

## **Murder of Chabad emissary tests UAE relations with Israel - opinion**

Despite growing pressures – particularly from Iran and in the context of Israel’s ongoing war – the UAE has maintained its relationship with Israel.

By Yoel Guzansky / Nov. 30, 2024

The details surrounding the abduction and murder of Chabad emissary Rabbi Zvi Kogan in the United Arab Emirates remain unclear. However, there is cautious speculation that Iran is behind the attack. Iran has long sought to target Israeli individuals and assets abroad. In this context, there have been numerous reports of Mossad operations thwarting such attempts in collaboration with foreign intelligence agencies all around the world.

Yet, the UAE is not just another location for such incidents. The murder of a religious figure associated with Israel undoubtedly embarrasses the Emirati authorities, who pride themselves on promoting cultural and religious tolerance. Despite growing pressures – particularly from Iran and in the context of Israel’s ongoing war – the UAE has maintained its relationship with Israel.

The prolonged war, with no apparent diplomatic resolution, has frustrated many in the Arab world, including the UAE. The Emirates plays a significant diplomatic and humanitarian role in Gaza and is the most active Arab state in providing aid, water, and medical help to the Gazans.

Crown Prince Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan faces criticism for adhering to the normalization agreement with Israel despite the extensive destruction in Gaza and the high Palestinian death toll. The murder of a Chabad emissary highlights the increasing costs the UAE pays for maintaining its relations with Israel.

This pressure is beginning to take its toll, as reflected in recent shifts in Emirati rhetoric. UAE Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed, the crown prince’s brother, recently stated that his country would not support reconstruction efforts in Gaza post-conflict (i.e., “the day after”) without the establishment of a Palestinian state. This suggests a recalibration in the Emirati stance, with future relations with Israel increasingly influenced by the Palestinian issue.

For now, cutting ties with Israel is not on the table. However, relations have been stagnant for some time, at least publicly. Emirati leaders find it prudent to keep a measured distance from Israel, partly due to growing criticism from the Arab street and fears that this discontent might turn against them.

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