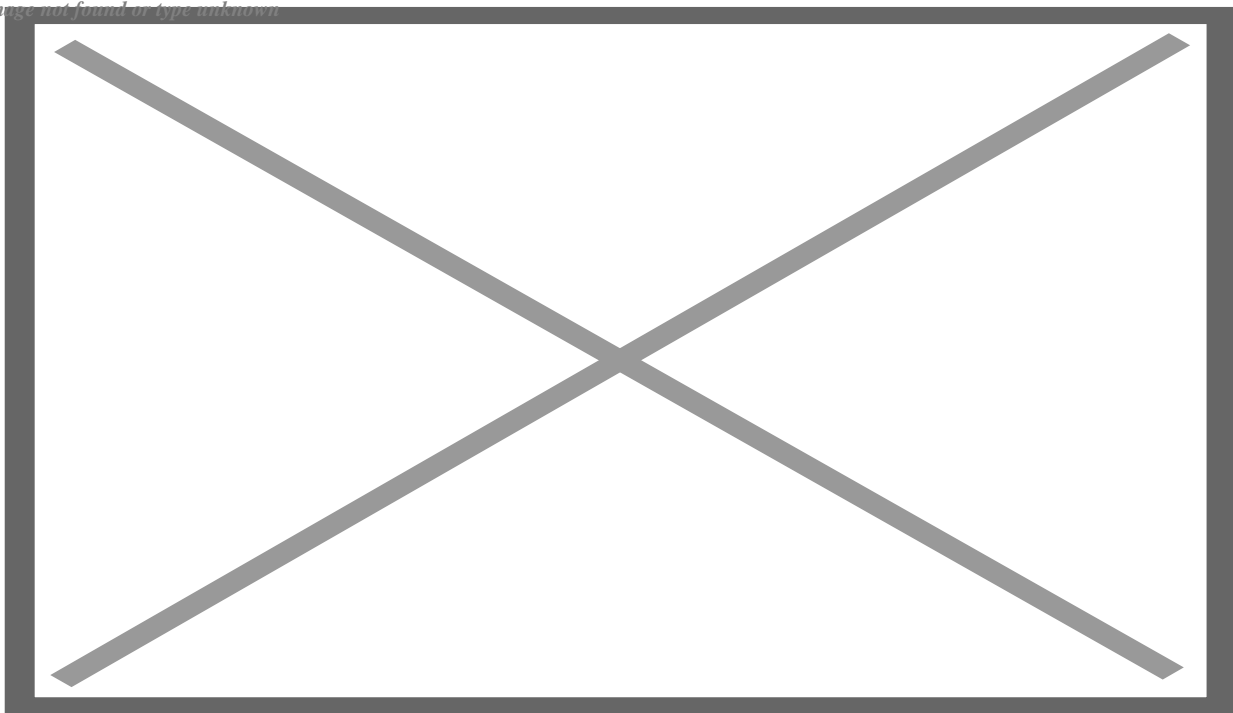


Israel ran secret diplomatic mission in Bahrain for years before formalizing ties

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Bahraini Foreign Minister Abdullatif bin Rashid al-Zayani and head of the Israeli delegation security advisor Meir Ben Shabbat, bump elbows after a signing ceremony in Bahrain's capital Manama, on October 18, 2020. (Photo: AFP)

Ramallah, October 23 (RHC)-- Israel has reportedly run a secret diplomatic mission in Bahrain for more than a decade through a front company listed as a commercial consulting firm, before Bahraini and Israeli officials signed a joint communiqué to officially establish bilateral diplomatic relations.

American Axios news website reported that the existence of the secret embassy remained under a gag order by the Israeli regime for 11 years. The report added that a company formerly named the "Center for International Development" was used as a front for the covert mission, with dual nationality diplomats serving as shareholders, who promoted hundreds of business deals between Israeli and Bahraini firms while they served as a communication channel between the Tel Aviv and Manama regimes.

The idea for the covert mission grew from negotiations in 2007-2008 between then Israeli foreign minister Tzipi Livni and her Bahraini counterpart Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifah, according to the report.

The decision to open the office came in 2009, shortly after Qatar ordered the closure of an Israeli trade office in Doha against the backdrop of an atrocious military onslaught by the Israeli military against Palestinians in the besieged Gaza Strip.

The Center for International Development offered marketing, commercial promotion and investment services, according to local documents. The firm changed its name in 2013, but the current name was not disclosed for what was described as security reasons.

The report named Israeli diplomats who served in the front company as Brett Jonathan Miller, a South African national who went on to be appointed in 2013 as Israel's consul general in the Indian port city of Mumbai; Ido Moed, a Belgian national who now serves as cyber coordinator in the Israeli foreign ministry; and Idan Fluss, a British national who now serves as the Israeli foreign ministry's deputy director general for the economy.

At a ceremony in Manama earlier this week, Bahraini and Israeli officials signed a joint communiqué establishing full diplomatic relations. The Manama and Tel Aviv regimes are now expected to open embassies.

The Israeli delegation, led by Israeli security adviser Meir Ben-Shabbat, flew on an El Al Israel Airlines charter flight from Ben Gurion airport in Tel Aviv, to Bahrain and was accompanied by US Secretary of the Treasury Steven Mnuchin.

The meeting followed a September 15 ceremony at the White House when Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu signed U.S.-brokered normalization deals with the Emirati Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan and Bahraini Foreign Minister Abdullatif bin Rashid al-Zayani.

The normalization deals have drawn widespread condemnation from Palestinians, who seek an independent state in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip, with East Jerusalem al-Quds as its capital. They say the deals ignore their rights and do not serve the Palestinian cause.

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