

Saudi Arabia will soon move to normalize ties with Israel, official predicts

Senior defense official says the kingdom could be next to 'come out of the closet,' amid reports that Jewish state on verge of normalizing relations with Sudan.



Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, left, speaks to his father, King Salman, at a meeting of the Gulf Cooperation Council in Riyadh, December 9, 2018. (Saudi Press Agency via AP)

A senior defense official on Thursday predicted Saudi Arabia would soon move to normalize ties with Israel.

The comments by the official, who spoke to reporters as Defense Minister Benny Gantz visited America, came amid reports that Sudan was poised to follow the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain in normalizing diplomatic relations with the Jewish state.

“Soon Sudan and later Saudi Arabia will come out of the closet,” the official was quoted saying by Hebrew media, without further elaborating.

Saudi leaders have publicly ruled out forging ties with Israel before a Palestinian state is created, even as they have welcomed the normalization deals between the Jewish state and Gulf Arab states signed in Washington last month.

Last week, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo encouraged Saudi Arabia to recognize Israel.



US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, right, listens to Saudi Minister of Foreign Affairs Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud during their meeting at the State Department, October 14, 2020, in Washington. (Manuel Balce Cenate/Pool/AFP)

“We hope Saudi Arabia will consider normalizing its relationships as well. We want to thank them for the assistance they’ve had in the success of the Abraham Accords so far,” said Pompeo, while hosting Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud in Washington.

When the White House announced in August that the United Arab Emirates and Israel had agreed to establish full diplomatic ties — a move matched by Bahrain weeks later — Saudi Arabia refrained from criticizing the deal or hosting summits condemning the decision, despite Palestinian requests to do so. The Palestinians have slammed the agreements as a “betrayal of Jerusalem, al-Aqsa Mosque and the Palestinian cause,” but government-controlled Saudi media hailed them as historic and good for regional peace.

The kingdom also approved the use of Saudi airspace for Israeli flights to the UAE, a decision announced the day after Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and senior adviser, met with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Riyadh. Kushner has been pushing Arab states to normalize ties with Israel and has said that the Jewish state could eventually enjoy fully normalized relations with Saudi Arabia.

Covert ties between Israel and Saudi Arabia are believed to have been growing in recent years. The shift in policy has reportedly been led by the crown prince, who sees Israel as a strategic partner in the fight against Iranian influence in the region.



Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, right, meets with presidential adviser Jared Kushner in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, September 1, 2020. (Saudi Press Agency via AP)

Some Saudi officials have also stepped up criticism of the Palestinians.

In a recent interview, the former Saudi ambassador to the US and former intelligence chief Prince Bandar bin Sultan called Palestinian leaders “failures” who squandered opportunities for peace over decades.

“The Palestinian cause is a just cause, but its advocates are failures. The Israeli cause is unjust, but its advocates are successful. That sums up the events of the last 70 or 75 years,” bin Sultan said.

Agencies contributed to this report.

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