



Center for Iranian Studies in Ankara

SAUDI – ISRAELI NEXUS: IMPLICATIONS FOR IRAN

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Saudi – Israeli Nexus: Implications for Iran

Suudi – İsrail İlişkilerinin İran'a Etkileri

روابط عربستان سعودی و اسرائیل و پیامدهای آن برای ایران

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SUMMARY

- The Middle East is a prime example for a new alliance formations and rapprochements.
- A new rapprochement is observed between Israel and the Gulf States.
- The improving relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia due to the mutual security concern is another example of newly established alliances.
- Growing Saudi-Israeli ties and as a result better ties between the Gulf States and Tel Aviv indicate that Iran's security buffer might be compromised.
- These growing and newly established ties can also result in the deterioration of the relations between Ankara and Riyadh.

Keywords: Israel, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Middle East, Gulf States, Alliance

ÖZET

- Ortadoğu coğrafyası yeni ittifak oluşumlarına ve yakınlaşmalara örnek teşkil eden başlıca bölgedir.
- İsrail ve Körfez ülkeleri arasında yeni yakınlaşmalar bu duruma örnek teşkil etmektedir.
- İsrail ile Suudi Arabistan arasındaki ilişkilerin karşılıklı güvenlik kaygısı nedeniyle gelişmesi yeni kurulan ittifakların bir başka örneğidir.
- Suudi-İsrail bağlarının gelişmesi ve buna bağlı olarak Körfez ülkeleri ile Tel Aviv arasında gelişen ilişkiler, İran'ın güvenlik tamponunun gelecekte tehlikeye girebileceği anlamına gelmektedir.
- Büyüyen ve yeni kurulan bu bağlar Ankara ile Riyad arasındaki ilişkilerin bozulmasına neden olabilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İran, Rusya, Suriye, Bölgesel Rekabet

چکیده

- جغرافیای خاورمیانه الگوی مهم در شکل گیری ائتلاف ها و ایجاد روابط نزدیک میان قدرت ها است.
- به عنوان مثال، ما اخیراً شاهد ایجاد روابط نزدیک بین اسرائیل و کشورهای حوزه خلیج هستیم.
- توسعه روابط بین اسرائیل و عربستان سعودی به دلیل نگرانی های امنیتی متقابل، نمونه ای دیگری از ائتلاف جدید است.
- توسعه روابط میان عربستان سعودی-اسرائیل و کشورهای حوزه خلیج-تل آویو به این معنی است که منطقه حائل امنیتی ایران می تواند در آینده به خطر بیفتد.
- ایجاد چنین روابط تازه تاسیس و رشد آن می تواند منجر به اختلال در روابط میان آنکارا و ریاض شود.

کلید واژه ها: اسرائیل، عربستان سعودی، خاورمیانه، کشورهای خلیج فارس، اتحاد

Introduction

The world has transformed dramatically over the last decade, which has necessitated a change of strategy for many countries. Moreover, the realist school of thought which talks about power and security has become more pronounced in the contemporary international order. Even though globalization has entailed interdependence, the fact remains that anarchy cannot be eclipsed and the notion that today's friends can be tomorrow's enemies perseveres. While military alliances are usually created to serve as a deterrent against a common threat, groupings and alignments have surfaced for economic gains and to deliver political interests. The Middle East is a prime example of alliance formations and rapprochements. An example is the US relationship with the YPG forces in Syria. While the US has declared the PKK in Turkey to be terrorists, it has been fighting on the ground in Syria alongside the YPG forces against the Islamic State (IS).¹ Some may call this being hypocritical, others would call it practical.

Another example of the changing groupings is Israel's nascent relations with the Gulf states which has caught the public attention, particularly the epochal visit in October by Prime Minister Netanyahu to Muscat², as well as calls by Bahraini officials endorsing Israel's acceptance and regional integration.³ Israel along with various Gulf Arab states believe that Iran is a disrupting force, which interferes in conflicts and supports rivals across the region through its proxies. However, as with every relationship, Israel-Gulf relations have reciprocity. While relations with the Gulf states would further put Iran in a corner, a relationship with Israel affords the Arab states to win favour with the US.

¹ Turkey says U.S. support for Syrian Kurdish YPG a "big mistake", "Reuters" <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-turkey-usa/turkey-says-u-s-support-for-syrian-kurdish-ypg-a-big-mistake-idUSKCN1NN09I>

² Israel's prime minister visits Oman, an Arab monarchy—and is welcomed, "The Economist" <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2018/11/03/israels-prime-minister-visits-oman-an-arab-monarchy-and-is-welcomed>

³ Israel, Bahrain could announce normalized ties by next year — report, "The Times of Israel" <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-bahrain-could-announce-normalized-ties-by-next-year-report/>

However, the elephant in the room hampering open bonhomie is the fact that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict remains an emotive anchor with the Arab people, and relations with Israel will likely remain restricted without a substantial peace agreement. Israeli forces have killed over hundreds of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip amidst a deepening humanitarian crisis and the peace process has been frigid for years. Furthermore, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas severed links with the US after Washington acknowledged Jerusalem as Israel's capital and moved its embassy to the city. Nevertheless, the Palestinian conflict is the thorn on the path to full public disclosure for the Gulf states and Israel.

Saudi Arabia, the self-proclaimed leader of the Muslim world, and Israel lack formal diplomatic ties and their relationship is amassed in decades of enmity. However, their mutual gratification over Iranian public protests in December 2018⁴, was the latest sign of growing converging political interests against their shared regional rival: Iran. Israeli-Saudi ties have cardinally improved in recent years primarily due to the shared security concern of incapacitating Iranian "imperialism" and possible nuclearization. The developing partnership has been abetted and bolstered by the Trump administration, which views both Israel and Saudi Arabia as paramount to achieving the American foreign policy goal of suppressing the Iranian regime. Moreover, it is, in fact, the best kept secret in West Asia that the two foremost Middle Eastern partners of the US, Saudi Arabia and Israel, are clandestine allies. Officially, they condemn each other; unofficially they are close affiliates.

Over the decades, Saudi Arabia and Iran ties have vacillated between nonchalance, hostility, and tension. Stemming from the domestic context that covers spheres such as ideology, politics and more recently economics. Presently, the Saudis believe that a response to the ongoing

⁴ Tens of thousands of people have protested in Iran. Here's why, "The Washington Post" https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/01/03/tens-of-thousands-of-people-protested-in-iran-this-week-heres-why/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.25d35eb3184c

Yemen conflict is pertinent in order to quench the Iranian supported Houthi rebels and win prestige for the Saudi nation.⁵ The Iran-Israel rivalry is not much different though the underlying doctrine of this dispute has reached new degrees, strengthening the strategic foundation of the rivalry. Iran's quest of a nuclear program has notably increased tensions between the two nations. Even though shared enmity has circumscribed Israeli-Iranian relations since the 1979 Revolution, the countries have never confronted each other in direct military terms. However, both sides are currently testing each other's limits in Syria.

In the article, *'Balancing Acts: The Gulf States and Israel'*⁶, the author talks about how national interests of weak states are subject to pressure from strong actors/nations. Using the Gulf countries' relationship with Israel as her case study, she points to how maintaining such a relationship means currying indirect favour with the hegemon- the US. Hence, these states adopt a more neutral stance in their Israeli foreign policy.

In the article *'Israel and the Arab Gulf States: Drivers and Directions of Change'*⁷, it is argued that practicality takes precedence over ideology and that despite unlikely direct relations between the Gulf states and Israel, unofficial contact and cooperation between the countries will increase keeping in mind joint interests, particularly Iran's nuclear ambitions.

The article *'Saudi Arabia's rapprochement with Israel: the national security imperatives'*⁸, examines how ties with the US and common detestation for Iran have shaped Saudi rapprochement with Israel and labels this approach pragmatic since it ensures a market for Saudi oil and helps Riyadh in acquiring weapons enabling it

to fight Iranian proxies, for example, Yemen. The author also concludes that unless the Palestinian conflict is resolved this alliance will not take public form.

The Organisation for Islamic Cooperation (OIC) was formed in 1969 following the Al-Aqsa Mosque fire. The objective of the body, which is the second largest after the United Nations, was largely to safeguard Muslim rights, particularly addressing the Palestinian cause.⁹ Saudi Arabia is the pioneer of the organisation; it is thus, interesting to examine how Saudi-Israel ties fit into its 1969 mandate of condemning Israeli atrocities against the Palestinians. Even though Saudi- Israel relations date as far back as 1901, this article will give a brief overview of Saudi-Israel relations post-2006 and address the following questions:

Question 1: What is the reason behind the Saudi-Israel nexus?

Question 2: What kind of implications does this nexus have for Iran?

Saudi-Israel Relationship: An Overview

The forefathers that counselled the Gulf states towards autonomy as far back as 1932 were antipathic towards Israel since they had witnessed first-hand the harrowing events that marked the creation of the Jewish state. In 1971, Emirati ruler, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan had expressed the current Arab sentiment when during an interview he stated:

*"Israel's policy of expansion and racist plans of Zionism are directed against all Arab countries, and in particular those which are rich in natural resources. No Arab country is safe from the perils of the battle with Zionism unless it plays its role and bears its responsibilities in confronting the Israeli enemy."*¹⁰

In the last decade, Riyadh's approach towards Tel Aviv is clearly built around the con-

⁵ Arhama Siddiqi, Muhammad Abbas Hassan, and Asad Ullah Khan. "Stabilizing Pakistan-Gulf Relations in the post-Yemen Crisis Period.", *Perspective* (2019) https://iramcenter.org/d_hbanaliz/stabilizing-pakistan-gulf-relations-in-the-post-yemen-crisis-period.pdf

⁶ Rosman-Stollman, Elisheva. "Balancing Acts: The Gulf States and Israel." *Middle Eastern Studies* 40, no. 4 (2004): 185-208.

⁷ Ulrichsen, Kristian Coates. "Israel and the Arab Gulf States: Drivers and Directions of Change." (2016).

⁸ Abadi, Jacob. "Saudi Arabia's rapprochement with Israel: the national security imperatives." *Middle Eastern Studies* (2019): 1-17.

⁹ Kayaoglu, Turan. *The organization of Islamic cooperation: Politics, problems, and potential*. Routledge, 2015.

¹⁰ Hassan Hamdan al-Alkim, *The Foreign Policy of the United Arab Emirates* (London: Saqi Books, 1989), 175. 5 Joseph.

cept of realism rather than ideology. On the other hand, Israel's conjectures regarding Saudi actions dimmed after the 2006 Lebanon War¹¹ and more so after the Arab Spring in 2011.¹² Since assuming the role of Prime Minister in 2009, Benjamin Netanyahu has candidly shared Saudi apprehensions regarding the Iranian pursuit of nuclear capability though the relationship between Israel and Saudi-Arabia has been enshrouded in secrecy. Meetings and actual cooperation only came to light following documents released by WikiLeaks in 2010 which showed meetings between the Director of the Mossad¹³, Meir Dagan and Saudi Officials where Riyadh allegedly permitted Israeli use of its airspace and offered succor in any strikes against Iran.¹⁴ Moreover, former Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, encapsulated their relationship when during an interview he said that "Saudi Arabia sees Israel as a serious potential partner both militarily and economically."¹⁵

In April 2015, both Riyadh and Tel Aviv were very forthright in their reproof against the nuclear agreement between Iran and the P5+1 which would provide Tehran relief from the economic sanctions that had been levied against it.¹⁶ The primary concern was that Iran would not only recuperate financially but also would gain the capability to aid regional terrorist outfits as well as covertly continue its nuclear programme. This conception shaped Saudi Arabia's Yemen policy, consequently, in 2015, along with the United Arab Emirates, Riyadh led a military operation against the Iranian backed Houthi re-

bels.¹⁷ On this occasion, Israel reputedly offered its Iron Dome defense technology.¹⁸

In early 2016, an Israeli news channel indicated that a deputation from Tel Aviv had visited Riyadh.¹⁹ In the same summer, under the direction of retired General Anwar Eshki, a Saudi delegation held meetings with Israeli officials in Jerusalem.²⁰ Reportedly during the talks, Eshki tried to persuade the Israeli's to accept a two-state solution citing that it would thwart Iranian attempts to exploit the Palestinian cause and incidentally render groups like Hamas and Hezbollah invalid. Although Israeli officials made no promises, they nevertheless welcomed progress in liasoning with the Arab countries.

In 2017, President Trump's advisor to the Middle East, his son-in-law Jared Kushner, visited Riyadh and discussed the blueprint of a peace plan with Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman.²¹ The plan was ostensibly tilted towards the Israelis. Subsequently, the prince summoned the Palestinian Authority leader, Mahmoud Abbas and ventured to coerce him into accepting the plan. During an interview conducted in the same year, Chief of General Staff of the Israel Defense Forces, Gadi Eizenkot said that both Riyadh and Tel Aviv were in utter concurrence regarding Iranian intentions. Furthermore, he labelled Iran, the "real and greatest threat to the region" and stated that in light of mutual interests, his country was willing to share intelligence deemed advantageous

¹¹ Kreps, Sarah E. "The 2006 Lebanon war: lessons learned." *Parameters* 37, no. 1 (2007): 72-85.

¹² The Arab Spring: A Year Of Revolution, "NPR" <https://www.npr.org/2011/12/17/143897126/the-arab-spring-a-year-of-revolution>

¹³ Barak Ravid," WikiLeaks Blows Cover Off Israel's Covert Gulf States Ties", *HAARETZ* <https://www.haaretz.com/1.5146634>

¹⁴ Saudi Arabia gives Israel clear skies to attack Iranian nuclear sites, "The Times" <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/saudi-arabia-gives-israel-clear-skies-to-attack-iranian-nuclear-sites-2x0mgqb7xj3>

¹⁵ What is behind the covert Israeli-Saudi relations?, "Al Jazeera" <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/11/covert-israeli-saudi-arabia-relations-171120142229835.html>

¹⁶ Simon Henderson, "Riyadh's Diplomatic Dance with Israel", *The Washington Institute* <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/riyadhs-diplomatic-dance-with-israel>

¹⁷ Arhama Siddiq, Muhammad Abbas Hassan, and Asad Ullah Khan. "Stabilizing Pakistan-Gulf Relations in the post-Yemen Crisis Period.", *Perspective* (2019) https://iramcenter.org/d_hbanaliz/stabilizing-pakistan-gulf-relations-in-the-post-yemen-crisis-period.pdf

¹⁸ Report: Israel Offered Saudi Arabia Use Of Its Iron Dome Technology, "The Jerusalem Post" <https://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Report-Israel-offered-Saudi-Arabia-use-of-its-Iron-Dome-technology-403893>

¹⁹ Israeli energy minister said to make secret visit to Abu Dhabi, "The Times of Israel" <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israeli-energy-minister-said-to-make-secret-visit-to-abu-dhabi/>

Israeli energy minister said to make secret visit to Abu Dhabi, "The Times of Israel" <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israeli-energy-minister-said-to-make-secret-visit-to-abu-dhabi/>

Energy minister: We have secret ties with 'many' Arab states, "The Times of Israel" <https://www.timesofisrael.com/energy-minister-we-have-secret-ties-with-many-arab-states/>

²⁰ Retired Saudi general visits Israel, meets official, "Press TV" <https://www.presstv.com/Detail/2016/07/23/476492/Saudi-Arabia-Israel>

²¹ The Kingdom and the Kushners: Jared Went to Riyadh. So Did His Brother, "The New York Times" <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/21/world/middleeast/kushner-saudi-arabia.html>

in countering the threat. When Saudi Crown Prince bin Salman became the de facto ruler in 2017, the change in the Saudi approach towards Israel became even more conspicuous. Moreover, in a revealing interview, MBS indirectly acknowledged the existence of Israel.²² When asked, whether the Jews had a right to their land, he affirmed that both the Palestinians and Israelis had a right to their land. Concomitantly, in the same interview, he likened Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to Adolf Hitler.²³ Moreover, his comments were synonymous with Riyadh's decision to grant Air India use of Saudi airspace for flights to and from Tel Aviv. Something previously unprecedented.

Decreasing Iranian sway in the region is not solely the mandate of the Saudi-Israeli alliance but has to a great extent been facilitated by the United States' own drive to exterminate Iranian influence. This was evident in the June 2018 meeting in Aqaba between the heads of the Israeli, Jordanian, Egyptian, Saudi Arabian, and Palestinian intelligence. Jared Kushner and Chief Legal Officer to President Trump, Jason Greenblatt were also in attendance.²⁴ The first broadcasted meeting between officials of the two countries was held on the sidelines of the 2018 Counter-Violent Extremist Organizations Conference in Washington, DC where Israel Defense Forces Chief of Staff, Lieutenant General Gadi Eizenkot, met his Saudi counterpart, General Fayyad bin Hamid al-Ruwayli.²⁵

The Saudi-Israeli relationship is not confined to geopolitics. It now also encompasses areas such as medicine, economy and technology. While there are no official trade figures, in 2018, a Tony Blair Institute paper indicated that the trade between Israel and the Gulf countries—predominately Saudi Arabia— approximated to

around \$1 billion.²⁶ Naturally, transactions are executed in utmost secrecy so the products have to be transported via third-party countries. In this regard, Jordan, which signed a peace agreement with Israel in 1994, has become a major conduit for such facilitations. In the arena of technology, evidence of cooperation is manifold. For instance, when Riyadh requested Intu-View, an Israeli intelligence firm, to structure a special programme that had the ability via scanning social media to pinpoint potential terrorist threats in the Kingdom.²⁷ Furthermore, Saudi officials have discussed how through economic partnership Israel can participate in Crown Prince Salman's Vision 2030. Moreover, there are signals that Israeli firms may join in the bidding process through mediatories in order to invest in the Smart City project in the Gulf of Aqaba.

Thus, examination of the Saudi-Israeli relationship demonstrates that realism is the underlying facet of this alliance. Aside from rants and talks, Riyadh has never physically threatened Tel Aviv. Moreover, official Saudi hate rhetoric against Israel serves as a safety diversion of sorts and works as a pacifier for the traditional elements in Saudi society. If scrutinized, both countries' behaviours towards the Palestinian cause are analogous. In fact, arguably in the post Arab Spring Middle East, Israel can assume the role of a balancer by mitigating the threat emanating from Iran. Though Saudi Arabia does financially support the Palestinian cause, it has obliquely managed to subtly mollify radical elements within its own society all the while not compromising its defense needs from the US. Increasing correlative credence was also discernible in 2013 when no objections were raised by the Israeli lobby in the US against the Kingdom's purchase of \$52 billion of US military equipment.

²² Saudi Crown Prince: Iran's Supreme Leader 'Makes Hitler Look Good', "The Atlantic" <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/04/mohammed-bin-salman-iran-israel/557036/>

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Kushner and Mossad in Jordan: Israeli-Arab Secret Meeting in Aqaba Revealed, "Al Bawaba" <https://www.albawaba.com/loop/kushner-and-mossad-jordan-israeli-arab-secret-meeting-aqaba-revealed-1151888>

²⁵ Israel military chief met Saudi counterpart in Washington, "The New Arab" <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2018/10/17/israel-military-chief-met-saudi-counterpart-in-washington-report>

²⁶ Tony Blair, "Assessing Israel's Trade With Its Arab Neighbours", *Tony Blair Institute for Global Change* <https://institute.global/insight/middle-east/assessing-israels-trade-its-arab-neighbours>

²⁷ Neri Zilber, "Gulf Cyber Cooperation with Israel: Balancing Threats and Rights", *The Washington Institute* <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/gulf-cyber-cooperation-with-israel-balancing-threats-and-rights>

Regional Implications

1. Trade

The regional consequences of Saudi conviviality are profound. The relations between the two countries serve as an impetus to other Gulf nations to invite Israeli investment into their economy. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's visit to Oman in 2018 and similar high-profile visits of Israeli officials to the UAE are in essence part of the same artifice. However, considering Saudi Arabia's stature in the Muslim world, Israeli-Gulf relations are reliant on Israeli-Saudi relations. Although trade amongst the Gulf countries and Israel has existed for decades, albeit through third-party states. Furthermore, there are ample opportunities in the Gulf for Israeli medicine, technology and agriculture markets- in the latter case, particularly in desalination and irrigation. Conversely, relations with Israel also have perks. This fact alone is a driving factor for Tel Aviv to establish relations with the Gulf countries. According to the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, in 2013, Israeli exports were US\$5.3 million.²⁸ Another potential avenue for cooperation is in the area of transport networks. Israeli Intelligence and Transportation Minister, Israel Katz who accompanied Prime Minister Netanyahu concurred with his meetings regarding rail links or what he called 'tracks of regional peace' between Israel and the Arab countries.²⁹ Furthermore, it would support Israel in tightening its grip over the territory it occupies without providing any sort of leeway to the Palestinians thereby reshaping the present state of affairs into an accepted norm amongst the Arab states. Bearing in mind that Muslim countries such as Egypt and Pakistan rely upon Saudi endowments. Thus, relations with Riyadh would pave the way for Israeli participation in Saudi policy circles and ultimately in decisions pertaining to matters such as Saudi investments in other countries. A recent instance being Saudi investment in Pakistan's Gwadar Port.

²⁸ Shezaf, "Israel Eyes Improved Ties."

²⁹ Fares Braizat, "Rail tracks for regional peace?", The Jordan Times <http://www.jordantimes.com/opinion/fares-braizat/rail-tracks-regional-peace>

2. Palestinian Issue

Currently, the Palestinian Authority, as well as the PLO, are no longer regarded as significant- especially with the younger generation since they do not relate to the aging Palestinian leadership. Despite Gulf countries discreet transactions with Israel, there is a growing stimulus to shelve the issue altogether so as to pursue national interests. The matter of forced Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands has become superfluous in the eyes of many Arab states. In fact, Prime Minister Netanyahu has categorically stated that resolution of the Palestinian issue is not imperative to construct relations with the Arab countries. In essence, it also furnishes the Israelis strong political power. The only barrier is the Palestinian issue since public rhetoric has always been the steadfast denial of Israel. However, dismissing the Palestinian issue would be arduous since it is enmeshed deeply in the societal fabrics of the Arabs. Moreover, this move would undermine Arab credibility and thereby further empower groups such as Hezbollah which have already been deemed a terrorist organization by the Arabs. The question then arises as to what do the Arab states have to gain out of this? The answer is simple. By showcasing themselves as allies of Israel, the Arab states can gain tract with the United States and hence garner the same security cover it provides to Israel.

3. Turkey versus the Kingdom

Even though cooperation between Turkey and Israel started in the 1990s, Ankara has invariably been a staunch supporter of the Palestinian cause. President Erdogan has overtly reiterated that Turkey supports the Palestinian struggle unequivocally. In fact, Turkey has never been timorous of making bold statements on issues such as its support for Pakistan in light of India's accusations in the Pulwama attack in February 2019. Moreover, President Erdogan was the first to call an emergency OIC meeting when the US shifted its embassy to Jerusalem. However, in the wake of the Khashoggi murder, Turkey-Saudi relations hit a snag. Therefore, presumably, escalating intimacy between Ri-

yadh and Tel Aviv will not bode well with Ankara as it would challenge its current increasingly viewed role as the leader of the Sunni Muslim world.

4. Implications for Iran

Prior to the 1979 Iranian Revolution, Iran and Israel shared cordial ties primarily because they were both under the US' wing. Post-Revolution, with the advent of Imam Khomeini, Iranian leadership underwent a 180-degree turn against Washington and viewed it as a symbol of Western dominance. There is no love lost between Iran and Israel. On several occasions, the Iranian leadership has equated Israel to a "cancerous tumor". Meanwhile, Prime Minister Netanyahu has expressed that Iranophobia is so overwhelming that it was driving the Arab states into seeking alliances with Israel. On one occasion, he proclaimed that "Iran is devouring one nation after the other." Apathy for Iran was shared by Saudi King Abdullah who time and again pressed Washington to demolish Iran's nuclear programme and "cut off the head of the snake." As mentioned previously, Riyadh has facilitated Israeli bombers by consenting for them to use its airspace. The Saudi-Israeli partnership is understandably fretting for Iranian leadership since it brings Riyadh's staunch Sunni supporters, such as the UAE and Bahrain into the anti-Iranian fold. The apprehension is also discernible in President Hassan Rouhani's parliamentary statement when he affirmed that unless the Kingdom severed ties with the Jewish state, Tehran would not restore ties with Riyadh. However, the present state of affairs in the Middle East dictates that Tehran will encounter even more parlous hurdles in the long run. Israeli meddling in Saudi policy circles, coupled with existing Israeli-Indian amiability mean that Israel is in a position to smoke Iran out of its own turf given Saudi investments in Pakistan's Gwadar which borders Iran; additionally Indian investment in Chabahar Port. Growing Saudi-Israeli ties and, as a result, better ties between the Gulf states and Tel Aviv mean that Iran's security buffer may be compromised.

Hence, isolation and the resulting vulnerability may lead to direct action by Israel against Iran.

Conclusion

A Riyadh and Tel Aviv alliance may have previously seemed like a far-fetched notion. However, developments in the Middle East—particularly the prospect of Iranian dominance—have nudged the two countries together. They are undoubtedly an empirical example of the dictum, "the enemy of my enemy is my friend." The collective abhorrence they have for Tehran has set the stage for new avenues for cooperation between the two states and helped frame a new regional paradigm. However, the Palestinian issue is the chief impediment in the pursuit of open relations, between Saudi Arabia, Israel and other Gulf Countries. Nevertheless, congeniality is being sought covertly and increasingly so. In essence, the integrity of the Arab states now borders on hypocrisy. Additionally, the OIC, which was premised on the safeguarding of Muslim rights is explicable redundant. In a world already dogged by islamophobia, any alliance with Israel would render the Muslim world rudderless. Furthermore, for Israel, Iran with its allies is the main threat that needs to be addressed imperatively. By simultaneously isolating and encircling Tehran with its own allies, Israel aims to leave Iran susceptible to annihilation—both from within and outside—a double squeeze in many respects. Having said this, the entity that will suffer the most significant loss in this inexorable game being played in the region is the Palestinians because the tenet for which they have been rallying for, for over seventy years, is now on the verge of merely being an offish recollection.

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