the middle
to be able to connect the ends together.
If this conversation goes as it looks
to the fact that you are actually giving each other a slap
that now there are things to think about,
how big can you say a game changer is that on the political scene in the middle?
It's completely a wild game changer.
It's tectonic plates that move,
it's world images that are turned upside down in the face,
if there is a long way to go between the two.
Can you agree with all this
and hope that a country like Yemen
and other countries where there are these conflicts
will shine in the future?
I think it's completely fair to hope
and believe that it's far more possible now.
It's a way back for us to be able to see
a solution of Yemen and perhaps in Syria.
But it's not a peaceful day in itself.
It's not like they just put their signature on paper
and then the local conflicts are solved.
But it's one of the conditions for them to be solved.
And I think that Yemen is a big indication
that Saudi Arabia would like to attract
and we are also already indications from Iran
that they want to stop the support for the future.
And already in these days we see that there is a beginning to talk
about maybe in Saudi Arabia
opening a diplomatic representation in Damascus.
So I think there are good factors.
It's just the level of tension that has been
all the way up in the red to come down
to something we are also close to.
And now I ask the person who has travelled
and known the Middle East,
what are you sitting back with?
I think I'm actually most sitting back
with a strong hope for some of those
who have been affected by this rivalry between the two powers.

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I mean, I'm sitting with a strong hope for Syria
for Iraq and for Yemenite
and that they could go on a peaceful time in the Middle East.
Helene, thank you for coming.
Thank you very much.
Here ends the day's starting again.
Behind the exhibition is the city of Mathias Bach's Søndergård,
line Fabrisius and Søren Elbeck.
Meet now at Thomas T. Larsen.