TAJIKISTAN: SAUDIS BRAG ABOUT PUSHING OUT IRAN

- 20.09.2017

Eurasianet, September 19, 2017

Saudi Arabias ambassador to Tajikistan spoke in an interview last week of his satisfaction at successfully pursuing diplomatic overtures that culminated with the expulsion of Iran and its agents from the country.

This is a great victory for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its wise leadership, said Abdulaziz bin Mohammed Al-Badi.

Al-Badi said the intensification of relations with Tajikistan has led to agreement for Saudi Arabia to fund the opening of six religious schools and two universities in the coming two years. The Saudi-led Islamic Development Bank is providing interest-free loans to build dozens of mosques and educational institutions across several regions of the country, the ambassador said.

Tajikistan has always enjoyed ambivalent relations with Iran. Although the Persian language link do provide a natural point of contact, Dushanbe has for decades openly grumbled about its suspicions that Tehran might be meddling in its internal affairs.

Irritation turned to rage in December 2015, when Iran welcomed Tajik opposition leader Muhiddin Kabiri, who is wanted back home on trumped-up charges of fomenting a plot to topple the government, to an Islamic-themed conference. During the same visit, Kabiri met with Irans Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei for talks and was pictured as they exchanged warm greetings.

In the immediate wake of that event, Tajikistans customs service slapped restrictions on the import of groceries from Iran, and in July this year, authorities forced the closure of a popular Iranian cultural center in the city of Khujand.

In the culmination the governments anti-Iran campaign, state television in August aired a documentary accusing Tehran of orchestrating a slew of assassinations of high-profile public figures on Tajik soil during and after the civil war of the 1990s.

By embarking on such a radical denunciation of Iran, Tajikistan has thus contrived to make a generous friend of Saudi Arabia. Tajikistans ambassador to Saudi Arabia met with this week with the Saudi deputy Foreign Minister Yousef bin Trad Al-Saadoun ahead of an Arab-Central Asian economic cooperation forum set to take place in Dushanbe in October.

Curiously, however, while taking sides in one Middle Eastern squabble, Tajikistan looks like it is playing a double game in another regional rift — the one between Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

Qatar has been another target of Tajikistans frantic attempts to drum up financial support for its economy in general, but more specifically for the giant Roghun hydropower plant project.

The newly appointed Tajik ambassador to Qatar presented his credentials this week to the Foreign Ministry in Doha. The meeting was dedicated in part to discussing the possible outcomes of a visit to Qatar by Tajik President Emomali Rahmon earlier this year. If there were to be any noteworthy results, they will hardly go down well with the Saudis.

Kaynak/Source: