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ARTICLE

# Changes and Trends in the Current Relations Between Saudi Arabia and Israel

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**ABSTRACT**

The relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel have become increasingly public after the Trump administration took office in the US. Particularly, Saudi Arabia either holds inconsistent, ambiguous attitudes or gives short shrift to sensitive issues such as Jerusalem issue and the 'Deal of the Century.' Moreover, Saudi Arabia and Israel have been interacting with each other frequently in a public and official way, which further embodies this change in their relationship. The relationship between Saudi Arabia and Israel has a long history, and it has experienced four development stages: mutual isolation, secret contact, open contact, and intimate contact. The changes in the current Saudi-Israeli relations have realistic interests, open interaction, and practical cooperation. The changes in the Saudi-Israeli relations have taken place under the combined effect of the realistic logic of the common political and security dilemma, the transformation of their respective diplomatic strategies and the complementary economic advantages of both sides, as well as the overall environmental changes in the Middle East, the overall fragmentation of the Arab world, and the ups and downs of the US Middle East policy. Saudi Arabia and Israel have formed an anti-Iranian quasi-alliance, which has certain actual or potential impacts. In the long run, although the changes in the Saudi-Israeli relations are conducive to bilateral cooperation and development in diverse fields, they bring no advantage to the overall stability of the Arab world, and the contradictions within the Arab world will further deepen, which, for example, is represented by a breakthrough in diplomatic relations between Israel and the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco. Besides, geostrategic competition in the Middle East will become more intense and will not contribute to the Middle East peace process.

**KEYWORDS**

Saudi-Israeli relations; anti-Iranian 'quasi-alliance'; Trump Administration; US

The conflict between the Arab world and Israel has a long history, especially since Israel's establishment in 1948 which encountered massive resistance from the Arab

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world. As a major Arab country and the 'Islamic leader,' Saudi Arabia has paid close attention to the Palestinian-Israeli issue since the Arab-Israeli conflict. Saudi Arabia tended to take an uncompromising attitude towards Israel, even though in the context of reconciliation, diplomatic relations were established or semi-official substantive ties between Israel and countries within the Arab world developed. This is the result of Arab nationalism and strategic positioning to hold high the banner of Islamism. Therefore, the relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel have long impressed the international community as 'incompatibility,' especially on the Palestinian-Israeli issue. However, in recent years, relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel have shown obvious signs of improvement, especially after the Trump administration took office. The development of bilateral ties has seen obvious changes. From the previous secret meetings between Saudi Arabia and Israel to the present public interactions, this is also the inevitable result of establishing an anti-Iranian quasi-alliance among Saudi Arabia, the United States and Israel. Especially since August and September 2020, when the UAE and Bahrain, the Arab monarchies around the Gulf, announced the normalisation of relations with Israel and the establishment of diplomatic relations, the trend of relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel has attracted the attention of the international community. Saudi Arabia and Israel are both powerful countries in the Middle East. The substantial improvement of their bilateral relations will significantly affect the direction and development of international relations in the Middle East. In particular, the fundamental breakthrough in the relations between the UAE, Bahrain, and Israel is not independent of Saudi factors' influence. The icebreaking of Saudi Arabia and Israel's relationship is a change from quantitative change to qualitative change. Behind it is the need for common interests and the perception of common threats, and finally presents a trend of further deepening of the relationship.

## 1. The Evolution of the Saudi-Israeli Relations

The openness of political interaction between Saudi Arabia and Israel was not accomplished overnight, but thanks to a historical evolutionary process achieved after a long-term balance of interests and gradual development. In the early years, Saudi Arabia carried the banner of anti-Israel, and it had the deep intention of using Islamism to counter the secular Arab nationalism of Egypt. After the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, Saudi Arabia began to secretly contact Israel on national security considerations. The evolution path of US-Iranian relations has directly affected the changes in Saudi Arabia's power in the Gulf region, and the two parallel alliances between the US-Israel and US-Saudi Arabia are increasingly breaking down barriers and show a trend of convergence in the face of the increasingly powerful Iranian 'threat'.[1] Breaking the ice between Israel and Saudi Arabia is the key. The Obama administration's measures to alienate Israel and improve relations with Iran induced Saudi Arabia's dissatisfaction with the United States and concern about Iran. The

[1]S. Niu, 'Iranian factors' influence on Israel-GCC state relations,' World Economic and Political Forum 30(2), (2010); L. Ding, 'Relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel have gone through the darkness?' World Knowledge (10), (2018); J. Wang, 'The background, goals and impacts of the improvement of relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel,' Contemporary World (1), 2019; M. Furlan, 'Israeli-Saudi relations in a changed and changing Middle East: growing cooperation?' Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs 13(2), (2019).

Trump administration's complete reversal of Iran's policy has led to the improvement of Saudi Arabia's relations with the United States, turning from a passive response to the Obama administration into an active collaboration with the Trump administration. In the eyes of both Saudi Arabia and Israel, the Trump administration coming to power is an opportunity to contain Iran, the top common enemy in the Middle East. The gradual publicisation of the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Israel is a gradual historical evolution process, and as is mentioned above, the relationship has gone through a process from quantitative changes to qualitative changes, which depends on the wishes of both parties and the changes in the geographical environment of both parties. In retrospect, the development of Saudi-Israeli relationship can be divided into four stages.

The first stage is the period of mutual isolation (from 1948 to the late 1970s). To maintain its position and prestige in the Arab world, Saudi Arabia participated in the Middle East war three times (in 1948, 1967, and 1973), and united other Arab countries against Israel. In the Middle East war in 1967, Saudi Arabia implemented the 'three no's policy' towards Israel.[2] That is, it did not recognise, reconcile to, or negotiate with Israel and provided economic and military assistance to the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). In the Middle East War in 1973, together with other Gulf countries, Saudi Arabia used oil as a bargaining counter to force Western countries to compromise with the Arab side. In 1979, Egypt was expelled from the Arab League after signing the 'Camp David Agreement' with Israel, which enabled Saudi Arabia to step up its status and take the role as the Arab world leader. In this case, its public opposition against Israel has become firmer, which help the country to win the overall support and love of the Arab world and significantly increase its influence.

The second stage is the secret contact period (from the early 1980s to 2010). In response to the massive impact of the Iranian Islamic Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War on its overall security, Saudi Arabia began to ease its attitude towards Israel in the early 1980s. In 1981, Crown Prince Fahd put forward the 'Eight-Point Peace Plan' on the Palestinian-Israeli issue, which included 'all countries in the region should be able to live in peace in the region.'[3] This presented the open detente of the core members of the Saudi Arabian royal family. In 2002, the 14th Arab Summit adopted the 'Arab Peace Initiative' based on Saudi Arabia's new Middle East peace proposal. Saudi Arabia stated that it would sign a peace agreement with Israel and establish normal relations with Israel if the initiative's conditions are met. This initiative has also become the basis of Saudi Arabia's attitude towards Israel since the 21st century. Saudi Arabia wished to negotiate a comprehensive solution to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli issue. The continuous expansion of Iran's influence in the Middle East, especially the emergence of the Iranian nuclear issue, has prompted Saudi Arabia and Israel to shelve the differences on the Palestinian-Israeli issue and carry out secret cooperation. For example, senior Israeli Security officials established communication channels with Saudi Arabia. Former Mossad Chief Meir Dagan had a meeting with Saudi Arabian

[2]E. Yaari, 'The Sudan agreement: implications of another Arab-Israel milestone,' (26 October 2020), available at: https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/sudan-agreement-implications-another-ar ab-israel-milestone.
[3]UNISPAL, 'The United Nations information system on the question of Palestine,' available at: https://w ww.un.org/unispal/data-collection/.

officials during his secret visit to Saudi Arabia to discuss the Iranian nuclear program's issues.[4]

The third stage is the public contact period (from the end of 2010 to 2016). After the outbreak of 'Arab Spring,' the confrontation between the Saudi Arabia and Iran was gradually intensified. To further contain Iran, the interaction between Saudi Arabia and Israel has slowly gone public to strengthen security cooperation further. In 2013, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu publicly stated in the Parliament that Israel 'is not the enemy of the Arabs' and Israel had common interests with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries on many issues.[5] After the outbreak of the conflict in Gaza in 2014, Saudi Arabia took measures and coordinated to advance a ceasefire to prevent Gaza from becoming a place for other parties to destabilise the region of Palestinian-Israeli peace negotiations, rebuild Gaza, and confront Iran.[6] During the Obama administration, Saudi Arabia-Israel relations further developed. Saudi Arabia believed that US Middle East policy was increasingly paying less attention to regional allies' interests, especially on the Iran issue. The result is that 'Obama made a very important contribution to the development of relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia.'[7] Israel declared, 'What we see is an American government that is not so loyal to traditional American friends.'[8] On the Iranian nuclear issue, the United States and Israel had the biggest differences. For example, after the Iran nuclear agreement was reached in 2015, Netanyahu publicly stated that the 'historically wrong' agreement increased Iran's risk of acquiring nuclear weapons, especially after the sanctions were lifted, and Israel would be threatened by Iran as well as the 'terrorism' it supported. Although Saudi Arabia did not show strong opposition, it has since expressed its concerns about the impact of the agreement. Saudi Arabia is worried about regional power imbalances, while Israel about direct security threats. The final goal is in the common interest of both countries. Therefore, Saudi Arabia opposes the Iran nuclear agreement, advocates the prevention of the 'Iranian threat,' and emphasises the need to strengthen security cooperation to prevent the Iran nuclear agreement from endangering the two countries' shared interests in the region.

The fourth stage is intimate contact period (from 2017 to present). After the Trump administration came to power, the US policy towards Iran changed. The United States unilaterally withdrew from the Iran nuclear agreement and restarted sanctions against Iran, which to no small extent conformed to the common interests of Saudi Arabia and Israel, and Saudi Arabia-Israel relations have since been further strengthened. In February 2019, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu participated in the US-organized conference to contain Iran, during which he met the Foreign Ministers of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and other Gulf countries. At the same time, Saudi Arabia and Israel were

[4]A. Pfeffer, 'Mossad chief reportedly visited Saudi Arabia for talks on Iran,' Haaretz, (26 July 2010), available at: https://www.haaretz.com/1.5152341.

[5]Israel's PM Office, 'PM Netanyahu's statement at the opening of the winter Knesset session,' (14 October 2013), available at: https://www.gov.il/en/departments/news/speechwinter151012.

[6]B. Ravid, 'Israel rejected 2014 Saudi proposal on Palestinian peace talks,' Axios, (12 February 2019), available at: https://www.axios.com/netanyahu-rejected-saudi-diplomatic-offer-gaza-war-62b8c2f6-132b-4e4a-b2af-c71933ba34b6.html.

[7]Z. Beauchamp, 'Why the US has the most pro-Israel foreign policy in the world," Vox, (24 July 2014), available at: https://www.vox.com/2014/7/24/5929705/us-israel-friends.

[8]Ibid.

cooperating in security and intelligence sharing. Israel said it was ready to share intelligence with Saudi Arabia to deal with Iran jointly.[9] Saudi Arabia and Israel actively cooperated to deter Iran and the Lebanese Hezbollah, Yemeni Houthis, and the Iraqi PMF that Iran supported. From August to September 2020, Saudi Arabia had a low-key attitude towards the incident when the UAE and Bahrain respectively announced the full normalisation of Israel's relations and started to establish formal diplomatic relations.

## 2. The Characteristics of the Current Changes in the Saudi-Israeli Relations

The current breakthrough changes in relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel are mainly reflected in the fact that Saudi Arabia, as the leader of Arab powers and Islam, is undergoing a significant change in its attitude to and position on the core Palestinian issue of the Middle East issue, especially the most sensitive Jerusalem issue and the so-called 'Deal of the Century.' Besides, Saudi Arabia and Israel are currently conducting open and frequent interactions in many fields, and the new changes in the relations between the two countries are specifically presented in the following aspects.

First, Saudi Arabia gives the Jerusalem issue short shrift. As the holy city of the three major monotheistic religions, Jerusalem is a particular territorial existence in the modern international system. During the implementation of the United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine (Resolution 181), there was a proposal of international co-management in this field, but it had never been materialised. Jerusalem's ownership has been the root cause of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict for many years, and Israel's unilateral actions on the Jerusalem issue have caused many contradictions and conflicts. For a long time, Saudi Arabia had opposed Israel's sole occupation of Jerusalem, but when US President Trump announced Jerusalem's recognition as the capital of Israel on 6 December 2017, Saudi Arabia remained silent on this. The United States then stopped assisting the Palestinian government to force Palestine to return to peace negotiations, and the Knesset took advantage of the momentum to pass the new Jerusalem bill. In this situation, when Jordan requested an emergency Arab Summit to respond to the US government's decision on recognising Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, Saudi Arabia expressed reservations about the proposal, stating that the Arab Summit would be held in Riyadh in March 2018, and it was not necessary to convene an emergency Arab Summit on the Jerusalem issue. The King of Saudi Arabia simply expressed an opinion that 'the United States' approach is dangerous.'[10] Saudi Arabia responded in a low-key manner and issued a notice to the domestic media, requesting that they reduce reports on Trump's declaration of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.[11] In Jordan the Saudi Arabian Embassy warned Saudi Arabian citizens in

[9]X. Bao and X. Hui, 'Secret contact? Israel seems to be willing to join hands with Saudi Arabia to deal with Iran,' Xinhua, (21 November 2017).
[10]Q. Hou, 'Saudi Arabia and Egypt acquiesced to the new Jerusalem policy of the United States? 'brothers in the Middle East' may have goals of their own,' Xinhua, (19 December 2017), available at: http://ww w.xinhuanet.com/world/2017-12/19/c_129769398.htm.
[11]Ibid.

Jordan not to participate in anti-American protests and demonstrations in Jordan. It is not difficult to see that Saudi Arabia was trying to minimise this issue's negative impact.

On the issue of the relocation of the US embassy, Saudi Arabia generally showed a symbolic opposition. In 2017, the United States stated that it planned to move the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, and many countries subsequently showed strong opposition. However, as a major Arab country, Saudi Arabia issued a statement the next day through the Saudi Arabian Royal Court, saying that the decision was dangerous and irresponsible and subsequently did not take actual opposition actions.[12] On 14 May 2018, the US embassy in Israel moved to Jerusalem. Saudi Arabia only expressed its opposition and condemnation to the US embassy on the next day.[13] King Salman said he would continue to support Palestine and assured other Arab leaders that he would continue to work hard to maintain the 2002 'Arab Peace Initiative,' which included the establishment of the State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on the 1967 borders. Saudi Arabia reassured the Palestinian government by reducing the dissatisfaction caused by the moving of the US embassy, towards which Saudi Arabia maintained a low-key attitude. After that, Saudi Arabia only expressed its opposition with simple words. This 'symbolic opposition' conveyed a subtle change in Saudi Arabia's attitude towards the Jerusalem issue. This shows that Saudi Arabia still publicly adhered to supporting Palestine to show its determination to defend the dignity of the Arab nation and protect the Palestinian people. However, its attitude and position on the Jerusalem issue in practical actions have softened.

The second characteristic is Saudi Arabia's ambiguous attitude towards the 'Deal of the Century.' When the US and Israel deliberately revealed the new version of the 'Deal of the Century' to the international community, Saudi Arabia made it clear that 'if (Palestinian-Israel peace plan) does not include the Palestinian capital of East Jerusalem, they will not be able to support the Trump administration's Palestinian-Israeli peace plan,'[14] fully expressing its determination and position to support Palestine. However, in June 2019, Saudi Arabia participated in the United States' economic conference in Bahrain. This conference is an essential part of Trump's launch of his peace plan, which encourages Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries to invest in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.[15] King Salman of Saudi Arabia emphasised at the meeting that Saudi Arabia's 'stance on the Palestinian issue and the rights of the Palestinian people is firm and unchanging.'[16] On 28 January 2020, Trump officially

[12]R. Noack, 'US allies reject Trump's Jerusalem pronouncement as 'very dangerous' and 'catastrophic,' Washington Post, (6 December 2017), available at://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017 /12/06/its-catastrophic-u-s-allies-reject-trumps-expected-jerusalem-pronouncement/v.

[13]R. Staff, 'Saudi Arabia rejects transfer of US embassy to Jerusalem,' Reuters, (5 May 2018), available at: https://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-usa-embassy-saudi-idUSKCN1IG1OU.

[14]A. Tibon, 'Saudi King tells US that peace plan must include east Jerusalem as Palestinian capital,' Haaretz, (27 July 2018), available at: https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/saudis-say-u-s-peace-plan-must-include-e-j-l-as-palestinian-capital-1.6319323.

[15]Reuters Staff, 'Saudi Arabia, UAE to attend US-led Palestine Investment Meeting,' Reuters, (22 May 2019), available at: https://www.reuters.com/article/us-palestinians-bahrain-emirates/saudi-arabia-uae-to-attend-us-led-palestine-investment-meeting-idUSKCN1SR2IC.

[16]Y. Tian, 'The US has released the 'Deal of the Century' on the Israeli-Palestinian issue,' Global Times (30 January 2020), available at: https://world.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrnKp75m.

launched the plan to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli dispute. The plan recognises Jerusalem as the 'indivisible capital' of Israel,[17] and the Palestinian state will establish a capital in parts of East Jerusalem in the future. The plan also recognises Israel's sovereignty over Jewish settlements in the West Bank, and allows Palestine to establish a state on the condition of achieving 'demilitarization.' As soon as the 'Deal of the Century' was released, it caused a strong international community response. However, Saudi Arabia never expressly opposed the agreement, and Crown Prince Mohammed even 'appreciated' Trump's efforts on the Palestinian-Israeli issue, calling on Israel and Palestine to open a direct dialogue with both sides. He also proposed that disagreements on the plan should be resolved under the United States' auspices. In an interview of *The Atlantic*, Crown Prince Mohammed stated that Israel had the right to live peacefully on its land.[18] With a belief that the 'Deal of the Century' is a critical process for advancing the Palestinian-Israeli issue, Saudi Arabia reiterated its 'support for all efforts aimed at reaching a just and comprehensive solution for the Palestinian cause.'[19] Saudi Arabia not only appreciates the Trump administration's efforts to formulate a comprehensive peace plan between Palestine and Israel but also encourages Palestine and Israel to start direct peace talks with the support of the United States, calling for the settlement of any differences related to the plan through negotiations, with an aim to 'facilitate the peace process and reach an agreement to realise the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people.'[20] Therefore, it is not difficult to see that Saudi Arabia's discrepancies in words and deeds are mainly manifested in its public political statements as before, and its specific terms and actions have increasingly shown acquiescence and support US-Israeli approach.

The third characteristic is the frequent public official interaction of Saudi Arabia with Israel. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu repeatedly indicated that he 'is in contact with moderate Arab countries.' Israel often publicly expressed its hope to 'strengthen cooperation with moderate Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia,' especially in jointly restricting Iran's diplomatic cooperation.[21] Israeli Intelligence Minister Katz stated that he had held a conference call with high-level Saudi Arabian officials. During the call, he conveyed to the Saudi Arabian King the idea of Prime Minister Netanyahu's intention to visit Riyadh.[22] Israel repeatedly expressed in public its recognition of Saudi Arabia's status as a regional power. For example, Intelligence Minister Katz often emphasised that Saudi Arabia is the 'leader country' in the Arab world.[23] Saudi Arabia

[17]China's Public Opinion Field, 'US announces 'Deal of the Century' for Israelis and Palestinians,' CCTV (29 January 2020), available at: http://tv.cctv.com/2020/01/29/ARTIrIrnfJeF31yZwUjtSrOl200129.shtml.

[18]'Foreign media: the Saudi Arabian Crown Prince sends a signal to move closer to Israel to emphasize common interests,' Xinhua, (4 April 2018), available at: http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/2018-04/04/c_1 29 843779.htm.

[19]Ibid.

[20]Ibid.

[21]J. Lis, 'Netanyahu: Israel working to reach peace with Arab nations that Stand against radical Islam,' Haaretz, (7 November 2017), available at: https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/netanyahu-israel-working-to-reach-peace-with-moderate-arab-nations-1.5463754.

[22]The Liveblog of Thursday, 'Katz calls for full Saudi ties, says Netanyahu should visit Riyadh,' Times of Israel, (22 June 2017), available at: https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/katz-calls-for-full-saudi-ties-says-netanyahu-should-visit-riyadh/.

[23]W. Strobel and D. Nissenbaum, 'US arranges secret talks between Israel, UAE over Iran,' Wall Street Journal, (15 August 2019), available at: https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-arranges-secret-talks-between-israel-u-a-e-over-iran-11565870404.

also approved of Israel's use of Saudi Arabian airspace when striking Iran if necessary.[24] Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Faisal stated in his speech at the Munich Security Conference that once an agreement is reached between the Jewish state and the Palestinians, Saudi Arabia will be willing to develop relations with Israel. On the military front, Saudi Arabia and Israel will cooperate in the deployment of anti-missile systems.[25] Israeli Chief of Staff Gadi Eisenkot said, 'Iran is the biggest threat in the Middle East, and Israel is willing to cooperate with Saudi Arabia to prevent Iran's expansion plan.'[26] In 2018, one Air India's passenger plane flew through Saudi Arabian airspace to Tel Aviv, suggesting that it was the first time that a civil flight to Israel did this in the past 70 years, which means for the first time, Saudi Arabia allowed a third country plane heading to Israel to fly over its airspace. This is a 'milestone' change in relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel. In this regard, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu also admitted that 'Israel's relations with Arab countries are at the 'best' level.'[27] In January 2020, Israel publicly allowed its citizens to travel to Saudi Arabia under certain conditions for the first time, such as carrying out hajj or participating in business meetings and investment activities.[28] Although Israeli tourists to Saudi Arabia still need to obtain permission from the Saudi Arabian government, the Saudi Arabian side has not denied Israel's statement. On 31 August 2020, the first non-stop commercial flight of Israel landed on the UAE, and the Israeli flight overflew Saudi Arabian airspace.

Currently, Saudi Arabia and Israel have shown overall tacit agreement on the Jerusalem issue and the 'Deal of the Century' and have carried out extensive and open interaction in multiple fields based on these two key issues. On the whole, it can be seen from the fact that the change of the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Israel has distinctive characteristics, and this change of this relationship took place in the aspects of interest reality, open interaction, and pragmatism of cooperation.

In terms of the reality of interests, the fragmentation of the Arab world and the decline of Arab nationalism have caused countries to pay more and more attention to their own development and lack confidence in further cooperation. 'Nationalism is a glamorous concept, but it is not a realistic political plan.'[29] Under the new geopolitical situation in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia pays particular attention to its own interests. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed said, 'We share many common interests with Israel. If there is peace, there will be many common interests between Israel and the Gulf

[24]M. Han, 'Saudi Arabia grants Israel the right to use airspace in exchange for the progress of the Palestinian issue,' (27 February 2015), available at: https://world.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrnJlbSc.
[25]J. Zhang, 'Israel-Saudi Arabian military relations are quietly heating up,' Youth Reference, (7 March 2019), available at: http://qnck.cyol.com/html/2019-03/07/nw.D110000qnck_20190307_2-06.htm.
[26]A. Ahronheim, 'Report: IDF chief of staff Eisenkot met with Saudi counterpart,' Jerusalem Post, (17 October 2018), available at: https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/report-idf-chief-of-staff-eisenkot-met-with-saudi-counterpart-569585.
[27]R. Hu, 'The first time in 70 years! a civil airliner to Israel flies over Saudi airspace,' (24 March 2018), available at: http://news.cyol.com/content/2018-03/24/content_17047774.htm.
[28]Reuters Staff, 'Israel approves travel to Saudi under limited circumstances,' Al Jazeera, (27 January 2020), available at: https://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-saudi-travel-idUSKBN1ZP0F3.
[29]S. Wu, 'Eugene Logan: from 'nationalism' to 'Islam,' what has the Arab world experienced?' (17 December 2019), available at: https://www.guancha.cn/EugeneRogan/2019_12_17_528614.shtml?s = zwyz zwzbt.

Cooperation Council member states.'[30] Saudi Arabia regards Israel as a potential partner against Iran, so it not only cooperates with Israel regarding political security, but also considers Israel as an attractive regional economic and technological centre in terms of economic consideration, and Aaudi Arabia hopes to cooperate with it to materialise the domestic economic development planning vision. Although Saudi Arabia is a traditional ally of the United States, this relationship is asymmetrical. The United States often pressures Saudi Arabia to carry out domestic political reforms or compromise over oil prices and production capacity policies. This has dramatically affected Saudi Arabia. Compared with the United States, Israel, which is not too strong in power, invests political and diplomatic capital in essential areas of common concern with Saudi Arabia: containing Iran, maintaining regional security, dismantling terrorist networks, and preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Therefore, the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Israel is equal, symmetrical, and complementary.

With regard to open interactions, the early interaction between Saudi Arabia and Israel was concealed, making the cooperation between the two parties flexible and challenging to be interfered with by the outside world, which can significantly reduce the difficulty of their security cooperation. Saudi Arabia can continue to play a leading role in the Arab world while developing low-key relations with Israel to safeguard its security interests. Israel can also gradually realise a key diplomatic breakthrough in the Arab world through secret interactions with Saudi Arabia. As the cooperation between Saudi Arabia and Israel continues to deepen, substantial relations between the two countries have no longer been a secret. The current relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel have gradually come to light and eventually become public. In particular, Crown Prince Mohammed could not 'conceal' his 'favours' and 'recognition' towards Israel when he attended diplomatic occasions, and his attitude towards Israel was obviously softened. The public interaction between Saudi Arabia and Israel has shown that Saudi Arabia has increasingly publicly recognised Israel's right to 'exist' and is willing to cooperate with it. The UAE and Bahrain as Saudi Arabia's main ally in the Gulf region, the full normalisation of these two countries' relations with Israel and the establishment of diplomatic relations are not independent of Saudi Arabia's acquiescence. This can also be seen as a way for Saudi Arabia to develop its relations with Israel indirectly.

About pragmatic cooperation, for a long time, the mistrust and misunderstanding between Saudi Arabia and the United States have been increasingly endangering the two countries' relations. In particular, due to the Obama administration's Middle East policy favouring Iran, Saudi Arabia pragmatically recognised the importance and benefits of further strengthening security, technological and economic ties with Israel to improve its geopolitical disadvantage. Simultaneously, the Obama administration's support for the Iran nuclear agreement made Israel increasingly aware of its national security. As a result, Saudi Arabia and Israel gradually and tacitly carried out further cooperation in the political and security fields. In 2016, Israel expressed its blessings to Saudi Arabia's plan to take over Tiran and Sanafir from Egypt. Israeli Defense Minister

[30]A. Tibon, 'Saudi Crown Prince: we share common interests with Israel, but there must be peace with Palestinians,' Haaretz, (3 April 2018), available at: https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/saudi-prince-israelis-have-the-right-to-have-their-own-land-1.5974278.

Yaalon said that Saudi Arabia would respect the relevant provisions of the Egypt-Israel peace treaty.[31] In 2018, when Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed was involved in the 'Khashoggi case,' Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu publicly defended him.[32]

In summary, although Saudi Arabia has no formal diplomatic relations with Israel, the interaction between the two countries has been powerfully advanced under the framework of the anti-Iranian alliance established by the United States. The characteristics of the new changes in relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel will dominate the fundamental development of the future relations between the two countries; especially after the UAE and Bahrain, which are both Gulf Arab monarchies and US allies, achieved a fundamental breakthrough in the relations with Israel, the United States is full of expectations for future relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel. After the breakthrough in the relationship between the UAE and Israel, the US Secretary of State Pompeo and Trump's son-in-law Kushner visited several countries in the Middle East, focussing on the Gulf monarchies such as Oman and Bahrain. It is generally believed that their ultimate goal is to create a condition for a breakthrough in the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Israel.

## 3. The Background and Realistic Logic of the Current Changes in the Saudi-Israeli Relations

As far as relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel are concerned, the long-term isolation and hostility between the two countries in the past was mainly influenced by Islamism, Arab nationalism, and the pattern of international relations. Due to the decline of Arab unity and the drastic changes in the Middle East's political situation since the 'Arab Spring,' relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel have gradually influenced by other factors besides religious factors. Saudi Arabia admitted that its long-term non-recognition of Israel's State was based on nationalism rather than religious considerations. This dramatically reduced the pressure of Saudi Arabia's 'Islamic leader' status on the development of relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel. It can also reasonably explain the long-standing behaviour of Arab countries such as Egypt and Jordan in establishing diplomatic relations with Israel. Saudi Arabia's consideration in current changes in relations with Israel includes two aspects: for one thing, Saudi Arabia recognises the importance of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the importance of Jerusalem's status in the hearts of Muslims; for another, Saudi Arabia prioritises the 'threat' of Iran, which makes it particularly attractive to improve the relationship with Israel.[33] Specifically, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed pointed out that although the Temple Mount's fate in East Jerusalem was the only 'religious concern' of the Saudi Arabians, he emphasised that 'there is no problem between our country and the

[31]D. Williams, 'Israel gives blessing to Egypt's return of Red Sea islands to Saudi Arabia,' Reuters, (12 April 2016), available at: https://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-saudi-islands-israel-idUSKCN0X9106.

[32]R. Silverstein, 'Why is Benjamin Netanyahu defending Mohammed bin Salman,' Middle East Eye, (5 November 2018), available at: https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/why-benjamin-netanyahu-defendin g-mohammed-bin-salman.

[33]M. Furlan, 'Israel-Saudi relations in a changed and changing Middle East: growing cooperation?' Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs 13(2), (2019), p. 183.

Jews.'[34] Saudi Arabia and Israel's current relationship is a quasi-alliance relationship that lies in the 'grey zone' between alliance and neutrality. Both countries are facing the Iranian 'threat' which hinders their security development interests. In particular, they need security cooperation in military assistance, intelligence cooperation, arms sales, and other aspects, and on this basis, they extend cooperation to non-security areas. In short, the establishment of the quasi alliance between Saudi Arabia and Israel has its realistic logic and is influenced by the comprehensive environment.

For Saudi Arabia and Israel, the ups and downs of US Middle East policy in recent years play a key role in promoting the acceleration of open relations between the two countries. To begin with, the conflicting Middle East policies of the Obama administration and the Trump administration accelerated and promoted the interaction between Saudi Arabia and Israel from two opposite sides. The Obama administration's strategic contraction in the Middle East caused its two hostile allies, Saudi Arabia and Israel, to openly cooperate, mainly because it facilitated the Iran nuclear agreement, making Saudi Arabia more uneasy. After Trump took office, the United States considerably eased its relationship with its traditional ally, Saudi Arabia, and once again chose to contain Iran and launched a new Palestinian-Israeli peace plan. The United States stepped up its efforts to collaborate with its allies, seeking to promote an informal alliance between the Gulf monarchy and Israel to contain Iran jointly. In May 2018, Trump announced his withdrawal from the Iran nuclear agreement signed by the Obama administration in 2015. Furthermore, the United States still dissatisfied Israel with its choice of non-armed ways to solve the Iran issue through extreme pressure, super deterrence, and all-around sanctions. The anxiety about the "Iranian threat" prompted Israel to strengthen cooperation with Saudi Arabia. In May 2020, after two years when the United States withdrew from the agreement, the United States announced a partial withdrawal of its troops from Saudi Arabia and the withdrawal of four 'Patriot' missile defence systems which used to protect Saudi Arabian oil fields and US military bases. This triggered massive speculation about relations between the United States and Saudi Arabia within the international community. Regardless of whether it is the Obama administration or the Trump administration, the United States is in a state of strategic contraction in the Middle East, resulting in a fact that Saudi Arabia and Israel treat each other as essential partners in of Iran's defence in the Middle East. Besides, the Trump administration's Middle East policy is centred on Iran, aiming to establish a geopolitical structure in the Middle East that the United States controls by solving the Iranian issue.[35] At the same time, the United States and Israel tried to launch the 'new cold war' between Saudi Arabia and Iran to expand the conflicts between Saudi Arabia and Iran, divert attention from regional conflicts, and marginalise the Palestinian-Israeli issue, thereby advancing the development of the new version of the 'Middle East Peace Process' and solving the Palestinian-Israeli issue as soon as possible, as aligning with the intentions of the United States and Israel to the maximum. The realistic logic that prompted in the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Israel includes the following aspects.

[34]M. Furlan, 'Saudi Prince says Israelis have right to 'their own land',' New York Times, (3 April 2018), available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/03/world/middleeast/saudi-arabia-mohammed-bin-salman -israel.html.
[35]B. Wu, 'The 'Iran problem' in the changing pattern of the modern world,' Cultural Aspects (4), (2019), p. 67.

The first aspect is the common political and security dilemma facing Saudi Arabia and Israel. The geopolitical competition in the Middle East is becoming increasingly fierce. The confrontation between the anti-Iran camp centred on Saudi Arabia and Israel and the Shiite camp centred on Iran has increasingly become the focus of regional competition. So the competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia is a comprehensive strategic competition rather than a pure sectarian contradiction. The competition between Israel and Iran is also a comprehensive strategic competition. Iran used the turmoil induced by the 'Arab Spring' to continuously intervene in the chaos in Yemen, Syria, and other countries, which strengthened Saudi Arabia's awareness of Iran as a threat. The gradual rise of Iran caused Saudi Arabia and Israel to worry about their own and regional security, and they reached a consensus on containing Iran. Response to the 'Iranian threat' has become the common security interest of Saudi Arabia and Israel and the core of cooperation between the two countries. The increase in Iran's comprehensive strength and regional influence will be regarded as a threat and challenge to their regimes' legitimacy or their governments. The Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 made the Gulf Sunni Arab monarchies and Israel full of worries: for one thing, Iran's Shi'a theocratic republic opposes the monarchy, and for another, it does not recognise the 'rights' of the state of Israel. In 2003, the United States launched the Iraq War to overthrow Iran's old enemy, Saddam's regime, which objectively enhanced Iran's influence in the region. Since then, Iran's nuclear activities have made Saudi Arabia and Israel very upset, and they have been more vigilant since a secret uranium enrichment facility in Iran were exposed. In recent years, Iran has increased its military and political involvement in countries such as Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen to further stabilise the Shia Crescent. Due to Iran's presence and its support to militants such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and Palestinian militant groups such as Jehad in Syria which borders Israel, Israel has to pay close attention to the situation in Syria, and Saudi Arabia to the situation in Yemen adjacent to it. The Houthis supported by Iran have seriously threatened the security of Saudi Arabia's land and sea channels. As Iran's regional influence continues to expand, preventing Iran from possessing nuclear weapons and containing Iran's contention for regional hegemony has become a security consensus between Saudi Arabia and Israel, and the anti-Iran camp among United States, Saudi Arabia, and Israel has gradually formed. The camp condemned Iran's regional expansion and regarded it as an 'Iranian threat.' Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed described Iran's Supreme Leader Khamenei as the 'new Hitler,' and Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu stated that Israel was ready to join the international coalition against Tehran. Besides the 'Iranian threat,' Saudi Arabia and Israel have common interests in other geo-security issues in the Middle East. The breakdown of the alliance between Israel and Turkey, the dispute between Saudi Arabia and Turkey for regional dominance, and the dispute between Sunni and Islamic world leaders all provided an opportunity for cooperation between Saudi Arabia and Israel. Saudi Arabia and Israel to jointly oppose the Bashar regime in Syria and express disappointment at the US withdrawal from Syria.

Second, Saudi Arabia and Israel have changed their diplomatic strategies. Because of Israel's victory in the 1967 Middle East War and Jerusalem's occupation, religious nationalism began to rise in the Arab world and gradually moved towards replacing

secular nationalism. In this context, Saudi Arabia took the lead in establishing the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) to unite with Islamic countries to speak out against Israel. With the outbreak of the Islamic Revolution in Iran and due to the fact that the Arab world has implicitly recognised Israel's existence since the 1980s (especially after the initiation of the Middle East peace process in the 1990s), the Arab world has divided positions and opinions on the Palestinian-Israeli issue. Since Salman succeeded as King of Saudi Arabia, the 'Salman New Deal' has become a guide for Saudi Arabia's internal affairs and diplomacy, especially in its diplomatic transformation. In terms of diplomatic concepts, Saudi Arabia has gradually played down the impact of pan-Islamism and paid more attention to realist diplomacy that focuses on power and interests. Religious and sectarian factors are no longer the key factors affecting the diplomacy of Saudi Arabia.[36] At present, Saudi Arabia's primary diplomatic goal is still to contain Iran, and Saudi Arabia has changed its former 'low-key and moderate' foreign policy into strengthening major-power diplomacy and pursuing a realistic diplomatic route to seek more international cooperation.[37] This is manifested by Saudi Arabia building an anti-Iranian quasi-alliance in the Middle East and surrounding regions. Saudi Arabia maintains balanced diplomacy with major powers internationally, minimises resistance in the Middle East in the fight for leadership in the Gulf region, and strives to improve relations with Israel based on this logic. Saudi Arabia also adheres to its basic diplomatic principles rooted on increasingly open and close ties with Israel. From a personal perspective, the reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Israel has been actively promoted by the United States' Trump administration, and Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner has developed an excellent personal relationship with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed. The primary goal of Israel's foreign policy is to maintain national security, and Prime Minister Netanyahu has strengthened relations with the Gulf Arab countries by exaggerating the 'Iranian Threat Theory,' promoting the increasingly marginalised Palestinian-Israeli issue, and using Saudi Arabia's power to help Israel achieve diplomatic breakthroughs and create a security environment that is beneficial to Israel in the Arab world. Therefore, the openness of relations with Saudi Arabia is what Israel has always expected. The ultimate goal of Saudi Arabia and Israel's diplomatic strategy transformation is to maintain the domestic regime's security and stability. As a member of the pro-American camp in the Middle East, Iran and its 'threat' have helped achieve Saudi Arabia's foreign policy transformation and Israel's diplomatic strategy.

Third, Saudi Arabia and Israel are willing to complement each other's economic transformation and development. If the political security is the cause of the increasingly close relationship between Saudi Arabia and Israel, then the complementary advantages in the two countries' economic development have become a guarantee for the deepening of bilateral cooperation.[38] Saudi Arabia has enormous economic strength and oil production capacity while Israel has excellent technological

[36]L. Ding and L. Huang, 'Adjustments and prospects of Saudi foreign policy since Salman's succession,' Contemporary World (2), (2020), p. 18.
[37]X. Ma, 'The 'Salman New Deal' and the trend of Saudi Arabia's internal affairs and diplomacy,' West Asia and Africa (2), (2018), pp. 3-30.
[38]Israpundit, 'Israel, Saudi Arabia are reportedly negotiating economic ties,' 5TJT, (25 October 2017), available at: http://www.5tjt.com/israel-saudi-arabia-reportedly-negotiating-economic-ties/.

innovation capabilities, Internet software development technology, and modern financial stability, making it possible for the two countries to complement each other's economic and technical advantages. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed stated publicly, 'Israel is an attractive regional economic and technological centre and a potential partner of Saudi Arabia.'[39] Israel is one of the 34 most developed economies globally and one of the most dynamic and technologically advanced market economies in the world, and it is in a leading position in innovative industries such as high-tech, clean technology, and life sciences. In 2018, Israel authorised NSO to sell spyware to Saudi Arabia.[40] Driven by substantial oil gains, Saudi Arabia's economy began to flourish in the 1970s and 1980s. What makes the New Deal implemented by Saudi Arabia in recent years the most eye-catching is the national development plan represented by the 'Vision 2030.' Its goal is to fundamentally realise the diversified development of Saudi Arabia's oil-dependent economy and to eliminate its dependence on oil exports and create more job opportunities. Saudi Arabia hopes and believes that Israel can help it realise economic reforms and smoothly promote 'Vision 2030.' As one of the plans, the 'NEOM Project' is about Saudi Arabia to construct a giant city at the Gulf of Aqaba entrance in the northeast corner of the Red Sea on the border with Egypt and Jordan. The project is close to Israel and coincides and complements with the important Israeli project, 'Red Sea-Mediterranean Railway Plan.' The two sides can carry out economic cooperation on this project and affect the geopolitical structure of the region.[41] In terms of talent exchange, Saudi Arabia regards Arab students graduating from Israeli universities as high-quality talents and provides them with employment opportunities and generous benefits package.[42] As Saudi Arabia has not yet formally established diplomatic relations and a formal bilateral trade mechanism with Israel, there are no official statistics on the bilateral trade volume between the two countries. However, Saudi Arabia and Israel have made the point that they will discuss open economic relations.[43] Also, there is great potential for cooperation between Saudi Arabia and Israel in cybersecurity, irrigation, medical supplies, and the diamond industry.

## 4. The Impact of the Current Changes in the Saudi-Israeli Relations

Saudi Arabia's difference in words and deeds on the Jerusalem issue, the ambiguity of its attitude towards the 'Deal of the Century' and various forms of open interaction with Israel show that the ambiguous relationship between Saudi Arabia and Israel is becoming public and gradually moving towards a 'honeymoon period.' Although Saudi Arabia and Israel have different interests, their common security goal is to

[39]B. Hubbard, 'Saudi Prince says Israelis have right to 'their own land',' New York Times, (3 April 2018), available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/03/world/middleeast/saudi-arabia-mohammed-bin-salman-israel.html.

[40]C. Levinson, 'Report: Israel authorized NSO's sale of spyware to Saudi Arabia,' Haaretz, (9 December 2018), available at: https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/report-israel-authorized-nso-s-sale-of-spyware-to-saudi-arabia-1.6725044.

[41]Commercial Counselor Office of the Chinese Embassy in Saudi Arabia, 'Saudi Arabia will lease long-term land from Egypt to build a new NEOM city,' (March 2018), available at: http://xyf.mofcom.gov.cn/ article/zb/201803/20180302719190.shtml.

[42]D. Zaken, 'Saudi Arabia opens its doors to Israeli Arabs,' Globes, (21 May 2019), available at: https://en.globes.co.il/en/article-saudi-arabia-opens-its-doors-to-israeli-arabs-1001286453.

[43]Staff, 'Israel, Saudi Arabia said to discuss open economic ties,' Times of Israel, (17 June 2017), available at: https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-saudi-arabi-said-to-discuss-open-economic-ties/.

contain Iran, which is the basis of their collaboration. At the same time, due to the United States' strategic contraction in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia and Israel need to work closer to prevent Iran from becoming more prominent and more potent in the Middle East, thereby threatening their security interests. The new changes in relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel will have an important impact on their relations and the Middle East's geopolitical structure.

First, it will help reduce the pressure on Saudi Arabia's national security and promote its oil and gas economy and technological economy. The improvement of Israel's relations has enabled Saudi Arabia's national security and stability and economic development. The two countries' military security, economic cooperation, and other complementary projects will bring considerable benefits to both sides. Saudi Arabia is already negotiating a plan to construct a gas pipeline to Eilat with Israel to import Israeli natural gas. This route can be used as an oil pipeline to Western Europe, and it can also avoid Iran's blockade in the Strait of Hormuz and the Mande Strait in the Red Sea and become a safer and more convenient channel to ensure oil exports of Saudi Arabia to the West.[44] Cooperation with Israel in superior high-tech innovation fields will help Saudi Arabia's commitment to realising its vision of domestic economic transformation and upgrading.

Second, the influence of Israel will be expanded and the anti-Iran alliance will be consolidated. The improvement and openness of Saudi Arabia and Israel's relationship will help to reduce the Middle East's pro-American camp which will pose a serious challenge to Iran's interests in the region, and become more difficult and complicated for Iran to intervene in the regional situation. As far as Israel is concerned, cooperation with Saudi Arabia cannot only contain Iran, but also use Saudi Arabia to promote the settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli issue so that the Palestinian-Israeli peace process will develop in favour of Israel itself, and the situation of 'strong Israel and weak Palestine' will be increasingly solidified. However, it should also be noted that the increasingly close relationship between Saudi Arabia and Israel can only soften the positions of Palestine and some Arab countries, but it will not wholly change the principles that the Arab world generally adheres to. Israel's exaggeration of Iran's threats is not conducive to the stability of the Middle East. The growing formation of the core camp and the confrontation and conflict between the two camps pose a serious threat to the Middle East's stability.

Third, it has affected Saudi Arabia's image in the region, and its status as a regional powerhouse has been challenged. The issue of Palestine has become an essential opportunity for the great forces in the Middle East to seise the ideological high ground and discourse power.[45] As the leader of the Arab power and the Islamic world, Saudi Arabia's increasingly open relations with Israel have undermined the trust of Palestine and other Arab countries that support the independent establishment of Palestine in Saudi Arabia. As some Palestinian people say, 'Our Arab brothers (the Gulf region) stabbed us in the back and the front abandoned us politically but supported

[44]F. Musmar, 'Saudi Arabia and Israel: who needs whom?' (13 December 2019), available at: https://www.algemeiner.com/2019/12/13/saudi-arabia-and-israel-who-needs-whom/.

[45]J. Zhao, 'Strategic confrontation of Saudi Arabia and Iran, future balance of the US-Saudi Arabia-Israel triangle and the Middle East pattern,' Contemporary World and Socialism (6), (2018), p. 160.

Israel. The flag of Israel may soon fly over some Gulf countries, while these countries are putting pressure on the Palestinian leaders, demanding them to accept an unacceptable peace agreement.'[46] This shows that many Palestinians are disappointed in Saudi Arabia and regard it as the barrier of the peace process. In the long run, it will not be helpful for Saudi Arabia's national image; at the same time, it will not help Saudi Arabia to compete with other countries, such as another regional powerhouse Turkey, for regional leadership. Both the 2017 and 2018 Organisation of Islamic Cooperation meetings were held in Turkey instead of Saudi Arabia. Most of the meetings focussed on conflict mediation and Palestine issue resolvement. In Turkey, they called for mediation as an effective mechanism for peaceful conflict resolution.[47] In April 2020, under Turkey's initiative, the OIC held another online meeting to fight the COVID-19 virus jointly. The openness of Saudi Arabia's relations with Israel will weaken Saudi Arabia's status as a regional power to varying degrees.

Fourth, the internal contradictions in the Arab world will deepen, and the geostrategic competition in the Middle East will become more intense. There is also fierce competition within Arab countries. For many years, the relationship between Israel and some Arab countries such as Oman and Bahrain have been developing in secret. Israel tends to develop bilateral exchanges and cooperation with Arab countries. As a major Arab country, bilateral interactions with Saudi Arabia will also stimulate other Arab countries to engage with Israel that knows that a divided Arab world is more beneficial to itself. Although Israel's attitude and actions on the Palestine issue have always been the main obstacle to reaching a peace agreement with Arab countries, Iran's common worries have narrowed the distance between Arab and Israel. In the long run, the Arab world will be more divided and lack unified goals and long-term plans. For example, in the Qatar diplomatic crisis in 2017, there were many internal contradictions within the Arab world, and there was still no sign of resolution for the severance of diplomatic relations. Under the premise that the Palestinian-Israeli issue has stagnated or even regressed, breaking the ice in the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Israel will not help resolve the Palestinian-Israeli issue or stabilise the Middle East. The development of relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel will further complicate regional competition. The major powers in the Middle East, such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, Israel and their respective allies, will continue to compete fiercely for regional dominance and status. Due to the lack of an effective regional cooperation mechanism in the Middle East, the Middle East's major powers have no intention to promote the establishment of an effective regional cooperation mechanism. This will accelerate the development of conflicts in the Middle East. Suppose Saudi Arabia and Israel cannot jointly push the Middle East peace process forward, the Palestinian-Israeli issue's status and influence will continue to decline and become increasingly marginalised. In that case, the Middle East region will still be full of turmoil and unrest.

[46]I. Black, 'Why Israel is quietly cosying up to Gulf monarchies,' Guardian, (19 March 2019), available at: https://www.theguardian.com/news/2019/mar/19/why-israel-quietly-cosying-up-to-gulf-monarchies-saudi-arabia-uae.

[47]A. Yi, 'The Organization of Islamic Cooperation seeks to establish a conflict mediation mechanism,' Xinhua, (21 November 2017), available at: http://m.xinhuanet.com/2017-11/21/c_1121991103.htm.

## 5. Conclusion

The development of the closeness and openness of Saudi Arabia and Israel must be treated with caution. Although the quasi-alliance relationship between the two countries is mainly based on the common security goal of containing Iran, the security dilemma between Saudi Arabia and Israel should not be ignored. First of all, at the regional level, the confrontation between Arab nationalism represented by Saudi Arabia and Jewish nationalism by Israel will persist. While uniting Israel to contain Iran, Saudi Arabia will not completely abandon its nationalist principles and will try to avoid negative influences on its Islamic leader status. Secondly, at the national level, Israel still has concerns about Saudi Arabia's military strength.[48] Even if Saudi Arabia's major military target is Iran, Israel still fears that US arms sales to Saudi Arabia may narrow the gap between them. Israel's worries are also recently manifested in the UAE. Even though the UAE has moved towards establishing diplomatic relations with Israel, Israel still strongly urged the United States to continue to ensure its military quality advantage in the Middle East. Besides, Saudi Arabia's request and willingness for the United States to assist in constructing nuclear reactors will cause Israel security concerns. In summary, the current quasi-alliance relationship between Saudi Arabia and Israel still has its limitations. Its cooperation mainly focuses on the containment of Iran, counterterrorism, and other security fields, while its economic cooperation can be an extension of security cooperation. As there are obvious economic complementary advantages between Saudi Arabia and Israel, this can become a new starting point for bilateral relations' future development. The current sharpness of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed is in stark contrast with King Salman's low-key cautiousness. Mohammed is pragmatic and flexible in developing foreign relations; he does not adhere to conventions and dares to break tradition. His diplomacy is bold as demonstrating the confidence of Saudi Arabia. This style promotes the improvement and openness of relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel, which shows that Saudi Arabia's diplomatic strategy will be more realistic in the future. The current tacit quasi-alliance between Saudi Arabia and Israel will continue to develop, and each will take what it needs under the banner of jointly containing Iran. In the long run, even if the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Israel is further driven by national interests in the future, the overall distrust between Arab and Israel will continue to exist. Saudi Arabia will continue to seek a balance between maintaining pragmatic exchanges with Israel and maintaining its status as a significant Arab power. Israel will continue to interact with Saudi Arabia in multiple areas, with national security maintenance as the core.

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[48]Reuters Staff, 'Israel minister expresses concern over US-Saudi arms deal,' Reuters, (21 May 2017), available at: https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-saudi-israel-idUSKBN18H0JW.