

Saudi Prince Turki Al-Faisal Behaving Badly In Manama

by Hugh Fitzgerald



The “Manama Dialogue,” just held in Bahrain’s capital, each year brings together political and military leaders from around the world to discuss security issues involving the Middle East. Ordinarily the atmospherics of these meetings is polite; if there are differences, they are expressed in I-beg-to-differ fashion; the expression of real animus is to be left at the door. But not this time. Saudi Prince Turki al-Faisal could not contain his anti-Israel feeling, even as a guest of Bahrain which has just normalized relations, quite happily, with the Jewish state. Turki al-Faisal let loose with a vicious string of accusations aimed at the startled representative of Israel, Defense Minister Gabi Ashkenazi, who attended virtually. Ashkenazi managed to maintain his sang-

froid, and gave a lesson in behavior to the deplorable Turki al-Faisal. A report on the Saudi's outburst is here: "Saudi prince: Bully Israel steals land, puts Palestinians in concentration camps," by Raphael Ahren, [Times of Israel](#), December 6, 2020. There is also a brief item on this posted yesterday at Jihad Watch [here](#).

A Saudi prince and former senior government official on Sunday launched a blistering attack against Israel, describing the Jewish state as a belligerent and apartheid-practicing occupier, and saying that peace will remain elusive until the creation of a Palestinian state along 1967 lines.

"Israeli governments have arrested thousands of the inhabitants of the lands they are colonizing and incarcerated them in concentration camps under the flimsiest of security accusations – young and old, women and men who are rotting there without recourse or justice," said Turki al-Faisal al Saud, the former head of the kingdom's intelligence service, at panel discussion in Bahrain that was also attended by Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi.

First of all, Israel is not "colonizing" the ancestral homeland of the Jewish people, the place where Jews have lived uninterruptedly for 3000 years, while those in exile never forgot "Jerusalem and Zion." The Mandate for Palestine (1922) gave international recognition to the connection of the Jewish people to this land – the land that went from the Golan in the north to the Red Sea in the south, and from the Jordan River in the east to the Mediterranean in the west. When Jordan seized part of Judea and Samaria in 1949 – renaming that territory in 1950 as "the West Bank" – and held onto it until 1967, it did so not as the recognized sovereign, but merely as the military occupier. When Israel won the "West Bank" in the Six-Day war, it was at long last able to exercise its preexisting right to that land; unlike Jordan, Israel was

never the “occupier” of land that had been assigned to the future Jewish National Home by the League of Nations’ Mandate for Palestine. But for Turki al-Faisal, the Israelis are engaged in “colonizing” their ancestral homeland, as if they were no different from the French in Algeria, or the English in India. All over Israel there are archaeological sites testifying, with their ancient synagogues, residences, mosaic floors, pottery, oil lamps, menorahs, wine jars, coins, scraps of writing, and more, to the presence of Jews in the Land of Israel for thousands of years. Israel is not a Jewish colony; it is their truest home.

Turki al-Faisal accused Israeli governments that, he said, “have arrested thousands of the inhabitants of the lands they are colonizing.” He means, of course, the Palestinian Arabs. But those arrested are not the innocent victims of a wicked Israeli state. They have committed, or helped others to commit, criminal acts including, most significantly, acts of terrorism carried out against Israeli civilians. They are not different from the terrorists who took over the Grand Mosque in Mecca in 1979, and who were subsequently executed by the Saudi state. Does Turki al-Faisal remember that incident? And perhaps Turki al-Faisal should be made aware that unlike Saudi Arabia, which regularly has public decapitations, where people are beheaded for nothing more than attending a protest rally, in its entire existence Israel has never imposed the death penalty on any Palestinian Arabs, no matter how many Israelis they may have killed.

Al-Turki claims that the Israelis have “incarcerated them [the Palestinians] in concentration camps under the flimsiest of security accusations – young and old, women and men who are rotting there without recourse or justice.”

This is complete nonsense. There are no “concentration camps” in Israel. Even Israel’s most ferocious critics, the BDSers, the U.N. kangaroo-court prosecutors, Ilhan Omar, Linda Sarsour, have never suggested that Israel keeps people –

“young and old, men and women” – in such “concentration camps.” “War is deceit,” said Muhammad, but the deceit mustn’t be so absurd as to make the deceiver ridiculous in the eyes of the world. And that is how Prince Turki al-Faisal now appears: ridiculous.

“They’re demolishing homes as they wish, and they assassinate whomever they want to. And yet, the Israeli Knesset passed a law that defines the citizenship of Israel as exclusively Jewish, denying the non-Jewish inhabitants of Israel equal rights under the law. What kind of democracy is that?”...

Israel demolishes homes for two reasons. First it demolishes houses that may have been built illegally, without permits, or are in violation of various building codes, ordinances, or regulations. It’s a long drawn-out process to obtain permission to demolish the homes of those – both Jews and Arabs – who have built structures illegally.

A second category of homes that are demolished includes those that belong to terrorists or their immediate families. It has been found useful as a way to discourage would-be terrorists; they may not care about sacrificing their own lives, but many are unwilling to make life more difficult for their families, and consequently, refrain from the temptation of terrorism. Several studies, such as “Evidence from House Demolitions” by Cynthia Blank, have concluded that demolishing the homes of Palestinian terrorists results in “an immediate, significant decrease in the number of suicide attacks.” Is Israel not entitled to minimize the harm to its own citizens from suicide bombers by such potentially life-saving demolishments?

Citizenship in Israel is not limited to Jews. There are nearly two million Arab citizens of Israel. They have equal civil, political, and religious rights as the Jews. Has no one told Prince Turki al-Faisal?

Turki al-Faisal calls the security barrier the “apartheid

wall” but there is no “apartheid” anywhere in Israel. Arabs serve in the Knesset, sit on the Supreme Court, go abroad as ambassadors for the Jewish state. Arabs and Jews study in universities together, work in offices and factories together, receive and provide care in the same hospitals, play in the same orchestras and on the same sports teams.

The security fence, or barrier, in the West Bank, exists only to protect Israeli civilians from Arab terrorists. It has nothing to do with “apartheid.” The Palestinians in the West Bank lead their separate lives, not because of some non-existent policy of “apartheid,” but because they are administratively under the authority of the PA.

The Saudi prince, who until Sunday’s appearance had been thought relatively well-disposed toward Israel, made the comments at the concluding session of the Manama Dialogue conference hosted by the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

Al-Faisal led Saudi intelligence for more than two decades and served as the kingdom’s ambassador to the United States and United Kingdom. Although he currently does not hold any official position, his stance is seen as closely mirroring that of King Salman. In contrast, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has signaled greater willingness to quietly engage with Israel to counter their common enemy, Iran, and boost foreign investment in the kingdom.

It is well-known that King Salman refuses to consider a normalization of ties with Israel until a Palestinian state “in the pre-1967 lines” is established. That means Israel would have to agree to being squeezed back within the 1949 armistice lines, leaving the country with a nine-mile-wide waist from Qalqilya to the sea. No wonder that Abba Eban called the 1949 armistice lines “the lines of Auschwitz” and Lord Hugh Caradon, who drafted U.N. Resolution 242 – which

recognized Israel's right to keep territory won in the Six-Day War that it needed in order to have "secure [i.e. defensible] and recognized boundaries" – called the 1949 lines "a rotten line." Israel will never agree to giving up the Golan, or the Jordan Valley, or its five largest settlements in Judea and Samaria. King Salman is 84 and in poor health. His son, the Crown Prince, has let it be known that he approves of the normalization of ties that the U.A.E. and Bahrain now have with Israel, and that he favors having Saudi Arabia eventually follow suit. One suspects that Turki al-Faisal's outburst in Manama, while it may win him passing praise in Ramallah, has alarmed MBS, and that once the Crown Prince ascends the throne, Turki al-Faisal is likely to find himself on the outs with the new king, and stripped of whatever power he now possesses.

Ashkenazi, in his comments right after the Saudi royal concluded his opening remarks, briefly referred to Al-Faisal's speech. "At the beginning of my remarks I would like to express my regret on the comments of the Saudi representative. I don't believe that they reflect the spirit and the changes taking place in the Middle East," he said, speaking via video from Jerusalem.

After such a vicious assault on Israel by Turki al-Faisal, with accusations about the Jewish state sending "thousands" of Palestinians to "concentration camps," Ashkenazi would have been well within his rights to answer back in kind, but instead he wisely chose to briefly take note of that verbal onslaught by saying "I would like to express my regret on the comments of the Saudi representative" which underscored just who was behaving very badly. and who was behaving exceedingly well. The Bahrainis were certainly taken aback by Turki al-Faisal's going off the rails, and they must have welcomed the dignified and diplomatic response from Ashkenazi.

Ashkenazi later tweeted: "The false accusations of the Saudi

representative at the Manama Conference do not reflect the facts or the spirit and changes the region is undergoing. I rejected his remarks and emphasized that the 'blame game' era is over. We are at the dawn of a new era. An era of peace."...

This, too, was a mild reproof, and an appeal to the spirit of the Abraham Accords that no doubt pleased the Bahraini sponsors of the conference.

The Saudi prince said that while Israeli leaders often describe their country as existentially threatened, it is in fact a powerful nation with a massive nuclear arsenal that regularly engages in "willy-nilly" military exploits in Syria, Lebanon and elsewhere.

In Syria, Israel has one main goal: to keep Iran from establishing bases, from where it can then deliver precision-guided missiles to Hezbollah in Lebanon, and perhaps also to threaten Israel directly. Turki al-Faisal describes Israel's attempts to defend itself against the threat from Hezbollah and Iran as "'willy-nilly' military exploits in Syria, Lebanon, and elsewhere." Does this Saudi prince not know that Israel engages in precise attacks on Iranian bases and arms depots in Syria in order to minimize the Hezbollah-Iran threat of a "Shi'a crescent" that would be a threat not only to Israel, but to Saudi Arabia? What country has done more than Israel to prevent Iran's dream of creating that "Shi'a crescent" from the Gulf to the Mediterranean? And shouldn't Turki al-Faisal, as a representative of Saudi Arabia, which like Israel is threatened by Iran, be congratulating Israel for its proven ability to set back Iran's nuclear program? That nuclear program threatens the Saudis even more than it does the Israelis, because Israel has the ability to respond to an Iranian attack with its own nuclear strike, while the Saudis do not. Shouldn't Prince Turki al-Faisal express his gratitude, for Israel's latest act of derring-do, undertaken

to delay Iran's progress toward producing a bomb, in assassinating Mohsen Fakhrizadeh?

"Offering friendship to the kingdom of Saudi Arabia has not stopped successive Israeli governments from unleashing their political minions and their media hounds from all countries to denigrate and demonize Saudi Arabia," he said.

Israel has not "unleashed [its] political minions and their media hounds" to "denigrate and demonize Saudi Arabia." In fact, Prime Minister Netanyahu has been avidly courting Saudi Arabia. There are countries determined to make the Saudis look bad. Israel is not among them. In first place is Erdogan's Turkey, which milked the story of the killing of Jamal Khashoggi for all it was worth. Erdogan sees Saudi Arabia's own pretensions to being the leader of the Muslim world, both because it is the Guardian of the Two Holy Places, Mecca and Medina, and because of its immense oil wealth, as standing in the way of his own neo-Ottoman schemes and dreams to lead the Muslim lands..

Second is Shi'a Iran, which has been trying for five years to help the Shi'a Houthis take over Yemen, which if accomplished would give Iran a firm base right along Saudi Arabia's southern border, from which to threaten the Kingdom from without, while Iran could simultaneously stir up trouble within Saudi Arabia, among the 4.3 million Shi'a who live almost entirely in the Kingdom's eastern, oil-bearing province.

He cited Saudi King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed as saying repeatedly that a two-state solution, with East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine and a "fair solution" for the Palestinian refugees, was "the only peaceful option for all of us."

Saudi Arabia has insisted that any normalization between it and Israel can only happen alongside a lasting peace deal

involving a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The kingdom publicly continues to state its unwavering support for the Arab Peace Initiative, a 2002 Saudi-sponsored deal that offers Israel full ties with all Arab states in return for Palestinian statehood on territory Israel captured in 1967.

Referring to the Abraham Accords – the normalization agreements Israel signed with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain – the Saudi royal said, “You cannot treat an open wound with palliatives and painkillers.”

Turki al-Faisal considers the Palestinian-Israeli conflict to be an “open wound” that is being treated with the “palliatives and painkillers” of the Abraham Accords. He’s missing the point. The Abraham Accords were meant not to “treat” the Palestinian problem, but to put it aside, while two Arab states – the U.A.E. and Bahrain – pursued their own national interests, no longer willing to be held back by what the Palestinians would permit.

“The Abraham Accords are not divine writ,” he added. For Saudi Arabia to join the agreement, he said, the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, which calls for a Palestinian state along the 1967 lines, “must be implemented.”

Only once the Palestinian question is solved can Riyadh and Jerusalem join hands to confront their common enemy, Iran, he said in conclusion.

The Abraham Accords are not “divine writ.” But nor is the insistence by Ramallah that the Arab states must be kept from normalizing ties with Israel, no matter what security and economic benefits those ties could bring, until the Palestinians’ maximalist needs have been met, and they provide their *placet*.

It's curious that Turki al-Faisal claims that Riyadh and Jerusalem can "join hands to confront their common enemy, Iran" only "once the Palestinian question is solved." Turki al-Faisal chooses to ignore that for several years, Riyadh and Jerusalem have done exactly that – "joined hands" in security cooperation against that common enemy, Iran, without the "Palestinian question" being "solved."

I suspect that this unpleasant outburst by Turki al-Faisal – the spectacle of his wild accusations in Manama being such a sharp contrast to Gabi Ashkenazi's dignified and laconic response – will cost him dearly at home, once MBS, who wants to forge closer ties with Israel, and doesn't forget who stands with him and who stands against, ascends the throne.

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