

Bahraini Minister: Normalization Will Help Against Iran, But Palestinians Not Forgotten

by Hugh Fitzgerald



Bahrain's Interior Minister has explained that his country has not forgotten the Palestinians, but is determined, through its new ties to Israel, to strengthen Bahrain's security against Iran. The story is [here](#).

The interior minister of Bahrain said on Monday that the normalization deal with Israel was not a disavowal of the Palestinians, but a move to fortify the kingdom in light of the security threat from Iran.

"It is not an abandonment of the Palestinian cause... it is to strengthen Bahrainis' security and their economic stability,"

said Rashid bin Abdullah Al Khalifa, according to the Reuters news agency. "If Palestine is our Arab cause, then Bahrain is our fateful [sic] cause."

That is not how the Palestinian Arabs see it. Despite the Interior Minister's assurance, Bahrain's move to normalize relations with Israel is, if not quite an "abandonment" of the Palestinian cause, at least signals that the Palestinian Arab cause is now of much less moment than before, and that Bahrain, like the United Arab Emirates (and other Arab states that may follow) has recognized that both its "security" and its "economic stability" will be enhanced by closer ties with Israel.

"Iran has chosen to behave in a dominating way in several forms and has become a constant danger that harms our internal security," Khalifa said. "The regional situation makes us deal with ongoing threats for the past years, in which most of them were deterred. It isn't wise to see the threat and wait for it to reach us if we can in any way avoid it."

Bahrain's worry about Iran is well-founded. The Iranians have long been stirring up trouble in the country among its majority Shi'a population, who are unhappy with being ruled by Sunnis. In 2011 there was an open revolt by Shi'a in Bahrain, put down with the help of Saudi troops. Iran continues to encourage disaffection among the Shi'a, hoping that Bahrain might someday become another Shi'a-ruled state.

"We are a state that is determined to develop our national capabilities, and our old and modern strategy is based on strong allies to confront potential threats," he said...

In the campaign to halt an aggressive Iran, the Gulf Arabs have no better ally than Israel. It is Israel that

relentlessly bombs Iranian bases in Syria, to prevent the transfer of advanced weapons to Hezbollah in Lebanon. Thus does Israel help prevent the creation of that "Shi'a crescent" by Iran, from the Gulf to the Mediterranean, that fills the Sunni Arab states of the Gulf with dread. Israel shares intelligence on Iran with both the UAE and Saudi Arabia, and no doubt will now do so with Bahrain as well. It is Israel that has managed to repeatedly set back Iran's nuclear program, which is a clear threat not just to Israel but also to the Gulf Arab states. In 2010 Israeli cyberwarriors created Stuxnet, a computer worm that infected Iranian computers, causing them to direct 1,000 centrifuges to spin out of control, which led them to self-destruct. It is Israeli agents who assassinated four top Iranian nuclear scientists. It was again agents of Israel who managed in the middle of the night, to blowtorch their way into a nondescript building in the middle of Tehran, where they located, seized, and managed to take back to Israel, Iran's entire nuclear archive of 50,000 documents and 134 computer discs. It is Israel, too, that recently sabotaged Iran's new centrifuge plant at Natanz, setting back the country's nuclear program by two years. What better ally can Bahrain have against the Iranian threat?

In normalizing relations with Israel, Bahrain also wins friends and influence in Washington, always useful for a small state in a most unsettled and violent neighborhood. Bahrain has allowed the Americans to build a naval base on its territory; now it has joined, and no doubt will be rewarded for joining, the "circle of peace" in the Middle East. Bahrain has for some time wanted to buy an advanced air-defense system from the Americans; now it will undoubtedly be allowed to do so.

Bahrain has accused Iran of instigating protests by the nation's Shiite Muslim community, which makes up the majority of its population, against the ruling Sunni Al-Khalifa dynasty.

The kingdom relied on a Saudi intervention to crush dissent in 2011 during the Arab Spring. The tiny island country borders Saudi Arabia, one of Iran's main foes, and relies heavily on Riyadh for financial support...

The Palestinians were made livid by the normalization deals, denouncing them as "despicable," a "betrayal," and a "stab in the back."

The White House ceremony has come and gone. While the Palestinians demanded that the Arab states boycott the event, many of them ignored the hysterical *diktat* from Ramallah. The Palestinians have not yet recognized that they are no longer the center of Arab attention or sympathy. They believe that the UAE and Bahrain, like all the Arab states, must submit to what the Palestinians demand, even if those demands conflict with their own national interests. When the UAE and Bahrain normalize relations with Israel, they do it for good and sufficient reasons of their own: to strengthen a security alliance with a powerful neighbor that is doing its best to curb Iranian aggression; to promote their economic interests by making deals with the Jewish state, in technology, trade, and tourism; to benefit from Israeli advances in medicine (including tests, therapies, and vaccines, for the coronavirus), medical equipment, irrigation, waste water management, solar energy, laser technology, military drones, anti-missile defense; to collaborate with, and learn from Israel, in high tech start-ups, and much more. The Palestinians, on the other hand, offer the UAE and Bahrain nothing of value. Their constant whining and demands for greater financial and diplomatic support – even as they strengthen their own ties to the mortal enemy of both countries, Iran – has unsurprisingly diminished their appeal both in the UAE and among Bahrain's Sunnis. And their angry responses to the UAE and Bahrain on social media, with videos of the flags, and photographs of the leaders, of both countries being defaced and stomped on by Palestinians, have

only inflamed Emiratis and Sunni Bahrainis.

An Israeli official on Monday declined to reveal whether the agreements that will be signed on Tuesday will include Israeli commitments toward the Palestinians. Israel agreed to shelve its plans to annex parts of the West Bank as part of its deal with the UAE.

One hopes that the only commitment made by Netanyahu will have been Israel's promise to "suspend" its planned extension of sovereignty over parts of Judea and Samaria, especially the Jordan Valley and the five large settlement blocs. There is alarm that Prime Minister Netanyahu may have secretly promised the Americans that he would put a freeze on settlements, as for the last six months he has refused to convene a meeting of the Housing Planning Council for Judea and Samaria, which must first give its approval for any new settlements, and for the expansion of existing settlements, to take place. Defense Minister Gantz in mid-September called on Netanyahu to convene such a meeting. We should soon find out, from Netanyahu's response, whether he has indeed imposed a freeze on settlements. That would be a terrible mistake, weakening Israel's hold on Judea and Samaria, and disheartening the settlers' movement – a mistake which, if it has indeed made by Netanyahu, Benny Gantz must at once reverse when he becomes Prime Minister next year.

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