

# King Salman Talks of Peace between Saudi Arabia and Israel

It was a gratifying surprise, and a sign of the changing political configurations in the Middle East that the retired Saudi major general, Anwar Eshki, director of the Middle East Center for Strategic and Legal Studies in Jeddah, spoke on panels in Washington and New York in 2015 together with Dore Gold, the Israeli international relations expert soon to become director general of Israel's foreign office, and advisor of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The improbable duo agreed on two crucial issues: bringing peace between Arab countries and Israel; and building a Saudi-Israel peace which among other consequences could counter the expansion of Iran.

It would be fruitful and rewarding for the world, as well as the Middle East, if King Salman of Saudi Arabia could write a statement that would address the issue in the same manner. If one were presumptuous enough to write his statement it might go like this:

King Salmon's letter to the International Community

In view of the challenges we are facing in the Middle East it is imperative to call on the Arab nations in particular and the international community in general to initiate changes to foster peace in the area. We must move forward to positive activity in our area. All are now far more concerned with the threat of Iran and now also with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria than with the State of Israel.

The people of Saudi Arabia in a recent public opinion poll

made known their views of who is the main adversary of their country: 53 per cent thought it was Iran, 22 thought it was the Islamic State, and only 18 per cent thought it was Israel. The world has noticed that we did not express any considerable criticism of Israel during its Operation Protective Edge in Gaza in 2014. I can reveal that there was talk of Israel offering its Iron Dome missile defense technology to us for use in Yemen.

The time is long overdue for my country, and the other Arab countries, to establish peace, diplomatic relations, economic and financial arrangements with the State of Israel. Our two countries seek the same objective, peace in our area, and are both aware of the major danger in the Middle East. Israel does not threaten any country, in the Middle East or elsewhere, but is itself threatened, as is Saudi Arabia, by a shared adversary, Iran.

Our two countries know that Iran's intentions are twofold: to extend hegemony over the whole Middle East, and revive the "Persian Empire"; and to achieve as soon as possible a nuclear arsenal.

Saudi Arabia and Israel both realize that Iran is a state with an active offensive policy, one that is likely to be strengthened as a result of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action signed in Lausanne, an agreement, which at a minimum, will allow Iran to be in a position to develop nuclear weapons in the not too distant future.

Saudi Arabia and Israel are both concerned over Iran's nuclear program and its regional ambitions.

We know that Iran will challenge us and boost its oil production as soon as sanctions are lifted. We are conscious of the impending danger. On August 23, 2015, Phillip Hammond the British Foreign Secretary remarked during his visit to Tehran that the United Nations Security

Council sanctions will be removed in the spring of 2016.

It is true that Israeli and Saudi plans to deal with the common enemy are not completely aligned, especially regarding the possibility of an Israeli air strike against Iran. We also understand that Israel may first be concerned and anxious to deal with Iran's proxies in the area, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and Hamas in the Gaza Strip, before committing itself to the larger problem of Iran.

We on the other hand call for a joint Arab military force to increase regional stability. We have already taken action to fight the Houthi rebels in Yemen who are backed by Iran. The rebels have ousted the president of Yemen and captured Sana'a, the capital of Yemen, and they are helping Iran to destabilize the region. We have helped stop the attempt of Iran to control the Bab al-Mandeb Strait.

We favor the creation of a Greater Kurdistan, containing parts of Turkey, Iraq, and Iran, to reward the brave Kurds for their fight against terrorism and their actions to limit Iran's ambitions in the Turkish territory. This will help in the struggle to control the Islamic State which is not only expanding its control of territory but also developing chemical, and perhaps also biological, weapons as has been shown by its use of chlorine in home made bombs.

We also realize that the Iran Supreme Leader and those who agree with his intentions, though they are Shiites, may have ambitions to capture Mecca and Medina, our two Holy Places.

It is regrettable, in view of the changing nature of the Middle East, that we have no diplomatic relations with Israel, and have only had some private meetings with Israelis during the last few years. We proposed the Arab Peace Initiative in 2002. We understand that some of the

original proposals, withdrawal of Israel from the Golan Heights and the return of Palestinian refugees to Israel, are not acceptable to Israel.

But the situation in the Middle East has changed in the ensuing 13 years, and the need for reconciliation with and understandings with Arab countries, is of the utmost importance. We suggest some changes, a new seven-point plan, to the original proposal. We therefore favor, and trust that other Arab states will follow the same policy, the establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel and the conclusion of a peace treaty with Palestinians. We are seriously considering the ending of the Arab League boycott of Israel.

We know that the Mahmoud Abbas, president of the Palestinian Authority, is planning to visit Iran in the near future, and that the PA, which already has an embassy in Tehran, wants to strengthen its relationship with Iran. We hope this will not prevent the Palestinians from pursuing negotiations with Israel.