

Pompeo says US has helped foster cooperation between Israel and Arab states

'We have set the conditions in the Middle East where these countries are now working together across multiple fronts,' top US diplomat tells Fox News



US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is interviewed by Fox News on January 3, 2019. (Screen capture: YouTube)

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Thursday the Trump administration has helped facilitate cooperation between Israel and a number of Arab countries with which it has no diplomatic ties.

In an interview with Fox News' Sean Hannity, Pompeo was asked whether the unofficial anti-Iran alliance between the US, Israel, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Jordan could lead to a major peace breakthrough.

"Undoubtedly. We have set the conditions in the Middle East where these countries are now working together across multiple fronts," Pompeo said.

Pompeo did not specify the nature of this cooperation, but Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has hailed the development of clandestine ties with unnamed Arab states and noted their shared hostility to Iran.

The only Arab countries Israel currently has formal relations with are Egypt and Jordan, though Netanyahu visited the Gulf sultanate of Oman last year and has said further diplomatic openings were in the works.

Reports in recent years have indicated the establishment of close security ties between Israel, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which — like Jerusalem — view Iran as its main nemesis in the Middle East.

In the interview, Pompeo also addressed Trump's abrupt announcement last month that he would pull out all US troops from Syria, a move that has sparked concerns in Israel of an emboldened Iran.

"We're still going to be able to effectively, with those partners, counter the threat from ISIS in the region and we'll do it without those 2,000 soldiers on the ground," he said, using an acronym for the Islamic State jihadist group and without mentioning Iran's presence in Syria.

"We haven't changed our policy about continuing to make sure there is no ISIS resurgence and we're just going to do it in a way that is smarter and better, and we can do that because of the alliances that President Trump has built," Pompeo added.

Addressing his decision to withdraw American soldiers from Syria, Trump said Wednesday that Iran "can do what they want" in Syria and that it is retrenching its presence there amid the bite of renewed US sanctions.



US President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu shake hands after speaking at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem on May 23, 2017. (Yonatan Sindel/Flash90)

Following these comments, Netanyahu on Thursday painted a picture of close Israeli-American cooperation in efforts to stymie Iran's nuclear and regional ambition.

"President Trump is acting against Iran at the economic level, and we here in Israel are acting against Iran at the military level," he said.

Netanyahu has repeatedly warned in recent years that Iran is seeking to establish a military presence in Syria, where it is fighting alongside its Lebanese proxy Hezbollah and Russia to restore the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

Israeli officials have also warned that America's absence would open the door for Tehran to create a so-called "land bridge" from Iran, through Iraq and Syria, into Lebanon and to the Mediterranean Sea.

Over the last several years, Israel has carried out hundreds of airstrikes on Syria against targets linked to Iran.

On Friday, Trump's National Security Adviser John Bolton will depart for a trip to discuss the withdrawal from Syria and its implications.



John Bolton@AmbJohnBolton

Leaving tomorrow for Israel & Turkey to discuss the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Syria, how we will work with allies & partners to prevent the resurgence of ISIS, stand fast with those who fought with us against ISIS, & counter Iranian

malign behavior in the region. 1/2

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