Saudi Arabia’s Role in Strengthening Greater Israel

 Amid Trump’s comments regarding the fact that after the presidential election he wants to hold a ceremony of signing a peace agreement between Israel and the Saudi Arabia, with King Salman and his son present there, Yori Cohen, the head of Mossad, has already stated that “normalization of relations with Israel will be a gift from Riyadh to the new US president – regardless of whether Donald Trump or Joe Biden wins.”

As previously reported by Israelinfo, Israel and Saudi Arabia have been secretly negotiating with the US since December 2019, to implement the “deal of the century” from the US President Donald Trump, and to include representatives of Saudi Arabia in the “Muslim Guardian Council for Holy Sites” on the Temple Mount. According to Arab diplomatic circles, Israel and the US are openly interested in Riyadh (and with it the UAE and Bahrain) supporting the “deal of the century”, including extending Israeli sovereignty to some territories in the West Bank.

One of the main objectives of these talks between the Jewish state and the largest Arab monarchy, according to Israel Hayom, is to prevent Turkey from increasing its influence in Palestinian affairs in the Guardian Council, particularly in the matter of protection of Muslim holy sites on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Saudi diplomats have confirmed to the press that these talks were conducted by small teams of diplomats and special service officers from Israel, the United States and Saudi Arabia as part of the American peaceful Middle East initiative, titled “deal of the century”. As is well known, in recent years Saudi Arabia has been facing harsh confrontation with the current Turkish authorities.

It must be noted that the Al-Aqsa Mosque on the Temple Mount is the third Islam shrine after the Al-Haram Mosque in Mecca and the Prophet’s Mosque in Medina. In 1994, after the signing of the Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty, the King of Jordan received a special status —Protector of Islamic shrines in Jerusalem — and the Jordanian monarch (at that time – Hussein ibn Talal) promised to transfer the authority to protect Muslim shrines in East Jerusalem to the Palestinians when they restore their rights in that part of the city. After Jordan’s decision to include Palestinian representatives in the Guardian Council on the Temple Mount, Palestinian officials started open relationships with the Turkish government to ensure its presence on the territory of Islamic shrines in Jerusalem, which has been perceived rather negatively in Israel and Saudi Arabia.

After the United States recognized the whole of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel in December 2017, which violated all international norms, in particular, the resolutions of the UN Security Council, for which the US itself once voted, the dispute over the status of East Jerusalem and the Islamic holy places within its borders has become even more acute. Due to this, it helped to realize mutual secret contacts between Tel Aviv and Riyadh in order to find a solution to the conflict over the Al-Aqsa Mosque, and then was moved by Washington to promote the “deal of the century” in the Muslim countries of Israel.

The pressure from the White House towards Riyadh, urging it to reach a peace agreement with Israel as soon as possible, has become particularly persistent in recent months. By signing such an agreement, Donald Trump was eager to demonstrate to the world and, most importantly, to his voters, the efficiency of his authority in resolving the Middle East conflict. Numerous phone call exchanges between the leaders of the two countries, as well as trips of several emissaries of the United States to Saudi Arabia and the surrounding region were devoted to the solution of this issue. During a telephone conversation on September 6, US President Donald Trump once again asked King Salman ibn Abdulaziz al Saud of Saudi Arabia to become the next Arab leader who would agree to normalize relations with Israel after the already signed agreement between the Jewish state and the United Arab Emirates.
However, the Saudi monarch conditioned this possible step by Riyadh on making substantial progress towards resolving the conflict between Israel and Palestine based on the Arab Peace Initiative proposed at the Arab League summit in Beirut in 2002.

So far, Riyadh’s only official decision, which could bring the potential normalization of relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel closer, is to allow direct flights between the Jewish state and the Arab Emirates, including flights aboard Israeli airliners, through Saudi Arabia’s airspace. Solving this issue was crucial for Israel, as it allows the use of Saudi Arabia’s airspace to strike Iran in case of such a need. In addition, it should be noted that in an environment of special secrecy, communication between the two countries has become almost regular, in particular, concerning the fight against terrorism. Moreover, Israel has already helped to equip an electronic radio reconnaissance station in Saudi Arabia, as well as selling a number of Israeli military technologies (primarily drones) via South African intermediaries.

In addition, for Mohammed bin Salman, in the environment where he has angered a large part of the inner elite, any misstep regarding the delicate situation in Israel could have grave consequences, and therefore, he actively seeks to prevent his inner opponents from getting the faintest chance of compromising him. Therefore, the revelations published by a number of media outlets owned by Israeli-American media magnate Haim Saban — who had recently met with Saudi Crown Prince bin Salman — about the Prince’s fear of developing a warmer relationship with Israel because of a possible threat to his life were hardly surprising. According to Mohammed, the Crown Prince believes that he “could be killed by Iranians, Qatars, or even his own kind.”

Media reported earlier that King Salman and his son disagreed on this issue. As noted, bin Salman sought to establish relations with Israel, and his father was against the idea. As a sort of compensation, the Crown Prince supported the authorities in Bahrain and Arab Emirates in their desire to approach Tel Aviv.

It seemed unbelievable not so long ago that Israel would be establishing relations with Saudi Arabia and other Arab states. However, this is now a real possibility. A common threat pushes Jews and Arabs, stubborn enemies before, together: the growing influence of Iran and the fight against Islamic radicals and Daesh (banned in Russia – ed.) terrorists.

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