



Reema Bandar Al-Saud ✓

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In these trying times in which we all face a common threat from a terrible pandemic, let us take solace in observing cherished holidays and use these occasions to strengthen the bonds of our humanity and faith in God. Stay safe and be well.



9:13 AM · Apr 9, 2020 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)

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In first, Saudi king hosts Israeli rabbi at royal palace

Jerusalem-based David Rosen, invited to Riyadh as part of interfaith meeting, hails 'revolutionary moment'; says Palestinian issue still 'glass ceiling' for Israel-Saudi relations

By **RAPHAEL AHREN** ✓

24 February 2020, 4:15 pm



Rabbi David Rosen, second from left, meeting with Saudi King Salman at the royal palace in Riyadh, February 2020 (courtesy KAICIID)

For apparently the first time in modern history, a rabbi met with the king of Saudi Arabia in Riyadh last week.

King Salman hosted Jerusalem-based rabbi David Rosen in his royal palace in the Saudi capital, in a move indicative of the monarchy's desire to further open itself up to the Western world.

Rosen was born in England but moved to Israel years ago and is a member of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate's Commission for Interreligious Dialogue. He spent two and a half days in the Saudi capital to attend a meeting of the [King Abdullah International Center for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue](#), where he is a member of the board of directors.

The Vienna-based center, known as KAICIID, was established eight years ago by the previous Saudi king, Abdullah, but no Saudi monarch has ever invited its board to the royal palace in Riyadh.

"It was amazing. The experience was really something special," Rosen told The Times of Israel this week. "And it was not just the meeting with the king. The most exciting thing was meeting young people and their sense of the transformation their country is undergoing."

Last week's meeting was in fact the first-ever interfaith group hosted by King Salman, Rosen said.

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Just two years ago, the Saudi authorities “would not have contemplated inviting us, and primarily me as a rabbi. This would have been too much for them,” Rosen said. In this sense, the reception at the royal palace was a “revolutionary moment,” he added.

Rosen, who serves as the American Jewish Committee’s director of interreligious affairs, was one of nine KAICIID board members who attended the meeting with King Salman, and the only one representing Judaism. The other eight represented Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Islam.

“The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques welcomed the board members, who were holding their first meeting in Riyadh, and stressed the importance of KAICIID’s role in consolidating the principles of dialogue and coexistence among different religions and cultures, promoting the values of moderation and tolerance, and combating all forms of extremism and terrorism,” the organization [said in a press release](#).

No kosher catering was provided for Rosen, who is a vegan, so he survived on pita, hummus, olives and dates, he said. “I don’t think I’ve ever eaten so many dates in my life,” he joked.

While his meeting with the king would likely not have been possible without the covert rapprochement between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the State of Israel, the possibility of establishing bilateral ties was not discussed, Rosen said.

“On the contrary: from the Saudi point of view, there was a desire to present me as a religious representative, a representative of the Jewish world and of the Jewish religion, and not as a representative of any specific political current,” he said. “I was presented to the king as representative of Jewish people and of Judaism, not in any particular national identity.”

Rosen, who also served as communal rabbi in South Africa and as chief rabbi of Ireland, said that he got the impression that for the Israel-Saudi relationship to grow more formal, tangible progress needs to be made in the Israel-Palestinian peace process.

“In all my conversations, there was the emphasis that there is still a glass ceiling. In other words: things can warm — and people want things to warm — but the symbolism of the Palestinian issue is still so significant that if there is no movement on that track, there always is going to be a limit to how much warming there can be,” he said.

The Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem declined to comment for this article. But its Arabic-language Twitter account tweeted a photo of the meeting.



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Joel C. Rosenberg, a Jerusalem-based Israeli Christian interfaith activist who traveled to Saudi Arabia in September, welcomed Rosen's invitation to Riyadh.

"I think it's enormously significant that the Saudis are continuing to pursue interfaith delegations and dialogue," he said. "The meeting between the rabbi and the king is of particular significance, because as far as I know it's the first time the king has met with one of these interfaith delegations."

In September, Rosenberg, a dual US-Israeli citizen, led a delegation of American Evangelicals on a three-day tour to Jeddah, the second group of high-profile church figures he has brought to the conservative kingdom in recent years. The delegation was received by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, but not by the king.



Joel C. Rosenberg, left, is greeted by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman at the Royal Palace in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, September 10, 2019 (courtesy Saudi Embassy in Washington)

"This is significant progress, and I am encouraged," he said about Rosen's audience with the monarch. "There is a long way to go, these are very significant movements, and I hope that the Saudis will continue to build on them. But I believe they will."

Another US interfaith activist with extensive ties to the Gulf, Rabbi Marc Schneier, earlier this month spent a few days in Saudi Arabia as well, where he met with the country's foreign minister, Prince Faisal bin Farhan bin Abdullah.

While he has met with the king of Bahrain, whom he advises on interfaith affairs, he has never been received in the royal palace in Riyadh.



Rabbi Marc Schneier, left, is hosted by Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal Bin Farhan, February 2020 (courtesy)

The kingdom would “very much like to actively pursue any kind of regional peace,” including establishing increasingly open relations with Israel, the rabbi said. However, during his recent trip he was told that “they don’t want to address this until after the Israeli elections” on March 2.

Earlier this month, a large delegation from the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations visited Saudi Arabia in what is believed to be the first trip of a US-Jewish group to the kingdom since the early 1990s.

The Conference of Presidents said the “very productive” visit was a “big step forward” in terms of Jerusalem-Riyadh relations. It declined to say who received the delegation.

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Josh Lederman ✓
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This is a first: The Saudi Embassy in Washington, under new Ambassador Reema bint Bandar, sent out Rosh Hashana greetings to American Jews



6:15 PM · Oct 1, 2019 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)

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[Saudi TV Series Sparks Rare Ramadan Debate on Ties With Israel](#)

April 29, 2020

By. Vivian Nereim, Bloomberg

A Saudi television series in which the taboo topic of ties with Israel became a plot line has spurred speculation it's a prelude to a real-life push for a rethink toward a country long viewed as a public enemy in the Arab world.

The show, called "Exit 7," is a comedic special for the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, exploring rapid changes in Saudi Arabia through a bumbling father figure who's trying to adapt. In the controversial episode earlier this week, he discovers his son has befriended an Israeli through an online game. The revelation divides the family: shocking the father, infuriating his daughter and leading his father-in-law to declare "so what?"

"Israel is there whether you like it or not," says the unperturbed elder, played by Saudi actor Rashid Al Shamrani. He later says he'd happily do business with Israelis and argues that Palestinians are the real enemy for "insulting" Saudi Arabia "day and night."

The fact that the episode was aired by MBC -- a private broadcaster majority-owned by the Saudi government -- led some Saudis to predict that officials want to pave the way for closer relations with Israel. Gulf Arab states and Israel don't have diplomatic relations, but there have been closer informal contacts in recent years which officials say stem from shared [concerns over Iran](#).

'Not My Issue'

"The notion of a real Saudi-Israeli normalization is still far-fetched," said Abdulaziz Alghashian, a lecturer of international relations at the U.K.'s University of Essex. But the TV show did at least start to normalize discourse about normalization, he said, and it could be "a way of gradually introducing the Saudi public to very early stages of sporadic Saudi-Israeli cooperation."

Across the Gulf, the idea of treating Israel as just another country is deeply contentious. Former Saudi intelligence chief Prince Turki Al Faisal recently appeared on Saudi television to declare "the Zionist lobby" was among the kingdom's biggest enemies in the U.S.

Yet there's also been a nationalistic reaction against long-established support for Palestinians and their demands for the return of land occupied by Israel, partly due to perceived Palestinian criticism of Saudi Arabia. Most recently a political cartoon by a Palestinian in Sweden that appeared to mock the

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damage of falling oil prices on the kingdom stirred anger. Saudi Twitter users have shared a "Palestine is not my issue" hashtag.

To some extent, it's a generational shift. Supporting the Palestinians remains a key element of state rhetoric. But some Saudis closer in age to 34-year-old Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman argue it's time to focus on their own country, not pan-Arab dilemmas that absorbed years of attention with little result.

Kuwait Row

"Exit 7" underscores how complex Saudi discourse on the topic is, Alghashian said. While the sister character declares a crusade against "the Zionist danger," a delivery man she asks about the topic replies that he wants nothing to do with politics and is more concerned about finding a job.

It's one of several Ramadan series to court controversy on the issue this year. Another MBC show called Umm Haroun, set in 1940s Kuwait, depicts a multi-religious village with Jewish residents and stars Kuwaiti actress Hayat Al-Fahad as a Jewish midwife. In a statement, MBC said the drama showcases "a Middle East where acceptance of one another was the norm." But it set off a backlash in Kuwait, with Al-Fahad criticized by some for taking on the role.

Meanwhile, Egyptian Ramadan series "The End" took the opposite tack: Set in the year 2120 in a dystopian post-Israel Jerusalem, it predicts the destruction of the Jewish state and imagines a future without it.

"Inside every Arab, there's the idea of liberating any occupied Arab territory," show writer Amr Sami Atef said in an interview with Saudi television channel Al-Arabiya Al-Hadath.

Israel's foreign ministry condemned the drama, which stood in stark contrast to the cooperation between governments in Egypt and Israel, which established full diplomatic ties in 1980, especially over security.

— *With assistance by Fiona MacDonald, Salma El Wardany, Alisa Odenheimer, and Reema Al Othman*

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Saudi Arabia Materials

Don Lederman

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Friday, May 08, 2020 10:21 AM

libby,

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Please see the materials attached that we discussed.

If you or your editor have any questions, please feel free to call.

Don

Don Lederman
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Dan Lederman

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Friday, May 08, 2020 10:24

Steve,

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Please see the materials attached that we discussed.

If you have any questions, please feel free to call.

Ben

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