



# PERSPECTIVES

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## Saudi Journalist Who Advocated Peace with Israel Is Released

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** Abdul Hameed Ghabin took a stand in favor of peace with Israel before it was safe to do so in Saudi Arabia, and he paid a price for his boldness. Sources suggest that he might have been freed under pressure from US President Joe Biden.

Abdul Hameed Ghabin is ahead of his time. He publicly called for peace between Saudi Arabia and Israel even before the Abraham Accords, and he attacked Iran and the Palestinians before it was popular to do so. He was eventually arrested for incitement by the Saudi establishment, and has now been released following a second arrest.

In 2018 and 2019, Ghabin openly supported [full normalization](#) with the State of Israel, making such statements in Arabic-language media without fear. The authorities at the time didn't know what to do with him. On the one hand, he wasn't doing anything illegal. On the other, he was embarrassing the kingdom's top officials, who were trying to portray themselves as defenders of the Palestinian cause.

Ghabin was the first Saudi to write an opinion column in an Israeli newspaper, *Israel Hayom*. In his [article](#), "A New Saudi Perspective for Peace," he attacked Jordan. This was risky, as from an Arab point of view it is unacceptable for a Saudi citizen to attack a member state of the Arab League. There is no democracy in Arab countries and no tolerance for opposing opinions.

Ghabin was a victim of behind-the-scenes conflicts within Saudi Arabia. Moderates didn't want to hurt him, but extremists managed to have him arrested. In some Arab countries, a judge's order is not necessary to make an arrest; a phone call from a politician or other high-ranking security official is sufficient. This is what

happened in Ghabin's case. In the opinion of many in Saudi Arabia, he had crossed the line of acceptable behavior and got what was coming to him.

There is no freedom of expression in countries like Saudi Arabia. Those who dare make noise without the approval of the authorities often pay a price in prison time, or worse. Ghabin did not attack the Saudi establishment. Had he had done so, he would almost certainly have either been executed or sentenced to decades in prison.

The Saudi journalist spent a year in prison, in addition to five months he was held at a police station. During that time his citizenship was revoked and the authorities tried to accuse him of spying for Israel. The charges against him included attempting to obtain Saudi citizenship by deception, smuggling money, supporting the British, and harming Palestinians. He was convicted of none.

Ghabin was recently released under severe restrictions. He is prohibited from leaving the country, being interviewed by any media, and opening social media accounts.

After a year-and-a-half, when it finally became clear to the authorities that Ghabin's imprisonment was without merit, the charges against him were dropped. A state committee is now examining the affair. If it concludes that Ghabin has been wronged, which is likely, he will be compensated.

The imprisonment of Ghabin constituted a violation of press freedom and of freedom of speech, and was a serious violation of human rights. Sources I spoke to in Saudi Arabia told me he was released so as not to damage delicate relations with the Biden administration in the US.

Ghabin has suffered enough. Western countries should offer him and his family political asylum, because he will never be able to lead a normal life in Saudi Arabia again.

*This is an edited version of an [article](#) published in Israel Today on July 19, 2021.*

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