

Media Analysis of the Meeting Between Prince Turki Al-Faisal and General Amidror

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Articles & Testimony

The May 6 meeting between Prince Turki al-Faisal, Saudi Arabia's former intelligence chief, and Israeli Major General Yaakov Amidror, Israel's former national security advisor—hosted by The Washington Institute for Near East Policy—has spurred a wide range of differing voices in the Arab press to comment. Some newspapers have denounced the meeting between the Saudi Prince and the Israeli Major General, harshly criticizing those in charge of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy. At the forefront of this critique is the independent newspaper Raialyoum, among others, which accuse Saudi Arabia of seeking to normalize relations with Israel and conspiring against the sanctities and stability of the region. On the other hand, other Arab newspapers and news websites welcomed the news of the Saudi-Israeli meeting. Still other sites showed great reluctance to delve into the details of this incident whatsoever. There were also those articles that chose to deliberately ignore most aspects of the dialogue between al-Faisal and Amidror, focusing on al-Faisal's discussion of the Palestinian issue and the Arab Peace Initiative. This slew of differing approaches to covering the event presents a fascinating glimpse into the shifting views and priorities throughout the Arab world.

Among the critics and skeptics, editor-in-chief of Raialyoum Abd al-Bari Atwa wrote that the meeting between Prince Turki al-Faisal and Israeli Maj. Gen. Amidror reflects the will of both parties – Saudi Arabia and Israel – to initiate a new stage of normalizing bilateral relations. They both seek to form a joint alliance against the common threat and danger of Iran and terrorism, both Shiite and Sunni. According to Atwan, al-Faisal deliberately tried to mislead the public when he said: “with Jewish money and Arab brains we can go a long way together (...) on science, on technology ...” Prince al-Faisal overlooked the fact that Arabs have both money and brains. They need neither. Their only problem is Arab leaders – mainly those of Saudi Arabia – who wasted that money and lost those brains. The fifteen million Jews around the world, says Atwan, do not have the money that Arabs have: Arabs export more than two-thirds of OPEC's oil production and they own two-thirds of the world's oil. Ewan24, an independent website, deemed that sentence the most dangerous of al-Faisal's speech, because it is based on the same logic promoted by Zionist propaganda: Arab money, Israeli mentality, and Arab workforce.

Iraqi news agency Buratha, on the other hand, published the speech of Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah's Secretary-General, where he references to the meeting that “the matter of the two Egyptian islands concerns Egypt, but it will open the door for further contact and cooperation between Saudi Arabia and Israel”, since the former has officially

become a part of the Camp David Accord after claiming of the two islands. Nasrallah asserted that this meeting echoed Saudi Arabia's views and an obvious shift in its foreign policy. Although some may pretend the meeting had no larger significance, Nasrallah noted, this is not just a meeting between various civil society groups; both parties have close association with their respective official authorities. According to Nasrallah, Saudi Arabia will now only take a stance regarding the situation in Gaza or elsewhere in order to save face.

The Palestinian Resistance Coalition similarly denounced the meeting, issuing a statement on its website that described the meeting as a sort of normalization between Saudi Arabia and the Zionist entity. The statement categorized the meeting as the latest in a series of secret discussions between Israeli and Saudi officials. Saudi Arabia has played a major role—in coordination with the Zionist entity—in “fueling sectarian strife” and in the continued hostilities against the people of Yemen, Syria, Iraq, and Libya. The statement also claims that Saudi-Israeli coordination seeks to divide and fragment the peoples of the region in order to eradicate the Palestinian cause. Calling upon the Arab nation to oppose normalization with the Israeli enemy, it warned against the Saudi plot to promote such normalization and execute a plan against the Arab people.

The Lebanese daily Assafir also presented the meeting as confirmation that Saudi Arabia has abandoned its fundamental principles: it is now seeking to implement its new vision of a strong alliance filling the vacuum of U.S. “withdrawal” from the Middle East. Assafir posits that these actions are all intended to ensure the continuity of the royal family and safeguard the economic and security interests of its GCC neighbors. The newspaper echoes a sentiment similar to that of Nasrallah that the meeting gathered the “hawks” of the region's security agencies and cannot be considered a mere “discussion circle” meant to show good faith due to the two participants' security backgrounds and their respective closeness to the actual vision of both countries' decision-makers.

On the other hand, the Tunisian daily Assabah focused on criticizing Israeli motives for the meeting. It described the Saudi-Israeli meeting as a “green card” that would allow Israel to promote Israeli diplomacy through media and propaganda. Moreover, Israel could now better promote its the public face it has promoted since the signing of the Iranian nuclear deal — its repeated warning against an increasing Iranian threat and expressed interest in joint cooperation a with GCC countries to confront and deter said threat.

Alquds News saw in the meeting between al-Faisal and the Israeli general a serious threat to the Palestinian cause and the Palestinian people. The newspaper believes that event has revealed Israel's intention to reject the Saudi peace initiative, suggesting this was clear in Amidror's speech: “The situation has changed with regard to the initiative presented by Saudi Arabia in 2002. Do you see Assad with the Israelis...? Do you see the Lebanese negotiating with the Israelis?”

In contrast, some major newspapers and websites refrained from going on the attack, overlooking most of the dialogue's content and merely focusing the discussion centering around the Palestinian cause. Notably, these reports lacked any accusations of normalization. For instance, Egypt's al-Ahram—which publishes articles against normalization with Israel almost daily and in general takes a strong stance against any domestic hint at normalization—presented the meeting as a standard debate, which Al-Faisal won over Israeli peer, rather than an indication of a burgeoning normalization or serious dialogue. On the other hand, al-Ahram described Israel's intent for this meeting was to instill fear and terror in Gulf countries of the Iranian threat, motivated by a secret wish to push the Saudis into Shiite-Sunni wars that would consume and weaken both sides.

In the independent Saudi newspaper Al-Hayat, the newspaper addressed the meeting in an article titled “Turki al-Faisal in Washington Reject Any Cooperation with Israel.” The newspaper shed some light on aspects of the meeting that highlight Saudi Arabia's interest in the Palestinian cause and adherence to the Arab Peace Initiative, emphasizing al-Faisal's statement that “there cannot be any sort of cooperation with Israel as long as Palestine is occupied by Israel.” Kuwait's Al Anba published a similarly neutral report mostly highlighting Prince Turki al-

Faisal's discussion of U.S.-Saudi relations and the Arab Peace Initiative. The report described al-Faisal's emphasis on the importance of adopting the Arab Peace Initiative as the best approach to achieve peace between Arabs and Israel, end the daily suffering of the Palestinian people, and stop the expansion of Israeli settlements. The Kuwaiti Al Rai took the same stance and allocated its most of its own report to summarizing al-Faisal's speech without presenting any analysis or criticism alongside it.

These various news stories regarding this meeting present a surprising variation in the amount of coverage and analysis. This journalistic tension emphasizes the differing viewpoints of reporters, the conflicting interests of those who control the various media outlets, and the nature of their relations – whether close or distant – with Saudi Arabia or Israel, not to mention the nature of their relations with the Palestinian cause.

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