



PERSPECTIVES

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Jared Kushner: Unsung Hero of the “New Middle East”

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Jared Kushner, son-in-law and Middle east envoy of outgoing US president Donald Trump, was instrumental in ushering in the peace agreements between Israel and the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan, and recently mediated an end to the three-year conflict between Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

In June 2017, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Bahrain, and the UAE—referred to in the Arab media as the Quartet, or the Siege countries—severed diplomatic relations with Qatar, sparking a diplomatic crisis that lasted for the next three years. In addition to establishing a diplomatic blockade, the countries blocked Qatar’s access to their airspace. Saudi Arabia even went so far as to block Qatari access to the Sloa Pass border crossing—the only land crossing the peninsula of Qatar has with any country.

Many factors led to the crisis. Among them was Qatari funding for Muslim Brotherhood elements that agitate against Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Another was its support for the Qatari-based Aljazeera TV network, which undermines stability in a number of Arab countries. The leaders of the Quartet have not forgotten how Aljazeera encouraged crowds to take to the streets during the upheaval euphemistically known as the “Arab Spring.” The Qataris claim that the Quartet’s hostility stems from their envy of Qatar’s success, including, among other achievements, its selection as host of the 2022 World Cup.

News reports recently surfaced indicating that Saudi Arabia had planned to invade Qatar but was dissuaded at the last minute by heavy American pressure.

The four countries set 13 conditions for lifting the siege and normalizing relations, including the cessation of terrorist financing and the closure of Aljazeera. Qatar did not buckle. It turned instead to Turkey and Iran, which provided logistical assistance in return for multibillion-dollar Qatari investments in those countries. Aljazeera, which had been critical of Iran, changed its tune and praised Quds Force chief Qassem Soleimani (who was killed in January 2020 by the US).

Jared Kushner succeeded where many before him had failed. For more than three years, Kuwait and others had been trying to bridge the gap between the Saudis and the Qataris in order to find a path toward reconciliation. The dispute between them was too serious, however, and the Khashoggi affair [deepened](#) it even further. Aljazeera committed dozens of journalists and many investigations to the task of damaging the image of Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman, considered to have been a key actor in the Khashoggi murder.

Yet American diplomacy in the form of pressure exerted by President Trump and diplomatic efforts by Kushner and his team ultimately led to reconciliation between bin Salman and Qatar's Emir Tamim Thani.

Not long ago, the Saudi Crown Prince opened the annual summit of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in northwestern Saudi Arabia by calling for a unified stance against Iran: "Today we desperately need a united effort to develop our council and address the challenges we face." Before the summit opened, he received the Emir of Qatar at the airport, where the leaders embraced and appeared to have reconciled.

The Gulf summit may yet be remembered as one of reconciliation where a path toward peace was found with the other three Quartet countries, but the details of the agreement are still unclear. One condition is that Qatar waive its lawsuit against Riyadh for damages caused by the siege. Only time will tell whether this is a genuine reconciliation, but media outlets on both sides have scaled back on attacks and social network wars have almost disappeared.

With his massive contribution to the peace agreements between Israel and four Arab states and his success at concluding the regional feud between Saudi Arabia and Qatar, Jared Kushner is the unsung hero of the "New Middle East."

Dr. Edy Cohen, a researcher at the BESA Center, specializes in inter-Arab relations, the Arab-Israeli conflict, terrorism, Jewish communities in the Arab world. He is the author of The Holocaust in the Eyes of Mahmoud Abbas and The Mufti and the Jews: The Involvement of Haj Amin Al-Husseini in the Holocaust and His War Against the Jews of the Arab Lands 1946-1935.