

# Mohamed Abdelaziz's Comment on Abdulhameed Hakeem "Who holds the keys of peace with Israel?"

by [Mohamed Abdelaziz \(/experts/mohamed-abdelaziz\)](#)

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Brief Analysis

**I**n his latest piece (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/who-holds-the-key-to-peace-with-israel>) on Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman and Israel, a Saudi writer and General Manager of the Middle East Center for Strategic and Legal Studies in Jeddah Abdulhameed Hakeem tries to wash Saudi Arabia's hands of the long history of animosity toward Israel. Instead, he holds the late Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser and the Muslim Brotherhood responsible for seeding such hostility and pushing other Arab states, including Saudi Arabia, to adopt the same approach. In fact, the author is partly right that Nasser and his pan-Arabist ideology played a key role in fueling hostility against Israel. But claiming that Saudi Arabia blindly followed Nasser is historically inaccurate.

The Saudi hostility toward Israel goes back to the pre-Nasser era, specifically with the declaration of the state of Israel in 1948. King Abdelaziz Al Saud took a very tough stance against Israel and sent funds, weapons, and soldiers to fight along with the Palestinians and the Arab armies. The Saudi army also sent some units to fight along with the Jordanian army during the 1967 war and funded countries that were directly involved in a war with Israel.

In addition, during the 1960s, both Egypt and Saudi Arabia engaged in a severe ideological war in which Saudi Arabia supported and promoted absolute monarchy and Islamist theocracy versus Nasser's secular, pan-Arabist discourse. Such an ideological conflict escalated into a civil war in Yemen where the Egyptian army intervened to save the progressive wings against the monarchical wings directly backed and funded by Saudi Arabia. Therefore, it does not make much sense to claim that Nasser had a great impact on Saudi Arabia's relations with Israel.

Moreover, during 1973 Arab-Israeli war and under the leadership of Saudi Arabia, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) imposed an embargo against the United States in response to the U.S. decision to re-supply the Israeli military. The embargo also extended to countries that were sympathetic with Israel, including the Netherlands, Portugal, and South Africa. Even more important, during the Sadat era, Saudi Arabia fiercely opposed the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty and considered Sadat a traitor to the Arab world, ultimately leading to the expulsion of Egypt from The Arab League. Moreover, despite its importance, the Arab Peace Initiative which Saudi Arabia sponsored since 2002, is not quite the boldest step since the birth of the Arab-Israeli conflict, especially when compared to Sadat's visit to Jerusalem.

Saudi regimes have also exported the Wahhabi Islamist ideology, known to be hostile to Israel. In this context, Saudi Arabia has a long history of supporting the Muslim Brotherhood and other Salafi groups that are extremely antagonistic to Israel, although it allowed neither such movements nor similar Saudi groups to open branches in the kingdom. When the Muslim Brotherhood was outlawed by Egypt in 1948, its founder, Hassan al-Banna received an invitation to relocate to Saudi Arabia, but he was assassinated in February 1949. Yet the relationship between Saudi Arabia and the Brothers continued and the kingdom allowed them to convene their meetings during the pilgrimage season to select their new Supreme Guide. Following Nasser's crackdown campaign on the Muslim Brotherhood after the failed assassination attempt on his life in 1954, the kingdom became the first refuge for the leaders of the Brotherhood and its cadres who fled the persecution of the Nasserite regime.

The Muslim Brothers were also an integral part of the ideological conflict between the conservative monarchies and “progressive” regimes led by Nasser. In the 1960s, the kingdom tried to intervene to stop Egypt’s execution of the Brothers' new leader, Sayyid Qutb, but their attempt failed. And beginning in the 1970s, when the kingdom witnessed an economic boom, thousands of Islamist professionals, workers, experts, and academicians traveled there looking for jobs and were welcomed with open arms. It was only much later that the honeymoon between Saudi Arabia and the Brothers ended, after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, Saudi Arabia then found itself in a critical situation, abruptly changing its strategy toward the Brothers. Prince Nayef bin Abdul Aziz, Minister of the Interior and one of the pillars of the royal family, blamed the Brothers for the growing violence and extremism.

Therefore, both Saudi policy and the radical Wahabi interpretation of Islam share responsibility for the growing radical Islamic movements that do not recognize Israel and conceive it as the enemy of the Islamic nation. Indeed, the majority of the textbooks Saudi Arabia spread in the region and in other parts of the world have justified violence and targeted the Jews as the enemy of Islam. Most recently, this has motivated the American administration under Trump to launch a new program with Saudi Arabia, seeks to replace the old Wahhabi curricula that sponsoring violence with more moderate ones; [Rex Tillerson \(https://arabi21.com/story/1014763/-تيلرسون-يكشف-بنود-اتفاق-السعودية-لمحاربة-الوهابية\)](https://arabi21.com/story/1014763/-تيلرسون-يكشف-بنود-اتفاق-السعودية-لمحاربة-الوهابية), the former U.S. Secretary of State, announced the program at a session Congress.

Nevertheless,, the current Saudi-Israeli incipient rapprochement is a major sign of the current ideological and political change that the Saudi regime is going through. It should be further encouraged and supported. Such rapprochement comes at a time when Saudi Arabia is assuming a new leadership position after the failure of the Arab Spring, which the kingdom and other Gulf countries conceived as a serious revolutionary threat to their existence.

Furthermore, this rapprochement comes at a time when both Israel and the kingdom face a common enemy, Iran, whose proxies pose a threat not only to both countries but also to the entire region. But if Saudi Arabia really intends to pursue the path of peace, it should provide a good example for other Arab countries by pursuing Sadat’s steps and establishing full diplomatic relations with Israel. ❖

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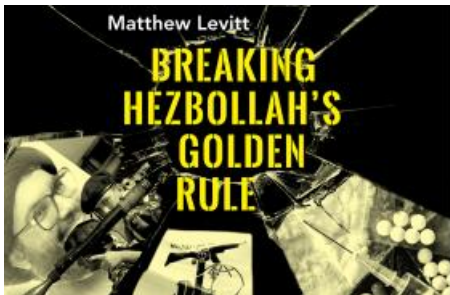
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