

Israeli, UAE officials reportedly met in secret in US to discuss countering Iran

National Security Adviser Meir Ben-Shabbat, Emirati envoy to DC said to have held talks at White House in December on Tehran, non-aggression pact between Abu Dhabi and Jerusalem.



Emirati Ambassador to the US Yousef al-Otaiba at an event with then-US House Speaker Paul Ryan, at the Emirates Diplomatic Academy, in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, Jan. 25, 2018. (AP Photo/Jon Gambrell)

The White House in December hosted a secret meeting last December with officials from Israel, the US, and the United Arab Emirates to discuss countering Iranian influence in the Middle East.

The officials discussed better coordinating their positions against Iran, and the possibility of advancing a non-aggression pact between Israel and the UAE, which

could mark a possible step toward normalizing relations between the countries.

Attending the December 17 meeting were Israeli National Security Adviser Meir Ben-Shabbat, US National Security Adviser Robert O'Brien, and the Emirati ambassador to the US Yousef al-Otaiba, who is considered close to the UAE Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahayan.

The US special envoy for Iran, Brian Hook, and Deputy National Security Adviser Victoria Coates also attended.

Israel's Channel 13 and the US news site Axios first reported the meeting on Tuesday, citing senior Israeli and American officials as sources.



Meir Ben-Shabbat, the head of the National Security Council, speaks at a trilateral meeting in Jerusalem of the Israeli, US and Russian national security advisers on June 25, 2019. (Noam Revkin Fenton/Flash90)

The reports said that the meeting spurred a tweet several days later by the Emirati foreign minister Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan apparently in support of warming Israel-UAE ties.

Al Nahyan, the UAE's top diplomat, tweeted a link to an article titled "Islam's reformation: an Arab-Israeli alliance is taking shape in the Middle East."

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu responded, writing "I welcome the closer relations between Israel and many Arab states. The time has come for normalization and peace."

Jerusalem is said to have developed clandestine ties with numerous Arab countries in recent years over the countries' shared antipathy toward Iran and the need to counter jihadism.

Israeli officials have also openly visited several such countries recently. In October 2018, Netanyahu was welcomed to Oman by the country's then-ruler Sultan Qaboos bin Said. That same month Culture and Sports Minister Miri Regev traveled to Abu Dhabi for the Abu Dhabi Grand Slam judo tournament, where Israel's national anthem was played for the first time in the Arabian peninsula

following Israeli judoka Sagi Muki's first-place win.



Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (left) with Sultan Qaboos bin Said of Oman in the Gulf state on October 26, 2018. (Courtesy)

Israel has also been invited to participate at the Expo 2020 in the UAE city of Dubai.

In June, Bahrain's foreign minister told the Times of Israel his country wished for peace with the Jewish state.

In October, Foreign Minister Israel Katz said he was advancing non-aggression treaties with several Arab nations in the Gulf, a "historic" démarche he said that could end the conflict between Jerusalem and those states.

Arab leaders, however, have also indicated that true normalization can not take place so long as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not resolved.

The UAE ambassador to Washington, along with envoys from Bahrain and Oman, attended the January 28 unveiling of the Trump administration's Israeli-Palestinian peace proposal in a tacit sign of support for the US initiative.

The UAE issued the most complimentary statement on the plan of any Arab state, calling it "a serious initiative" and stating that it "offers an important starting point for a return to negotiations within a US-led international framework."

The UAE also signed on to an Arab League rejection of the plan, however.

Arab countries in the Gulf, especially Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain, view Iran as a major regional foe and strongly oppose its support for armed groups throughout the Middle East.

Source:

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/israeli-uae-officials-reportedly-met-in-secret-in-us-to-discuss-countering-iran/>

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