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**Saudi Arabia and the New  
Regional Landscape: How  
Does Israel Fit In?**

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Joshua Teitelbaum  
January 2018

Strategic  
Outlook  
Series

5



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# Saudi Arabia and the New Regional Landscape: How Does Israel Fit In?

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## About the author

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# Saudi Arabia and the New Regional Landscape: How Does Israel Fit In?

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Entering 2018, Saudi Arabia faces tremendous challenges, both domestic and regional. The domestic challenges range from reforming an economy in the face of drastically lower oil prices, establishing the leadership of Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman in the face of royal family opposition, and balancing between the demands of tradition and those of innovation. Saudi Arabia has faced regional challenges before, beginning with Egypt in the mid-1930's, followed by the Hashemite monarchies of Iraq and Jordan. Egypt again posed a challenge during Nasser's reign. Yet for the past several years, regional challenges have again raised their head. This brief paper will analyze those challenges, and Israel's place in Saudi Arabia's calculus.

## What is the New Regional Landscape?

The new regional landscape is fundamentally a result of changes in US policy. America was once a firm defender of the Persian Gulf. The February 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran and the December 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan prompted President Jimmy Carter to formulate what became known as the [Carter Doctrine](#), announced in his January 1980 State of the Union address. Carter stressed that the

*Soviet effort to dominate Afghanistan has brought Soviet military forces to within 300 miles of the Indian Ocean and close to the Strait of Hormuz, a waterway through which most of the world's oil must flow. The Soviet Union is now attempting to consolidate a strategic position, therefore, that poses a grave threat to the free movement of Middle East oil.*

His conclusion was quite forceful:

*Let our position be absolutely clear: An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.*

The Carter Doctrine was given a specifically Saudi and Iranian twist in October 1981, when President Ronald Reagan issued what has become known as the doctrine's [Reagan Corollary](#): "We cannot permit Saudi Arabia to become Iran," Reagan declared. The Carter Doctrine and the Reagan Corollary were responsible for the increase of the US military presence in the Persian Gulf, first in the form of the Rapid Deployment Force, and eventually, a full military command, the US Central Command. But at the time they had barely digested the massive potential of Iran's revolutionary Shi'ite message.

One leader who was aware of Iran's potential was Iraq's Saddam Husayn, who attacked it in 1980. The war lasted eight years and demonstrated that the Islamic Republic was not a passing phenomenon.

Iran posed a regional and religious threat to Saudi Arabia. Regionally, it threatened the Saudis across the Gulf. Religiously, as its influence grew it, it offered a previously minority and even heretical view to the Sunni majority, which Saudi Arabia claimed to lead. During the Iran-Iraq war the Sunni Arab Persian Gulf countries, which formed the Gulf Cooperation Council in 1980, were pleased to have Saddam run interference for them.

But Saddam was not grateful. Claiming that the GCC countries owed him money (and Kuwait had been stealing his oil), he rolled into Kuwait in the summer of 1990 and stood on Saudi Arabia's doorstep. The US pulled together a massive international coalition and threw him out of Kuwait the next year. Iraq was wounded, but the US left Saddam in business. This war was the highpoint of US engagement in the region, which had begun with the Carter Doctrine. It was also the end of the old regional landscape.

The new regional landscape begins with the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. If the US would have been satisfied with the removal of Saddam and his replacement by another Sunni strongman, the Saudis might have supported the US invasion. But they understood the US would try to impose a Western-style democracy, which would inevitably lead to Shiite majority rule. This was exactly what happened. Moreover, the war invigorated Sunnis extremists at home, who went to fight the US in Iraq and attacked targets in the kingdom, and put wind in the sails of Shiite minorities all over the Gulf, including in Saudi Arabia's oil-rich Eastern Province. It bears stressing that Iran has its hand in the Sunni opposition as well as in the Shiite one. Saudi officials, who released a list of 85 of its most-wanted Sunni terrorists, noted that 35 of them were last seen in Iran.

The 2005 elections in Iraq resulted in a Shiite victory -- a result expected by the Saudis and a victory for Iran. The pro-Saudi Prime Minister of Lebanon Rafiq al-Hariri was assassinated by the Iranian-backed Hizballah that same year. The Obama Administration took over the White House in 2009 with the expressed goal of ending the war in Iraq and withdrawing US troops, which it mostly did. Now broken, it was proving hard to put Iraq back together. The withdrawal of US troops led to another Sunni insurgency, fearful of the Shiite dominance of the state. This was soon taken over by Islamic State.

Meanwhile, Russia was on the rise. Recovering from its transformation from the Soviet Union, it metamorphosed into Imperial Russia in a "Back to the Future" moment. The Bush and Obama Administrations seemed powerless in Georgia and Ukraine. And when the "Arab Spring" reached

Syria in 2011 and developed into a bloody civil war, Russia protected Damascus as it murdered its citizens with chemical weapons. President Obama's August 2012 "Red Line" warning against such use proved an empty one.

The Syrian episode was a watershed signal of American retrenchment. Politics abhors a vacuum. Russia and Iran moved in. There was lingering US animosity about Saudi complicity, or at least cover-up in the 9/11 attacks, the price of oil was down and the US was nearly self-sufficient as new oil resources came on line. Obama assessed that to further disengage from the Middle East, the US needed to balance Iran and Saudi Arabia.

And indeed, President Obama has been explicit about this. In an [interview](#) with the New Yorker's David Remnick in January 2014 he noted that there was "an equilibrium developing between Sunni, or predominantly Sunni, Gulf states and Iran in which there's competition, perhaps suspicion, but not an active or proxy warfare." This line of thought matured into the [Obama Doctrine](#), set out in a long interview with The Atlantic's Jeffrey Goldberg in April 2016. Obama told Goldberg that the Saudis would have to "share" the Middle East with the Iranians. Indeed, there was no love lost between Obama and the Saudis. He knew – and related to Goldberg -- how the Saudis had funded extremist Islam overseas and had changed more tolerant versions such as those practiced in Indonesia, where he had grown up. Obama mentioned this in a conversation with Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull.

*"Aren't the Saudis your friends?," Turnbull asked. Obama smiled. 'It's complicated,' he said."*

To Saudi ears, this was a significant pro-Iranian shift. Instead of standing steadfastly by an ally, Obama was for a balance of power. Obama, in the Saudi view of this zero-sum game, was pro-Iranian.

For Obama, the best way to assure this balance was to acknowledge Iran as a nuclear power, with the capability to manufacture nuclear weapons. This position was enshrined in the nuclear deal signed by the US and other powers in July 2015, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). In a classic poker move, Tehran had upped the ante by adding the nuclear issue to a "pot" that also included the Iranian ballistic missile program and supporting proxies in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Gaza. But the Iranians insisted negotiations be limited only to the nuclear issue, and the other parties went along. The result of the move was that Tehran now had carte blanche to support their destabilizing proxies and continue missile development.



The Iranians had outmaneuvered the Americans, and it was abundantly clear to all in the Middle East, particularly the Saudis and the Israelis.

The rise of Russia and Iran to fill the vacuum left by American retrenchment signaled to both Israel and the Saudis that the US had, in deed if not by statement, abandoned the Carter Doctrine. The Obama Doctrine now ruled the roost. This was the most salient feature of the new regional landscape.

This new regional landscape has pulled the kingdom out of a traditional, cautious and consensus-driven foreign policy, to a point where it feels the need to take initiatives. It can no longer rely on the United States to follow Riyadh's priorities. This new policy began under King Abdallah, who died in 2015, and matured under King Salman and Crown Prince Muhammad. Saudi Arabia believed it could use its influence to dampen Iranian gains in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. But it has not been successful. Enter Israel.

## How Does Israel Fit in To Saudi Arabia's New Regional Approach?

In the face of Sunni extremists, which threaten Saudi legitimacy as the leader of the Sunni world, an ascendant Iran, and a region roiled by the Arab Spring, the kingdom cast about for stable allies. Closest to home, it found the UAE, where Muhammad bin Salman could find a kindred spirit in Abu Dhabi's Shaykh Muhammad bin Zayid. They were the same age and shared many of the same concerns. There was also Egypt, whose ruler Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi had cleverly brought down the Muslim Brotherhood leader Muhammad Mursi, putting his finger in the dyke of an Arab Spring that threatened the monarchies of the Persian Gulf.

But there was also Israel. The Saudis admired Israel's proven ability to project military force, without resorting to the United States. A massive arms procurement program, as well as a [paper](#) authored by an adviser on Saudi national security in 2014, put forth a new Saudi defense doctrine that involved a more assertive foreign policy combined with a hugely expanded force structure. After the Goldberg interview introduced the Obama Doctrine, the Saudi adviser, Nawaf Obaid, termed this new strategy the [Salman Doctrine](#).

But the Saudis could not make an effective go of the Salman Doctrine – at least not for the present. The Yemen adventure was a case in point. Riyadh could not get to a decisive moment. The Saudi armed forces were primarily designed to protect the regime. Over the years, they had developed a limited offensive air capability, but remained weak in armor and infantry. In Yemen, they are active nearly only from the air, with limited involvement on the ground. Despite military help from the UAE, and intelligence sharing from the US and Britain, they have failed to build on initial gains and find themselves mired in an open-ended conflict with no end-game in sight. Saudi Arabia desires an independent military capacity to achieve political goals, but without a US commitment to these goals, they will not be able to achieve them.

Riyadh figured that Israel could play a role in furthering its goals. Israel was a stable country, it had good relations with the US, a fine military, and it was vehemently opposed to Iran. And this is the place to remind ourselves of some home truths about Israel and the Gulf countries – particularly Saudi Arabia. Thinking more deeply about the similarities between Israel and the Gulf countries in general leads to an immediate insight. None of these countries share the meta-narrative of Arab nationalism that has so defined the core states of the region since the fall

of the Ottoman Empire. The Gulf countries did not share the powerful discourse of Arab nationalism, and were not dictatorial-authoritarian regimes. They operated more on a consensual, tribal basis, in a system that was an outgrowth of tribal values and societal norms. In a large sense, these states were outsiders to the anti-colonialist and anti-Western narrative and history that so characterized the Arab Middle Eastern core of Egypt, Syria, and Iraq. They are also monarchies while the Arab core states are populist authoritarian regimes or some version thereof. Indeed, for much of the modern period they have been reviled by the core Arab states as anachronistic “others” who were out of step with the march of Arab history.

Israeli governments have been well aware that not all Arab countries hold the same views regarding the Palestinians. Early on, Israel realized that the Gulf countries were different. They were more interested in infrastructural development and improving relations with Washington than trying to help the Palestinians. Israel sought to end regional isolation by seeking relations with the GCC countries even before the establishment of the GCC in 1981. In a little-known episode, from 1964-1966 it helped the pro-Saudi Yemeni royalists against an Egyptian-supported revolution. This was an effort known in Israel as Operation Sauce. It was coordinated by British SAS veterans, and financed by Saudi Arabia. Israel’s activity consisted of several IAF arms drops, 14 of them, coordinated by the Mossad.

Since the 1980s, far from being a rejectionist state as some might assume, Saudi officialdom has evinced a relatively conciliatory public stance towards Israel. Crown Prince Fahd’s Initiative of 1981 (point 7: “All States in the region should be able to live in peace in the region”), is a case in point, although it typically morphed into a somewhat lesser affirmation as the Final Declaration of the Twelfth Arab Summit Conference held in Fez in 1982 (point 7: “The establishment by the United Nations Security Council of guarantees of peace between all States of the region, including the independent Palestinian State.”). Saudi Arabia participated as an observer in the Madrid Arab-Israeli peace talks (1991), led the other Gulf Cooperation Council states in ending the secondary and tertiary boycotts of Israel (1994), and attended the peace conference at Annapolis (2007).

Most importantly, Saudi King (then Crown Prince) Abdullah reached out to Israel with a peace plan in February 2002. He called for “full withdrawal from all the occupied territories, in accord with UN resolutions, including in Jerusalem, for full normalization of relations” with Israel. As the Fahd Plan had before it, Abdullah’s plan hardened as is turned into the “Arab Peace Initiative” at the Beirut summit the following month, particularly with its demand for the return of Palestinian refugees to Israel and the rejection of their absorption in Arab countries. Nonetheless, the fact that

the Initiative was adapted unanimously by the Arab League and contained positive language concerning “normal relations” with Israel did not go unnoticed by members of the government of Ariel Sharon, nor that of his successor Ehud Olmert. In 2006 and 2007 there were several reports of secret meetings between Israeli and Saudi officials with eye toward modifying the Initiative. In 2008 Olmert offered, as confirmed in Condoleezza Rice’s memoirs, to have a custodial committee of religious leaders from Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Israel, Palestine and the US administer the Holy Places in Jerusalem. And since then, there have been numerous reports of meetings between serving officials, and actual public meetings between former officials.

In discussing Saudi Arabia’s regional vision in 2018, we must consider that severe domestic challenges facing Riyadh which will have a bearing on that vision. The Crown Prince is engaged in a multi-vectored effort to reform the kingdom’s economy, society, and ruling institutions, all on a scale that dwarfs past efforts, such as those during the reign of King Faysal (1964-75). These reforms are hugely ambitious and threaten several traditional power centers. The longer-term results of his detainment of business leaders and leaders of important family factions in November are still far from clear. The degree of support within the royal family for these moves is uncertain, and the royal family remains the main pillar of support for the regime. Muhammad bin Salman may be relying on the support of the young people in the kingdom, but this is a huge gamble. He has left himself open to challenges. It is therefore reasonable to assume that his attention will be focused more on domestic concerns, and that may severely influence foreign moves.

The Saudi Sunni majority is anti-Iranian, to be sure. Iran is a strategic threat in the Gulf and religious threat to Saudi Arabia Islamic leadership all over the Middle East. The most glaring example of this is Syria, where a corollary of Iranian victories has been the [migration of Shiites](#) to that Sunni majority country. Confronting Iran will therefore remain a key part of Riyadh’s vision for the region in 2018, inter alia because there is no domestic price to be paid for it.

Israel and Saudi Arabia can help each other by putting Iran on the defensive, none the least by causing it to expend resources in areas that it would rather not. Areas to be explored might include:

1. **Maritime cooperation in the Red Sea.** Israel, Egypt and Saudi Arabia could cooperate in the Red Sea interdicting Iranian arms bound for the Houthis in Yemen, or from other sources to ISIS in the Sinai Peninsula. Foreign sources often refer to an Israeli naval footprint in Eritrea's Dahlak Archipelago opposite Yemen. Eritrea is a Muslim country, yet Israel has an embassy in Asmara. Might Egypt prevent Iranian naval ships from transiting the Suez Canal? This would greatly constrain Iranian options in the Eastern Mediterranean and make its planned land bridge from the Gulf to the Mediterranean more difficult to achieve.
2. **Theater Missile Defense (TMD).** Israel has advanced capabilities in TMD. It is meant to defend Israel against Hamas, Hizballah, and even Iranian missile attacks. Jerusalem cooperates with the United States in TMD, as do the countries of the GCC. Might not the US encourage greater cooperation as a way of reducing the US footprint in the region?
3. **Protection against Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs).** Israel has vast experience in this area, and could offer its expertise to UAE and Saudi armor fighting in Yemen.
4. **Intelligence cooperation.** Israel has cooperated for many years with Jordan in this regard. Given mutual threats from Iran, it could increase cooperation with Riyadh. According to [Emile Nakhleh](#), a former top CIA analyst on the Middle East, such cooperation has existed between Jerusalem and Riyadh since the 1990s.
5. **Cyber operations** to confuse Iran and cause it to divert resources to protection.
6. **Subversion and covert operations** to destabilize the Islamic Republic, particularly via restive minorities, forcing it to divert precious resources. There is a [struggle](#) of this sort going on, the most recent manifestation of which was the [assassination of an Iranian Arab nationalist](#) in the Netherlands in November.
7. **Basing arrangements.** Explore the feasibility and advisability of basing arrangements for the Israel Air Force in Gulf countries, for a possible attack on Iran's nuclear infrastructure.

Israel, of course, would like to see high-level diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia. The more overt such relations become, the more Israel would be seen as an integral, legitimate part of the region, without connec-

tion to a resolution of the Palestinian issue, which seems unattainable in the near future. That is why it is mostly Israeli officials who talk up any evidence of a Saudi change in attitudes towards Israel (usually about Saudi “pragmatism”).

Most recently, on 14 November, the Israeli Chief of Staff, Lt. Gen. Gadi Eisenkot, gave an interview to the UK based Saudi online publication Ilaf to Israeli Druze correspondent Majdi Halabi, where he emphasized common interests between Israel and Saudi Arabia in confronting Iran and Hizballah and offered to share intelligence with Riyadh.

Not wanting to be upstaged by his underling, Minister of Defence Avigdor Liberman penned an article in the American Defense News on 11 December. Liberman [wrote](#):

*We see much evidence of sober thinking elsewhere in the region, notably among the Gulf states. Perhaps the clearest example is Saudi Arabia, whose leadership is leading a bold and visionary policy that doesn't balk from identifying Iran as the overall regional threat and is forthrightly confronting its terrorist affiliates – the Houthis, Hezbollah and Hamas. By prioritizing modernization, liberalization and infrastructural investment, the Saudi government is focusing on its genuine, vital interests. All of these are, in fact, key regional interests.*

Yisrael Katz, Minister of Transportation, and perhaps more importantly, Minister of Intelligence, gave an [interview](#) to Ilaf on 13 December. This was apparently the first interview by an Israeli minister to a Saudi-owned news outlet. Katz emphasized the mutual threat from Iran. He spoke tough on Hizballah (“we are capable of sending Lebanon back to the stone age”) stressing that Israel could strike Iranian missile plants there and Syria, sure music to Riyadh’s ears, and waxed lyrically about relations with Saudi Arabia through a joint transportation network. He invited the Saudis to lead a new initiative for the region. Katz also attempted to soften the expressed Saudi disappointment with US President Trump’s recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital, stressing that Trump had left the borders of Jerusalem for the negotiations. Katz’s remarks may have been a wink at Riyadh’s interest in a role in Jerusalem, which was offered to it by Olmert as noted above. Clearly, the Israelis have identified the new Saudi Crown Prince as an agent of change, and hope to move him closer to the Jewish State.

One can’t rule out the influence of domestic politics on the Liberman and Katz interviews. Relations with Saudi Arabia is the new hot issue for Israeli politicians, now that BDS seems to be running out of steam. With Prime

Minister Benjamin Netanyahu being investigated for corruption, some on the right smell the blood in the water. Liberman wants to head a right-wing bloc, and Katz of the Likud has already announced that he considers himself a candidate to head the party.

These media appearances by Katz, Liberman and Eisenkot (the latter would not have given the interview without Netanyahu's consent) represent Israel's regional vision for the coming years. And they also represent how Israel wishes to present itself to Saudi Arabia. It is strong, it is watching out for its interests, and can be counted on by countries which share similar interests. It also has pull with President Trump, who in December recognized Israel as Jerusalem's capital – the only country to do so. Although the Saudis publicly opposed the move, it is a good bet they took notice of what Israel was capable of.

Probably the most urgent area for Saudi-Israeli cooperation is in Syria against the Iranian presence that is sure to expand following the defeat of ISIS. Both countries have a deep interest in preventing a sustained Iranian foothold in the country. A recent [article](#) by Brig.-Gen. (res.) Yossi Kuperwasser of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs seemed timed to signal to the Saudis Israel's determination to act against Iran in Syria. Kuperwasser portrays an Israel with proven capabilities to deter Iran and its proxies should their presence in Syria become a threat to Israel. Indeed, their very presence is a threat. He concludes:

*Even though it acts in accordance with its own interests, [Israel] proves to be the most valuable asset of the pragmatic camp in the region in the effort to prevent Iran and other radical elements from spreading their influence in the region. This...factor illustrates how important the strategic value of Israel is for the West, in general, and for the United States, in particular. This factor also shows Israel's importance for the pro-Saudi/pragmatic Arab camp, especially in contrast to the Saudi setback in Yemen manifested in the killing of their ally, Ali Abdallah Saleh. This may lead to acceleration of the already diaphanous process of progress in the Saudi-Israeli relations.*

Kuperwasser was formerly Director General of the Ministry of Strategic Affairs and head of the Research Division of IDF Military Intelligence. He is close to Dore Gold, a senior adviser to Prime Minister Netanyahu.

In a way, Israel and Saudi Arabia, given the right kind of American support, could lessen the need for a greater American footprint in the region. While the interests of the three are not identical, they do overlap in important areas – particularly confronting Iran.

Saudi Arabia's regional vision has at its center an Iran on the defensive. It would like to see some Iranian setbacks. On this issue, it is entirely on the same page with Israel and the United States. While President Trump is essentially hemmed in by the JCPOA, which is an international agreement, all three countries can cooperate on limiting Iran's reach, particularly its attempt to get a land bridge from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean through Syria.

Over the years, there have been public visits of Saudis to Israel, even of people close to officials, but no official public visits. But it does appear that the Saudis are willing to make some small gestures if it keeps the Israelis interested. Thus, in December, an ecumenical Bahraini delegation arrived in Israel. While not an official delegation, it would have had to have had official blessing. And that official blessing would not have come without a Saudi nod. Bahrain is more or less a satellite of Saudi Arabia and relies on Riyadh for financial aid. In March 2011, Saudi troops crossed the King Fahd causeway into the island state to save the regime from a Shiite uprising.

For the near future, it appears that the Israelis want to involve the Saudis in peace efforts for several reasons. First, to demonstrate that Israel is serious about peace efforts in the face of years of stalemate, for which Israel usually gets unfairly blamed by the international community. By isolating the Palestinians from their Arab supporters, Israel hopes to moderate the Palestinian position. Given the activist foreign policy of Muhammad bin Salman, and perhaps with encouragement from the Americans, Jerusalem may be assessing that for the price of greater Israeli involvement against Iran on all fronts, Saudi Arabia might step forward to lead peace efforts. While this would not mean recognition of Israel, it would involve direct and public contacts with the Jewish state.

But for this to work, Israel would have to make some much more positive statements about the 2002 Saud-led Arab Peace Initiative than it has in the past. That initiative has been approved by the Arab League, as well as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, which includes, by the way, Iran. This is a very tall order for Israel, for whom the only positive article in the API is the one that calls for the recognition of Israel. Nevertheless, there may be language that could creatively be employed.

For the Saudis, on the other hand, this is the last thing they need. They have enough internal issues without waking this sleeping dog. Moreover, it is in Israel's interest to cooperate with Saudi Arabia against Iran and radical Islam, so there is no upside for Riyadh to recognizing Israel. Why should Muhammad bin Salman risk this while he is trying to achieve so much at home and abroad? And Israel seems to already be helping Saudi Arabia, so why buy the cow when you can get the milk for free? Such a Saudi step does not seem likely.



Still, according to a [recent poll](#) by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, “a remarkably solid majority of the Saudi public approves a key new element in U.S. policy: 68 percent say ‘Arab states should play a new role in Palestinian-Israeli peace talks, offering both sides incentives to take more moderate positions.’” While this poll refers to US policy (questions about Saudi policy might have been met with a slammed door), and does not specify Saudi Arabia as one of those states, it may indicate an opening for some very cautious Saudi engagement. Much of this hinges on the success of Muhammad bin Salman’s recent moves to centralize power. Can he operate without consensus within the ruling family? Or is he moving toward full on dictatorship on the model of Sisi’s Egypt? It is still too early to tell.

Might Saudi Arabia be convinced to take the lead in a “regional” peace process, withholding recognition until an agreement is signed with the Palestinians? This seems to be at the top of Israel’s wish list, and was most probably the direction taken pursued by Secretary of State Kerry in the last year of the Obama Administration, in a convoluted move that involved Israeli opposition leader Isaac Herzog, Egypt’s President al-Sisi, King Abdullah II of Jordan, and the Saudis. The Trump Administration’s stab at reviving these efforts, led by Jared Kushner, has renewed efforts towards this regional solution, and in November began hinting that they were getting somewhere. Details were not forthcoming, but Kushner, in an [interview](#) with businessman Haim Saban, poured cold water on Israeli hopes that full blown progress in Saudi-Israeli relations could be made absent a deal with the Palestinians.

The Israeli goal of an open diplomatic relationship with the Saudis does not seem like a realistic possibility at this point. But this leaves open the possibility of greater covert Saudi-Israeli cooperation, with the support of the United States. All sides stand to gain as they confront mutual challenges. Yet there does not seem to be any advantage to the Saudis of bringing this cooperation into the light of day, or of recognizing Israel. And Israel would be well-advised to exercise caution about throwing in its lot with Muhammad bin Salman. His hold on government appears firm, but we are still early days.





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