



PERSPECTIVES

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Ten Tips for Israel when Negotiating with Saudi Arabia and the Arab World

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Speculation is rife about the possibility of normalizing relations between Israel and the nations of the Arabian Peninsula (Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait, and Qatar). If such negotiations do take place, the Israeli government will need to approach them in such a way as to avoid repeating mistakes that were made in the peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan.

When negotiating with the Saudis and their friends, Israel's number one rule should be to make clear that it will not pay anything for peace. If the Saudis want to live in peace with Israel, it will extend its hand to offer them peace in return. But that is all they will get. There is no other kind of peace agreement. If they do not want peace on those terms, then there is nothing to discuss.

When Israel negotiated its accords with Egypt and Jordan, its own ignorance of the Middle Eastern culture of negotiation led it to make egregious errors. The following are ten essential pointers to help Israel negotiate with the Saudis in an informed fashion. (Note: From here on, when I write Saudis or Saudi Arabia, I am referring to all the nations in the Arabian Peninsula, as listed above, as well as any other Arab or Islamist nation.)

1. It is of the utmost importance to recognize that the Saudis do not really want peace with Israel. Had they wanted peace, they would have joined Anwar Sadat in 1979 or King Hussein in 1994. All they want is Israel's help in facing their formidable arch-enemy, Iran, now and in the future. If there were no Iranian threat, the thought of peace with Israel would not even cross their minds. Once the threat is gone – even if the price is an all-out Iran-Israel war that results in Israel's

suffering casualties and destruction – there is no certainty whatsoever that Riyadh's relations with Jerusalem would continue to be peaceful.

2. Israel is not going anywhere. It has been an established member of the international community for 70 years without peace with Saudi Arabia, and can continue as a state for another 7,000 years without it. The desire for instant peace (as expressed in the disastrous "Peace Now" slogan) will raise the price of that peace. Israel has all the time in the world and has no reason to feel pressed to make peace with anyone. It has to remind itself, the Americans (who are motivated by the urgency of election cycles), and the world at large that peace with the Saudis and the Emirates will not solve any other Middle Eastern problems, just as the peace accords with Egypt and Jordan did nothing to advance solutions to any of the other problems facing the Middle East.
3. Peace with Saudi Arabia must be entirely unencumbered by other issues, particularly a Palestinian connection. In 1978, while at Camp David, Prime Minister Begin made a terrible mistake when he agreed to the idea of Palestinian autonomy, granting it a strong police force. This paved the way for the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, which morphed into a terror state in Gaza and may yet turn into another terror state in the hills of the West Bank – a territorial expanse that overlooks most of Israel and has most of the country within shooting range. If the Saudis want peace with Israel, let there be peace, without linking the question to any other issue. Israel is not in the least interested in tying peace with Saudi Arabia to any other matter.
4. If the Saudis insist on addressing the Palestinian issue, Israel's response in any peace agreement should be: "If you truly wish to help the Palestinians, you can build cities and towns for them in Saudi Arabia. Israel will be only too pleased to share its experience in establishing new communities and in developing local economies and infrastructure for the benefit of residents." Any reference on the part of the Saudis to a different solution (with the exception of the "emirate solution") should lead the Israeli delegation to leave the negotiations.
5. a) Israel will recognize the House of Saud's regime in Mecca and Medina (though the family does not originate in the Hijaz but is from the Najd Highland) in exchange for Saudi recognition of Israel's right to Jerusalem as its historic and eternal capital city.

- b) Israel will grant recognition to Saudi Arabia's self-definition as an Islamic state in exchange for Saudi recognition of Israel as a Jewish state, or as a state belonging to the Jewish People.
 - c) Israel will recognize the right of the House of Saud to live anywhere in Saudi Arabia in exchange for Saudi recognition of the Jewish People's inalienable right to live in all of Israel, from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River.
 - d) Israel will not allow incitement against Saudi Arabia in its media. In return, the Saudis will not allow anti-Israel incitement in Saudi media. (This is crucial with regard to al Jazeera in case Qatar joins the negotiations with Israel.)
6. Israel will permit its embassy in Saudi Arabia to be located wherever the Saudis wish it to be, provided the Saudis agree to locate their embassy in Israel wherever the Israelis wish it to be; that is, in Jerusalem. Having the Saudi embassy located in Jerusalem is a matter of principle. The day the Saudis move their embassy anywhere else without Israel's consent is the day the peace agreement and everything it entails becomes null and void.
 7. Saudi Arabia will not vote against Israel in international organizations and institutions, and Israel will not vote against the Saudis in those same venues. Both states will have the right to abstain from voting if they so wish.
 8. The Americans and Europeans must be kept away from the negotiating table, as they are not party to the agreement and will not have to suffer the consequences of its failure. Their interests are not necessarily those of Israel, especially when it comes to the speed at which negotiations move forward. The Americans want to cut a deal, even a bad one. If they are allowed into the negotiation room, they will press Israel to give in, mainly on the Palestinian issue. Israel must preserve the option of leaving the negotiations at any point, without anyone telling it what to do.
 9. Israel must absolutely refrain from accepting international guarantees, even from its best friends, in exchange for giving in on something the Saudis want. Israel must not forget for an instant the international guarantees Ukraine received (the Budapest Manifesto of 1994) promising a unified Ukraine. The countries that signed it – Russia, the UK, and the US – abandoned Ukraine and forgot their commitments to it when Russia, one of the signatories, invaded Ukraine, conquered the Crimean Peninsula, and annexed it. That is

exactly the kind of result Israel can expect if it relies on international guarantees. No country in the world will support Israel when it needs it, not even if their signatures appear on a thousand guarantees.

10. Peace with the Saudis must entail more than just a ceasefire with an attached document ("*salaam*" in Arabic). Israel agreed to that in the cases of Egypt and Jordan, reflecting the ignorance of those running the negotiations on Israel's side. Israel must instead insist on complete normalization ("*sulh*" in Arabic), which includes cultural, tourist, business, industrial, art, aeronautical, scientific, technological, athletic, and academic ties and exchanges. If Israel participates in international events taking place in Saudi Arabia, the Israeli flag will fly alongside those of other countries. If Israel is the victor in any sports competition in Saudi Arabia, the Hatikva anthem will be played. Israeli books will be shown at book fairs and Israeli products officially displayed at international exhibitions taking place in Saudi Arabia.

An economic document must be an addendum to the agreement, to be based on mutual investments and acquisitions as well as a commitment to non-participation in boycotts.

A security addendum must also be added to the agreement making these points:

- a) The Saudis will not help any other country or party act against Israel, will not transfer information to such parties, and will not allow parties working against Israel inside Saudi borders. Israel will make an equivalent pledge to the Saudis.
- b) Israel will not commit itself to attacking any country anywhere in the world that does not present a direct threat to Israel.

Israel must be very wary of a mutual defense pact with the Saudis. In January 1991, Riyadh did not respect the mutual defense pact it had signed with Iraq and actually worked against its implementation. Over the past seven years, it has proven itself totally indifferent to the spilling of Arab and Muslim blood in Syria and Yemen. It is hard to believe the spilling of Jewish blood would merit a better response. The House of Saud has been motivated by unadulterated cynical self-interest from the day that kingdom was established, and it is difficult to imagine a scenario in which the Saudi army goes to war to protect Israel – unless the war directly affects Saudi interests. There is no benefit whatsoever in relying on a mutual defense pact with Riyadh.

All other details belong under this general rubric: peace for peace, recognition for recognition, normal relations for normal relations. Gone are the days when

Israel paid in hard currency, in portions of its hard-won land, for a piece of paper with the word “peace” written on it.

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