

**ISRAELI-SUNNI COOPERATION FUELED BY IRAN'S GROWING
REGIONAL INFLUENCE**

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Isranet Daily Briefing, April 24, 2018

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[Israel's Search for Peace May Pass Through the Gulf](#): Rick Ekstein, *Globe and Mail*, Apr. 17, 2018— Twenty-five years ago, when I started doing business in the Persian Gulf, no one could have reasonably imagined the warming of relations now unfolding between Israel and a number of key regional players.

[The Secret to Successful Arab Modernization is to Stop Hating Israel](#): Lee Smith, *Tablet*, Apr. 4, 2018 — In the middle of Mohammed bin Salman's two-week trip across America seeking investment and advice...

[The Middle East's Nuclear Technology Clock Is Ticking](#): Dr. James M. Dorsey, *BESA*, Mar. 20, 2018— Concerns about a Middle Eastern nuclear arms race are being fueled by uncertainty over the future of Iran's 2015 nuclear agreement...

[The Dangers of Failing Middle East States](#): Kobi Michael and Yoel Guzansky, *Middle East Quarterly*, Spring 2018 — In an address to a prominent British think tank, Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu recently argued that before establishing a Palestinian state...

On Topic Links

[Business Ties to Arab World Skyrocketing, Says Venture Capitalist Margalit](#): Max Schindler, *Jerusalem Post*, Apr. 22, 2018

[The Future of Israel Looks Good](#): Efraim Inbar, *JISS*, Apr. 18, 2018

[An Emerging Arab-Israeli Thaw](#): James S. Robbins, *National Interest*, Apr. 3, 2018

[Russia's Aim in Mid East: Bloody the Nose of Uncle Sam \(Podcast\)](#): Elliot Friedland, *Clarion Project*, Apr. 11, 2018

ISRAEL'S SEARCH FOR PEACE MAY PASS THROUGH THE GULF

Rick Ekstein

[Globe and Mail](#), Apr. 17, 2018

Twenty-five years ago, when I started doing business in the Persian Gulf, no one could have reasonably imagined the warming of relations now unfolding between

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Israel and a number of key regional players. The signs of progress may not make headlines, which are generally reserved for the worst news from the region, but they are important and clearly present, if you know where to look.

To cite just one example, analysts took notice of Air India's historic announcement that it will operate a direct route between Tel Aviv and Delhi over Saudi airspace - an act that was previously denied by the Gulf state. Across the region, leaders once hostile to Israel are increasingly viewing Israelis as valuable trade, technology, and security partners.

It's widely observed that these unlikely friendships are rooted in mutual concern toward Iran's growing influence in the region, seen in the Shia theocracy's massive expenditure of forces and funds in terror groups across the Middle East. Today, Iran's aggressive agenda spans much of the map. The regime is bankrolling Hezbollah missiles in Lebanon and Hamas missiles in Gaza. It is arming a brutal insurgency in Yemen. It is building a permanent military presence in Syria, armed with advanced weaponry. This is to say nothing of Iran's nuclear ambitions, which generate as much - if not more - fear in Riyadh and the Gulf as it does in Tel Aviv.

While the context may be one of regional anxiety, the resulting Israeli-Sunni cooperation offers optimism for those who seek an accord between Israel and its neighbours. It may yet foreshadow a comprehensive peace that Israelis have always sought - with mixed success - for their children.

Polling data over the years consistently shows most Israelis support significant concessions for the sake of an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement. Since the state's establishment - 70 years ago this spring - Israeli leaders have been willing to share the land with their Arab neighbours in two states for two peoples, as envisioned by the UN's 1947 partition plan.

Since the Oslo Accords, Israelis have offered multiple far-reaching peace proposals, made major concessions, relinquished extensive tracts of land and withdrawn forces in an effort to enable progress towards peace. Tragically, the Palestinian leadership is wracked with dysfunction. Palestinians are currently split between a Gaza-based "government" under Hamas that rejects Israel's very right to exist and a West Bank Palestinian Authority that has lost the confidence of its people and has boycotted negotiations for years.

I use the term "mixed success" because the failure of Palestinian leaders has not

ISRAELI-SUNNI COOPERATION FUELED BY IRAN'S GROWING REGIONAL INFLUENCE

isranet-publications

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prevented exceptional progress with neighbouring Sunni states. The peace treaties Israel signed with both Egypt (1979) and Jordan (1994) prove that peace and co-operation are possible. These agreements survived the devastating effects of the Arab Spring, which engulfed the Middle East in chaos. They have also enabled Israelis to share their tremendous knowledge, technology, and resources (now including natural gas) with their neighbours - especially Jordan.

Indeed, a region wracked by socioeconomic, environmental, and security challenges needs more co-operation with innovators in Israel, the so-called "startup nation." This sentiment is reflected in my personal experience. Many of the friends I made across the Arab world have always held Israel in great esteem and had no problems working with me, a Jewish businessman from Toronto and a strong supporter of Israel.

The Gulf states seem to be quietly recognizing that those who refuse to let go of bitter historic grievances are, tragically, captive to the past. Many Sunni government and business leaders understand that those who fantasize that Israel will disappear - the likes of Iran, Hezbollah, and Hamas - are as self-deluded as they are self-defeating. To the contrary, Israelis recognize that their future is inseparable from the future of the region, which is one reason why Israel is committed to the security, prosperity and progress of its neighbours.

Nothing is a given in the Middle East. As Israeli leaders - including current Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu - have repeatedly shown, historic rivals can mend old wounds and build a better future for the next generation. In the face of shared threats, there is a historic opportunity for Sunni leaders to forge a new relationship with Israelis. To build upon current momentum, regional players should urge the Palestinian leadership to end its boycott of negotiations with Israelis and seek a peace accord based on two states for two peoples.

[Contents](#)

THE SECRET TO SUCCESSFUL ARAB

MODERNIZATION IS TO STOP HATING ISRAEL

Lee Smith

[Tablet](#), Apr. 4, 2018

ISRAELI-SUNNI COOPERATION FUELED BY IRAN'S GROWING REGIONAL INFLUENCE

isranet-publications

Isranet Daily Briefing, April 24, 2018

<https://www.isranet.org/daily-briefing/israeli-sunni-cooperation-fueled-by-irans-growing-regional-influence/>

In the middle of Mohammed bin Salman's two-week trip across America seeking investment and advice, from tech innovators in Palo Alto to New York rabbis, for his blueprint for his country's future, the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia made news—maybe history. In an interview with the Atlantic Magazine's Jeffrey Goldberg published Monday, the man known as MBS said that he personally recognized the legitimacy of Zionism. "I believe that each people, anywhere, has a right to live in their peaceful nation," said the Saudi royal. "I believe the Palestinians and the Israelis have the right to have their own land. But we have to have a peace agreement to assure the stability for everyone and to have normal relations."

In 1919, Emir Faisal, ruler of the Kingdom of Hejaz, signed a famous agreement with the Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann recognizing a Jewish State in a future Arab sphere of influence that would be free of Ottoman and Western colonial rule. Yet ever since MBS's grandfather Ibn Saud founded the modern Saudi kingdom in 1932, Riyadh has opposed a Jewish state in the Middle East. Some of MBS's predecessors were more active than others in their opposition. In the early 2000s, for instance, Riyadh covered much of Hamas' budget and supported other extremist groups committed to the destruction of Israel.

There have also been peace overtures, like the initiative that MBS's uncle Abdullah, then Crown Prince himself and later King, made public in a February, 17, 2002 Thomas Friedman column. Abdullah's proposal offered Israel "full normalization of relations" in exchange for withdrawal from "all the occupied lands." But MBS's statement leapfrogs Abdullah's initiative. He has validated the central tenet of Zionism—the Jews have a right to their own land. In the Middle East.

Now when he gets back to Riyadh, the Crown Prince should move for open and normal relations—not because of Israel or the Palestinians or Muslims more generally, or for the sake of world peace, but for his own people. Perhaps it's because the 32-year-old Arab leader has already broken so many taboos that reports of this history-making statement have been muted. It's certainly gotten less attention than when MBS detained some 200 officials for several months starting in November. Among those held at the Ritz in a huge corruption purge were several princes, including Waleed bin Talal, one of the world's wealthiest men. That is, MBS was calling his own family, the royal family, to account.

While many commentators argued the corruption purge was simply cover for a power grab, MBS is already the power behind the throne he is destined to inherit

**ISRAELI-SUNNI COOPERATION FUELED BY IRAN'S GROWING
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isranet-publications

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from his father, the 82-year-old King Salman bin Abdulaziz. The real point was that in jailing his own blood, MBS showed that no one is above the law. The royal family, the custodians of Islam's two holy shrines in Mecca and Medina, is not itself sacred. Rather, it's an imperfect institution that should be held accountable, like everyone else.

Thus MBS established the precedent by which he too will be judged by those he leads—men as well as women, whom he seeks to make a full part of this conservative country's society and economy. According to sources in the region, MBS has further pushed against tradition, though much less publicly, in urging religious officials to reform certain Islamic texts that preach violence and hostility to non-Muslims. He told Thomas Friedman in November that the kingdom is not "reinterpreting" Islam but "restoring" it to its origins. On MBS's reading, it all started to go wrong in 1979, when armed extremists took over the grand mosque in Mecca, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, and the Islamic Revolution took root in Iran.

If Middle East and Islam experts tend to roll their eyes with talk of a pre-1979 Saudi Arabia that sounds a little like Sweden, the reality is that he's written a new foundation story for the vast majority of a population born after 1979. Another thing Saudi youth don't remember is the last full-on Arab Israeli war in 1973, or the economic embargo MBS's uncles imposed on the US for supporting Israel. His grand reform project, known as Vision 2030, is a clear warning to his countrymen that Saudi Arabia can no longer exist on oil receipts alone. Nor, as his statement on Israel shows, can Riyadh allow its foreign policy to be held hostage by other regional actors

The Saudis have been embroiled in a regional squabble with their Gulf Cooperation Council neighbor Qatar for close to a year now. Riyadh has imposed an embargo on Doha until it stops promoting and funding extremists, interfering with Saudi's internal politics, and flirting with Iran. The Saudi effort is ham-fisted, but MBS wants his neighbors in line to counter the Iranian threat. The Palestinians represent a more dangerous breach than Qatar.

The Hamas-fueled protests—attacks —on the Gaza border are partly intended to deflect attention as the Trump administration prepares for the possibility of withdrawing from the Iran nuclear deal in mid-May. Iran's strategy is to sow divisions in the US alliance system by highlighting Saudi Arabia's budding, albeit quiet, relationship with the Palestinians' adversary, Israel. If in sending children to

**ISRAELI-SUNNI COOPERATION FUELED BY IRAN'S GROWING
REGIONAL INFLUENCE**

isranet-publications

Isranet Daily Briefing, April 24, 2018

<https://www.isranet.org/daily-briefing/israeli-sunni-cooperation-fueled-by-irans-growing-regional-influence/>

the border Hamas is trying to force the Saudis to choose between the Palestinians and Israel, MBS deflected the issue Monday, explaining that both have rights...

[To Read the Full Article Click the Following [Link](#)—Ed.]

[Contents](#)

THE MIDDLE EAST'S NUCLEAR TECHNOLOGY CLOCK IS TICKING

Dr. James M. Dorsey

[BESA](#), Mar. 20, 2018

Concerns about a Middle Eastern nuclear arms race are being fueled by uncertainty over the future of Iran's 2015 nuclear agreement, a seeming US willingness to weaken its strict export safeguards in pursuit of economic advantage, and a willingness by suppliers such as Russia and China to ignore risks involved in weaker controls.

The Trump administration was mulling a loosening of controls to facilitate a possible deal with Saudi Arabia as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu urged President Trump, in a recent address to a powerful Israeli lobby group in Washington, to scrap the Iranian nuclear deal unless the Islamic Republic agrees to further military restrictions and makes additional political concessions. Israel has an undeclared nuclear arsenal of its own and fears that the technological clock is working against its long-standing military advantage.

The US has signaled that it may be willing to accede to Saudi demands in a bid to ensure that US companies, with Westinghouse in the lead, have a stake in the kingdom's plan to build 16 reactors by 2032 that would have 17.6 gigawatts (GW) of nuclear capacity. In putting forward demands for parity with Iran by getting the right to controlled enrichment of uranium and the reprocessing of spent fuel into plutonium, potential building blocks for nuclear weapons, Saudi Arabia is backing away from a 2009 memorandum of understanding with the US in which it pledged to acquire nuclear fuel from international markets.

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isranet-publications

Isranet Daily Briefing, April 24, 2018

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“The trouble with flexibility regarding these critical technologies is that it leaves the door open to production of nuclear explosives,” warned nuclear experts Victor Gilinsky and Henry Sokolski in an article in Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists. While Israeli opinion is divided on how the US should respond to Saudi demands, Trump’s and Netanyahu’s opposition to the Iranian nuclear accord has already produced results that would serve Saudi interests.

European signatories to the agreement are pressuring Iran to engage in negotiations to limit its ballistic missile program and drop its support for groups like Lebanon’s Shiite Hezbollah and the Houthi rebels in Iran. Iran has rejected any renegotiation but has kept the door open to discussions about a supplementary agreement. Saudi Arabia has suggested it may accept tight US controls if Iran agrees to a toughening of its agreement with the international community.

The Trump administration recently allowed high-tech US exports to Iran that could boost international oversight of the nuclear deal. Deputy Secretary of State John Sullivan signed a waiver that allows a Maryland-based company to export broadband networks, satellite dishes, and wireless equipment to Iran for stations that monitor nuclear explosions in real time.

Iranian resistance to a renegotiation is enhanced by the fact that Europe and even the Trump administration admit that Hezbollah, despite having been designated a terrorist organization by the US, is an undeniable political force in Lebanon. “We...have to recognize the reality that (Hezbollah) are also part of the political process in Lebanon,” former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said on the eve of a visit to Beirut. A US willingness to go easy on demands that Saudi Arabia adhere to tough safeguards enshrined in US export control laws, widely viewed as the gold standard, would open a Pandora’s Box.

The United Arab Emirates, the Arab nation closest to inaugurating its first nuclear reactor, has already said it would no longer be bound by the safeguards it agreed to a decade ago if others in the region are granted a more liberal regime. So would countries, like Egypt and Jordan, that are negotiating contracts with non-US companies for the construction of nuclear reactors. A US retreat from safeguards in the case of Saudi Arabia could add a nuclear dimension to the already full-fledged arms race in the Middle East.

The Washington-based Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS) cautioned last year in a report that the Iranian nuclear agreement had “not

**ISRAELI-SUNNI COOPERATION FUELED BY IRAN'S GROWING
REGIONAL INFLUENCE**

isranet-publications

Isranet Daily Briefing, April 24, 2018

<https://www.isranet.org/daily-briefing/israeli-sunni-cooperation-fueled-by-irans-growing-regional-influence/>

eliminated the kingdom's desire for nuclear weapons capabilities and even nuclear weapons... There is little reason to doubt that Saudi Arabia will more actively seek nuclear weapons capabilities, motivated by its concerns about the ending of the (Iranian agreement's) major nuclear limitations starting after year 10 of the deal or sooner if the deal fails."

Rather than embarking on a covert program, the report predicted that Saudi Arabia would, for now, focus on building up its civilian nuclear infrastructure as well as a robust nuclear engineering and scientific workforce. This would allow the kingdom to take command of all aspects of the nuclear fuel cycle at some point in the future. Saudi Arabia has in recent years significantly expanded graduate programs at its five nuclear research centers...

[To Read the Full Article Click the Following [Link](#)—Ed.]

[Contents](#)

THE DANGERS OF FAILING MIDDLE EAST STATES

Kobi Michael and Yoel Guzansky

[Middle East Quarterly](#), Spring 2018

In an address to a prominent British think tank, Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu recently argued that before establishing a Palestinian state, it would be necessary to internalize what had happened in the broader Middle East during the past few years—a reference to the collapsing regional order and the attendant proliferation of failed states. "It's time," he said, "we reassessed whether the modern model we have of sovereignty, and unfettered sovereignty, is applicable everywhere in the world."

Netanyahu expressed a wider and deepening concern over the long-term consequences of the on-going Arab upheavals, euphorically misdiagnosed at their onset as the "Arab Spring." These upheavals have toppled a number of established regimes and destabilized several states at a horrific human and material cost. But they also have called into question the century-long Arab

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REGIONAL INFLUENCE**

isranet-publications

Isranet Daily Briefing, April 24, 2018

<https://www.isranet.org/daily-briefing/israeli-sunni-cooperation-fueled-by-irans-growing-regional-influence/>

system based on territorial nation-states by accelerating processes and undercurrents that have long been in operation, turning many of these entities into failed states. By most accepted measures, the Palestinian Authority is also a failed entity. Would a Palestinian state fare any better?

According to the U.N.'s definition, "failed states" are political entities that demonstrate little or no ability to provide their citizens with basic security. Such states suffer from at least three key failings: a weak government that lacks legitimacy and does not enjoy a monopoly on the means of violence; extreme political and societal fragmentation; and severe economic weakness. To these can be added the lack of correlation between nation and state, especially when various national or ethnic groups aspire to independence or view themselves as belonging to a neighboring state. This phenomenon is particularly salient in the contemporary Middle East where the post-World War I agreements partitioned the defunct Ottoman Empire into artificial states that grouped together diverse ethnic groups, rival religions, and, in some cases, speakers of different languages.

American political scientist William Zartman argues that, in most cases, the process of state failure is gradual and prolonged, rather than sudden, as in a coup d'état or revolt. He notes that states that suffer from internal disintegration (primarily because of identity politics—religious, ethnic, etc.) and simultaneously are characterized by weak or non-functioning institutions are liable to become failed states. In such states, failure intensifies in a kind of vicious circle. The weakness of the state's institutions reinforces the fragmentation, which in turn further weakens the institutions and their legitimacy.

The last two decades show that most of today's active conflicts, including international terrorism, emanate from failed states, which either cannot control the spillover of domestic turmoil beyond their borders or deliberately seek to export it in an attempt to reduce the threat at home. In other words, crises that develop in failed states also harm their surroundings: They are the biggest generators of humanitarian crises, displaced people, and refugees; they endanger regime stability in neighboring states; they enable access to sophisticated weapons stolen from collapsing military facilities, and they constitute fertile soil for the advent of extremist and terror groups. In the context of the Middle East, they encourage subversive activities among Muslim communities in Western countries in a way that might destabilize those countries' social order...

[To Read the Full Article Click the Following [Link](#)—Ed.]

[Contents](#)

On Topic Links

[Business Ties to Arab World Skyrocketing, Says Venture Capitalist Margalit: Max Schindler, *Jerusalem Post*, Apr. 22, 2018](#)—As Israel marked Independence Day, the country was benefiting from ever-growing business ties with the Arab world, according to one Israeli executive who has helped paved the way for the budding rapprochement.

[The Future of Israel Looks Good: Efraim Inbar, *JISS*, Apr. 18, 2018](#)—At 70, Israel stands strong, yet debates about its health persist. The radical Israeli Left seems most concerned about the country's future, arguing that there is great urgency in solving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict; otherwise, Israel is doomed. The Left contends that Israel's democratic character, its international legitimacy, and its ability to withstand protracted conflict all are threatened by the ongoing stalemate.

[An Emerging Arab-Israeli Thaw: James S. Robbins, *National Interest*, Apr. 3, 2018](#)—A tectonic shift is taking place in Middle East politics. We may be on the verge of seeing a historic normalization of relations between Israel and several major Arab states. And it is all thanks to Iran.

[Russia's Aim in Mid East: Bloody the Nose of Uncle Sam \(Podcast\): Elliot Friedland, *Clarion Project*, Apr. 11, 2018](#)—To the detriment of the U.S., Russia seems to be dominating much of what is going on in the Middle East right now - especially on the Syrian front. Why? And how does it affect America? Listen to the following podcast in which Clarion Project's Elliot Friedland presents four answers.