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Ten Ways Israel Is Just Like Saudi Arabia

By Medea Benjamin
May 11, 2016

On the surface, it would seem that Saudi Arabia and Israel would be the worst of enemies and indeed, they have never had diplomatic relations. After all, the Saudis have championed the cause of the Palestinians, who are oppressed by the Israelis. Israelis say they are besieged by Muslim extremists, and many of these extremists are motivated by the intolerant, Wahhabi ideology born and bred in Saudi Arabia.

But beneath the surface, these two old adversaries actually have a lot in common and have become the strangest of bedfellows.

Rumors about the budding relationship have been circulating for the past few years, with gossip that the two countries have been holding secret meetings and exchanging intelligence. In 2015, former Saudi and Israeli officials confirmed that they had, indeed, held a series of high-level meetings to discuss shared concerns such as the growing influence of Iran in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Lebanon, as well as Iran's nuclear program. Shimon Shapira, an Israeli representative who participated in secret meetings with the Saudis, said: "We discovered we have the same problems and same challenges and some of the same answers."

On May 5, Prince Turki bin Faisal, Saudi Arabia's former intelligence chief and one-time ambassador to Washington, and retired Israeli Major General Yaakov Amidror, former national security advisor to Prime Minister Netanyahu, spoke together in Washington DC at an event hosted by the policy wing of the Israel lobby AIPAC. The Washington Institute for Near East

Policy, The event, broadcast live online, showed that Saudi Arabia and Israel have finally come out of the closet – together.

Here are some traits Saudi Arabia and Israel have in common.

1. Both oppress the non-dominant groups living in their borders. Israel oppresses Palestinians, building settlements on their land and surrounding their villages with apartheid walls and heavily-armed soldiers. Saudi Arabia has set up a political and judicial system that oppresses everyone who is not Sunni (like Shia and non-Muslims), as well as women and millions of migrant workers. Both nations respond to political dissidents in similar ways, using excessive force, arbitrary and indefinite detention, impunity, intimidation, and torture.

2. Israel and Saudi Arabia have invaded neighboring lands, killing thousands of civilians. Israel has been invading and bombing Gaza since 2008; in 2014 alone the Israeli military killed 2,104 people, mostly civilians, destroyed 17,200 homes and left 475,000 living in emergency conditions. The Saudis have interfered in the internal affairs of neighboring Yemen. In March 2015, they launched a vicious bombing campaign, killing over 6,000 Yemenis, mostly civilians, hitting markets, schools, hospitals, residences and wedding parties, and displacing over 2.5 million people. Both use weapons that have been internationally banned: Israel used white phosphorus in Gaza; Saudis used cluster bombs in Yemen.

3. Religion plays a key role in the politics of both nations. Israel is considered the homeland for the Jewish people and the Basic Laws of Israel that serve in place of a constitution define the country as a Jewish State. Jews get preferential treatment, such as the right for Jews anywhere to immigrate to Israel and automatically become citizens while Muslims face daily discrimination and are treated as second-class citizens. In Saudi Arabia, Mecca is the holiest city for Muslims and the Saudi kingdom considers itself the global center of Islam. Only Muslims can become Saudi citizens and the non-Muslims are treated like second-class citizens.

4. Both export “products” that promote violence. Israel is a major exporter of weapons and trains police in other countries (including the US) in repressive techniques. The Saudis export the extremist Sunni ideology called Wahhabism all over the Middle East and North Africa. Wahhabism is the ideological basis of Al Qaeda and the Islamic State.

5. If the enemy of my enemy is indeed my friend, than it is the hatred of Iran that is bringing these adversaries together. Both view Iran as an existential threat and fear Iran’s growing influence in the region. They both opposed the Iran nuclear deal that was such a great win for diplomacy over war, and they are determined to stop the United States from getting any closer to Iran.

6. Both nations supported the military coup in Egypt, led by General Adbul Fattah el Sisi, that overthrew a democratically elected government and led to a brutal wave of repression that put 40,000 dissidents in prison. The Saudis have stepped in with billions of dollars to fill the Sisi regime’s coffers, and Egypt has collaborated with Israel in Israel’s continued siege on Gaza.

7. Israel and Saudi Arabia have been supporting extremist groups in Syria like Al Nusra, which is an al-Qaeda affiliate, as they both are more concerned with overthrowing Assad (who is aligned with Iran) than defeating the Islamic State. The Saudis have sent weapons and money to Al Nusra; Israel has been treating wounded Al Nusra fighters in Israeli hospitals and then sending them back to battle the Syrian army. Israel also killed Lebanese-Iranian advisers who were assisting Assad's government in fighting against Al Nusra.

8. Both nations lock up thousands of political prisoners, including minors. In February 2016, Israel had 6,204 Palestinians in prison, 438 of them minors. Many of the minors are imprisoned for throwing stones at Israeli soldiers. Saudis have beheaded minors, and presently have three prisoners facing execution who were arrested as juveniles for nonviolent protests.

9. They both spend many millions of dollars to influence US policy. The Israeli government is aligned with the U.S. lobby AIPAC (American Israel Public Affairs Committee), which is the most influential foreign policy lobby group in the United States. The Saudis have just started their own version called SAPRAC (Saudi American Public Relations Affairs Committee). For years they have been buying influence by contracting influential public relations and law firms like the Podesta Group, and donating to the Clinton Foundation, the Carter Foundation and dozens of think tanks and Ivy League universities.

10. They are both longtime allies of the United States. US administrations have supported Israel since its founding in 1948; they have also supported an array of Saudi kings since the founding of that nation in 1932. The US has helped guarantee the security of both nations. US taxpayers give over \$3 billion a year to support the Israeli military; the US military guards the Persian Gulf for the Saudi royalty, and Saudi Arabia is the number one purchaser of US weapons.

Some say it is good for Israel and Saudi Arabia to bury the hatchet and find common ground. But peace in the Middle East will not be furthered by Israeli-Saudi collaboration. Israel has to make peace with the Palestinians; Saudi Arabia has to come to terms with Iran. Otherwise, Saudi-Israeli collusion will only be a fatal embrace that causes more heartbreak for the region.