

Saudi journalist claims 'secret alliance' between Israel and Iran

by Hugh Fitzgerald



Iran's Ayatollah Ali Khamenei (L) and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman

We read a good deal about an increasingly warm Saudi-Israel relationship, even an informal alliance, based on both countries' shared opposition to a relentlessly aggressive Iran. While the Saudis have for years been fighting a proxy war against Iran in Yemen, giving, and taking, blows from the Shi'a Houthi, Israel fought a war in 2006 against Iran's other proxy, Hizballah. Recently the Israelis uncovered and destroyed a half-dozen massive tunnels that Hizballah had dug from Lebanon into northern Galilee. And Israel has been bombing, without effective resistance, Iranian weapons depots and outposts in Syria.

We hear stories of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's warm relations with Prime Minister Netanyahu, about the sharing of intelligence on Iran, even about the Saudis allowing overflights of Israeli planes. And, as a corollary to this, we learn that the Saudi government is becoming tired of the whole "Palestinian" business, that the Crown Prince finds the Palestinians, and Mahmoud Abbas in particular, insufferable and wildly unrealistic in their demands. The "Palestinian" cause is no longer central to the Saudis or other Arabs; Abbas has been threatened with a loss of Arab diplomatic support unless he accepts – as best as he can – whatever the Trump Administration's "Deal of the Century" has on offer.

[MEMRI](#) (The Middle East Research Institute) has published a series of articles over the past few years that appeared in the Saudi media, by writers, journalists, intellectuals who urge still closer ties with Israel, stress the continuing danger from Iran while claiming that Israel is no threat to Saudi Arabia. These articles argue that diplomatic ties should be established with Israel, and the Jewish state be openly recognized as a valuable Saudi ally. A few have even reported favorably on their trips to Israel, and urged that the Saudis emulate "the Jews' success." Among such reports at MEMRI are these: "Saudi Writers, Intellectuals: Iran Is More Dangerous Than Israel; Peace With It Is Vital In Order To Repel Iranian Threat, May 29, 2018; Shift In Saudi Media's Attitude To Israel – Part II: Saudi Writer Who Visited Israel: We Want An Israeli Embassy In Riyadh; We Should Make Peace With Israel, Uproot Culture Of Hatred For Jews, May 29, 2018; Saudi Columnist: Iran Is The Real Enemy, Not Israel, June 6, 2017; End The Antisemitic Discourse, Learn From The Jews' Success, August 13, 2016.

At the same time, other Saudi journalists have continued to take a hard line on Israel, reminding readers of the Jewish state's bottomless perfidy. One such article, claiming that Israel is not the enemy of, but rather has been collaborating

all along with, Iran, is [here](#):

“Also scathingly hostile to Israel was an article by Muhammad Al-Sa’idi, a lecturer on Islam at Umm Al-Qura University and a columnist for the daily Al-Watan. Following the February 2019 Warsaw summit, which was attended by Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu as well as by Arab foreign ministers, and which condemned Iran’s policy in the Middle East, he asserted firmly that Saudi Arabia has no contacts with Israel, overt or covert. He added that Israel actually cooperates with Iran, although the two countries are careful to present themselves as enemies because they derive benefit from this.”

“Al-Sa’idi wrote: ‘To date, Saudi Arabia has no ties, overt or covert, with the Zionist entity. Those who claim that contacts take place under the table were asked years ago to present even a single leak as proof [of their claim], but were unable to do so. All they do is talk about meetings between Israeli officials and [Saudis] who have no [official] authority and represent nobody but themselves. The [Saudi] authorities have denied any responsibility for their behavior, and some were even summoned for interrogation and were barred from [leaving the country] for what they did. Ultimately, meetings do not reflect the positions of countries.

No charge is too ludicrous, no conspiracy theory too absurd, for many Arab writers hostile to Israel. Muhammad Al-Sa’idi insists, despite the many stories that have appeared about Saudi-Israel contacts, that there is no truth to any of them. He dismissively claims “that Saudi Arabia has no ties, overt or covert, with the Zionist entity.” Shall we believe Al-Sa’idi or, instead, the many reports of those contacts? What of the visit of Muhammad bin Salman to Tel Aviv on September 7, 2018, to discuss regional peace efforts, a visit confirmed by Israeli officials and reported in the Israeli media? What

of the remarks by Bin Salman, in an interview he gave to The Atlantic, in which he spoke, astonishingly, about the need to recognize the Jews' right to their homeland and mentioned the possibility of establishing close economic ties with Israel in the future? Doesn't all this suggest a warming of Saudi-Israel relations and "ties" in the making?

"On February 8, [2019], the Zionist Channel 13... aired reports confirming that all the efforts to persuade Saudi Arabia to normalize its relations with the Zionist entity had failed, and that Saudi Arabia adheres to the Arab Initiative, which mentions Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine and the right of return of all Palestinians..."

The Israelis understand perfectly that the Saudis have to go slowly with publicly acknowledging ties to Israel, and Al-Sa'idi's claim that Israel as making tremendous "efforts to persuade Saudi Arabia to normalize its relations" sounds implausible. The Israelis understand perfectly why the Saudi rulers have to proceed with caution in persuading the Saudi people, who have been brought up in an atmosphere of unrelieved hostility to Zionists, to accept Israel's existence.

"[As for] the Zionists' purported hostility towards [Iran's] Ayatollah regime and their desire to eliminate it, history and the facts prove that these are false claims... After [the exposure of] the Iran-Contra scandal, the fact that the Zionists were among the supporters of Iran during its war with Iraq became so universally known that there is no need to present it... [Furthermore,] everything Iran is doing in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen serves the interests of the Zionist entity more than anyone else's, in many ways, especially by pushing the Palestinian issue off the agenda of statesmen, peoples, intellectuals and the media... As for Iran's and the Zionists' insistence on presenting themselves as enemies, [they do it because] it benefits them both..."

Here Mohammad Al-Sai'idi reaches the zenith – or is it the nadir? – of conspiracy theories. According to him Israel and Iran are now close allies; their “insistence on presenting themselves as enemies, [they do it because] it benefits them both.”

He is right about one thing: Israel did sell some weapons to Iran in 1981, in order to prevent a swift Iraqi victory. It did this with the approval of the Reagan Administration. The aim was not to help Iran win, but to prevent Iran from losing quickly; the best outcome for Israel and for the United States was a long war, using up men, money, material, and morale in both Iran and Iraq, and ending, after many years, in a stalemate. And that's exactly what happened.

The Islamic Republic of Iran, despite buying weapons from Israel in 1981, had from its beginning declared its enmity to the Jewish state. Ayatollah Khomeini had always been not just anti-Israel but also deeply antisemitic. Among the first victims of the Islamic revolution was the head of Iran's Jewish community, the businessmen Habib Elghanian, who was executed for the crimes of “corruption, contacts with Israel and Zionism, and ‘friendship with the enemies of God.’” Iran's Jews fled en masse from Khomeini's antisemitic regime, many of them to Israel. Yet we are being assured by Al-Sa'idi, on the basis of Israel's weapons sale to Iran in 1981, that Israel and Iran have always been secret allies. How likely is it that Israel would be an ally of a country that persecuted and murdered Jews, and forced the entire Jewish community into exile?

For the past 40 years, no Iranian rally has been complete without a denunciation of Israel, the “Little Satan” to America's “Great Satan”. Israeli flags are provided to be stepped on or burned; a great time is had by all. Ayatollah Khomeini, Ayatollah Khamenei, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the head of the army Mohammed Bagheri, the head of the Al-Quds force within the Revolutionary Guard, Major General Qassem

Soleimani, and many lesser political leaders, military officers, and clerics, have never let up in their constant threats to destroy Israel.

If Iran has secretly been Israel's ally all these years, almost everyone in the Iranian ruling class has apparently missed the memorandum.

If Israel were a secret ally of Iran, would Israeli agents have assassinated four of the most important Iranian nuclear scientists and wounded several others? Those were real deaths, in Teheran traffic, with many witnesses, not faked murders designed to fool the Arabs into believing that Israel and the Islamic Republic are at daggers drawn. The diabolically clever Israeli Stuxnet computer worm caused many centrifuges essential to Iran's nuclear program to speed up and tear themselves apart. Stuxnet reportedly ruined almost one fifth of Iran's nuclear centrifuges. Targeting industrial control systems, the worm infected over 200,000 computers and caused 1,000 machines to physically degrade. Does Muhammad Al-Sa'idi think that Iran would have deliberately allowed such colossal destruction in order to convince the world that Israel and Iran were enemies?

Has Mohammad Al-Sa'idi noticed that Israel has been dropping real bombs on real Iranian targets in Syria, killing real Iranians? And what does he think of Israel's attack on Hezbollah targets in both Syria and Lebanon? Has he forgotten the network of Hezbollah tunnels that Israelis have uncovered and destroyed? Finally, does Mohammad Al-Sa'idi remember the Israel-Hezbollah War of 2006? Would Israel have endured 165 dead, and the displacement of 300,000-500,000 Israelis, only to further the notion that Israel and Iran-backed Hezbollah were enemies?

Al-Sa'idi might have written something else. He might have acknowledged that Israel and Iran are enemies, admitted that Israel assassinated Iranian nuclear scientists and destroyed

1,000 centrifuges, recognized that Israel has been busy bombing Iranian outposts in Syria, but then pointed out that Israel had helped Iran before – in 1981 – at a time when Iran was just as anti-Israel and anti-Jewish as it is now, and that it might, in Machiavellian fashion, help Iran again. The Zionists were not to be trusted. Just as it supplied Iran with weapons then, so as to ensure that there would be no swift end to the Iran-Iraq War, Israel might now be willing to help Iran not with weapons (Iran has plenty) but with intelligence, in order to help prolong any war the Islamic Republic might engage in with the Saudis. This version does have one virtue, implausible as it is: it is not nearly as absurd as what Muhammad Al-Sa'idi wants the world to believe about that long-running top-secret non-existent "Israel-Iran alliance."

First published in