

Israel And Saudi Arabia: A Match Made In Heaven (Or In Washington)

By Investig'ation



Prince Mohammad bin Salman and Israeli PM Benjamin "Bibi" Netanyahu

If we were to believe all the propaganda we would think (the occupation state of) Israel and (the medieval kingdom of) Saudi Arabia were mortal foes. On one hand we have an entity that describes itself as a blooming democracy, an oasis of civilisation amongst barbaric foes, and on the other a royal family that presents itself as the natural leader of the Arabs. Given that there is no greater cause in the Middle East than that of the Palestinians, this would put them severely at odds. In reality, what we have is a brutal, apartheid, settler-colonial state and a backward, Wahhabi/Salafist and oil-reliant monarchy, both spreading terror across the region, each in its own way. What binds them together is their position vis-a-vis the US Empire, making them in fact natural allies, something that has started making the rounds publicly.

A recent article appeared in the Zionist bastion that is the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP) with the auspicious title "An Open Letter from a Young Saudi to Prince Mohammad bin Salman." Conceding that it was indeed a young Saudi who wrote it (1), the letter contains the expected rear-end kissing towards the Saudi prince, who is "God's chosen to lead Saudi Arabia" through the current challenges, the waving of the Iran bogeyman spectre and some other (un)remarkable bits (2). The most eye-catching bit is the call for an alliance with Israel to confront Iran's nazi-like (!) threat, and lest it offend the religious fundamentalists, this is justified on religious grounds.

This call follows recent declarations by Saudi officials, with former minister Saud al-Faisal, for example, saying “we should normalize relations with the Jewish state”. Nevertheless these public declarations, even if mostly made far away from the Arab public, are a relatively new phenomenon.

With some exceptions, support for the Palestinian cause in the Arab world is overwhelming. And regimes like Saudi Arabia have happily betrayed the Palestinian cause over and over again because they are aware that key to their survival is subservience to the United States, and that an alliance with Israel may boost their regional hegemony prospects. But because their legitimacy to rule is incredibly thin to say the least, royals and officials need to keep pretending in public that they are defending and fighting for the Palestinians.

Zionism and anti-semitism

These public declarations of support for Israel, in the safe English-speaking confines of Washington think tanks, still carry a heavy stench of anti-semitism. The young Saudi’s letter falls into the anti-semitic habit of conflating Jews and Israel as being a single entity. Prince Turki bin Faisal, a loyal western servant and former ambassador to the US, in the similarly safe space that is the Davos World Economic Forum, talked about the wonders that can be done by joining “our [Arab] brain power, and Jewish wealth.” Of course, a little brain power would have served him to realise that this statement is incredibly anti-semitic, not to mention that it is wealth, and not brain power that gets people like Prince Turki invited to places like Davos.



Prince Turki (left) and Israeli defence minister Moshe Ya'alon (right) shake hands during the Munich Security Conference in 2016

Religious officials in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries are known for spreading hatred against Shias, Alawites, Christians and Jews. Saudi media even attacked Iran for allowing Jews to live there! However, the mainstream media is always happy to tolerate this kind of anti-semitism from those who lend their support to the Zionist colonisation project, while viciously throwing the “anti-semitic” label at anyone who will not bow down to the occupation of Palestine.

Shared values and moderation

For their part, Israeli officials also tread carefully, but this is essentially to avoid placing a “friend of the colonial project” sticker on useful allies. But statements praising Saudi Arabia as a partner in the region are also becoming common. For example, defence minister Avigdor Lieberman warned that Iran’s (who else!) ultimate goal was undermining Saudi Arabia. Former minister Tzipi Livni also echoed this view, and in both cases they framed the Middle East as a battle of “good vs. evil”, or as they put it, “moderates vs. radicals”, with Livni going as far as mentioning “shared values”. So Saudi Arabia, the most medieval of regimes, who regularly beheads people on public squares, is somehow considered *moderate*. As for Israel, there has not been anything *moderate* about their 70 year history of massacres, colonisation and ethnic cleansing. Then again, “moderate” in this context nowadays stands only for “US ally”. The common denominator is always highlighting the Iranian threat, with some bending over backwards to connect Iran to bad guys like al-Qaeda. Connecting them to Saudi Arabia, given that 15 of the 19 hijackers on 9/11 were Saudi nationals, and that this group, like all extremist groups for that matter, was backed and funded by the Saudis, would have been too easy. Additionally, the Zionist lobby has also been pulling its weight to improve the image of the house of Saud.

Cooperation in Syria

This semantic redefinition of the term “moderate” has been a central feature of the Syrian war. The term has been consistently used to whitewash the extremist nature of rebel groups and to obscure the fact that the US has been supporting, directly or indirectly, groups like al-Qaeda.

For their part, the Saudis have been the main backers of the most extremist groups in the Syrian opposition, continuing their long standing tradition of exporting Salafi terrorism everywhere. The similarities between the *takfiri* ideology (3) of the most powerful rebel groups and that of Saudi Arabia are no coincidence.



Saudi- and western-backed rebels and ISIS celebrate Israeli strikes against Hezbollah in Syria (cartoon by Carlos Latuff)

But Israel's involvement in the Syrian war is also worth analysing. For all the talk of being threatened by extremist groups, Israel has been quite comfortable with the presence of jihadi factions like the Nusra front right on their doorstep, in the occupied Golan Heights.

Moreover, it has offered medical treatment to injured fighters and there have also been reports of collaboration between these groups and the IDF. Not only that, Israel has frequently bombed targets and assassinated people from the Syrian army and their allies, the most prominent of those being Hezbollah.

Of course, there is no room for morals or principle when it comes to foreign policy. And Israel has never held any moral high ground, for that matter. Simply put, the Israelis have seen the Syrian war as an opportunity to be rid of their most uncomfortable neighbour, as far as official governments go, even if Syrian support for the Palestinian cause has been, and we are being kind here, limited. More than that, Israeli officials are happy to see their most formidable foe, Hezbollah, bogged down in a taxing conflict away from home.

In the greater picture of Middle Eastern geopolitics, Israel and Saudi Arabia always have Iran as their ultimate target. The war against the Syria and Hezbollah, just like the war in Yemen, is meant to attack Iran by weakening and possibly removing its allies (4).

Under the wings of empire

In reality, the secret-come-public cooperation between Saudi Arabia and Israel is only logical given their position vis-a-vis the US Empire, which of course shares the hostility towards Iran, the fiercest resistant to US imperialism in the region.

The US and the Saudis enjoy **“strong and friendly relations”**, a **“special relationship”** predicated on oil and weapons sales, which have **sky-rocketed** with the Saudi war on Yemen. In his incoherent ramblings, president Trump occasionally stumbles upon the (inconvenient) truth, which is that **“Saudi Arabia, if it weren’t for us, they wouldn’t be here...”**

Without the support of the US Empire, and the British Empire in the earlier part of the century, the house of Saud would be a footnote in history books, and an amusing footnote at that. It is its usefulness as a local agent for western empires that has ensured its longevity.



President Obama and Israeli PM Netanyahu at the White House

As for Israel, they enjoy the premium, **“unbreakable bond”** relationship with the United States, which essentially means

the Israelis get their weapons for free. For all the talk of Obama not being pro-Israeli enough, he did not leave office without splashing the biggest military aid package in history on Israel. With so much uncertainty surrounding the 2016 presidential election, this was clearly a priority for the outgoing Obama White House.

The respective relations of Israel and Saudi Arabia with the US empire can perhaps be encapsulated in symbolic moments. For Israel, it is the US resupply of ammunition during the 2014 Gaza offensive, so that the massacres could continue unimpeded. And for Saudi Arabia, it is US planes refuelling Saudi jets during their war on Yemen, so that they would not run out of fuel before bombing first responders.

We have two projects flourishing under the wings of the US empire and spreading death and terror throughout the region. After justice and freedom arrive in the Middle East, they might end up sharing a footnote in future history books.

Notes

- (1) It might be dangerous for people in Saudi Arabia to voice what they *really* think of the royal family.
- (2) For instance, it claims that Wahhabism, the ultra-conservative and retrograde version of Islam that is enforced and exported by Saudi Arabia, cannot be connected to modern terrorism because Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab lived 300 years ago.
- (3) Takfiris are those who denounce others as not being true Muslims, making them infidels.
- (4) While the Iran threat is invoked to justify the Saudi invasion, the connections between the Houthi rebels and the Iranians may be more hype than substance, and they are certainly more a case of an opportunity seized by Iran, either out of a sense of duty or opportunism, than historical or ideological ties.

Source:

<http://www.investigaction.net/en/israel-and-saudi-arabia-a-match-made-in-heaven-or-in-washington/#sthash.UM5AETKJ.dpuf>