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The Changing Dynamics of Israel's Foreign Policy

Michael Harari · Paul Scham · Joshua Sinai · Rémi Daniel, Gallia Lindenstrauss & Yoel Guzansky · Ian S. Lustick · Chelsi Mueller · Nir Boms & Ahmed Khuzaie · Levent Kırval · Umut Can Adısönmez & Laçin İdil Öztığ

Eyal Zisser
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Maia Hallward & Taib Biygautane
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The Changing Dynamics of Israel's Foreign Policy

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THE PREMIUM CORPORATE SPONSOR OF THIS ISSUE:

Foreword

Israel, formally known as "The State of Israel," was established on 14 May 1948, and has since played a pivotal role in international affairs, particularly in the politics of the Middle East and North Africa. Israel's relations with its Arab neighbors have been tense for decades, and a lasting peace has never appeared more likely. Yet, we already live in a time of perpetual change, and naturally, the politics of Israel and the surrounding region of the Middle East and North Africa are not immune to this pattern. Realizing this, TPQ decided to focus on the Changing Dynamics of Israel's Foreign Policy in its upcoming Fall 2022 issue.

Many new headings, with a specific reference to Israeli politics, have started to appear in Middle East and North African context. Israel and its Arab neighbors, often considered as "the enemies at gates," are experiencing an intriguing phase of normalization of relations. The Abraham Accords, a historic agreement resulting from this process, were ratified on 15 September 2020. Since then, positive reports about the improvement of ties among Israel, the UAE, Bahrain, and Morocco have been steadily increasing. We at TPQ are firm believers in the significance of the Abraham Accords and plan to keep covering the topic as one of our primary areas of focus. The Abraham Accords will be the main topic of our upcoming roundtable organization, going to take place in Istanbul on November 30. This comes after a lengthy hiatus caused by the pandemic.

One of the main goals of this issue is to delve deeper into the possibilities the Abraham Accords present by analyzing the factors of improving ties between Israel and its neighbors. In this spirit, we have encouraged our contributors to highlight this in their work. Additionally, we discuss the changing dynamics of Israeli-Palestinian relations as well as Israel's ties with other major regional actors such as Türkiye in this issue. The fourteen papers featured in this special issue of TPQ were written by a diverse group of internationally known scholars and public intellectuals who welcome your feedback and constructive criticism.

Eyal Zisser sees the signing of the Abraham Accords in September 2022 as a turning point in Israel's place in the Middle East. He thinks the accords improved the atmosphere for cooperation in the areas of security and the economy by laying the groundwork for it. However, he claims that this change doesn't do anything to fix Israel's fundamental issues. His article is a brilliant work that aims to further evaluate these essential issues.

Gerald M. Feierstein says that Israelis and Gulf Arabs drew closer due to similar

worries of an aggressive and potent regime in Tehran, which bragged of its sway over four Arab capitals (Baghdad, Damascus, Beirut, and Sanaa). His excellent work focuses on regional issues that contributed to making of Abraham Accords. He likewise explores the Abraham Accords and discusses the geographical dynamics that contributed to its ratification.

Efraim Karsh argues that in the 85 years since the two-state solution was proposed (a Jewish state and a Palestinian Arab state living side by side in peace and security), no Palestinian Arab leader has shown true support for it. Therefore, he concludes that if Palestinian society does not experience a thorough revolution that sweeps the corrupt and repressive PLO and Hamas governments from power, it will remain a pipe dream. He considers a two-state solution as a delusion.

Maia Carter Hallward and Taib Biygautane believe that in 2020, numerous Arab governments announced U.S.-brokered full normalization accords with Israel, without any specific sacrifices on Israel's part vis-à-vis the Palestinians. According to them, these agreements, the Abraham Accords, signified a dramatic change in Arab-Israeli relations. Their great article looks at how the Abraham Accords were portrayed in the Israeli press.

We encourage you to learn more about the aspects of Changing Dynamics of Israel's Foreign Policy. On behalf of Transatlantic Policy Quarterly, I would like to express my gratitude to all of the contributors who committed a significant amount of effort and work. The TPQ team has had a great time putting together this special issue. An important acknowledgment goes to our premium corporate sponsor Yapı Kredi. In addition, we would like to thank our online sponsor, and the sponsor of this issue, Monaco Economic Board. We also like to thank our other sponsors Gordon-Blair, Kalekim, TEB, The Ritz-Carlton, Tüpraş for their ongoing support.

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THE ABRAHAM ACCORDS - ISRAEL AND THE MIDDLE EAST – WHAT NEXT?

The signing of the Abraham Accords in September 2020 was a turning point in Israel's standing in the Middle East. The accords created a positive atmosphere that helped promote regional cooperation in security and the economy. This positive change does not, however, provide an answer to some of the fundamental challenges that Israel is facing, which cast their shadows on the entire region, such as the Iranian threat - Tehran's regional ambitions and its efforts to gain nuclear capabilities; but first and foremost, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is getting further and further away from a solution, and may flare up and damage regional stability and hinder the progress in Israeli-Arab relations, which was achieved following the signing of the Abraham accords.

Eyal Zisser*

TPQ
Fall 2022

* Prof. Eyal Zisser is the Vice Rector of Tel Aviv University.

On 15 September 2020, the "Abraham Accords" between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain were signed in a solemn ceremony on the lawns of the White House. A few weeks later, Morocco and Sudan also joined the accords. The accords were reached with the support of the United States, which sought to see them as a cornerstone for its efforts to promote regional cooperation in security and economy and to ensure regional stability.[1]

During the two years that have passed since these accords were signed, they have survived challenges - such as rounds of violence between Israel and Hamas and the Islamic Jihad in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, as well as sharp criticism from Iran and its allies in Lebanon and Palestine. The accords contributed to creating a positive atmosphere between Israel and its Arab neighbors, which helped promote regional cooperation in the fields of security and economy. Türkiye, which reached an understanding with Israel in August 2022 to normalize the relations between the two countries, may also play an essential leading role in this regional cooperation.[2] The positive change in the atmosphere and the promotion of regional cooperation in a variety of fields do not, however, provide an answer to some of the fundamental challenges that Israel is facing, which cast their shadows on the entire region, such as Iran's ambitions to obtain nuclear capabilities as well as to increase its influence in the Persian Gulf and throughout the Fertile Crescent, starting in Iraq, moving to Syria and Lebanon and ending in faraway Yemen.

Along with this, it is worth noting the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the solution of which is getting further and further away in the face of reluctance on both the Israeli and the Palestinian sides to advance the two-state solution. A flare-up of renewed rounds of violence between Israel and the Palestinians could destabilize the region and erode the achievements of the Abraham Accords and the momentum of regional cooperation gained following their signing in recent years.

Israel And the Changing Faces of Middle East

The signing of the Abraham Accords with Israel expressed the willingness of the signatory Arab states, led by the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, to establish peaceful relations with Israel and to promote cooperation with it in the face of

[1] See The White House, "Abraham Accords Peace Agreement," 15 September 2020. Retrieved from www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/abraham-accords-peace-agreement-treaty-of-peace-diplomatic-relations-and-full-normalization-between-the-united-arab-emirates-and-the-state-of-israel/. See also Michael Crowley, Israel, U.A.E. and Bahrain Sign Accords, "With an Eager Trump Playing Host," *New York Times*, 15 September 2020. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/15/us/politics/trump-israel-peace-emirates-bahrain.html

[2] Meir Ben-Shabbat, David Aaronson, "The Abraham Accords, Two Years On: Impressive Progress, Multiple Challenges, and Promising Potential," *INSS Insight*, No. 1632, 15 August 2022. https://www.inss.org.il/publication/abraham-accords-two-years/

shared challenges and threats and in recognition of Israel's standing as a regional power with military and economic might, and even political importance – that may contribute to strengthening their security and prosperity.

> *"Thus, Iran took advantage of the chaos created by the Arab Spring revolutions to establish a hold not only in Syria but also in Yemen, and even in Iraq, which already collapsed following the United States' invasion of the country in the spring of 2003."*

All of this is to express the changing faces of the Middle East in recent decades, which are marked by the weakening of the "Arab collective," and the decline of Arab nationalism - a leading ideology in the fifties and sixties - as a result of the failure of Arab countries to deal with worsening social and economic problems at home.[3] These changes cracked the wall of Arab enmity and hostility towards Israel. They led to the signing of an Israeli-Egyptian peace agreement in March 1979, and later in the nineties to the opening of a peace process between Israel and the Arabs which led to the signing of the Oslo Accords in September 1993 between Israel and the PLO and the signing of a peace agreement between Israel and Jordan in October 1994.[4]

However, Israel was not the only one to benefit from the changes on the map of the Middle East. Alongside her stood two new-old regional players, who sought to fill the void created by the decline of Arabism. One was Türkiye under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who gave his country political stability, the likes of which it had not known for many years and turned it into a regional power of weight. Erdogan focused Türkiye's interest and activity not only in Europe as before, but also in the Arab region, the Muslim world, mainly in Central Asia, and even Africa.[5] Iran also benefited from the changes that took place in the Middle East. It took advantage of them to advance its goals focused on achieving influence and even hegemony in the Persian Gulf and the Fertile Crescent - that region that extends from the Iranian highlands to the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, starting in Iraq, going to Syria and ending in Lebanon, and finally, even in Yemen where it mobilized

[3] See Fuad Ajami, *The Arab Predicament: Arab Political Thought and Practice Since 1967* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1981); Asher Susser, "The decline of the Arabs," *Middle East Quarterly, 10*(4) (Fall 2003), p. 3-15.

[4] See Kenneth Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy: Sadat, Kissinger, Carter, Begin and the Quest for Arab-Israeli Peace* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Itamar Rabinovich, *Waging Peace: Israel and the Arabs at the End of the Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

5 See Sone Cagaptay, *The Rise of Turkey: The Twenty-First Century's First Muslim Power* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014); *Erdogan's Empire: Turkey and the Politics of the Middle East* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2019).

to help the Houthis (a Zaydi-Shi`ite faction) in the civil war that broke out in the country. Along with this, Iran worked to attain nuclear capabilities that may allow it a free hand in advancing its goals. These ambitions of Iran were perceived as a threat by the Gulf states and pushed them towards Israel.[6]

The Arab Spring and its Aftermath – Repercussions for Israel

In the winter of 2010, protests and revolutions broke out in many of the Arab countries, that led to destabilization and even the collapse of some of the regimes that had ruled them for decades.

In Tunisia and Egypt, Islamic parties - the Nahda movement in Tunisia and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt - took power into their own hands, after winning in the general elections held in these countries after the collapse of the ruling regimes of Zayn al-Abidin bin Ali and Husni Mubarak. But at the end of the day these two countries returned to the starting point where they were on the eve of the Arab Spring revolutions. In Tunisia, power soon returned to the forces of the old order - the army, the state institutions, and the economic and social elites. In Egypt, the army returned and took power in June 2013 under the leadership of General Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi.[7]

In Libya and Yemen, on the other hand, the protests led to the disintegration and the collapse of these states and the outbreak of bloody civil wars. In Syria, the Arab spring protest turned into a civil war. Still, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad survived the challenge to his regime, thanks to the military involvement of Russia and Iran in fighting beginning in September 2015.[8] Thus, Iran took advantage of the chaos created by the Arab Spring revolutions to establish a hold not only in Syria but also in Yemen, and even in Iraq, which already collapsed following the United States' invasion of the country in the spring of 2003.[9]

Iran's growing regional standing pushed many of the Arab countries, and mainly the Gulf states, into Israel's arms and contributed to the deepening of dialogue and cooperation, aimed at curbing the threatening power of Iran as well as fighting the waves of Salafi-Jihadist terrorism led by the ISIS organization that raised its head in the Arab world.

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[6] See Amin Saikal, *Iran Rising: The Survival and Future of the Islamic Republic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

[7] See Marc Lynch (ed.) *The Arab Uprisings Explained, New Contentious Politics in the Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

[8] See William Harris, *Quicksilver War, Syria, Iraq and the Spiral Conflict* (London: Hurst, 2018).

[9] See Jonathan Spyer, "Is it Iran's Middle East now?" *Fathum* (Autumn 2015), https://fathomjournal.org/is-it-irans-middle-east-now/

Thus, for example, Israel and Egypt began to cooperate in the fight against the ISIS affiliate Salafi groups in the Sinai Peninsula. Although there has been no change in the attitude of the public in Egypt towards Israel, the Egyptian regime has become more committed to unprecedented cooperation in the military fields with Israel.[10] Israel also tightened security cooperation with Jordan given Jordan's fear that the war in Syria would spill over into its territory. Jordan also became dependent on Israel as a source of energy and water supply. The two countries signed several agreements to supply Israeli gas to Jordan and increase the water quotas that Israel provides to Jordan.[11]

> *"The strengthening of Israel's regional standing and the improvement in its relations with its Arab neighbors also strengthened its international standing."*

Cooperation has also tightened between Israel and the Gulf countries, primarily Saudi Arabia. It began at the late 1990s when channels of political dialogue and military cooperation, that included the transfer of intelligence information and purchases of military equipment from Israel, were established between the parties. Still, it gained momentum in the last decade.[12]

In 2019, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the Gulf countries mobilized to help the American administration promote the "deal of the century", a peace plan favorable to Israel, to achieve an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement, and even pressured the Palestinian Authority to accept it.[13] It should be mentioned that President Trump's administration (2016-2020) gave Israel unprecedented support and thus, for example, recognized in December 2017 Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, and in March 2019 the annexation of the Syrian Golan Heights to Israel. Thus, his attempt to promote the "deal of the century" presented in January 2020 was also seen as an expression of American support for Israel.[14]

[10] Al-Jazeera, "Egypt, Israel in close cooperation against Sinai fighters: Sisi," 5 January 2019, https://katzr.net/c0644b

[11] Aaron Magid, "Israel and Jordan's Relationship Is Better Than It Looks," *Foreign Policy*, 29 July 2021, https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/07/29/israel-jordan-palestine-bennett-netanyahu-abdullah-cold-peace/

[12] Yossi Melman, "Under the radar: The secret contacts between Israel and Saudi Arabia have moved up a notch," *Forbes*, 17 June 2016, http://www.forbes.co.il/news/new.aspx?Pn6VQ=EG&0r9VQ=EHJHL [in Hebrew].

[13] Mohamed Abdelaziz, "Arab Reactions to Trump's Peace Plan: An Analysis and Recommendation," The Washington Institute. 31 January 2020. https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/arab-reactions-trumps-peace-plan-analysis-and-recommendation

[14] Ruth Margalit, "Trump's Legacy in Israel," *The New Yorker*, 12 January 2021. https://www.newyorker.com/news/dispatch/donald-trumps-legacy-in-israel

And finally, on 15 September 2020, the Abraham Accords between Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain were signed in Washington. A few weeks later these countries were joined by Morocco and Sudan, who also established diplomatic relations with Israel.

Middle East - Following the Abraham Accords

The United States played an essential role in promoting the Abraham Accords. Thus, for example, Washington mobilized to support the military regime ruling Sudan and recognized the annexation of Western Sahara to Morocco in return for their readiness to normalize their relations with Israel.[15]

The United States also contributed to the tightening and deepening of security cooperation between Israel and many of the Arab countries, for example, in air defense and early warning from enemy aircrafts. The Americans also initiated joint air and naval exercises in which Israeli forces participated alongside Arab forces. In addition, it was reported in June 2022 about a meeting of Arab chiefs of staff, including the Saudi chief of staff, in Sharm el-Sheikh, which dealt with increasing the ability to provide early warning and air defense against aerial threats, especially missiles and drones, in which the Israeli chief of staff also participated. This meeting was seen in the media reports as part of the American effort to establish Middle Eastern NATO which will assist in maintaining regional stability and in which Israel will also be integrated.[16]

It should be noted that the signatory countries of the Abraham Accords did not limit the cooperation they promoted with Israel only to the security field but worked to promote economic ties and even full normalization with Israel, including mutual visits and the promotion of trade, tourism and cultural and academic dialogue.[17]

This economic cooperation gained momentum following the discovery of gas fields on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. Israel was the first to discover and exploit gas fields along its shores, which made it an important player in the world energy field. In September 2021, the regional gas forum was founded in Cairo by seven Mediterranean countries: Egypt, Israel, Greece, Cyprus, Jordan, Italy, France, and the Palestinian Authority. In June 2022 Israel signed a memorandum of understanding

[15] See Jason Isaacson, "The Abraham Accords' 'Side Deals'," *Newsweek*, 11 February 2021. https://www.newsweek.com/we-must-honor-abraham-accords-side-deals-uae-morocco-opinion-1568314

[16] Michael R. Gordon and David S. Cloud, "U.S. Held Secret Meeting With Israeli, Arab Military Chiefs to Counter Iran Air Threat," *The Wall Street Journal*, 29 June 2022. https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-held-secret-meeting-with-israeli-arab-military-chiefs-to-counter-iran-air-threat-11656235802

[17] Omar Rahman, "The emergence of GCC-Israel relations in a changing Middle East," *Brookings Institute*, 28 July 2021. https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-emergence-of-gcc-israel-relations-in-a-changing-middle-east/

with the European Union according to which gas from Israel will be piped to Egypt where it will be liquefied and exported to Europe.[18]

Israel's efforts to leverage the gas discoveries to advance its relations with Türkiye initially did not go well. Yet, in 2022 the two countries began a dialogue that led to the normalization of their relations and got them back on track. One of the topics on the agenda was the cooperation in the field of gas production and export, including the possibility of exporting gas to Europe through Türkiye.[19]

The strengthening of Israel's regional standing and the improvement in its relations with its Arab neighbors also strengthened its international standing. Indeed, along with tightening ties with the United States under the administration of President Trump, Israel promoted its ties with Russia to establish an intimate dialogue, at least until the Russian invasion of Ukraine in early 2022; and heightened economic cooperation with China and with India. Even its relations with Europe improved, due to Europe's need for new sources of energy as well as the need to purchase weaponry systems such as the Iron Dome and Arrow missiles. Israel also continued to promote relations with countries in the wider circle, including Greece and Cyprus and even Romania and Bulgaria, with whom it held joint military training, as well as with Azerbaijan, Ethiopia, and South Sudan.[20]

The Abraham Accords and the Challenges Ahead

By signing the Abraham Accords, many Arab countries expressed their readiness to advance their relations with Israel regardless of the Palestinian question and the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, this conflict remained a significant challenge to the regional stability and the Arab-Israeli relations, which may impose anew on Israel and the entire region.

Israel seemed to have lost faith in peace negotiations with the Palestinians and thus avoided launching or engaging in such negotiations. However, it is worth mentioning that alongside fatigue and indifference showed by the Israeli public towards a possible Israeli-Palestinian peace process, there was also a change in direction and policy in Israel, as expressed in the efforts made by Benjamin Netanyahu government that

[18] Joe Macaron, "The Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum Reinforces Current Regional Dynamics," *Arab Center Washington DC (ACW)*, 25 January 2019. Retrieved from https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/the-eastern-mediterranean-gas-forum-reinforces-current-regional-dynamics/. See also Andrew Parasiliti, Elizabeth Hagedorn, "The Takeaway: Egypt's U.S envoy touts EastMed Gas Forum as regional model," *al-Monitor*, 18 May 2022. https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2022/05/takeaway-egypts-us-envoy-touts-eastmed-gas-forum-regional-model

[19] Steven A. Cook, "How Israel and Turkey Benefit from Restoring Relations," *Council on Foreign Relations*, 23 August 2022. https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/how-israel-and-turkey-benefit-restoring-relations

[20] For more see Yossi Shain, The Israeli Century, and the Israelization of Judaism (in Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Miscal, Yediot Aharonot, 2019).

ruled Israel during the last decade (2009-2021), to preserve Israel's control of the West Bank and to prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state in these territories. And so, in the opinion of many, the vision of the two states went on and died out, considering the reality created on the ground itself - the dramatic increase in the size of the Jewish population in the Israeli settlements in the West bank.

Thus, Israel tried to preserve the existing status quo in the West Bank and ensure relative stability, while avoiding any peace negotiation with the Palestinians. The result was however the breaking out of rounds of violence again and again in the West Bank as well as between Israel and Hamas and the Islamic Jihad in the Gaza Strip.[21]

Iran is also a source of threat for Israel due to the nuclear project it promotes, which Israel sees as a potential existential threat. But the Iranian challenge also has to do with Iran's attempts to establish a hold on the shores of the Mediterranean and to use the outposts it has obtained in Lebanon, Syria and the Gaza Strip to attack Israel. Given these challenges and threats, Israel launched an offensive campaign ("the campaign between the wars"), to delay the Iranian nuclear project and prevent Tehran from establishing a military presence in Syria. This Israeli-Iranian friction may lead to an undesirable open military confrontation between the two countries.[22] It is worth noting that many Arab countries, especially the Gulf states, are willing and even interested in cooperating with Israel in the face of the growing Iranian threats to their stability and security. But at the same time, they prefer to avoid a frontal military confrontation with Iran. Thus, the overlap between the Israeli interests on the Iranian question and that of its Arab partners is not complete.

In Conclusion

Following the signing of the Abraham Accords in September 2020, the secret dialogue that Israel and its Arab neighbors maintained on security issues turned into an intimate alliance that includes political and economic components.

These accords positively contributed to Israel's relations with the surrounding Arab countries, thus strengthening Israel's regional standing. The normalization of Israel's

[21] Amos Yadlin, Udi Dekel, Kim Lavi, "A Strategic Framework for the Israeli-Palestinian Arena," *The Institute for National Security Studies*, March 2019. https://www.inss.org.il/publication/strategic-framework-israeli-palestinian-arena/; Pnina Sharvit Baruch, *Viability of One-State Models, Memorandum No. 217*, December 2021. https://www.inss.org.il/publication/one-state-models/

[22] Eran Ortal, "The Fly on the Elephant's Back: The Campaign between Wars in Israel's Security Doctrine," *Strategic Assessment*, Volume 24, No. 2 (April 2021), p. 108-115, https://strategicassessment.inss.org.il/en/articles/the-fly-on-the-elephants-back-the-campaign-between-wars-in-israels-security-doctrinee/ ; Louis Imbert, "Israel-Iran: The Shadow War Intensifies," *Le Monde*, 13 June 2022. https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2022/06/13/israel-iran-the-shadow-war-intensifies_5986617_4.html

relations with Türkiye is but another layer in this new regional order whose purpose is to confront the security and economic challenges faced by the region's countries. Contrary to the past, the Palestinian issue did not prevent the promotion of relations between Israel and its Arab neighbors. And yet it still casts its shadow over the region. Indeed, while the Arab regimes recognize the importance of their ties with Israel, the Arab street still shows enmity and hostility towards Israel. Thus, in the absence of a visible chance of achieving a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Palestinian problem will continue to threaten the regional stability and the building of Israel's relations with its Arab partners.

Even on the Iranian question, there is not necessarily a complete overlap between Israel's goals and those of its Arab partners. The latter want to create an effective deterrence against Iran, but not necessarily to be dragged into a major conflict with it.

The Abraham Accords can therefore be seen as a progress on the way to achieving regional stability and economic prosperity. Still, the challenge for Israel and its Arab partners remains as it was a decade ago - how to promote a close relationship while trying to prevent the outbreak of an all-out Israeli-Iranian conflict and a flare-up in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and at the same time leaving the door open to the possibility of bringing about a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the future that would be acceptable to both sides and on the international community.[23]

[23] See Imad K, Harb, "The Middle East Accords: An Arab Perspective," *The Arab center, Washington D.C.*, 2 November 2020. https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/the-middle-east-accords-an-arab-perspective/

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AS ISRAEL LOOKS EAST, THE GULF IS BOTH A WAY STATION AND A DESTINATION

Israelis and Gulf Arabs became closer amid shared fears of an aggressive and powerful administration in Tehran, which boasted of its influence over four Arab capitals (Baghdad, Damascus, Beirut, and Sana'a). With the signing of the Abraham Accords, states on the periphery of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict decided that the benefits of establishing relations with Israel outweighed the risks. They reasoned that if they advocated for increased coordination between Israel and the Arab world, it would increase pressure on the Palestinians to negotiate with Israel. This article focuses on the regional factors that led to the signing of the Abraham Accords and carefully reviews this important historical document.

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Setting the Stage

It would be a misnomer to suggest that the signature by the governments of Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain (Morocco and possibly also Sudan also signed agreements but, for the purposes of this piece, we will address only the Gulf Arab signers) marked a radical departure from the status quo ante. In fact, the de facto relationship between Israel and the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council had become increasingly transparent and expansive for years prior to the normalization process completed in 2020. Indeed, signs of changing attitudes toward Israel stretch as far back as the mid-1990s when both Qatar and Oman permitted the Israelis to open offices in their capitals (with Oman reciprocating with an office in Tel Aviv), and Oman also established the Middle East Desalination Research Center, a byproduct of the Madrid peace process, to include full Israeli participation.

At that point, the impetus for Doha and Muscat was to encourage moderation in Tel Aviv. In the wake of Itzhak Rabin's assassination in 1995, the two Gulf governments sent a signal that support for Shimon Peres' candidacy would bring benefits in the form of expanded relations within the Arab world. But the gambit failed and, when Benjamin Netanyahu's election in 1996 was followed quickly by renewed Israeli-Palestinian conflict, both the Qataris and Omanis quietly shut down the Israeli offices.

Despite their frustration over successive Israeli governments' hardline stances on resolving the conflict with Palestinians, the Gulf states continued to seek opportunities to advance the peace process. In particular, in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, amid pressure from the Bush administration to demonstrate a willingness to resolve what was perceived as the main grievance for millions of Arabs and Muslims against the U.S., Saudi King Abdullah tabled his Arab Peace Initiative in 2002. The initiative offered full, normal political, economic, and diplomatic relations between Israel and the Arab League member states in exchange for Israel's recognition of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital and a resolution of the refugee issue on the basis of UNSCR 194. Although the Israeli government's response to the initiative has varied from outright rejection to a grudging acceptance that some elements could form the basis for negotiation, the API remains on the table and marks a significant step forward in acknowledging Israeli legitimacy.

That acknowledgment paved the way for subsequent steps towards rapprochement, characterized in particular by a confluence of views over regional political and security developments. Although neither side had a positive view of the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq, both were unnerved by the results of the botched U.S.

invasion that overthrew Saddam but also brought a threatening rise in extremism and instability to the entire region. A mutual perception subsequently compounded the shared perception of U.S. mismanagement of critical aspects of regional security that the U.S. had contributed to further regional instability through its embrace of the Arab Spring popular uprisings against longstanding regional security anchors. Determined to push back against the rise of political movements in key capitals, especially the Muslim Brotherhood and its affiliates, which they saw as posing existential threats to their survival, the Gulf Arabs quietly turned to Israel to provide the capacity to track and undermine security threats.

> *"Unlike Israel, the Gulf states were not as concerned about an Iranian nuclear weapon, which was unlikely to be aimed at them. Instead, they focused on Iranian threats closer to home, including its interference in neighbors' internal affairs, its ballistic missile programs that could carry conventional as well as nuclear warheads, and support for terrorist movements that targeted them."*

Against a backdrop of shared doubts about the credibility of U.S. regional security commitments, the Israelis and Gulf Arabs were increasingly drawn together by concerns over an aggressive and empowered regime in Tehran that boasted of its control over four Arab capitals — Baghdad, Damascus, Beirut, and Sana'a. Regional concerns were reinforced by the Obama administration's decision to negotiate with the Iranian regime over its nuclear program. The agreement that was reached — the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action or JCPOA — was seen by both the Israelis and Gulf Arabs as weak. From an Israeli perspective, the JCPOA merely delayed but did not end the Iranian nuclear threat. From a Gulf Arab perspective, it failed to address what they saw as the core threats to their security from Iranian interference in their internal affairs, support for terrorism, and the development of threatening ballistic missiles. Even if starting from different points of concern, the two sides found collaboration to challenge the JCPOA, both internationally and within the U.S. political system, to be another area of mutual interest.

The Trump Administration Seizes the Opening to Promote Cooperation

The cooperation that had developed over the previous years provided a foundation

for the two sides to move a step closer to formalizing their relations when the Trump administration came into office in 2017. From the administration's earliest days, expressing scant interest in pursuing Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking, President Trump and his son-in-law, Jared Kushner, had touted the possibility of an "outside-in" approach to Middle East peacemaking. In their conception, promoting enhanced collaboration between Israel and Arabs would serve to pressure the Palestinians into concessions in negotiating with the Israelis. Although the effort would not be realized until nearing the end of Trump's term of office, the signing of the Abraham Accords was seen as an indicator that, for states on the periphery of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the advantages of establishing relations with Israel outweighed the disadvantages.

The Abraham Accords and Deepening Security Cooperation

The signing of the Abraham Accords agreements was widely perceived as an acknowledgment by the Gulf signatories that, differences over Palestine aside, the parties perceived a more urgent requirement to coordinate with Israel on shared concerns over Iranian malign regional behavior. As noted, the foundation for cooperation rested in part on their assessment of shared threat perspectives. But it also reflected a sense that, for the Gulf states, the U.S. was not the reliable guarantor of the security they had depended on in the past. The decision by the Obama administration to engage Iran on its nuclear weapons program and to prioritize negotiations with Tehran over confrontation unnerved both the Israelis and the Gulf governments. Repeated assertions by U.S. political leaders that Washington would reallocate resources away from the Middle East to address growing challenges in the Asia Pacific region from a rising China and manage the challenges of a revanchist Russia added to their unease. Thus, both sides sense an urgent need to shore up their defenses without a reliable U.S. security umbrella.

Despite their perceptions, the interest in aligning to confront an Iranian threat papered over the reality that their individual concerns about Iran were far more complicated. Unlike Israel, the Gulf states were not as concerned about an Iranian nuclear weapon, which was unlikely to be aimed at them. Instead, they focused on Iranian threats closer to home, including its interference in neighbors' internal affairs, its ballistic missile programs that could carry conventional as well as nuclear warheads, and support for terrorist movements that targeted them. Thus, while the Gulf states welcomed the Trump administration's decision to end its participation in the JCPOA and pursue its "maximum pressure" campaign aimed at forcing Iran to abandon its nuclear weapons program, they were still left with a U.S. policy that prioritized Chinese and Russian challenges and did not address the issues of

Iranian behavior most concerning to them. To their regret, the Trump administration proved no more willing to reinforce U.S. security guarantees than had the Obama administration except in its eagerness to sell additional weapons. This perception was reinforced by President Trump's insouciant "it's not my problem" reaction to the Iranian drone attacks on shipping in the UAE and the critical Abqaiq oil facility in Saudi Arabia. In response, the Gulf states pursued an option not available to Israel … opening a channel of dialogue with the Iranians while insisting that their relations with Israel were not oriented towards confronting Iran.

"Of all of the Arab signatories to normalization agreements with Israel, the UAE has the most sophisticated private sector. It is thus best placed to profit from collaboration with the Israeli private sector."

Nevertheless, the space for cooperation with Israel on regional security issues has opened further in the two years since the signing of the Abraham Accords and has included even those Gulf states, especially Saudi Arabia, that have not fully normalized their relations with Tel Aviv. The decision to transfer management of U.S.-Israel bilateral defense cooperation from the European Command to the Central Command has played an essential role in providing a venue for integrating Israel into regional security programs as it brings Israeli and Gulf Arab military leaders together in a joint planning forum. Iranian expansion into the Red Sea, particularly through its support to the Houthi rebels in Yemen, has provided further motivation for cooperation among the Gulf Arabs and Israel. The International Institute for Security Studies (IISS) reported in a paper prepared for the Manama Security Dialogue in 2022 that the U.S. had hosted a meeting of senior defense officials from Bahrain, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE to discuss Iran's growing missile and UAV threats. On the ground, USCENTCOM organized a quadripartite naval exercise in November 2021 with U.S., Bahraini, Emirati, and Israeli naval forces participating. This was followed shortly afterward by a second exercise that also added participants from Oman and Saudi Arabia. Support for greater regional cooperation and the integration of security programs was a major theme of President Biden's visit to Israel and Saudi Arabia in July 2022. The U.S. role in mediating the successful completion of an agreement among Egypt, Israel, and Saudi Arabia to transfer control of Tiran and Sanafir islands, flashpoints in the 1967 War, from Egyptian to Saudi control marks a major milestone in enhancing regional security cooperation in the northern Red Sea.

More controversially, shared concerns about the rise of political Islamist groups, especially the Muslim Brotherhood, following the Arab Spring uprisings underscored greater interest in the region in coordinating with Israeli organizations, both public and private sector, in intelligence collection. Most notoriously, several Gulf states purchased Pegasus spyware from the Israeli NSO group that was used to surveil adversaries, real or imagined. Revelations of the use of the Pegasus spyware has generated concerns internationally and led to the NSO group being blacklisted in the U.S.

The Negev Forum

An early effort to institutionalize the Abraham Accords brought together foreign ministers from Israel, the UAE, and Bahrain along with their U.S., Moroccan, and Egyptian counterparts at the Israeli Negev town of Sde Boker. The original concept of the summit was to coordinate approaches to the Iranian threat. But the parties were eager to demonstrate that the normalization process was more than an anti-Iran coalition and that normalization with Israel could bring benefit to resolving other regional challenges, including the Israel-Palestine conflict. Thus, at a June 2022 meeting of the newly coined Negev Forum Steering Committee in Manama, the six parties agreed to coordinate on advancing a shared vision for regional development. To promote that cooperation, the parties agreed to form six working groups dealing with clean energy, education and coexistence, food and water security, health, regional security, and tourism.

Economic Cooperation as an Aspect of the Abraham Accords

Further to efforts to expand the scope of their newfound cooperation beyond security, Israel and the UAE, and Bahrain have emphasized measures to boost economic ties. Israel signed its first free trade agreement with an Arab state when it signed one with the UAE in May 2022. The two sides speculated that their bilateral trade would expand from $1.2 billion to $10 billion within five years. Under the terms of the FTA, the parties would undertake immediate or gradual tax exemptions on 96 percent of trade on food, cosmetics, medical equipment, and medicine, among other categories. Of all of the Arab signatories to normalization agreements with Israel, the UAE has the most sophisticated private sector. It is thus best placed to profit from collaboration with the Israeli private sector. The UAE-Israel Business Council has forecast that over 1,000 Israeli companies would be working in and through the UAE by the end of 2022. An Israeli venture capital platform, OurCrowd, has opened an office in Abu Dhabi, where it intends to finance an Artificial Intelligence research and development facility. In addition, there have been several government-to-government agreements covering cooperation on military drone technology, and a plan to build solar energy and water desalination plants on either side of the Jordan River.

Although Bahrain lags well behind the UAE in its private sector development — bilateral trade only reached $7.5 million in 2021 — the Bahrainis are seeking to finalize an FTA with Israel by the end of 2022. Additional negotiations are anticipated for November. The Bahrainis particularly see scope for expansion of their tourism sector with Israeli visitors.

And the Others

Aside from Kuwait, which has remained committed to the approach outlined by the Arab Peace Initiative or API (see above), the remaining Gulf Cooperation Council member states have advanced de facto relations with Israel to one extent or another. As noted above, both Oman and Qatar were early leaders in the region in opening doors for the Israelis, beginning in the 1990s. More recently, the two sides have engaged in additional conversations about normalization, including opening Omani airspace to Israeli commercial aviation, but the Omanis have emphasized their preference for "quiet diplomacy." Israel also invited Oman to participate in the Negev Forum. Although that hasn't happened, as noted above, Omani naval units did participate in a quadripartite exercise organized by the U.S. Central Command, in late 2021.

Similarly, Israeli-Qatari relations have warmed in the two years since the signing of the Abraham Accords but full normalization does not appear to be on the immediate horizon. Qatar permits Israeli commercial enterprises to operate in Doha and allowed Tel Aviv to open a representative office during the 2022 World Cup to handle citizen services for those Israelis who travel to Doha as spectators. Although the two sides have cooperated on issues related to Gaza in recent years, Qatar's relationship with Hamas is an obstacle to further advances in their bilateral relations.

The crown jewel of post-Abraham Accords normalization agreements, of course, would be with Saudi Arabia. Beginning in the waning days of the Trump administration, the Saudis have been pressed to expand their ties with Israel but until now the Saudis have resisted and have re-emphasized their commitment to the Arab Peace Initiative, which the late Saudi King Abdullah introduced at the Beirut Arab League summit in 2002. Nevertheless, Riyadh has taken several steps to cement its ties to Tel Aviv, including expanded military and commercial links. In an effort that is of significant value to the Israeli economy, the Saudis announced in the summer that they would open their airspace to Israeli civilian aircraft, providing the Israelis with direct access to Asian destinations. The Saudis also permitted for the first-time direct travel by charter aircraft from Israel for Hajj participants. Israel's agreement to transfer sovereign control for the Sanafir and Tiran islands from Egypt

to Saudi Arabia reflects the warming ties between the two states.

The Way Forward – Expansion or Retreat?

Two years after the signing of the Abraham Accords, it appears unlikely that there will be additional signings of normalization agreements soon with the remaining GCC member states. For Saudi Arabia, particularly, full normalization would present problems in its aspirations to leadership of the entire Arab and Islamic worlds where normalization with Israel remains controversial for many. Nevertheless, regional ties to Israel are becoming increasingly routine and overt. The parties cooperate on a broad array of shared security concerns and businesspeople increasingly pursue cooperative commercial links. Especially for more sophisticated economies like the UAE, economic integration with Israel offers substantial benefits and, on high-tech programs, can be a U.S.-approved alternative to greater dependence on China.

But the way forward to greater regional cooperation is not a given. Although there are no signs of substantial hostility, there also does not appear to be a great deal of popular support among Gulf citizens for the opening to Israel, while sympathy for the Palestinians remains high. Moreover, the potential advent of a hard-right Israeli government has clearly concerned the Gulf leadership, with UAE Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed reportedly warning prospective Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu of the possible damage to Israeli-UAE relations if known Jewish supremacists are included in the new government. The relatively quick end to the 2021 Israel-Gaza conflict allowed the Abraham Accords signatories to avoid being drawn into it. But a prolonged deterioration of the Israel-Palestine relationship, or a rise of clearly discriminatory actions against Palestinians, especially if they involve the Haram al-Sharif, could provoke a widespread backlash in the region and force governments to re-calculate their relations with Israel. Recent Jewish settler violence against Palestinians in Hebron is a potential harbinger of a more troubled future. Under those circumstances, it may be the Arab Peace Initiative rather than the Abraham Accords that proves to be the more sustainable approach to broader Israeli-Arab peace.

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THE TWO-STATE DELUSION

In the 85 years since the evocation of the two-state solution (i.e., a Jewish state and a Palestinian Arab state living side by side in peace and security), not a single Palestinian Arab leader has ever evinced any true liking for the idea or acted in a way signifying an unqualified embrace of it. Allowing their anti-Jewish hatred and obsession with violence to get the better of them, Palestinian leaders have repeatedly dragged their hapless constituents into disastrous conflicts that culminated in their collective undoing and continued statelessness. So long as Palestinian society does not undergo a comprehensive transformation that will sweep the corrupt and oppressive PLO and Hamas regimes from power, eliminate endemic violence from political and social life, and teach the virtues of coexistence with Israel, the two-state solution will remain a pipe dream.

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"An agreement with the Palestinians, based on two states for two peoples, is the right thing for Israel's security, for Israel's economy, and for the future of our children," Israel's interim prime minister, Yair Lapid, told the UN General Assembly's 77th Session on 22 September 2022. "We have only one condition: A future Palestinian state will be peaceful. That it will not become another terror base from which to threaten the well-being, and the very existence of Israel."[1]

Endorsed by the Zionist movement as early as 1937 when it was first proposed by a British commission of inquiry headed by Lord Peel, this "two-state solution"—a Jewish state and a Palestinian Arab state living side by side in peace and security—has become over time the standard solution to the Arab-Jewish conflict in the Holy Land. There has been, however, one insurmountable obstacle: the century-long Palestinian rejection of the idea of Jewish statehood—from the Jerusalem mufti Hajj Amin Husseini who led the Palestinian Arabs from the early 1920s to the late 1940s; to Yasser Arafat, who dominated Palestinian politics from the mid-1960s to his death in November 2004, and his successor Mahmoud Abbas; to the Islamic Resistance Movement (or Hamas as its Arabic acronyms know it).

The Long Trail of Palestinian Rejectionism

The story begins in April 1920, when the newly-formed League of Nations—the post-WWI organization and the United Nation's predecessor—appointed Britain as mandatory for Palestine with the specific task of putting into effect the 1917 Balfour Declaration "in favor of the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people."[2] This mandate was ratified in July 1922 by the League's Council, which stressed "the historical connection of the Jewish people with Palestine" as "the grounds for reconstituting their national home in the country."[3]

As it were, the British government failed to comply with this international obligation, repeatedly cowering to Arab violence aimed at averting that purpose. As early as March 1921, it effectively severed the vast and sparsely populated territory east of the Jordan River ("Transjordan") from the prospective Jewish national home (though not from the Palestine Mandate) and made Abdullah, the emir of Mecca, its effective ruler. In 1922 and 1930, two British White Papers further compromised the prospective Jewish national home by imposing harsh restrictions on Jewish immigration and land sales to Jews.

[1] "Full text of Lapid's 2022 speech to the UN General Assembly," *The Times of Israel*, 22 September 2022.

[2] "British Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of the Supreme Council, held at the Villa Devachan, San Remo, on Saturday, 24 April 1920, at 4 p.m.," in E.L. Woodward and Rohan Butler (eds.), *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939* (London: HMSO, 1960), ser. 1, vol. 8, pp. 176-7.

[3] Avalon Project, "The Palestine Mandate," 24 July 1922, Preamble.

But Arab violence mounted, and in July 1937, it reaped its greatest reward when the Peel commission recommended repudiating the terms of the mandate altogether in favor of a two-state solution: the partitioning of mandatory Palestine into an Arab state, united with Transjordan, which would occupy some 85 percent of the mandate territory west of the Jordan river, and a Jewish state in the remainder. "Half a loaf is better than no bread," the commission wrote in its report, hoping that "on reflection, both parties will come to realize that its advantages outweigh the drawbacks of partition."[4]

"At the time, though, nobody envisaged a return to the two-state solution. Quite the contrary: Palestinian nationhood was rejected by the entire international community, including the western democracies, the Soviet Union (then the foremost supporter of radical Arabism), and the Arab world itself (as late as 1974, Syrian President Hafez al-Assad openly referred to Palestine as "a basic part of southern Syria")."

But partition did not happen. While the Zionist leadership gave the plan its halfhearted support, the Palestinian Arab leadership and the Arab regimes (except Abdullah, who viewed partition as a stepping stone to the vast Arab empire he was striving to create) dismissed it out of hand. They reverted to mass violence to subvert the commission's recommendations.

The same thing happened in November 1947 when, in the face of the imminent expiration of the British mandate, the UN General Assembly voted to partition Palestine. Rejecting the plan altogether, the Arab states and the Palestinian Arab leadership attempted to destroy the state of Israel at birth. This time, however, Arab violence backfired in grand style. In the ensuing war, not only did Israel confirm its sovereign independence and assert control over somewhat wider territories than those assigned to it by the UN, but the Palestinian Arab community was profoundly shattered, with some 600,000 of its members fleeing to other parts of Palestine and the neighboring Arab states.[5]

Nor did the magnitude of the defeat (*al-Nakba*, The Catastrophe, as it came to be dubbed) win the Arabs over to the merits of the two-state solution. Neither Egypt nor

[4] Palestine Royal Commission, *Report. Presented to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in Parliament by Command of his Majesty, July 1937* (London: HMSO; rep. 1946), p. 296.

[5] Efraim Karsh, *Palestine Betrayed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 264-7.

Jordan permitted Palestinian self-determination in the parts of mandatory Palestine they had occupied during the 1948 war. Transjordan annexed the biblical lands of Judea and Samaria in April 1950, to be hitherto known as the West Bank (of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan), while Egypt kept the Gaza Strip under oppressive military rule. "The Palestinians are useful to the Arab states as they are," Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser stated in 1956. "We will always see that they do not become too powerful. Can you imagine yet another nation on the shores of the eastern Mediterranean?"[6] Only after Israel's conquest of these territories during the June 1967 war would their political future gradually become a question of the first order.

At the time, though, nobody envisaged a return to the two-state solution. Quite the contrary: Palestinian nationhood was rejected by the entire international community, including the western democracies, the Soviet Union (then the foremost supporter of radical Arabism), and the Arab world itself (as late as 1974, Syrian President Hafez al-Assad openly referred to Palestine as "a basic part of southern Syria"). Instead, according to Security Council Resolution 242 (22 November 1967), it was assumed that any territories vacated by Israel would be returned to their pre-1967 Arab occupiers: Gaza to Egypt and the West Bank to Jordan. The resolution did not even mention the Palestinians by name, affirming instead the necessity "for achieving a just settlement of the refugee problem"—a clause that also applied to the hundreds of thousands of Jews expelled from Arab states following the 1948 war.[7] Small wonder that the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), established in 1964 at Nasser's initiative, derided the resolution as designed "to accord [with] the Zionist racist colonial illegal occupation in Palestine."[8]

It was only after the PLO's steady ascendance led to Jordan's renunciation of its claim to the West Bank (in 1988) that Resolution 242 came to be ***misinterpreted*** as implying a two-state solution: Israel and a PLO-governed Palestinian state in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Conveniently ignored was one glaring fact: the PLO ***rejected*** any such resolution and continued to adhere to its 1974 "phased strategy," which stipulated the seizure of whatever territory Israel was prepared or compelled to cede and its use as a springboard for further territorial gains until the "complete liberation of Palestine."[9] It is true that in November 1988, more than two decades after the passage of 242, the PLO made a pretense of accepting the resolution, but this was little more than a ploy to open a dialogue with Washington. Shortly after that move, Salah Khalaf, the PLO's

[6] John Laffin, *The PLO Connections* (London: Corgi Books, 1983), p. 127.

[7] Avalon Project, "United Nations Security Council Resolution 242," 22 November 1967.

[8] The Palestine Arab Delegation, New York, "Justice Will Triumph," 5 June 1968. *Irish National Archives*, NA 200143/100.

[9] "Political Program for the Present Stage Drawn up by the 12th PNC, Cairo, June 9, 1974," *Journal of Palestine Studies* (Summer 1974), p. 224-5.

second-in-command (better known by his nom de guerre of Abu Iyad), declared: "The establishment of a Palestinian state on any part of Palestine is but a step toward the whole of Palestine."[10] Two years later, following Iraq's occupation of Kuwait (which the PLO endorsed), he reiterated the point at a public rally in Amman, pledging "to liberate Palestine inch by inch from the [Mediterranean] sea to the [Jordan] river."[11]

"As a result, terrorism in the territories spiraled to its highest level since its capture by Israel in the 1967 war. In the two-and-a-half years between the signing of the DOP and the fall of the Labor government in May 1996, 210 Israelis were murdered—nearly three times the average annual death toll of the previous 26 years."

The Oslo Disaster

Despite the PLO' unwavering commitment to Israel's destruction, Yitzhak Rabin's government decided to enter into peace negotiations with the organization. On 13 September 1993, the two parties signed the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangement (DOP), or the Oslo Accord as it was commonly known after the Norwegian capital, where it had been negotiated. The agreement provided for Palestinian self-rule in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip for a transitional period not to exceed five years. During that time, Israel and the Palestinians would negotiate a permanent settlement.[12] And while the DOP (as well as the follow-up May 1994 and September 1995 accords) were not explicitly based on a two-state solution, with Rabin envisaging to his dying day "an independent Palestinian entity short of a state,"[13] they were widely understood to signal an implicit Israeli readiness to acquiesce in the establishment of a Palestinian state.

But then, the PLO leadership has never viewed the Oslo accords as a pathway to a two-state solution, but, in the words of prominent PLO leader Faisal Husseini, as a

[10] *Al-Anba* (Kuwait), 5 and 13 December 1988. For similar statements by senior PLO officials see, for example, Khaled Hassan's interview with *al-Musawar* (Cairo), 20 January 1989; Salim Zaanun's interview with *al-Anba* (Kuwait), 21 November 1988; Rafiq Natsha's interview with *ash-Sharq al-Awsat* (London), 9 December 1988 & with *al-Jazeera (Saudi Arabia)*, 1 January 1989.

[11] *Baghdad Voice of the PLO,* 8 January 1991; *ar-Ra'i* (Amman), 2 January 1991.

[12] United Nations Peacemaker, "Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangement ('Oslo Accords')," October 1993.

[13] Yitzhak Rabin's address at the 376th session of the 13th Knesset, 5 October 1995.

"Trojan Horse designed to promote the organization's strategic goal of 'Palestine from the [Jordan] river to the [Mediterranean] sea'"—that is, a Palestine in place of Israel.[14] PLO Chairman Arafat admitted as much five days before signing the DOP when he told an Israeli journalist, "In the future, Israel and Palestine will be one unified state in which Israelis and Palestinians will live together"—that is, Israel would cease to exist.[15] And even as he shook Rabin's hand on the White House lawn, Arafat was assuring the Palestinians in a pre-recorded Arabic-language message that the agreement was merely an implementation of the PLO's phased strategy.[16]

The following eleven years till Arafat's death (on 11 November 2004) offered a recapitulation, over and over again, of the same story. In addressing Israeli or Western audiences, Arafat (and his erstwhile henchmen) would laud the "peace" signed with "my partner Yitzhak Rabin." To their Palestinian constituents, they depicted the Oslo accords as transient arrangements required by the moment's needs. Arafat made constant allusions to the "phased strategy" and the Treaty of Hudaibiya, signed by Muhammad with the people of Mecca in 628, only to be disputed a couple of years later when the situation shifted in the prophet's favor. He also insisted on the "right of return"—the Palestinian/Arab euphemism for Israel's destruction through demographic subversion. As Arafat told a skeptical associate shortly before moving to Gaza in the summer of 1994 to take control of the newly established Palestinian Authority (PA): "I know that you are opposed to the Oslo Accords, but you must always remember what I'm going to tell you. The day will come when you will see thousands of Jews fleeing Palestine. I will not live to see this, but you will definitely see it in your lifetime. The Oslo Accords will help bring this about."[17]

And that was the least of it. Further discrediting the two-state solution, the PLO failed to abolish the numerous clauses in its hallowed Palestinian National Covenant calling for Israel's destruction, as Arafat had promised Rabin in what cleared the road to the DOP.[18] Worse: the PLO/PA launched a sustained campaign of racial hatred and political incitement against Israelis and Jews, unparalleled in scope and intensity since Nazi Germany. Palestinians were not only indoctrinated in the illegitimacy of the state of Israel and the lack of any Jewish connection to the Land of Israel. Still, they were also told of the most outlandish Israeli plots to corrupt and ruin them, wholly congruent with the medieval myth of Jews as secret destroyers and poisoners of wells—from the alleged killing of Palestinian children, to injecting Palestinian children with the AIDS

[14] Faisal Husseini's interview with *al-Arabi* (Cairo), 24 June 2000.

[15] *Ha'olam Ha'ze* (Tel Aviv), 8 September 1993, pp. 3-4.

[16] *Jordan TV*, 13 September 1993.

[17] YouTube, "Al-Quds al-Arabi editor-in-chief Abd al-Bari Atwan: Arafat planned that Oslo accords would chase away Israelis," 3 September 2015.

[18] United Nations—The Question of Palestine, "Letter from Yasser Arafat to Prime Minister Rabin," 9 September 1993.

virus, to distributing chocolate infected with "mad cow disease" in the West Bank and Gaza, and so on and so forth.[19]

Arafat also utilized the immense inflammatory potential of Islam to discredit his Israeli peace partners, if not the idea of peace itself. Week after week, preachers used their pulpits to deride the peace process and to instill hatred for Israelis and Jews. Worshippers have been taught that Jews are the "descendants of apes and pigs" and warned of Zionist machinations to destroy al-Aqsa Mosque, Islam's third holiest shrine, as well as to divide the Palestinian people and spawn internecine strife. After Arafat launched his war of terror in September 2000 (euphemized as the "al-Aqsa Intifada"), the Friday preachers embarked on a collective anti-Jewish invective and outright calls for the mass murder of Israelis and Jews wherever they were found.

Nor did the PLO content itself with disparaging the Oslo Accords and its Israeli peace partner. Embracing violence as the defining characteristic of his rule, Arafat built an extensive terrorist infrastructure in the territories under his control. He refused to disarm Hamas and Islamic Jihad as required by the Oslo accords and tacitly approved the murder of hundreds of Israelis by these terrorist groups. He created a far larger Palestinian army (the so-called police force) than was permitted by the accords, and reconstructed the PLO's old terrorist apparatus, mainly under the auspices of the Tanzim—the military arm of Fatah (the PLO's largest constituent organization and Arafat's alma mater). He frantically acquired large quantities of prohibited weapons, and, eventually, resorted to outright mass violence, first in September 1996 to discredit the newly elected Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu and then in September 2000, shortly after being offered Palestinian statehood in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip by Netanyahu's successor, Ehud Barak, with the launch of his terror war—the bloodiest and most destructive confrontation between Israelis and Palestinians since 1948.

As a result, terrorism in the territories spiraled to its highest level since its capture by Israel in the 1967 war. In the two-and-a-half years between the signing of the DOP and the fall of the Labor government in May 1996, 210 Israelis were murdered—nearly three times the average annual death toll of the previous 26 years. Moreover, almost two-thirds of the 1994-96 victims were murdered in Israeli territory inside the pre-1967 "Green Line"—over 60 percent of the average toll in Israel in the preceding six violent years of the Palestinian uprising (intifada). By Arafat's death, his terror war had exacted 1,028 Israeli lives in some 5,760 attacks: nine times the average death toll of the pre-Oslo era. About 450 people (or 43.8 percent of victims) were killed in suicide bombings, which were a practically unheard-of tactics in the Palestinian-Israeli

[19] Efraim Karsh, *Arafat's War* (New York: Grove, 2003), Chapters 3-6.

context prior to Oslo. All in all, over 1,700 Israelis were murdered and another 10,000 wounded from the signing of the DOP to date—nearly four times the average death toll of the preceding 26 years.[20]

More of the Same

This revolting practice was sustained by Mahmoud Abbas, who, in stark contrast to his international image as a "man of peace," is cut from the same cloth as his predecessor: a rejectionist PLO veteran who has never eschewed his commitment to Israel's destruction and who views the "peace process" as the continuation of his lifelong war by other means. An unreconstructed Holocaust denier (in his doctoral dissertation, written at a Soviet university and subsequently published in book form, he argued inter alia that fewer than one million Jews had been killed in the Holocaust, and that the Zionist movement colluded in their slaughter),[21] Abbas has had no qualms about reiterating the vilest anti-Semitic calumnies (in June 2016, for example, he told the European Parliament that Israeli rabbis urged the poisoning of Palestinian water)[22] and has repeatedly stressed his rejection of Jewish statehood.

As early as May 2005, four months after assuming the PA presidency, Abbas described the establishment of Israel as an unprecedented historical injustice and vowed never to accept it. Two-and-a-half years later, at a U.S.-sponsored peace conference in Annapolis, he rejected Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's proposal of a Palestinian Arab state in 97 percent of the West Bank (with the remaining 3 percent added by means of a land swap) and the entire Gaza Strip, dismissing the request to recognize Israel as a Jewish state alongside the would-be Palestinian state and insisting on full implementation of the "right of return" (i.e., Israel's destruction).[23] In June 2009 Netanyahu broke with Likud's longstanding precept by publicly accepting the two-state solution and agreeing to the establishment of a Palestinian state (reiterating this stance two years later in an address of a joint session of the U.S. congress),[24] he was contemptuously rebuffed by the Palestinian leadership. Abbas's spokesman Nabil Abu Rudaina accused the Israeli PM of "sabotaging" the "peace process." At the same time, Abbas's security advisor Tawfiq Tirawi stated, " it is impossible for Jerusalem to be restored restored to us without thousands of martyrs." The PLO's chief negotiator Saeb Erekat prophesied that Netanyahu "will have to wait 1,000 years before he finds

[20] Efraim Karsh, "The Oslo Disaster" (Bar-Ilan University: Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, 2016), *Mideast Security and Policy Studies* No. 123, p. 18-19.

[21] Mahmoud Abbas, *al-Wajh al-Akhar: al-Alaqat al-Sirriya bayna al-Naziya wa-l-Sihyuniya* (Amman: Dar Ibn Rushd, 1984).

22 *Haaretz*, 23 June 2016.

[23] Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), Apr. 16, 2009, 15 July 2009, 21 July 2009; PMW, 29 September 2021.

[24] Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 14 June 2009; *Washington Post*, 24 May 2011.

one Palestinian who will go along with him."[25]

As Fatah's general congress responded to Netanyahu's acceptance of the two-state solution by reaffirming its commitment to "the armed struggle [i.e., terrorism]… until the Zionist entity is eliminated and Palestine is liberated," Abbas vowed to continue Arafat's "long and exhausting struggle [that was] fraught with blood, sweat, and tears."[26] Rallying the Arab League behind his "absolute and decisive rejection to recognizing Israel as a Jewish state,"[27] he repeatedly derided Israel's establishment in his annual UN General Assembly addresses as "a disgrace to humanity," "a heinous crime," and "a historic injustice," to name just a few pejoratives.[28] As late as July 2022, at a press conference with President Biden in Ramallah, Abbas called for the end of Israel's 74-years-long "occupation of Palestine."[29] In other words, nearly three decades after the onset of the Oslo process, Israel's "peace partner" will not even accept its right to exist and considers its very creation an "occupation" of "Palestinian lands."

Conclusion

The Palestinian leadership's serial rejection of the numerous opportunities for statehood since the Peel Commission's report of 1937 casts a serious doubt on its interest in the creation of an independent state. Had Hajj Amin Husseini chosen to endorse the idea, the Palestinians would have had their independent state over a substantial part of mandate Palestine by 1948, if not a decade earlier, and would have been spared the traumatic experience of dispersal and exile. Had Arafat set the PLO on the path to peace and reconciliation instead of turning it into one of the most murderous and corrupt terrorist organizations in modern times, a Palestinian state could have been established in the late 1960s or the early 1970s; in 1979 as a corollary to the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty;[30] by May 1999 as part of the Oslo process; or at the very latest, with the Camp David summit of July 2000. Had Abbas abandoned his predecessors' rejectionist path, a Palestinian state could have been established after the Annapolis summit of November 2007, or during the Obama presidency after Netanyahu's endorsement of the two-state solution.

But then, not a single Palestinian leader has ever evinced any genuine liking for the two-

[25] MEMRI, 23 July 2009; DW (Berlin), "Palestinian Statehood."

[26] MEMRI, 20 August 2009, 31 August 2009, 30 November 2009.

[27] Ibid., 26 March 2014.

[28] WAFA (PLO/PA official news agency), 23 September 2022, 30 September 2015.

[29] Official PA TV, 15 July 2022.

[30] When American Arab academic Edward Said brought Arafat the Carter's administration's offer to join the Egyptian-Israeli peace process he was told: "This is a lousy deal. We want Palestine. We're not interested in bits of Palestine. We don't want to negotiate with the Israelis. We're going to fight." Edward Said, *The Pen and the Sword: Conversations with David Barsamian* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1994), p. 137.

state solution or acted in a way signifying an unqualified embrace of it. Allowing their anti-Jewish hatred and obsession with violence to get the better of them, Palestinian Arab leaders have dragged their hapless constituents into repeated disastrous conflicts that culminated in their collective undoing and continued statelessness.

This in turn, means that just as the creation of free and democratic societies in Germany and Japan after World War II necessitated a comprehensive sociopolitical and educational transformation, so Palestinian society deserves a real "spring" that will sweep the corrupt and oppressive PLO and Hamas regimes from power, eliminate endemic violence from political and social life, and teach the virtues of coexistence with Israeli neighbors. Until this happens, the two-state solution will remain a pipe dream.

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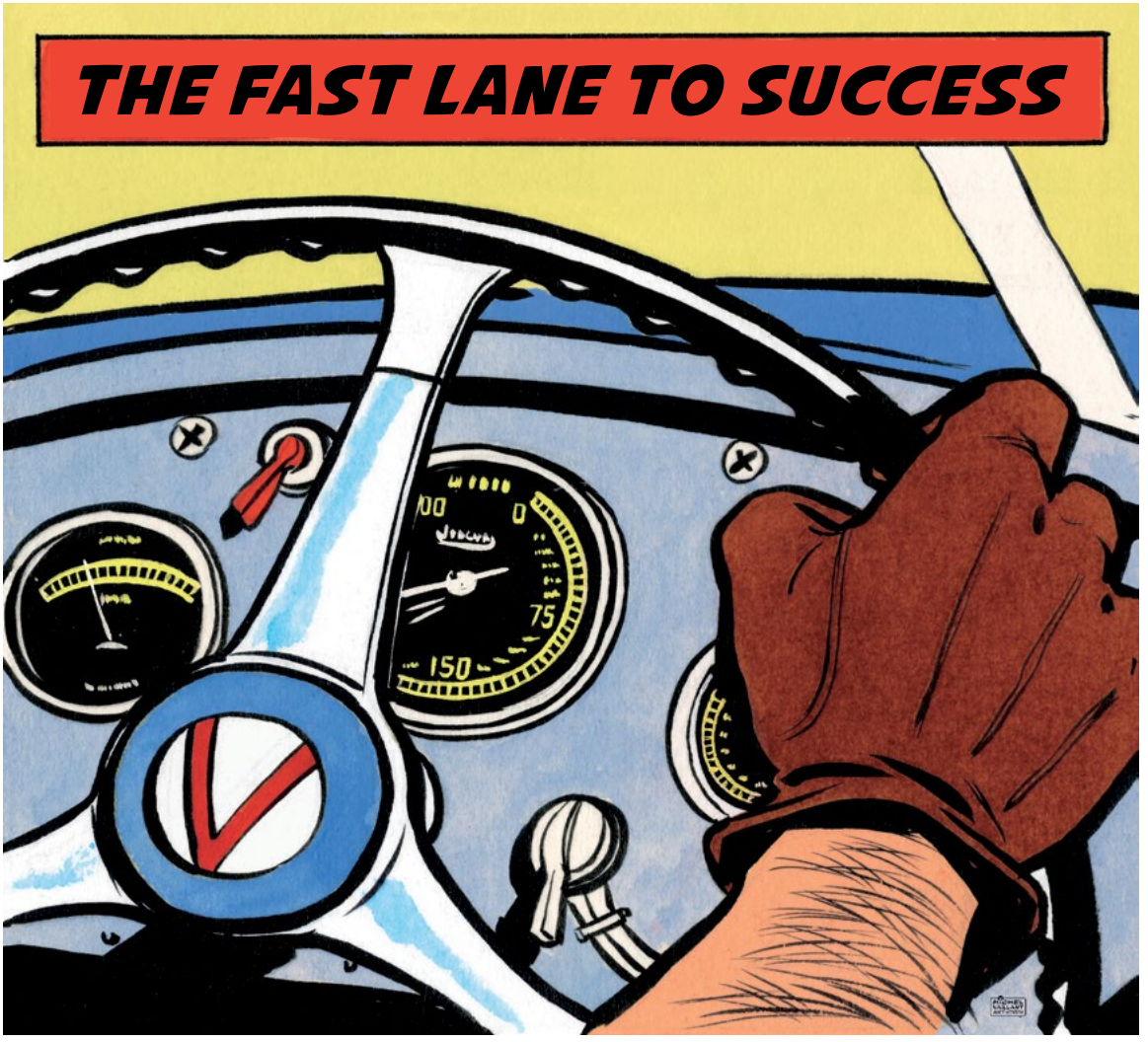

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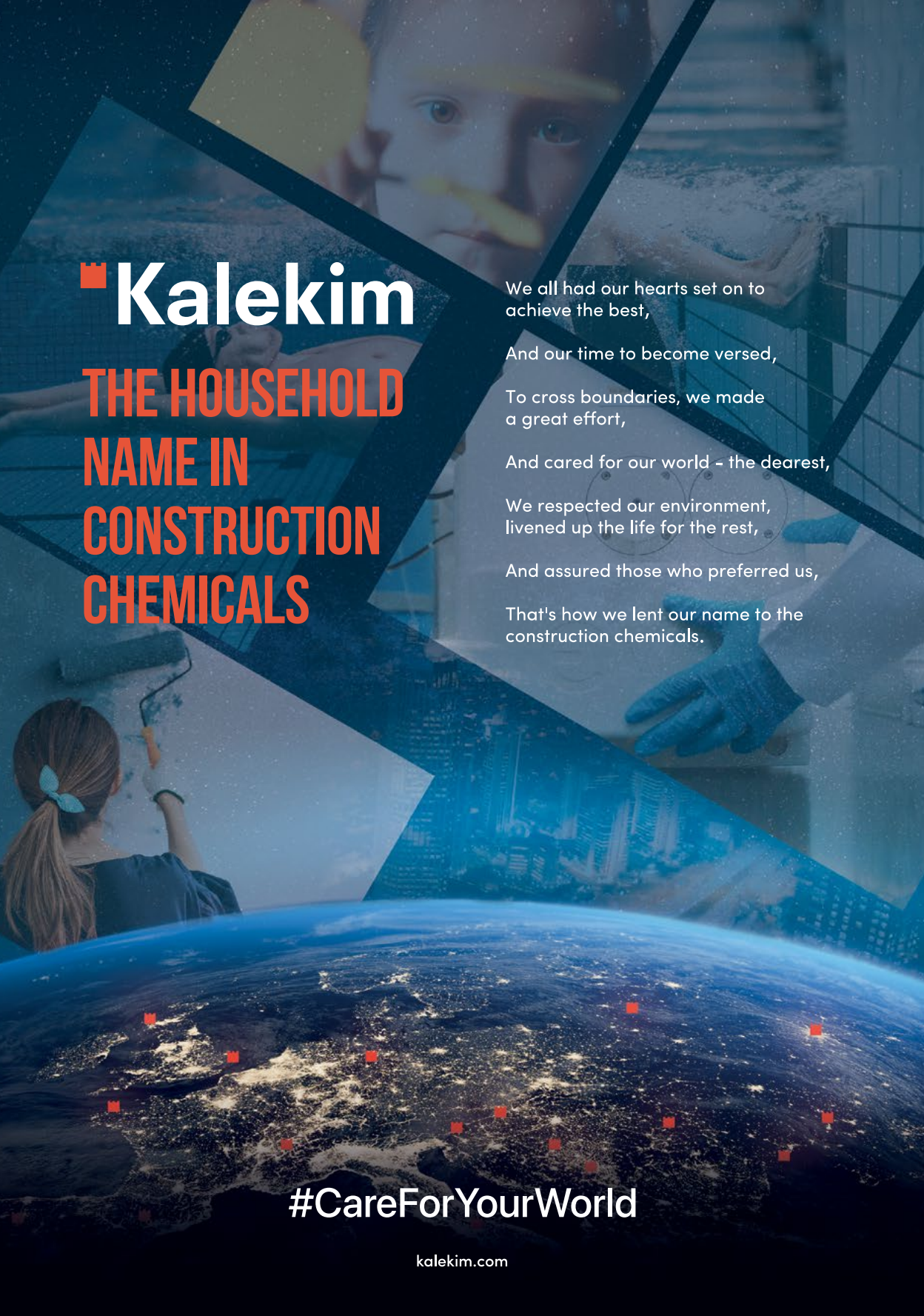
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PEACE, SECURITY, OR THE ECONOMY? ISRAELI NARRATIVES ABOUT THE ABRAHAM ACCORDS

In 2020 several Arab states announced U.S.-brokered full normalization agreements with Israel, absent any explicit compromises on Israel's side vis-à-vis the Palestinians, a significant shift from traditionally held positions. While several of these states already had informal security, intelligence, and trade relations with Israel and, except for Sudan, were never at war with Israel, these agreements represented a significant shift in historical Arab-Israeli relations and thus required discursive justification to a range of audiences, including the Arab and Israeli publics. This article looks specifically at how the Abraham Accords were framed in the Israeli press and takes an initial look at the extent to which the Accords have impacted Israel's economic and security situation.

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Israel has fought numerous wars with Arab states since its founding in 1948. Although peace treaties with Egypt (1979) and Jordan (1994) have endured, Israel remains technically in a state of enmity with Syria and Lebanon. It lacks official diplomatic relations with most Arab and Muslim-majority states barring Türkiye and, recently under the Abraham Accords, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco. Political conflict has been accompanied by economic conflict—for example, the Arab state boycott of Israeli products.[1]

Historically, Israel has pushed for recognition from and "normalization" of relations with the Arab world, while Arab states have sought Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories and rights for Palestinians in accordance with international law, such as UN Resolution 242. However, peace agreements, starting with the Egypt-Israeli agreement, have tended to sideline international law and Palestinian sovereignty in favor of normalization efforts.[2] Although Egypt was initially shunned for its recognition of Israel, the 1991 Madrid Conference and later the Oslo process opened the door for bilateral meetings and economic summits between Israel and the Arab world.[3] In late 1994, for instance, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) officially relaxed their enforcement of the Arab League boycott,[4] and U.S.-promised economic 'peace dividends' also induced Morocco and Tunisia to exchange liaison offices with Israel and initiate direct economic relations.[5] However, the onset of the Second Intifada in 2000 challenged and reversed this growing shift toward normalization.

The Arab Peace Initiative

Under the leadership of Saudi Arabia, in 2002, the Arab League offered full normalization of relations with Israel in exchange for Israeli withdrawal from the territories occupied in 1967, the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state, and the settlement of the Palestinian refugee issue; those were reaffirmed in 2005, but not officially acknowledged by Israel.[6] The Arab Peace Initiative (API) signified the first significant shift away from the Arab states' "three Nos" (no to peace with Israel, no to recognition of Israel, and no to negotiations with Israel) of 1967 to "three "yeses": yes to peace with Israel, yes to recognition of Israel, and yes to negotiations

[1] Preston L. Greene Jr, "The Arab Economic Boycott of Israel: The International Law Perspective," Vand. J. Transnat'l L. 11 (1978): 77.; Amber Jameel Kalyal, "Israel and the Arab Boycott." *Strategic Studies* 21, no. 1 (2001): p. 167-193.

[2] Marie-Christine Aulas, "The Normalization of Egyptian-Israeli Relations." *Arab Studies Quarterly* (1983): p. 220-236.

[3] Edward W. Said, "The end of the peace process: Oslo and after," *Vintage*, 2007.

[4] Chaim Fershtman and Neil Gandal, "The effect of the Arab boycott on Israel: The automobile market," *The Rand Journal of Economics* (1998): p. 193-214.

[5] Kalyal 2001; Eliyahu Kanovsky, "Has the Peace Process Reaped Economic Dividends?," *Israel at the Crossroads* (1997): p. 23-64.

[6] Elie Podeh, "Israel and the Arab Peace initiative, 2002–2014: A plausible missed opportunity," *The Middle East Journal* 68, no. 4 (2014): p. 584-603.

with Israel."[7] However, between poor timing and lack of acknowledgment by Israel and the U.S., it did not lead to any diplomatic breakthroughs.

"Trade is a second key factor emphasized in the agreements. In addition to trade with the states signing the accords, the agreements could also affect Israel's trade with the West, as such states have used trade as a political leverage point."

In 2020 several Arab states announced U.S.-brokered full normalization agreements with Israel, absent any explicit compromises on Israel's side vis-à-vis the Palestinians, a significant shift from traditionally held positions. On 13 August 2020, Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, announced an agreement with then-U.S. President Trump and then-Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu "to stop further Israeli annexation of Palestinian territories" and "to cooperation and setting a roadmap towards establishing a bilateral relationship."[8] A joint statement of the U.S., Bahrain, and Israel was released on September 11, announcing the "establishment of full diplomatic relations" between Bahrain and Israel.[9] The two announcements became official on September 15 during the Abraham Accords signing ceremony at the White House. On October 23, Sudan and Israel announced the normalization of relations[10], only days after the U.S. officially removed Sudan from the list of states sponsoring terrorism; they formally signed the Abraham Accords on 6 January 2021.[11] Morocco joined the Abraham Accords on 10 December 2020, as part of a quid pro quo. It established full diplomatic relations with Israel in exchange for U.S. recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over disputed Western Sahara. Subsequent to signing the accords, Arab states repealed the remaining boycotts on Israel, contributing further to normalization. However, Israel did not make any reciprocal moves regarding territorial withdrawal from occupied territories, recognition of Palestinian rights, or addressing the issue of Palestinian refugees.[12]

[7] Podeh 2014: p. 598

[8] Mohamed Bin Zayed, *Twitter*, 13 August 2020. https://twitter.com/MohamedBinZayed/status/1293925353560461312

[9] U.S. Mission Egypt, "Joint Statement of the United States, the Kingdom of Bahrain,and the State of Israel," 13 September 2020. https://eg.usembassy.gov/joint-statement-of-the-united-states-the-kingdom-of-bahrainand-the-state-of-israel/

[10] *The Wall Street Journal*, "Israel, Sudan Agree to Normalize Ties in U.S.-Brokered Deal," 24 October 2020. https://www.wsj.com/articles/israel-sudan-agree-to-normalize-ties-in-u-s-brokered-deal-11603469178

[11] *The Wall Street Journal*, "Israel-Sudan Deal: Sudan Removed from U.S. Terrorism List," 14 December 2020. https://www.wsj.com/articles/israel-sudan-deal-what-does-the-pact-mean-and-why-now-11603483853?mod=article_inline; Mohammed Amin, "Sudan signs deal to normalize relations with Israel," *Anadolu Agency,* 6 January 2021. https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/sudan-signs-deal-to-normalize-relations-with-israel/2100349

[12] Lora Vonderhaar, "The Abraham Accords: A Peace Deal in Name Only," *Georgetown Security Studies Review*, 23 October 2020. https://georgetownsecuritystudiesreview.org/2020/10/23/the-abraham-accords-a-peace-deal-in-name-only/

While several of these states already had informal security, intelligence, and trade relations with Israel and, except for Sudan, were never at war with Israel, these agreements represented a significant shift in historical Arab-Israeli relations and thus required some discursive justification. Here, we examine how the Abraham Accords were framed in the Israeli press and explore how the Accords have impacted Israel's economic and security situation.

What Kind of Peace Accord?

The 2020 Abraham Accords garnered two main reactions. One camp heralded these agreements as an achievement of peace, while the other condemned them as mere business agreements or a betrayal of the Palestinian cause. These reactions reflect contending views on peace held by Israel and the Palestinians, with the former seeking recognition and security (normalization) and the latter seeking resolution of conflict issues and adherence to international law. These contending reactions also correspond to divergent concepts of and approaches to "peace" in the literature. Popularized by Johan Galtung, negative peace denotes a narrow conception of peace limited to the absence of war, violence, or direct conflict, similar to a "cold" peace.[13] In contrast, positive peace signifies the absence of structural and cultural violence and includes justice, rights, freedom, and "the integration of human society."[14] In the following sections, we explore narratives surrounding the agreements and what type(s) of peace are advanced in Israeli media narratives.

Method

This article uses quantitative and qualitative data to explore how the Abraham Accords were portrayed in the Israeli media. It first draws on quantitative data obtained from Google's Global Database of Events, Language and Tone (GDELT) project using Tableau software package to generate graphs that capture the events and words frequently mentioned in Israeli news coverage of the Arab signatories to the Abraham Accords in the weeks when the Accords were announced for each of the respective Arab states. The GDELT Project is an open news index that monitors, collects, and translates global news from 1979 onward. GDELT 2.0 codes the data along three themes: actor attributes (we use Israel as ACTOR 1 and the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco separately as ACTOR 2), event action attributes (e.g., type of event, number of mentions, we look at terms such as economic and diplomatic cooperation), and event geography (latitude and longitude).

[13] Benjamin Miller, "When and how regions become peaceful: potential theoretical pathways to peace," *International Studies Review* 7, no. 2 (2005): p. 229-267.

[14] Johan Galtung, "Theories of peace," A Synthetic Approach to Peace Thinking. Oslo: International Peace Research Institute (1967).

We also captured the levels of economic exchange between Israel and the Arab signatories to the Abraham Accords to examine the extent to which the Accords translate to material cooperation.

> *"In contrast to the quantitative findings that found more mentions of general cooperation, the qualitative analysis indicates that economics and security were primary considerations regarding Israel's justification of the Abraham Accords to domestic audiences."*

To add greater context and nuance to the quantitative data, we qualitatively analyzed a sample of Israeli news articles from the same time frames from four Israeli English news sources: the Jerusalem Post, Ynet, Israel Hayom, and 972 Magazine. These were all freely accessible online, capturing a wide range of Israeli perspectives. One article was selected from each publication for each of these date ranges, except there was no 972 Magazine coverage of the Moroccan deal. The articles were thematically coded in terms of how the agreements impacted Israel in economy, security, and peace. Given the controversy surrounding the normalization agreements, we also coded any references to Palestinian concerns.

Trade Data for The West and Abraham Accords Signatories

Using available online databases and institutional reports, we investigated how the Abraham Accords impacted the Israeli economy and security situation. Limited data exists for economic relations between Israel and the Gulf states before 2020 due to the unofficial nature of these interactions. Further, as there has been no armed conflict between Israel and the Abraham Accords signatories, there are no conflict deaths to report. One can look at conflict data related to Israel/Palestine as a proxy for a more direct conflict/security impact on Israel. Table 1 shows human fatalities in Israel and the Palestinian Territories over the past five years. The data for 2021 and 2022 indicate that the Abraham Accords had no effect in reducing fatalities; as Palestinians were excluded from the agreements, this is unsurprising.

Table 1: Human fatalities in Palestine and Israel between 2017 and 2022

Years	# of Palestinian deaths	# of Israeli deaths
2017	77	17
2018	300	13
2019	138	12
2020	30	3
2021	349	11
2022	139	13

Source: Data on casualties. https://www.ochaopt.org/data/casualties#

Note: Data for 2022 are partial.

Trade is a second key factor emphasized in the agreements. In addition to trade with the states signing the accords, the agreements could also affect Israel's trade with the West, as such states have used trade as a political leverage point. After the Oslo Accords, for example, Israel benefited from a so-called "peace dividend." Table 2 shows available trade statistics for the past five years. In 2021 Israeli trade with the EU, the U.S., and the U.K. was valued at US$45, 24, and 5 billion, respectively. In comparison, one year after the Accords, total Israeli bilateral trade with the UAE was roughly US$1 billion. While low compared to Israeli trade with its Western partners, it nevertheless marks a significant increase from nearly US$ 200 million in 2020. Further, partial trade data for 2022 shows an increase of up to US$1.407 billion,[15] and these numbers will likely increase further due to the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement signed by Israel and the UAE in 2022.[16] Trade with Morocco was also comparatively low, at US$ 42 million in 2021, but this is double 2020's figures.[17] While Bahrain has the least trade with Israel, with roughly US$6.5 – 7.5 million in 2021, it is higher than Sudan, which thus far lacks any official trade with Israel.[18] This is not surprising given that the economic disparities between Sudan and the other three states.

[15] *Al-Monitor*. "UAE-Israel trade."

[16] *Al-Monitor*. "UAE-Israel trade."

[17] Jaffe-Hoffman, "What is the future."

[18] *Reuters*, "Israel, Bahrain start free trade agreement talks," 20 September 2022. https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israel-bahrain-start-free-trade-agreement-talks-2022-09-20/

Table 2: Bilateral trade between Israel and the EU, the US, the UK, and the four Abraham Accords signatories between 2019 and 2022 (in millions of US$)

	EU	U.S.	U.K.	UAE	Bahrain	Sudan	Morocco
2019	37,093.60	17,652.30	8,027.30	11.2			13.7
2020	35,090.80	21,181.80	6,681.40	188.9			22.6
2021	45,054.20	24,487.70	5,377.20	1,155	6.5		41.6
2022				1,407[19]			24.3[20]

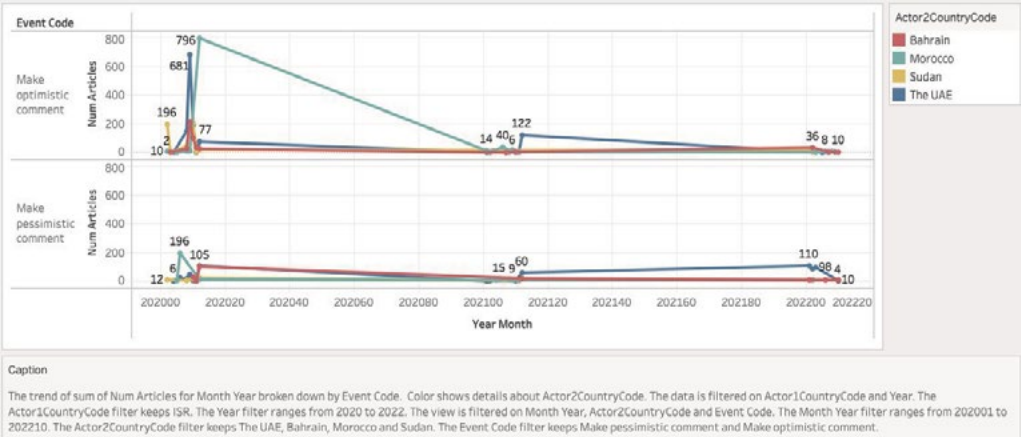
Source: Israel Central Bureau of Statistics. https://www.cbs.gov.il/he/publications/doclib/2022/fr_trade12_2021/td1.pdf

Note: Data for 2022 are partial.

Quantitative Findings

Figure 1 shows the extent to which content mentioned within Israeli newspapers about the four Accords signatories was optimistic or pessimistic. During the entire period between 2020 and 2022, pessimistic comments remained below 200 articles, whereas optimistic comments reached close to 800 at the peak. As expected, optimistic comments spiked during the first weeks following the announcement of the Accords, with 681 optimistic comments about the UAE and 796 about Morocco.

Figure 1: Optimistic and negative comments about Abraham Accords signatories in Israel media between 2020 and 2022



[19] *Al-Monitor,* "UAE-Israel trade already tops last year," 22 August 2022. https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2022/08/uae-israel-trade-already-tops-last-year#ixzz7iZsjLr1G

[20] Maayan Jaffe-Hoffman, "What is the future of Israel-Morocco economic ties?," *The Jerusalem Post,* 21 October 2022. https://www.jpost.com/business-and-innovation/all-news/article-720132

Figure 2 captures the extent to which Israeli newspapers mentioned intent to cooperate in general and to cooperate economically and militarily. Numbers spiked in the first weeks following the announcement and signing of the Accords, with the UAE (13,426 articles) and Morocco (8,126 articles) receiving the highest coverage. However, there was relatively little mention of economic and military cooperation specifically.

Figure 2: Mentions of intent for material cooperation with Abraham Accords signatories in Israel media between 2020 and 2022

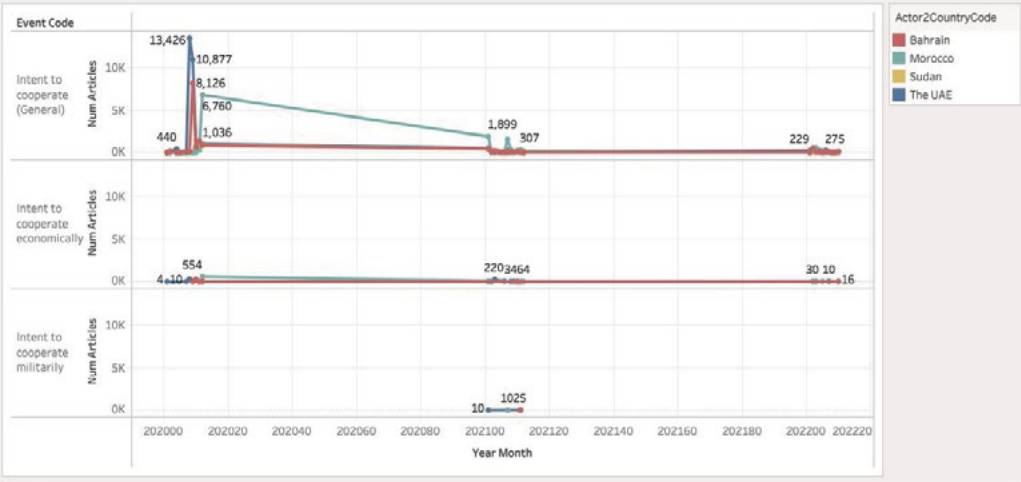
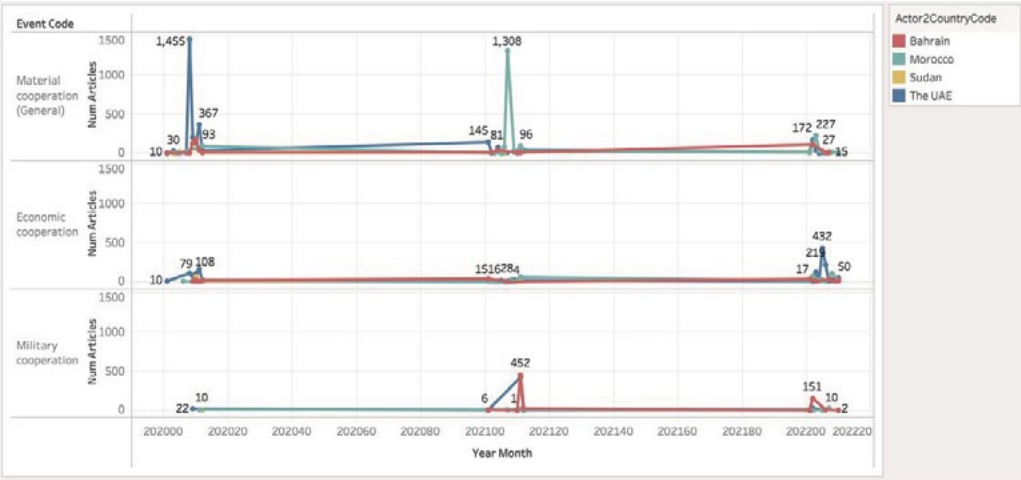


Figure 3 goes beyond intent to capture engaging in material cooperation between 2020 and 2022. The first query captures general material cooperation, while the second and third queries explore economic and military cooperation. The UAE received the highest media coverage for material cooperation (1,455 articles) in the first few weeks following the Accords. The rest of the signatories received relatively low media coverage throughout 2020 and 2022. The most notable exception is Morocco in July 2021, which saw 1308 Israeli media articles mentioning material economic cooperation. On July 25, 2021, Morocco and Israel officially launched nonstop commercial flights between the two countries, materializing the goals of increasing tourism, trade, and economic cooperation outlined in the Abraham Accords.[21] Overall, actual engagement in economic and military cooperation was

[21] Steven Scheer, "Israeli airlines start direct flights to Morocco after improved ties," *Reuters*, 25 July 2021. https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/israels-el-al-starts-flights-morocco-after-improved-diplomatic-ties-2021-07-25/

low. Notable spikes correlate with the 31 May 2022, signing of the Israel-UAE free trade agreement, Morocco's first defense agreement with Israel in November 24, and the UAE's participation in a naval war drill with Israel, the U.S., and Bahrain.

Figure 3: Mentions of engaging in material cooperation with Abraham Accords signatories in Israel media between 2020 and 2022



Qualitative Findings

In contrast to the quantitative findings that found more mentions of general cooperation, the qualitative analysis indicates that economics and security were primary considerations regarding Israel's justification of the Abraham Accords to domestic audiences. Further, in contrast to the quantitative findings which show spikes for events primarily related to the UAE and Morocco, the qualitative sample provides more coverage of the UAE and Bahrain; there were fewer, shorter, and less comprehensive articles related to the agreements with Sudan and Morocco. For example, while the articles covering the UAE and Bahraini deals had author bylines and sometimes several lead authors, the pieces on Sudan and Morocco were sometimes simply attributed to "Staff" or were done in conjunction with news wires like Reuters. While this may have to do with the novelty of the agreements in the first months, further research should be done regarding the difference in coverage. For example, it may have to do with the difference in wealth between the countries, geographic differences, or factors related to the number of Moroccans and Sudanese living in Israel and associated domestic dynamics therein.

Eleven of the 15 articles reviewed here (four articles for each of the three main newspapers and three for 972 Magazine) referred to economic benefits from the Abraham Accords. For example, Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu suggested that signing the agreement with the UAE reflected his commitment "to pull Israel out of the world recession."[22] Statements about the signing emphasized the potential for regional transformation, economic growth, technological innovation, and the launching of joint projects.[23] Some, such as the 972 Magazine's Kattan, criticized the economic focus, suggesting that the deals conflated peace and prosperity "as if they were a single term."[24] Coverage of the agreement with Sudan differed in focus, noting Israel's provision of debt relief, aid, and investment in Sudan[25]and support for the government against Sudanese protesting financial crisis. Commentary surrounding the Moroccan agreement stresses economic connections in the tourist sector, given the number of Israelis of Moroccan descent and Morocco serving as a "gateway to Africa" for Israeli investors.[26] Most of the articles, however, did not discuss peace in the context of economics, but simply emphasized the economic benefits of the agreements, largely due to the opening of trade relations with advanced economies that were previous off limits (at least officially).

Twelve of the 15 articles reviewed discuss security in some way. Eichner noted that "the agreements won't end active wars but will rather formalize the normalization of Israel's already warming relations with the two [Gulf] countries."[27] Regarding the agreements with the UAE and Bahrain, the emphasis is on the historically evolving cooperation noting that it has accelerated particularly with the rise in the Iranian threat.[28] While there is a thread of concern expressed in the articles regarding a possible loss of Israel's qualitative military edge if the U.S. sells F-35 fighter jets

[22] Lahav Harkov, "The UAE-Israel deal is a paradigm shift for the Middle East," *The Jerusalem Post*, 27 August 2020. https://www.jpost.com/arab-israeli-conflict/the-uae-israel-deal-is-a-paradigm-shift-for-the-middle-east-640228

[23] Lahav Harkov and Omri Nahmias, "Israel, UAE reach historic peace deal: 'We can make a wonderful future'," *The Jerusalem Post*, 14 August 2020. https://www.jpost.com/breaking-news/israel-and-uae-reach-historic-peace-deal-638524; *Ynetnews*, "Israel, UAE to launch diplomatic ties in return for halt to annexation," 13 August 2020. https://www.ynetnews.com/article/SkKHL0GzP

[24] Karim Kattan, "A fever dream of dictators," *972 Magazine*, 17 September 2020. https://www.972mag.com/uae-israel-accords-dictators/

[25] Lahav Harkov, "Sudan officially joins Abraham Accords to normalize Israel ties," *The Jerusalem Post*, 6 January 2021. https://www.jpost.com/breaking-news/sudan-officially-joins-abraham-accords-to-normalize-israel-ties-654461; Ariel Kahana and Daniel Siryoti, "Trump announces Israel, Sudan to normalize ties," *Israel Hayom*, 23 October 2020. https://www.972mag.com/uae-israel-accords-dictators/

[26] *Ynetnews*, "Morocco hosts Israeli envoys, Kushner to hammer out new ties," 22 December 2020. https://www.ynetnews.com/article/rkPgyY1aw

[27] Itamar Eichner and Matan Tzuri, "Israel makes history with UAE and Bahrain treaties signed at White House ceremony," *Ynetnews*, 15 September 2020. https://www.ynetnews.com/article/186KP7TG3

[28] Harkov, "The UAE-Israel deal."; Tovah Lazaroff, "Did UAE, Bahrain betray Palestinians by ignoring two-states in accords?", *The Jerusalem Post*, 16 September 2020. https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/one-step-closer-to-palestinian-statehood-analysis-642409; Ariel Kahana, Reuters, AP, and ILH Staff, "'We brought hope to all the children of Abraham,'" *Israel Hayom*, 15 September 2020. https://www.israelhayom.com/2020/09/15/we-brought-hope-to-all-the-children-of-abraham/

to the UAE; overall, the emphasis is on the strategic partnership of these countries against Iran.[29] The one exception to the Iran-centered focus is the narrative around Sudan, where the narrative of anti-terrorism is more prominent. For example, Sudan designated Hezbollah as a terrorist organization, and the US removed Sudan from the list of State Sponsors of Terrorism.[30] Yet even in the coverage of the Sudan agreement there is mention of Sudan's shift from Iranian to Saudi patronage in recent years[31]; the same anti-Iran focus holds in discussions of Morocco and their distrust of Iran due to Iran's funding of the Polisario Front in Western Sahara.[32] Thus, the direction of the peace accords as presented to the Israeli public (at least in the English language version of its press) is in alignment with the narrative of Iran as the primary strategic threat facing Israel in the past years[33]. The articles note—and the data above support—that there has been no security threat to Israel from these Arab states in recent decades. This security-focused narrative aligns with the discourse of negative peace, in which 'peace' is equated with the absence of war rather than a set of positive set of conditions.

While the overwhelming emphasis of the sampled news articles was on the economic and security impact of the Abraham Accords, some noted benefits for Bahraini Jews and potential benefits for Sudanese refugees in Israel, although some raised concerns regarding possible repatriation to the Sudan.[34] Any repatriation without agreement by the refugees would violate international law and threaten human rights, thereby the antithesis of positive peace. Overall, however, the articles gave minimal discussion to concepts related to positive or warm peace in terms of positive and mutual understanding between peoples. Instead, the focus was on government elites and formal security and economic arrangements. While discussion of Palestinian statehood and Palestinian refugees was limited in the articles reviewed, a few pieces did contrast the successful negotiation of the Abraham Accords with the lack of

[29] Eichner and Tzuri, "Israel makes history."; Tovah Lazaroff, "Did UAE, Bahrain betray Palestinians by ignoring two-states in accords?," *The Jerusalem Post*, 16 September 2020. https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/one-step-closer-to-palestinian-statehood-analysis-642409; Omri Nahmias, Lahav Harkov, Greer Fay Cashman, "Morocco, Israel normalize ties as US recognizes Western Sahara," *The Jerusalem Post*, 11 December 2020. https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/israel-morocco-agree-to-normalize-relations-in-latest-us-brokered-deal-651742; Hagay Hacohen, "Netanyahu: I will bring UAE investments to the Negev," *The Jerusalem Post*, 19 August 2022. https://www.jpost.com/breaking-news/netanyahu-uae-deal-means-flow-of-investments-in-negev-639174

[30] Lahav Harkov, "Sudan officially joins Abraham Accords to normalize Israel ties," *The Jerusalem Post,* 6 January 2021. https://www.jpost.com/breaking-news/sudan-officially-joins-abraham-accords-to-normalize-israel-ties-654461; Kahana and Siryoti, "Trump announces Israel.".

[31] Yotam Gidron, "Not a new dawn: Why the Israel-Sudan deal was a long time coming," *972 Magazine*, 30 October 2020. https://www.972mag.com/sudan-israel-normalization-history/

[32] Nahmias, "Morocco, Israel normalize."

[33] Michael Herzog, Iran Still Looms Large in Israel's Threat Perception, *The Washington Institute*, 15 July 2016. https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/iran-still-looms-large-israels-threat-perception

[34] Hadar Gil-Ad, Itamar Eichner, "Sudan's asylum seekers in Israel say they'll go back if 'peace is real'," *Ynetnews*, 25 October 2020. https://www.ynetnews.com/article/BkHFL9fdD

progress on the Palestinian front.[35] Several correspondents acknowledged that Palestinians felt "stab[bed] in the back by fellow Arabs"[36] while others noted that the Gulf regimes were not allies of the Palestinians to begin with.[37] In an effort perhaps to quell criticism from their own populaces, Gulf leaders stated that their efforts helped put a stop to annexation of Palestinian territories by Israel and/or lay the groundwork for a lasting peace.[38] Overall, "peace" was not the main focus of the articles reviewed; the Abraham Accords were instead portrayed as a boon for Israel's economy and security.

Conclusion

This preliminary study of the discourses surrounding the Abraham Accords suggests the agreements were, from the Israeli perspective, primarily about security and economic interests rather than cooperation more generally, although the data suggest more discussion of intent to cooperate rather than actual engagement in economic or security cooperation. While it is difficult to measure the economic impact due to the lack of records prior to 2020, Israel has had a positive economic benefit. However, it still pales compared to Israel's trade with Western partners. Yet, the signing of trade deals with the UAE, Bahrain, and Morocco in 2022 means the economic impact is only beginning to show. Further, the qualitative findings suggest that the Israeli security narrative focuses on having allies against Iran, perceived as a collective threat to all involved parties, rather than any prior threat from these Arab states (or even Palestinians).

This project raises several questions for further study. First, it is worth examining other narratives about the agreements in the Israeli public sphere, including in Hebrew language papers, popular social media outlets, and military statements. Further, digging deeper into the differences in the narratives surrounding the Gulf states and the African countries would be helpful. This could reflect economic bias, or it could reflect racism or prejudices that have been documented elsewhere. Finally, the general lack of discussion of the Palestinians indicates the disconnect between the inter-state and intra-state dimensions of the Israeli-Arab conflict and Israel's occupation of Palestine.

[35] Harkov, "The UAE-Israel deal."

[36] Kahana and Daniel Siryoti, "Trump announces Israel,"; Eichner and Tzuri, "Israel makes history."

[37] Kattan, "A fever dream."

[38] Eichner and Tzuri, "Israel makes history."; Neta Bar, Reuters, and ILH Staff, 'Circle of peace' expands as Bahrain poised to normalize ties with Israel, *Israel Hayom*, 11 September 2020. https://www.israelhayom.com/2020/09/11/report-bahrain-to-announce-normalization-with-israel/

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SELECTIVE RECONCILIATION: THE RAPPROCHEMENT BETWEEN ISRAEL AND THE GULF MONARCHIES

The September 2020 Abraham Accords between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain was the culmination of a multi-year process. Later two other Arab monarchies, Morocco, and Jordan jointed them in improving their relations with the Jewish State while the remaining Gulf Cooperation Council members opted not to join the Accords. This article focuses on Gulf Kingdoms and argues that the improvement in Israeli-Arab relations is explained by a growing realization that in Iran, both sides have a common enemy; the failings of America's Middle East policy; the anticipated economic and security benefits to be gained from improved relations; and the diminished importance of the Palestinian issue for Arab societies and governments.

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The six kingdoms of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates [UAE]) have viewed Israel as their natural enemy from its founding. The Jewish State's repression of Palestinians, the numerous wars it fought against Arab enemies, and religious, political, and sociocultural differences virtually guaranteed that, even in the long run, the two siders would remain enemies. And yet, in the last decade relations between Israel and some Arab monarchies have gradually improved and in 2020 a milestone was reached. The signing of the Abraham Accords by Israel, the UAE, and Bahrain heralded a new era of peaceful and cooperative relations. Why now? What explains the timing behind the rapprochement between some Arabian rulers and Israel?

This essay argues that the reasons are found in four broad areas: foreign policy, the economic and security realms, and domestic politics. In foreign policy, the realization that Iran was the archenemy not just of Saudi Arabia and the UAE – the two most powerful Arab monarchies – but also of Israel. Moreover, the failings of U.S. Middle East policy – the Obama Administration's missteps during and in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, its 2015 nuclear deal with Iran that was stridently opposed by both the Gulf states and Israel, and the recognition that the Trump White House's support of its Gulf allies was not unconditional – further induced Gulf-Israeli amity. GCC member states have also come to recognize that the benefits of détente with Israel lay in cooperation in the security and intelligence fields and expanded ties to the only innovation economy in their region. Finally, in terms of domestic policy, for a younger generation of Gulf rulers, Israel's treatment of its Palestinian minority and its refusal to agree to the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative (API) are no longer the deal-breaking obstacles to a reconciliation that they were for their elders. Following a brief section outlining individual monarchies' nexus to Israel, I will examine these policy areas.

Gradually Warming Relations

In the past decade most Gulf governments have relaxed their decades-long anti-Israel rhetoric. \ Already in 2005, Bahrain's King Hamad prohibited the media from referring to Israel as "the Zionist entity" and announced that Bahraini Jews who emigrated to the U.S. and the UK were free to return. Oman has continued its traditional non-conflictual relations with Israel, welcoming Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in October 2018 for an official state visit. Regarding Israel policy, Kuwait is the odd man out in the Gulf. After 1991, owing to the Palestinian Liberation Organization's pro-Iraq stance, the Emirate deported over 400,000 Palestinians. Still, Kuwait repaired its links to Palestinians in 2004 and since then

many more Palestinians have settled there. The ruling Al Sabah family remains keenly interested in the fate of Palestinians and has been careful not to antagonize its raucous National Assembly and its significant (about 30 percent) Shia minority. Qatar's position toward Israel has swayed between provocative and conciliatory acts. Israel had at times allowed Doha to make financial donations to Gaza to help prevent its humanitarian collapse and aid its stabilization. Qatar – along with Egypt and the United Nations – had attempted to negotiate ceasefire agreements between the Israeli Defense Forces and Hamas. The seesaw nature of Qatar-Israel relations has diminished but little in the last few years. When in 2019 Prime Minister Netanyahu requested a meeting with the Qatari Foreign Minister, Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, he was rebuffed. In 2020, however, former Qatari Prime Minister Hamad bin Jassim Al Thani publicly indicated that Israel was on track to sign a non-aggression pact with Gulf states and that Doha was in principle not against this as long as the API also advanced.

> *"From the Gulf states' perspective, Trump's election was a godsend. Here was an American president who was not only eager to undo the "misdeeds" of his predecessor – from the Iran nuclear deal to "Obamacare" – but who was also enamored with populist and authoritarian rulers from Benjamin Netanyahu and Abdel Fatah el-Sisi to Vladimir Putin and Rodrigo Duterte."*

In the past two decades the UAE has been the front-runner in the Gulf in developing pragmatic and relatively open contacts with Israel. Cabinet-level Israeli officials made repeated visits to the UAE for various conferences and meetings of UAE-headquartered international organizations. Emirati Foreign Minister Abdullah Ibn Zayed was even purported to share "good and personal relations" with his Israeli colleague, Tzipi Livni. Although the UAE has developed far closer relations to Israel than Saudi Arabia, for political and economic reasons Riyadh's ties with Jerusalem clearly have enhanced geostrategic importance. In the larger Gulf-Israel nexus context, the Jerusalem-Riyadh link remains the forerunner of change.

Foreign Policy: A Common Enemy and a Doubtful Patron

The single most important reason for the gradual warming of relations between the Gulf and Israel is the Arabian leaders' realization that they share a common adversary

and that the support of their principal ally, the United States, was not unconditional. In regional terms, Iran has become more robust, exploiting the sectarian rivalries in the aftermath of the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 and taking advantage, directly and through its proxies, of the violent conflicts spawned by the Arab Spring in Iraq, Libya, Syria, and, even earlier, Yemen. The Gulf states – especially Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain – had gradually come to appreciate the value of cooperating with Israel to thwart their regional enemy.

The Obama Administration's foreign policy with its reluctance to offer straightforward leadership in the Middle East only pushed the Gulf countries and Israel together. Obama did not see eye to eye with either Benjamin Netanyahu or the Gulf rulers. His administration's decisions to hastily cut ties with loyal allies of long standing – most importantly Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak – in the region during the Arab Spring, and his failure to deliver on his threats to punish Syrian strongman Bashar Al Assad for the atrocities his forces had committed in its aftermath, had severely damaged his credibility in Arabia and in the broader Middle East. But the most essential reason Gulf rulers turned away from him was his policy toward Iran that culminated in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (the Iran nuclear deal), negotiated and sealed without due consultation with the parties, the members of the GCC, that Tehran most directly endangered.

From the Gulf states' perspective, Trump's election was a godsend. Here was an American president who was not only eager to undo the "misdeeds" of his predecessor – from the Iran nuclear deal to "Obamacare" – but who was also enamored with populist and authoritarian rulers from Benjamin Netanyahu and Abdel Fatah el-Sisi to Vladimir Putin and Rodrigo Duterte. Moreover, the president's son-in-law and adviser, Jared Kushner – whom he appointed to lead the Palestinian-Israeli peace initiatives – had developed close relations to arguably the most important present-day Gulf leader, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MbS). Though the Trump Administration was far preferable to Obama's in the capitals of Arabia, he did not extend a figurative blank check to back them in every conflict.

In many ways, Trump was a transactional, bargain-seeking president: he wanted to sell weapons to the Gulf states whether they needed them or not. He got rid of the Iran nuclear deal because he saw it as a bad deal. But his saber-rattling rhetoric was just that: he stopped short of confronting Iran at every opportunity, let alone committing American troops to combat there. A case in point was Washington's subdued reaction to the Iranian-sponsored drone strike on Saudi oil processing facilities in September 2019. Tehran's attacks made Riyadh recognize that their policies vis-à-vis Yemen and Iran made them vulnerable to severe domestic threats

where it hurt most. In the absence of vigorous American retaliation Saudi officials demonstrated more openness to a tactic they had not tried for a while: exploring talks with Iran. In short, Obama's ineffective policy and Trump's "bottom-line" approach to the region created an awareness in the Gulf monarchies of the strategic benefits of détente with Jerusalem.

> *"The older generation of Gulf Arabs – by definition more prosperous and politically influential – tend to be more interested in the destiny of their brethren than younger people. The contrast between the younger and older age groups' views on Palestine is nowhere more evident than in the Saudi royal family."*

The driver of the dramatically improved Riyadh-Jerusalem nexus has been the two countries' shared enmity toward Tehran. In late 2015 Dore Gold, the director-general of the Israeli foreign ministry in the first interview his organization had ever granted a Saudi news outlet, emphasized the commonality of Israeli-Arabian interests in their region.[1] In 2016 retired Saudi major-general Anwar Eshki met with Knesset members in Jerusalem during a visit that was meant to highlight the Kingdom's interest in further improving Saudi-Israeli relations. In the following year the Israeli Defense Force's Chief of Staff, Lt. Gen. Gadi Eisenkot gave an unprecedented interview with the independent Arab online daily newspaper, *Elaph*, and asserted that Israel was "prepared to share intelligence with 'moderate' Arab states such as Saudi Arabia to 'deal with' Iran."[2] By then experts had known of the long-standing relationship between the two countries' intelligence organizations; the novelty was the open admission of it by a high-ranking Israeli official. Israeli counter-terrorism experts for several years have participated in a maritime defense and aviation security conference in Bahrain and elsewhere in the Gulf. Both of these issues are vital priorities for the GCC states given Iran's proximity.

Benefits in Security Cooperation and Economic Relations

For well over a decade now, Israel has been the source of security technology for both the UAE and Saudi Arabia. The Jewish State became the world's eighth most prominent supplier of major arms in 2019 (in 2014-2018 its share in the global

[1] Nathan Wise, "Gold Stresses Common Israeli-Arab Interests in Unprecedented Interview to Saudi Paper," *Jerusalem Post*, 28 December 2015.

[2] Joseph Millis, "Israel and Saudi Arabia: The Best of 'Frenemies'," *RUSI Commentary*, 21 November 2017.

weapons exports was 3.1 percent) and with the steady erosion of political obstacles it is well positioned to expand arms sales to the Gulf.[3] Israel has been especially active in cooperation and providing know-how in the areas of high-tech barrier construction (to be used, for instance, on Saudi Arabia's 600-mile border with Iraq) and surveillance (e.g., tracking and identification software). Israel recently sold its sophisticated "Barak" air defense sytems to the UAE which deployed it for the first time in October 2022.[4] Unlike Jerusalem's links with other Gulf monarchies, the Emirati-Israeli relationship has even encompassed active defense cooperation, namely, joint participation in military maneuvers, pilot training exercises, and combined force drills in Europe and the U.S.. Expansive trade relations between the two countries have also included Israeli weapon sales and granting access to high-resolution satellite imagery.

Aside from security-intelligence collaboration, enhanced Gulf-Israeli relations may augur significant commercial and trade benefits to both sides. Israel's is the Middle East's only highly developed innovation economy. In addition to cooperation in high-tech fields, the GCC states could greatly profit from Israel's cutting-edge agricultural practices, irrigation technology, and water management. As a result of the regional energy revolution, Israel has become a net energy exporter – it recently signed a $15 billion agreement for the sale of natural gas to Egypt.[5] Thus, for the Jewish State, the most important benefit from heightened commercial relations with Arabia would be not so much access to oil but entry to the large and prosperous GCC market.

Another sizable economic dividend of better relations with the GCC states is overflight rights over Arabia for El Al and other Israeli carriers. This is a major benefit because until recently Israeli planes had to fly around much of the Middle East to reach their destinations in India, Southeast Asia, and China, all of which are large markets for Israeli high-tech companies. One of the results Netanyahu's 2018 visit to Muscat yielded was permission to fly over Oman, but a quick glance at the map shows that it is of nebulous value without a similar concession from Saudi Arabia. In fact, tensions developed between Riyadh and Jerusalem in the same year because the former granted access to its airspace to foreign carriers en route to Tel Aviv while still barring Israeli aircraft. The dispute regarding overflight rights hinted at the many remaining limits to the Gulf-Israeli relationship. Finally, in July 2022 Saudi Arabia announced to open its skies for Israeli commercial aircraft.

[3] *SIPRI Yearbook 2019* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019): p. 232.

[4] Joe Saballa, "UAE Deploys First Israeli Barak Air Defense System," *Defense Post*, 21 October 2022.

[5] Author's interview with former Israeli Minister of National Infrastructure and Energy, Yosef Paritzky (telephone 26 March 2020).

Generational Differences Regarding Palestine

In the past, the main impediment to normalizing Arab-Israeli relations was the situation of Palestinians in Israel. But attitudes in Arabia – as well as the larger Middle East – have shifted toward Palestinians. This development is primarily explained by the bifurcation of attitudes toward the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in Arab societies. By and large, the older generation continues to hold the issue close to their hearts. In contrast, younger people seem to be less interested in it and thus more willing to entertain an Arab-Israeli détente.

In a number of Arabian countries – particularly in Saudi Arabia and the UAE – there is palpable frustration with the Palestinian issue. Throughout several decades, the Gulf states have invested billions of dollars in Palestinian causes but feel short-changed by the meagre return. Many Gulf leaders are exhausted by the Palestinian question owing to the political instability, leadership rift, seemingly endless internecine conflicts, mismanagement, corruption in the Palestinian Authority and more broadly, Palestinian politics. Jamal al-Suwaidi, an influential Emirati official and academic whose Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research has long been a conduit for the UAE's contacts with Israel, recently opined that "The Palestinian cause is no longer at the forefront of Arabs' interests as it used to be for long decades" and has "sharply lost priority in light of the challenges, threats, and problems that face countries of the region."[6]

The younger generation of Gulf Arabs do not seem to feel the same way about Palestinians as their elders. Although the median age of the six Gulf countries' population is not as low as that in many other Arab states (e.g., Egypt 23.9, Jordan 22.8, Sudan 17.9), they are also very young countries. The lowest median age in the GCC is Oman's at 25.8 years, but even in Kuwait (29.4) and Saudi Arabia (29.9) it is under 30.[7] Many young people in the Gulf – especially those in the less affluent countries – consider the Palestinian issue pragmatically: they think it has received too much attention and resources for too long without any tangible improvement in the situation. Rather than throwing good money after bad, they wish to see their governments more responsive to their concerns.

In the annual Arab Youth Surveys, "rising cost of living" and "unemployment" are issues that concern young Arabs more than youths more than "The Palestinian Israeli Conflict."[8] The results of this poll support the widespread "perception that the

[6] Jamal al-Suwaidi, "Dismantling the Palestinian Issue: Manifestations, Causes, and Consequences," *Gulf News*, 20 November 2018.

[7] *The World Factbook* (Central Intelligence Agency, 2018).

[8] See the annual *Arab Youth Surveys*, in the most recent (2022), 17.

younger generation in the Arab world worry more about issues pertaining to their daily lives."[9] Many experts believe that youth support for the Palestinian cause is even more lukewarm in the kingdoms of Arabia.

Generational change in the Gulf's ruling families has been even more consequential for Arab-Israeli relations. The younger leaders – most importantly MbS, the Emir of Qatar Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, and MbS's mentor, Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed (MbZ), who is not young but has for long represented a pragmatist policy-line – have had a demonstrably different view of the Palestinian issue than their elders. MbZ has repeatedly noted that he viewed Israel as an ally against Iran. In a meeting with American Jewish leaders in 2019, MbS said that Palestinians should accept Trump's "deal of the century" proposal or "shut up and stop complaining" and "made clear that the Palestinian issue was not a priority for his government nor for the Saudi public. 'There are far more pressing and more important issues to deal with, such as Iran'," he added.[10]

The older generation of Gulf Arabs – by definition more prosperous and politically influential – tend to be more interested in the destiny of their brethren than younger people. The contrast between the younger and older age groups' views on Palestine is nowhere more evident than in the Saudi royal family. MbS's father, King Salman, has remained loyal to the Palestinian cause. In mid-2017, when Israeli Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman saw Qatar's conflict with three GCC member-states as an opportunity to improve relations with the Saudis, Salman instructed his government to continue to link normalization to the Palestinian problem, something Jerusalem wanted to avoid. In numerous phone calls and meetings with President Trump the king has restated "the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people to an independent state with Jerusalem as its capital," often without mentioning Israel."[11] When MbS reacted mildly to Washington's decision to move its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, King Salman renamed the 2018 Arab League conference in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia "The Al-Quds (Jerusalem) Summit," announced $200 million aid for Palestinians, and assured his Arab allies that Riyadh "will not endorse any Middle East peace plan that fails to address Jerusalem's status or refugees' right of return."[12]

Kuwait's elderly rulers have been unambiguous in their steadfast support of the Palestinian cause and opposition to the Gulf-Israeli détente. Kuwaiti officials

[9] See Jumana Al Tamimi, "Why Palestine Still Matters to Arab Youth," *Gulf News*, 2 May 2019.

[10] Cited in Ian Black, "Just Below the Surface: Israel, the Arab Gulf States, and the Limits of Cooperation," *LSE Middle East Centre Report*, March 2019: p. 22-23.

[11] Ben Hubbard, "Saudi Prince Says Israelis Have Right to 'Their Own Land'," *New York Times*, 3 April 2018.

[12] Robert Satloff, "Mohammed bin Salman Doesn't Want to Talk About Jerusalem," *Foreign Policy*, 14 December 2017.

have boycotted regional meetings with Israeli participation and even lobbied the International Parliamentary Union to expel the Knesset from its membership. Many Kuwaiti politicians insist that there should be no peace agreement with Israel as long as it continues to occupy and appropriate Palestinian lands. The Speaker of Kuwait's National Assembly, Marzouq Al-Ghanim, scolded Gulf-Israeli normalization advocates, stating, "It is shameful and disgraceful to leave Palestinians to face the enemy alone without support and backers."[13] At the end of the day, the rapprochement with Israel for many Gulf citizens seems upsetting and distasteful even if no longer unthinkable. This is the reason that the normalization process between the two countries has been kept mainly out of Gulf media outlets.

Concluding Remarks

In 2019, Israeli and Gulf officials, drafted a non-aggression pact that was to produce a "historic" deal. The 2020 Abraham Accords effectively meant that after normalizing ties with Egypt and Jordan in 1979 and 1994, respectively, Israel had also made peace with two Gulf Arab monarchies, the UAE and Bahrain. Even so, most citizens of Arabia were until recently unaware of this endeavor because Israeli-Gulf relations are still customarily conducted under the radar. Although relations with Israel is no longer the taboo subject it once was, Arabian media outlets outside of the UAE and Bahrain seldom mention it. From the Saudi perspective, as MbS's statements suggest, the clandestine cooperation with Israel is acceptable but not to be discussed publicly. Clearly, caution is more important for the Gulf leaders whose citizens are divided about the prospects of détente with Israel. For Jerusalem, a peace accord with the Gulf countries signified a historic breakthrough.

Although no other Gulf monarchy has joined the Abraham Accords to date, Morocco and Sudan decided to participate. In December 2020 Rabat formalized its ties with Israel by joining the Abraham Accords and establishing full diplomatic relations. The sweetener was Washington's support for Moroccan sovereignty over the Western Sahara, a long-disputed territory to the south. Khartoum became a signatory in January 2021, in exchange for being removed from the U.S. government's list of states promoting terrorism and a $1 billion loan from the World Bank. Since taking office in January 2021, the Biden Administration has supported the expansion of the Abraham Accords to other countries in the Middle East. The Palestinian community is seemingly the only necessary party left out of the discussions.

[13] "Kuwait Official: 'Shameful and Disgraceful for Palestinians to Face Israel Alone'," *Middle East Monitor*, 13 August 2019.

ISRAELI FOREIGN POLICY IN LIGHT OF DRAMATIC CHANGES IN THE REGION: DIPLOMATIC SUCCESS AND CHALLENGES AHEAD

The dramatic developments in the Middle East in the last decade have improved and strengthened Israel's position in the region. The implications of the Arab Spring, the discoveries of natural gas in the deep waters of the East Med, and specifically within the Israeli EEZ, initiated a regional process where Israel is playing a central, substantial and constructive role. It was manifested with the impressive regional architecture in the East Med (and in particular the establishment of the EMGF) and the Abraham Accords. Those developments strengthened Israel's room of maneuver and its self-confidence. At this strategic junction, a substantial and extremely important challenges are ahead of Israel's Foreign policy: Expanding the regional cooperation in the East Med to include more relevant players if possible; Deepening the cooperation with the Abraham Accords countries and using this model for wider cooperation in the region; and last but not least, initiating a political and realistic process with the Palestinians in order to revive the Two State Vision.

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The past decade was characterized by dramatic developments in the Middle East and beyond, which directly affected the interests of all countries in the region, including Israel. Naturally, it won't be possible to refer in detail to the multitude of events, but the focus will be on the main consequences these events had on the region.

It is thus appropriate to emphasize five key developments:

1. The dramatic and surprising events through the Arab Spring, which raised many hopes initially, ended with a weak and disappointing result a decade later. Practically, those uprisings and their failures caused a significant weakening of most of the Arab countries and ongoing violent conflicts and civil wars, some of which are still occurring.

2. The strengthening of Iran at the expense of the Arab world; an assertive and forceful regional foreign policy, simultaneously with the American withdrawal from the nuclear agreement (by the Trump administration), which enabled Teheran to proceed with its nuclear program without restrictions or any agreed parameters.

3. Changes in the order of priorities of the American foreign policy, in a way that deepened the perception, or a reality, of a significant decrease in American attention to the Middle East.

4. The decline in the centrality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, both in terms of the players in the region, and in terms of the international arena.

5. The energy discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean, with an emphasis on Israel's economic waters, made the Eastern Mediterranean stand out as a distinct sub-region and encouraged a rather impressive network of regional cooperation.

These developments changed the regional relationship almost beyond recognition and opened a fascinating latitude for Israeli foreign policy, which was not possible before. The practical expression of this was realized in two main directions: the regional alignment in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Abraham Accords with countries in the Gulf, Morocco and even Sudan.

It is essential to clarify how and why these trends developed and deepened.

The East Mediterranean

The discoveries of the natural gas fields in the East Mediterranean illustrated for Israel (and the entire region) the real potential that lies in the deep waters of the

region, energetically and no less importantly, from Political and strategical meaning and implications. It is worth mentioning that in those years, the relationship between Türkiye and Israel, and in fact with most of the countries in the region, was cold and critical. The Turkish support of the political Islam (Muslim Brotherhood), which grew more substantial in the first years of the Arab Spring, and even came to power in Egypt, was received with great disapproval among most of the regional actors, in Israel and in the Arab world. Moreover, the Hellenic countries - Greece and Cyprus - immediately recognized the regional window of opportunity that opened up to them. The result: a significant improvement in the relationship between Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Greece, and Cyprus, which later led to the establishment of the Regional Gas Forum (EMGF), which was joined by other players such as Italy, France and even the Palestinian Authority. The United States and the European Union joined as observers. As a matter of fact, the absence of Türkiye from that regional diplomacy helped create the "glue" between most of these countries during those years. Furthermore, the latest agreement between Israel and Lebanon regarding their maritime border, a dramatic and impressive development in itself, although additional unique factors stand at the root of it (mainly the unprecedented political-economic crisis in Lebanon), bears witness to the fascinating regional value. The attractiveness of the Eastern Mediterranean to Europe, due to the gas discoveries, and following the war in Ukraine and the current energy crisis, are added to all the developments listed so far.

"The Turkish support of the political Islam (Muslim Brotherhood), which grew more substantial in the first years of the Arab Spring, and even came to power in Egypt, was received with great disapproval among most of the regional actors, in Israel and in the Arab world."

Bottom line, it can be summarized that the last decade has contributed to the developing an impressive regional architecture in the Eastern Mediterranean. It has reached, at present, a challenging junction of how to integrate, if possible, the "missing players" into this regional complex built, as mentioned, in recent years in the region—clearly, a challenge with quite many question marks of its validity.

The Abraham Accords

The agreements signed in September 2020 between Israel, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, to which Morocco and Sudan also joined (the latter is admittedly at a different stage, mainly due to the internal circumstances in the country), constitute a significant leap forward in the relationship between Israel and the Arab world, and clearly to the whole region. The Abraham Accords illustrates the depth of the changes that have taken place in the region in recent years. It is imperative to emphasize three key aspects which lies beneath it, or contributed to the realization of those agreements: the threat that the Arab countries, with emphasis on the Gulf countries, feel from Iran's direction; the marginalization of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with which progress in its solution, as recalled, was seen as a necessary and early condition for further Israeli-Arab normalization; and the question marks that have arisen, mainly in the Gulf, regarding the degree of American commitment to stand by their side in the event of a tangible Iranian threat (actually, as it took place in several times in recent years from the Gulf countries point of view). The agreements, which are known to have received discreet Saudi support, including a few public expressions on its part (such as Prime Minister Netanyahu's visit to the kingdom at the time, which was "leaked to the media"), emphasize the depth of the changes in the region. Furthermore, the ease, and the public manifestations of normalization between Israel and these countries, were seen in Jerusalem as a crucial testimony, or illustration, to the common interests of those countries.

The Abraham Accords joins the peace agreements between Israel, Egypt, and Jordan, significantly expanding the scope and depth of Israeli-Arab relations, and in Israel's view, stabilize a strong front against Iran. Moreover, those agreements represent to a large degree, a kind of model of future (and nowadays a present) Israeli – Arab relations in the region. It strengthens, to a substantial degree the reality of Israeli integration in the region.

The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict And The Two-State Vision

As mentioned, the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians has been pushed aside in the last decade, given the dramatic changes that have taken place in the region. The regional instability, the strengthening of political Islam (in the first years of the Arab Spring), the disintegration of countries such as Syria, Libya and Yemen, and the strengthening of Iran, greatly reduced the centrality of the Palestinian issue, in the views of the regional and the international arena. From Israel's point of view, all of these add to the narrative that has developed and deepened since the beginning of the 2000s - the failure of the Camp David negotiations and the second intifada – meaning the lack of a Palestinian partner for an agreement. Actually, there has been

no political dialogue at all between the two leaderships for more than a decade. The perception established in Israel during these years, of the absence of a Palestinian partner, has deepened more so in recent years, characterized by the twilight of Abu Mazen's rule in the Palestinian Authority. The Abraham Accords, which were received with much criticism by the Palestinians, alongside the established and deepened control of Hamas in the Gaza Strip, did not help the Palestinian issue vis-a-vis the Arab regional arena. Neither vis-à-vis the Israeli public opinion.

"In practice, a political process and the possibility of a permanent Israeli-Palestinian agreement are now seen as impractical at best. The Israeli arena is fixed, more than ever, with the "no partner" concept. From its perspective, the Palestinian arena is accustomed to this reality, and there are no substantial efforts to challenge this reality or establish some sort of dialogue with the Israeli Public."

These regional processes and the profound changes in the Israeli and Palestinian arena pushed the discourse about the two-state vision to the margins. In practice, a political process and the possibility of a permanent Israeli-Palestinian agreement are now seen as impractical at best. The Israeli arena is fixed, more than ever, with the "no partner" concept. From its perspective, the Palestinian arena is accustomed to this reality, and there are no substantial efforts to challenge this reality or establish some sort of dialogue with the Israeli Public. It is fair to summarize the present circumstances with the tragic note that the Two State Vision may be seen as far from reality for both sides.

Israeli Foreign Policy – Where It Is Going (Or Should Go) Ahead?

The regional processes, described above, expanded Israel's room for maneuvering, regionally and internationally, and significantly strengthened the self-confidence in Israeli foreign policy. The regional cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean on the one hand, and the Abraham Accords on the other, have proven that it is possible to develop a regional system, in which Israel plays a central and constructive role, illustrating the meeting of interests created fascinatingly, between Israel and many actors in the region. It is important to add, to that reality, the thaw in relations between Israel and Türkiye, including visits by the highest levels in both countries and the

return of political representation to the level of ambassadors. Turkish foreign policy has recently been characterized by improving and restoring relations with a series of countries in the region, beyond Israel - Saudi Arabia, the Gulf countries, and Egypt.

So, What Are The Challenges Facing Israeli Foreign Policy These Days?

This paper corresponds well with the current political reality in Israel, with the entrance of a new government in Israel. The administration will be required, it is assumed, to formulate an up-to-date foreign policy in light of and on the basis of the developments we have described. The war in Ukraine is exacerbating the Israeli dilemma regarding the proper policy, in the face of the ever-escalating Russian-Western conflict. Israel's affiliation with the Western camp is completely clear. Still, its precise expressions are not fully consolidated, regarding the degree of assistance it requires to Ukraine, and the consequences on the relationship with Moscow, including on the Syrian arena and vis-a-vis Iran. It is therefore requested to illuminate, and even suggest, a few desirable courses of action for Israel's foreign policy.

The Eastern Mediterranean

The challenge facing Israel (and the region) is twofold: how to deepen the regional architecture built in recent years, and at the same time inviting important players who were absent from it to integrate into this fabric constructively. This is of course, mainly in relation to Türkiye, and in a different way also to Lebanon. The Israeli - Lebanese agreement, which was signed not long ago, is a siren of regional reassurance and presents Lebanon with a challenging but promising way to integrate into these regional processes. The Turkish angle is challenging and promising at the same time. Israel's foreign policy has proven in recent years that it knows how to recognize a window of opportunity that opens before it, and to manipulate it properly.

The close relationship, and the high level of trust, that Israel has developed and deepened with countries such as Egypt, Greece and Cyprus should help strengthen the relationship between Israel and Türkiye. The last few years have proven, to a large extent, that it is possible to conduct diplomacy that is not necessarily based on a zero-sum game. In other words, Israel needs to improve its relationship with Türkiye, alongside its close and excellent relations with the other regional players. Türkiye's integration into the regional system is essential, even if it is not easy. **Israel should and can play a constructive role** in this, precisely based on the trust it enjoys and, of course its strategic relationship with the U.S. The growing attractiveness of the energy discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean for Europe and the West can help with this. This is another window of opportunity. The last decade has proven that countries in the region knew how to recognize it and step in. The

thinking around regional energy hubs, which implies competition or rivalry, must be put aside, and instead develop a variety of channels for cooperation, in which each country contributes its relative advantages.

The Abraham Accords

The rationale of these agreements reflects the shared sense of threat on the one hand, and the enormous potential inherent in regional cooperation, and in all fields, on the other hand. The relationship between the countries illustrated that there is no contradiction between the two. Israel's challenge is twofold: deepening the cooperation and expanding it, while "marketing" the model that stands at its foundation to the entire region. A central and most promising course of action can and should be in the connection between the two regional arrays - the Eastern Mediterranean and the Gulf.

There are multiple areas of cooperation, but it is appropriate that they focus on the connection, or the interface, between energy and the climate crisis. The climate conference in Egypt (COP27), which is currently taking place, and the future conference next year in Dubai (COP28) are a fascinating illustration of the required agenda in terms of the region. Israel, and its technological capabilities in the various relevant fields, can and must contribute and integrate into this.

The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

The absence of political discourse, or any political process, between the two sides was explained on the basis of the dramatic regional developments in the last decade. **However, inaction cannot be a policy.** Inaction pushes both sides to contradicting corners and promote, not necessary by an active way, the "one state" chaotic reality. Therefore, it is requested to lay the foundation for the renewal of a political process in preparation for more possible and practical circumstances down the road. Israel must harness the successful and fascinating regional strategies that have emerged in recent years, the improved self-confidence because of its positive integration in regional affairs, and the interests of most regional players to contribute to conflict resolution, in order to place the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on constructive lines. This challenge is presented to both sides, Israel, and the region: to encourage both public opinions and political arenas in Israel and Palestine to look towards the two-state vision in a more positive and sober light.

Concluding Remarks

It is of extreme importance to emphasize the fascinating and challenging reality lay

again ahead of us: Never before the East Mediterranean enjoyed such promising, and at the same time, escalating circumstances. The present architecture built in recent years has proved what could be achieved when actors recognize a window of opportunity and jump through it. But it hasn't completed its mission. It is so important and possible, to conclude this process, no matter how challenging it may be.

ISRAEL'S RIGHTWARD PULL VERSUS REGIONAL RAPPROCHEMENT

The Abraham Accords of 2020 were Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's proudest foreign policy achievement. They were applauded in Israel and the United States but were met with more skepticism by the Arab public because they lacked any satisfaction of Palestinian demands for statehood. Netanyahu, who won Israel's recent election and is slated to become prime minister once again as soon as his government is in place, would like to enlarge the Accords signatories to more Arab states, especially Saudi Arabia, but may be stymied by his far-right coalition partners, whose agenda is based on expanding settlements, annexing the West Bank with no regard for its Palestinian population, and making Israel more religiously Jewish. This will almost certainly lead to violence, perhaps even a new intifada, as the West Bank is already seething. Western and Arab leaders have expressed their concern about the leaders of Israel's far right parties, some with histories of violence, becoming government ministers. There is good reason to believe that not only are the Accords unlikely to expand but, rather, may contract if Arab leaders see headlines of violence, with Palestinians being killed by Israeli forces. The government must be formed by mid-December and while Netanyahu will lead it, its policies may destroy the Accords, his pride and joy.

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Israel's once and now presumptive prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, may face new and challenging internal obstacles to his presumed hopes for expanding the Abraham Accords, his signature foreign policy achievement in 2020 (along with then-President Trump). The Accords themselves appeared unexpectedly at a critical moment in August of that year, just when he was widely expected to annex part of the West Bank, pursuant to President Trump's invitation to do so. Instead, too much of the world's astonishment, he unexpectedly announced that diplomatic relations were to be opened between Israel and the United Arab Emirates. It was generally understood that this was pursuant to a quid pro quo: Israel would not annex, and the UAE would extend diplomatic relations. Its example was shortly followed by Morocco and Bahrain, which received their own quid pro quos[1] via the United States. This initiative was christened as the Abraham Accords.

The Accords were immediately and almost universally popular in Israel, though much less so in the Arab world, including among the populace of Israel's new diplomatic partners. Like previous treaties with Egypt and Jordan, these are government-to-government affairs, and the public gets little say. Netanyahu and other rightist politicians proclaimed that this had finally proved their long-held conviction that Israeli-Palestinian peace was not the necessary prelude to a broader Israeli-Arab peace, insisting that the new diplomatic facts spoke for themselves. Meanwhile, Palestinian President Abbas denounced the Abraham Accords. The Palestinian Authority has held itself completely aloof from them and from projects begun under their framework, such as a tripartite electricity for water deal[2] between Israel and Jordan, financed by the UAE. Israeli vacationers soon flocked to the beaches of Abu Dhabi and Israeli businessmen and government officials became regular visitors to Gulf states, including those that did not yet have relations with Israel, such as Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Qatar, which reportedly hosted 30,000 Israelis for the World Cup.[3]

In the immediate prelude to the current situation, after its 4th election in two years, Israel formed a short-lived "Government of Change" in June 2021 in place of Netanyahu's, which likewise celebrated the Abraham Accords. However, it was unable to expand them to other Arab states. Some speculated that President Biden's visit to Saudi Arabia in July 2022 might herald such relations but, predictably,

[1] Joel Singer, "The Abraham Accords: Normalization Agreements Signed by Israel with the U.A.E., Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco," *International Legal Materials*, Vol. 60, No. 3 (2021): p. 448–63. doi:10.1017/ilm.2021.18

[2] Bruce Riedel and Natan Sachs, "ORDER FROM CHAOS: Israel, Jordan, And The UAE's Energy Deal Is Good News," *Brookings*, 23 November 2021. https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2021/11/23/israel-jordan-and-the-uaes-energy-deal-is-good-news/

[3] "30,000 Israelis to travel to Qatar for World Cup," *Middle East Monitor*, 8 November 2022. https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20221108-30000-israelis-to-travel-to-qatar-for-world-cup/

nothing occurred beyond the famous fist bump. Instead, relations between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia sharply worsened in October, 2022, when Riyadh, together with Russia and the OPEC+ nations, announced a production cut, with the ostensible goal of keeping the price high. The U.S. government cried betrayal and vowed retaliation for its humiliation, though it now is carrying out a re-evaluation[4] of the relationship. Israel has wisely remained uninvolved and still hoped that the expected recognition might occur, perhaps when the aged and ailing nominal King, Salman bin Abdul Aziz, passes away and Mohammed bin Sultan becomes king of the country he has ruled in all but name since 2015.

> *"It is a political curiosity that the left and right are apparently aligned regarding the Accords, but only the right's opposition is of political significance. That became painfully obvious in the election of 1 November 2022, which brought the pro-Netanyahu bloc back to power with a comfortable 65-seat majority in the 120-seat Knesset."*

The Abraham Accords did not overjoy two utterly disparate groups of Jewish Israelis. The far right, composed of extreme nationalists, most of whom combine it with religion, has since 1967 sought the official annexation of the West Bank by Israel, regarding it as the ancient heartland of the Jewish people which the State of Israel must retain at all costs. Certainly, no part of it could be turned into a Palestinian state, the solution overwhelmingly preferred by the world community, but which had long been abandoned as a serious option by most Israelis, and never even considered by the right. Netanyahu himself has no use for a Palestinian state, but through his whole political career has invariably sought to maintain the status quo, with Israelis free to settle in the 132 existing "official" settlements and 147 outposts[5] (unofficial settlements tacitly allowed by recent Israeli governments), with a settler population in 2021 of 465,000 (not including East Jerusalem). The far right regards Netanyahu's comparative pragmatism as politically and religiously unacceptable, but has been willing to tie itself politically to him as the paramount figure on the Israeli right since he returned to the prime minister's office in 2009.

[4] Jonathan Guyer, "Why America can't seem to quit Saudi Arabia," *Vox*, 17 November 2022. https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2022/11/17/23423031/why-america-cant-seem-to-quit-saudi-arabia

[5] Peace Now, "Data: Population," *Peace Now,* https://peacenow.org.il/en/settlements-watch/settlements-data/population

The far right had to bide its time through 2021-22 while the anti-Netanyahu "Government of Change" was in power. Although the prime minister for most of its tenure was Naphtali Bennett, leader of a different far-right party formally committed to annexation, the government was constrained by the coalition agreement with its disparate partners, including two small center-left parties and an Arab and Islamist one, to take no new steps regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The extreme right, represented by the Religious Zionism party, sitting in the opposition during the Change Government, had to wait for the next election in hopes of a Netanyahu government in which it could exert some leverage.

The other group dismayed by the Abraham Accords was the political opposite of Religious Zionism, namely, the shrunken Israeli left, whose main raison d'etre since the 1980s had been the pursuit of an Israeli-Palestinian peace based (for most of them) on a two-state solution. They had long ridiculed the notion, increasingly championed by Netanyahu, that peace with the Arab world was possible without prior reconciliation with the Palestinians. When the Abraham Accords suddenly turned the tables, they could not denounce it, but have not yet formulated a policy that takes into account the apparent abandonment of the Palestinians by many of the western-oriented Arab states, in return for a peace based on a shared anti-Iranian belligerence, plus presumed economic benefits. It should be noted that this is not the so-called "Zionist Left," represented by the Meretz and Labor parties, which had reservations about the Accords but voted for them anyway. Instead, it was the now-defunct Joint List, represented in the new Knesset by the predominantly Arab Hadash-Taal party, as well as non-parliamentary groups such as the website 972.[6] Most attention has focused on the alarm felt by the Accords' Arab signatories. Still, there is also reason for concern that the Israeli far-right might bring them down in pursuit of its traditional objective to secure and settle a Greater Israel.

It is a political curiosity that the left and right are apparently aligned regarding the Accords, but only the right's opposition is of political significance. That became painfully obvious in the election of 1 November 2022, which brought the pro-Netanyahu bloc back to power with a comfortable 65-seat majority in the 120-seat Knesset.

This article is written amid the coalition negotiations that will decide on the makeup of the new government as well as its policies. Netanyahu, confident in his ability to control his coalition partners, had publicly assured the country that these negotiations, unlike most in Israel, would be finished in two weeks, but they are

[6] Haggai Matar, "If you're pro-peace, reject this peace," *+972 Magazine*, 29 October 2020. https://www.972mag.com/zionist-left-netanyahu-abraham-accords/

currently deadlocked. While the ultimate result can't be predicted, the battle lines are clear, and the new government's probable policies, enforced on Netanyahu by his coalition partners from the far right, will likely seriously impact the future of the Abraham Accords and possibly its relationships with a host of other countries, perhaps including the United States.

> *"Apart from being responsible for the IDF, the defense minister is also the virtual ruler of the West Bank and of all the Palestinians living there. The territory is under military control (even the portion nominally governed by the Palestinian Authority) and all policies and practices affecting its inhabitants are under the jurisdiction of the defense minister, including settlement permissions and policies, to the extent not specified by legislation."*

It should be noted that most Israeli rightwing extremists have nothing inherently against Israeli peace with Arab countries. Unlike an old stereotype of Zionism as essentially expansionist, they do not seek to acquire or control land outside the borders of the historic Land of Israel.[7] They are neutral to positive on the Abraham Accords, so long as Israel has a free hand in the religiously defined "Land of Israel." And therein lies the problem,[8] and the complications. There is good reason for concern that the Israeli far-right might bring down the Abraham Accords in pursuit of its traditional objective to secure and settle a "Greater Israel".

Three weeks after the election, Religious Zionism dissolved into its original three component parties: a shrunken Religious Zionism (7 seats), led by Bezalel Smotrich,[9] who emphasizes changing Israel into a state governed by Jewish religious law; the Jewish Power party (6 seats), led by Itamar Ben-Gvir, who, like his mentor, Meir Kahane advocates suppressing Arabs, whether in Israel proper or in the

[7] There is a partial exception with regard to Jordan, the western part of which was indeed specified in the Bible as being part of the "promised land," and all of Jordan was included in the original Palestine mandate from the League of Nations in 2022. Though the Israeli right used to sing about owning the "two banks of the Jordan," this now appears to be a political dead letter.

[8] Meron Rapoport, "Israel: Netanyahu asked the world to forget the occupation. Ben-Gvir wants it front and centre," *Middle East Eye*, 22 November 2022, https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/israel-netanyahu-ask-world-forget-occupation-ben-gvir-front-centre

[9] Ben Caspit, "US apprehensive Netanyahu will nominate far-right defense minister," *al-monitor*, 15 November 2022. https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2022/11/us-apprehensive-netanyahu-will-nominate-far-right-defense-minister

West Bank; and Noam (1 seat), whose primary goal is awakening Israelis to the existential danger of LGBTQ+ rights (Israel is generally progressive in this area). They combined under pressure from Netanyahu before the election, who was afraid that separately one might fall below the minimum vote threshold of 3.25 percent (as actually happened to two leftwing parties, thus inflating Netanyahu‘s Knesset majority). They do not disagree on policy but their emphases, and even more the personalities of their leaders, differ and frequently clash. However, the dissolution should help Netanyahu, who will be under less pressure to give major ministerial posts to smaller parties than to the second-largest coalition member.

Ben-Gvir was technically number two in Religious Zionism, but he is the current phenomenon and bad boy of Israeli politics, wielding more power than his position now as leader of the coalition's second smallest party (after Noam) should entitle him. When he was 18, the Israeli army refused to draft him, citing his extremist associations, and he was later convicted of incitement to riot. For decades, he was closely associated with Meir Kahane's followers, the extremist Israeli-American rabbi and one-time Knesset member who was assassinated in 1991. Kahane advocated expulsion of Arabs from Israel and a racist program that has been compared to the Nazi Nuremberg laws. Ben-Gvir has ostensibly moderated his views in the last year to avoid what Kahane had suffered: exclusion from running for the Knesset because of extremist views. The difference is that Kahane was ostentatiously ignored and isolated by all other Knesset members in the 1980's while Ben-Gvir is a power broker and about to become a minister.

The most significant dispute, however, in the messy process of forming a government has been over Smotrich's demand that he be made Defense Minister or, as a second choice, Finance Minister. These are significant posts, that usually go to either the coalition's dominant partner (not infrequently kept by the Prime Minister) or the leader of a major party. The former almost invariably goes to a very senior general-turned-politician (such as the incumbent from the outgoing government, former IDF Chief of Staff Benny Gantz) or occasionally to a very experienced national security figure. Smotrich's military experience was as a clerk, and a majority of Israelis consider him unfit for the job, Netanyahu contends that the Finance Ministry has been promised to the Sephardi ultra-Orthodox party Shas, with 11 seats now the Likud's largest coalition partners. It now appears Smotrich will get Finance, or perhaps serve in a rotation[10] with Shas's leader, Aryeh Deri. But the real reason

[10] Michael Hauser Tov, "Likud Demands Ministry Legal Adviser Revamp; Dery, Smotrich Mull Finance Ministry Rotation," *Haaretz*, 22 November 2022. https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2022-11-22/ty-article/.premium/negotiations-continue-over-proposal-to-rotate-finance-ministry-between-dery-and-smotrich/00000184-a084-d199-ade4-ebc778340000

Netanyahu is determined[11] not to allow the far right to have the defense ministry, apart from Smotrich incessantly criticizing him, relates directly to the Abraham Accords.

Apart from being responsible for the IDF, the defense minister is also the virtual ruler of the West Bank and of all the Palestinians living there. The territory is under military control (even the portion nominally governed by the Palestinian Authority) and all policies and practices affecting its inhabitants are under the jurisdiction of the defense minister, including settlement permissions and policies, to the extent not specified by legislation. Smotrich wants to control[12] this, which is what he has promised his constituency, and he makes no secret of his intention to expand settlements and crack down hard on the Palestinian population. Netanyahu, who has always supported settlements, has nevertheless kept some limits on them and attempted to avoid what might be seen as "excessive" violence because he tries to keep Israel's relations with the world community – especially the U.S. of course – from deteriorating too far. Since 2020 this has also included improving relations with the Abraham Accords countries. It will be much harder to achieve this balance with the far right inside the government, and Netanyahu has already agreed[13] to legalize settlement in an area in the northern West Bank that was banned in 2005. Abraham Accords countries do not want to see headlines like that, especially not about violence against Palestinians.

Netanyahu rightly fears that with the actions Smotrich could take as Defense Minister, or even as Finance Minister, Israel's relationships with much of the world would deteriorate rapidly, with Arab countries perhaps even breaking newly forged diplomatic relations. State Department spokesman Ned Price said pointedly[14] "We hope that all Israeli government officials will continue to share the values of an open, democratic society," which allows Netanyahu to tell Smotrich that an Israeli Defense Minister cannot function[15] without American support (a finance minister somewhat less so). Moreover, the United Nations General Assembly has just asked[16]

[11] Danny Zaken, "Netanyahu tells Arab leaders Smotrich won't be defense minister," *Globe*, 20 November 2022. https://en.globes.co.il/en/article-netanyahu-tells-arab-leaders-smotrich-wont-be-defense-minister-1001430370

[12] Ben Caspit, "US apprehensive Netanyahu will nominate far-right defense minister," *al-monitor*, 15 November 2022. https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2022/11/us-apprehensive-netanyahu-will-nominate-far-right-defense-minister

[13] Michael Hauser Tov and Jonathan Lis, "Netanyahu, Ben-Gvir Agree to Legalize West Bank Settlement Evacuated in 2005," *Haaretz*, 16 November 2022. https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2022-11-16/ty-article/.premium/netanyahu-ben-gvir-agree-to-legalize-west-bank-settlement-evacuated-in-2005/00000184-8245-dd3b-a5bf-c6453bb90000

[14] Jacob Magid, "US: We hope all Israeli officials will uphold our shared democratic values," *The Times of Israel*, 2 November 2022. https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/us-we-hope-all-israeli-officials-will-uphold-our-shared-democratic-values/

[15] Ben Caspit, "US apprehensive Netanyahu will nominate far-right defense minister," *al-monitor*, 15 November 2022. https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2022/11/us-apprehensive-netanyahu-will-nominate-far-right-defense-minister

[16] Jonathan Shamir, "Israel's Occupation and the International Court of Justice: What Happens Next?," *Haaretz,* 15 November 2022. https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2022-11-15/ty-article/.premium/israels-occupation-and-the-international-court-of-justice-what-happens-next/00000184-7b5c-d6bd-a9fc-7bdf23260000

the International Court of Justice in the Hague for its opinion on whether Israel's 55-year occupation of the West Bank by now constitutes virtual annexation in defiance of international law, as well as whether Israel is committing the crime of apartheid in its treatment of Palestinians. The U.S. opposed the measure, which was overwhelmingly carried by 98 to 17.

In addition, the West Bank has been seething for months, with almost nightly IDF raids on armed Palestinian militants, and a West Bank death toll not seen since the waning days of the Second intifada in 2005. The head of the Shin Bet security service reportedly has warned[17] the incoming prime minister of the genuine likelihood of a new intifada breaking out imminently. This is compounded by the advanced age of the unpopular Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas (he just turned 87 on November 15), who is in the 18th year of a 4-year term and has no obvious successor.

There is good reason to believe the Abraham Accords states would react sharply to policies imposed by a new far-right government, even without Smotrich at Defense. Indeed, Emirati Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed expressed concerns[18] about it when he visited Israel before the elections. While it can be assumed that no diplomatic action will be taken before the government is formed, which will likely be about Dec. 18, it is very possible that the widespread anger in at least some of the Abraham Accords states may persuade their governments to withdraw their newly appointed ambassadors. It is hard to imagine that any more Arab states, especially the big prize, Saudi Arabia, will "normalize" relations with this government in power. However, Netanyahu has surprised analysts before, but trying to control this upcoming government will likely be the most challenging test of his long political career.

[17] Toi Staff, "Shin Bet head said to warn Netanyahu PA could collapse, worsening security situation," *The Times of Israel*, 19 November 2022, https://www.timesofisrael.com/report-shin-bet-chief-warns-netanyahu-on-dangers-of-pa-collapse-resulting-violence/

[18] Barak Ravid, "Scoop: Emirati FM tells Netanyahu he is concerned about ultra-right coalition," *Axios*, 26 October 2022. https://www.axios.com/2022/10/26/uae-israel-netanyahu-ultra-right-itamar-ben-gvir

TRENDS IN THE TERRORIST THREATS AGAINST TÜRKİYE AND ITS COUNTERTERRORISM MEASURES

To assess the magnitude of the terrorist threats facing Türkiye and the nature and effectiveness of its counterterrorism (CT) campaign, this analysis is divided into two parts. The first part presents an overview of the terrorist threats facing the country by the major terrorist groups that threaten it. The second part provides an overview of the government's security agencies involved in the CT campaign and an assessment of their response measures vis-à-vis the spectrum of terrorist threats facing the country.

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Part I: The Terrorist Threats Facing Türkiye

Türkiye, with an estimated eighty-five million population, faces a high threat from terrorist attacks by primarily domestic Kurdish insurgents (many of whom are also based in their safe havens in neighboring Syria and Iraq). Islamic State (IS) operatives present a second terrorist threat, some of whom are based in Türkiye (as either domestically radicalized Islamists or mostly based in Syria).

In another type of terrorist threat, although Iranian security services have not conducted a terrorist attack against their adversaries residing in Türkiye, the Israeli government has been concerned that Iranian operatives might attack Israeli businessmen and tourists in the country. Iran's motivation to attack Israelis in Türkiye was due to retaliation against Israel's targeted assassinations of Iranian nuclear scientists and security officials in Iran and Syria. As a result, in 2022, for example, on May 30, June 13, and November 13, Israel's National Security Council issued travel warnings to Israeli businessmen and tourists in Türkiye to maintain the highest security vigilance following reported plots by Iranian operatives to target Israelis in the country.

Specifically, Türkiye faces terrorist threats from two primary types of adversaries. The first and longest running threat is presented by Kurdish terrorist groups, particularly the Partiya Karkaren Kurdistan (PKK), also known as Kurdistan Workers Party, and the Turkish Freedom Falcons (TAK). The second threat, from the Islamic State (IS – also known as ISIL or Daesh), emanates from the neighboring Syrian civil war, which escalated in 2011, and with several hundred thousand Syrian refugees flowing into neighboring Türkiye, some of whom were radicalized into IS-type militancy.

While most terrorist attacks in Türkiye can be attributed to their terrorist group organizers, some have been difficult to attribute. In the latest example, on 13 November 2022, it was reported that an explosive-filled bag was detonated by a female operative on Istiklal Avenue in Istanbul's Beyoğlu district, killing six people and injuring 81 others.[1] No terrorist group has claimed responsibility for the attack, although the Turkish Interior Minister, Süleyman Soylu, formally accused the PKK of responsibility for the attack.[2]

[1] Aljazeera, "Explosion in the Heart of Turkey's Istanbul kills 6, wounds 81," (13 November 2022). https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/11/13/turkey-istanbul-explosion-istiklal-several-injured

[2] The Guardian, "Istanbul Bombing: 46 detanied as Turkey Minister Blames Kurdish Separatists," (14 November 2022). https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/nov/14/istanbul-bombing-suspect-arrested-as-turkey-minister-blames-kurdish-separatists

Kurdish Terrorist Threats

Kurds constitute the largest ethnic minority in Türkiye, estimated in 2022 to constitute 18 percent of the country's population.[3] The Kurds are indigenous inhabitants of south-eastern Türkiye (with neighboring Kurdish communities in north-eastern Syria, northern Iraq, north-western Iran, and south-western Armenia).

> *"The YPG are the armed wing of the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Unity Party (PYD). While they are considered by Western governments as effective forces against IS in Syria, they are regarded by Türkiye as an extension of the PKK, resulting in Turkish cross-border military attacks against them."*

Beginning in the 1960s and 1970s, an increasingly significant portion of Türkiye's ethnic Kurds began to demand cultural, linguistic, and political rights as Kurds. The unwillingness of successive Turkish governments to resolve these demands was one of the factors leading to the creation of several Kurdish insurgent groups in the late 1970s. The human toll of this conflict has been high, with an estimated 40,000 people killed in Turkish-Kurdish clashes from the mid-1980s through early 2016.[4]

The Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan (PKK)

The Partiya Karkaren Kurdistan (PKK), also known as Kurdistan Workers Party, is the most prominent Kurdish terrorist group. It was established in November 1978 by Abdullah Ocalan, who became its long-time leader. A Marxist-Leninist group, it called for the establishment of an independent Kurdish state within Türkiye. The PKK launched its insurgency in August 1984. In the 1990s, the PKK scaled back on its demands for an independent Kurdish state, advocating for greater autonomy for the Kurds. In 1999, the PKK experienced a major blow when Ocalan was arrested and jailed for treason. As of late 2022, he was still imprisoned.

At its peak in 1993, the PKK numbered some 10,000 fighters and approximately 60,000 part-time fighters, which by 2000 had reduced to between 3,000 and 4,000

[3] Fanack, "Population of Turkey," (11 August 2020). https://fanack.com/turkey/population-of-turkey/

[4] Berkay Mandıracı, "Turkey's PKK Conflict: The Death Toll," *Crisis Group*, 20 July 2016. https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/western-europemediterranean/turkey/turkey-s-pkk-conflict-death-toll

fighters. In 2022 it was estimated there were approximately 5,000 PKK operatives, with most of them located in northern Iraq, along the Turkish-Iraqi border, with others located in Syria, along the border with Türkiye.

Following three decades of conflict with the PKK, in late 2012 the Turkish government and PKK leader, Ocalan, initiated a peace process, which led to a cease-fire around March 2013. However, in July 2015, the PKK announced an end to the cease-fire and re-started its armed attacks against Türkiye's security forces and military bases.[5] This led to large-scale operations by Turkish security forces against the PKK, whether inside Türkiye or across the border with Syria.

Inside northern Syria, along the Turkish border, there are Kurdish Popular Protection Units (YPG) fighters, where they have been carving out a self-declared autonomous region known as Rojava. The YPG are the armed wing of the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Unity Party (PYD). While they are considered by Western governments as effective forces against IS in Syria, they are regarded by Türkiye as an extension of the PKK, resulting in Turkish cross-border military attacks against them.

Kurdistan Freedom Falcons (TAK)

The TAK, a highly secretive organization, was established as a break-away faction of the PKK. It was established around 1999 when the PKK was designated by the Turkish government as an illegal terrorist organization. It seeks an independent Kurdish state in eastern and south-eastern Türkiye. At the beginning of its operations, its strength was estimated at 300 operatives, but the current amount active is unknown. Its first major terrorist operation took place in January 2005. It has continued to launch attacks in subsequent years, including several in 2015 and 2016.

Islamic State (IS)

The Islamic State is the second most lethal terrorist threat against Türkiye. IS operatives attack mostly target civilians in popular places such as tourist sites in the country's cities.

On one level, IS's attacks against Turkish targets are part of the blowback for Ankara's previously relatively lax control of its long border with Syria. This open border enabled thousands of foreign nationals to exploit it as a transit route to join terrorist groups such as the ANF and IS in their insurgencies against the Syrian

[5] Humeyra Pamuk, "Three Turkish Soldiers killed as PKK Steps Up Attacks After Air Strikes," *Reuters*, (2 August 2015). https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-mideast-crisis-turkey-attack-idUKKCN0Q703520150802

regime – also Ankara's adversary. Once Türkiye began cracking down on the use of its territory by these foreign nationals, the IS in particular, began to mobilize its operatives in Türkiye to conduct terrorist attacks in-country.

> *"Türkiye in formulating its terrorism watch list, and upgrading its border security, aviation security, and law enforcement investigations. Türkiye also permits the use of its Incirlik airbase in the southern city of Adana by American fighter aircraft to launch airstrikes against IS targets in Syria. At times, however, such cooperation has been marred by disagreements over U.S. and European backing of Kurdish insurgent forces in Syria that Türkiye views as affiliates of the PKK, which its own military forces attack in cross-border raids."*

The IS has also launched several attacks in Türkiye that targeted Israeli tourists. On 19 March 2016, a suicide bombing attack in Istanbul by a Turkish-based IS operative killed three Israeli tourists, with six others injured.[6]

Overall, IS's motivations to attack Türkiye are driven by the following factors:

- Türkiye's retaliatory offensives against its fighters following IS terrorist operations in Türkiye,
- Türkiye's intensification of its surveillance and arrest of potential jihadi operatives from countries around the world who attempt to use Türkiye as a crossing point into Syria, with 2,337 foreigners suspected of planning to cross the border into Syria detained in 2015,
- The arrest of IS terrorists based in Türkiye,
- Türkiye's alliance with Western nations, particularly the U.S., in targeting IS positions in Syria,
- Türkiye's re-establishment of diplomatic, economic, and military ties with Israel,
- The opposition to their own government of some several thousand Turkish

[6] Times of Israel, "3 Israelis said killed, at least 11 others hurt in Istanbul bombing," (19 March 2016). https://www.timesofisrael.com/explosion-rocks-major-istanbul-shopping-street-reports/

nationals who became radicalized into Islamist extremism and joined IS in Syria, and, like their counterparts from other Western countries, having some of them instructed by IS to conduct attacks in Türkiye upon their return.

Part II: Assessing the Effectiveness of the Turkish Government's Counterterrorism Response Measures

The Turkish government's overall counterterrorism campaign seeks several objectives. First, Ankara seeks to militarily defeat the PKK's and TAK's domestic insurgency and force them to withdraw their operatives from Türkiye, even, if possible, without an agreed-upon political settlement of Kurdish demands. Second, by achieving these objectives, Türkiye would also be able to lessen the military threat presented by the YPD's control of an estimated 265 miles of territory along the porous 565-mile Turkish-Syrian border. Finally, Türkiye seeks to eliminate the threat presented by IS terrorist operatives in Türkiye through law enforcement, intelligence, and military measures, and to create an IS-free zone along its border with Syria. In this case, given IS's extremist and uncompromising demands, a political settlement with this jihadi group is deemed impossible.

In general, Türkiye's counterterrorism campaign consists of three components: first, agencies involved in law enforcement, intelligence, and military measures; secondly, countering violent extremism; and, finally, cooperation with regional and international partners.

Government Agencies Involved in Counterterrorism

The primary Turkish government bodies involved in managing and executing the country's counterterrorism campaign consist of intelligence, law enforcement and military agencies. At the top, under the Prime Ministry's Under Secretariat, are the National Security Council and the National Intelligence Organization (MİT). Under this echelon are the Strategic Analysis Directorate, the Counter-Intelligence Directorate, the External Operations Directorate, the Security Intelligence Directorate, the Electronic and Technical Intelligence Directorate, the Signals Intelligence Directorate (SİB), and the Under Secretariat of Public Order and Security (KDGM) – a semi-dependent, internal security service.

In terms of the military component of counterterrorism, the responsible agencies include the Joint Chief of Staff Intelligence Bureau, the Army Intelligence Bureau, the Navy Intelligence Bureau, the Air Force Intelligence Bureau, the Coast Guard Intelligence Bureau, the Gendarmerie Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism Bureau

(allegedly known as JİTEM) and the Gendarmerie Intelligence Organization.

The Interior Ministry (IM) is the primary agency responsible for countering terrorism. Under the IM are two counterterrorism agencies: the Turkish National Police (TNP) and Turkish Gendarmerie (TG) forces. In this organizational framework, responsibilities for countering terrorism are divided according to the two agencies' geographical jurisdiction. Thus, the TNP, and its Counter-Terrorism Department, are responsible for policing urban areas, while the TG is responsible for maintaining security in the country's rural areas. Finally, the TNP's Intelligence Department (ID) collects terrorism-related intelligence throughout the country's urban and rural regions. The ID's International Relations Section also shares terrorism-related intelligence with Türkiye's foreign counterpart police agencies.

Other government services also involved in counterterrorism (or the more defensively focused anti-terrorism), such as the Ministry of Finance, Financial Crimes Investigation Unit (MASAK), and the Ministry of Customs, Customs Enforcement.

Countering Violent Extremism

A second component of counterterrorism involves countering the violent extremism that gives rise to terrorism. The Turkish government has established several programs to counter violent extremism. These include an outreach program administered by the Turkish National Police to reach vulnerable populations and prevent their recruitment into terrorism. Another program is administered by the government's Religious Affairs Office (Diyanet) to counter violent extremist messaging. Yet, no effectiveness metrics or examples of programmatic success by these programs in turning vulnerable populations away from PKK/TAK or IS violent extremism are available to determine the effectiveness of such programs.

Regional and International CT Cooperation

With terrorist groups attaining global reach by taking advantage of porous borders between states and other interconnected international systems, such as in transit, communications (with much of this facilitated by the Internet), and finance — it is essential for effective counterterrorism to include bilateral, regional and international cooperation with counterpart state partners. In this third component, Türkiye's counterterrorism campaign cooperates with regional and international partners. These include NATO allies, including the United States. It has been reported, for example, that CIA Director John Brennan has made several trips to Ankara, including in January 2016, for meetings on counterterrorism operations

with his MIT counterparts. Such cooperation reportedly involves assisting Türkiye in formulating its terrorism watch list, and upgrading its border security, aviation security, and law enforcement investigations. Türkiye also permits the use of its Incirlik airbase in the southern city of Adana by American fighter aircraft to launch airstrikes against IS targets in Syria. At times, however, such cooperation has been marred by disagreements over U.S. and European backing of Kurdish insurgent forces in Syria that Türkiye views as affiliates of the PKK, which its own military forces attack in cross-border raids.

Türkiye also cooperates with other countries' intelligence services whose IS-inspired violent extremists attempt to use Türkiye as a transshipment point into Syria in counter-terrorism information sharing. This reportedly includes a "banned from entry list" of such foreign operatives to prevent their travel into Türkiye as potential foreign fighters.

In a recent development, following a thawing in their diplomatic relations, which were broken in 2008, Turkish and Israeli security services are reported to cooperate in counterterrorism. Although no specific details are available in media sources, this cooperation was formalized in 2022 during the official visits of Israeli President Yitzhak Herzog to Türkiye on March 9, Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid on June 23, and Defense Minister Benny Gantz on October 27.

Türkiye is also a member of international agencies involved in counterterrorism such as the United Nations, NATO, the Committee of Experts on Terrorism, and the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), to which it has also provided secretariat support. It is a member of the Global Coalition to Counter IS, as well as the Working Group on Foreign Terrorist Fighters (WGFTF). It serves as co-chair of the GCTF's Horn of Africa Working Group. Türkiye also participates in the OSCE's expert meetings on the Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism. It is also a member of the International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law, which provides training for judges and prosecutors who handle terrorism cases.

Assessing the Effectiveness of Türkiye's CT Response Measures

Türkiye's counterterrorism response measures against its separatist Kurdish and Islamic State (IS) threats have been vastly exacerbated by several factors, especially the country's internal political turmoil, post-15 July developments, and a hawkish stance against oppositional media and academic circles. These factors led to severe internal political turmoil, resulting in contradictory CT strategies (e.g., battling

IS and Kurdish anti-IS forces at the same time), which have greatly hindered the country's overall CT effectiveness.

First, the July 15-16, 2016 coup attempt against President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and subsequent declaration of a 90-day state of emergency by his government was followed by an escalation in arbitrary police arrests and other coercive military measures against what were perceived as internal threats to regime stability.

Second, the high fatality terrorist attacks by IS in Türkiye, whether in Ankara, Istanbul, or Gaziantep, near the Syrian border, were followed not necessarily by incursions against IS forces in Syria, but by incursions into YPG-held positions along the Syrian-Turkish border. Thus, while Türkiye's stated objective is to fight IS and other jihadi rebel forces in Syria, it is also battling anti-IS Kurdish forces, thereby diminishing the overall fight against IS.

Third, further complicating Türkiye's CT campaign is the fact that although Türkiye is not responsible for the Syrian-based IS – Kurdish conflict, it has spilled over into Türkiye, with IS terrorist operatives using it to attack Kurdish civilian targets. This was demonstrated by the horrific suicide bombing by an IS operative of a Kurdish wedding in Gaziantep, a city near the Syrian border, in which more than 50 people were killed.[7]

Fourth, Türkiye's incursions against the Kurdish anti-IS insurgents, in fact, belied the fact that the Turkish government's Syria policy was filled with other contradictions, as well. Thus, Ankara's stated opposition to President Bashar al-Assad's regime appeared half-hearted. Thus, at the beginning of the Syrian civil war, Türkiye sponsored and trained the reportedly "moderate" anti-Syrian regime Free Syrian Army (FSA) and provided it a safe haven in its territory. Later, however, the improvement in political relations with Russia in September 2016 signaled that Türkiye was not necessarily vehemently opposed to Russia's extensive military involvement in the Syrian civil war on behalf of the Assad regime, which included battling the FSA, Türkiye's supposed ally.

Fifth, moreover, in this regard, Türkiye's permission for the use of its Incirlik airbase in the southern city of Adana by American fighter aircraft to launch airstrikes against IS targets in Syria, also served to complicate the picture of the multi-faceted interventions by different actors in the Syrian civil war from Turkish originated military bases, especially since they, unlike Türkiye, specifically target IS forces, while regarding the anti-IS Kurdish forces as their military allies.

[7] Tim Arango and Ceylan Yeginsu, "Syria's Horrors Visit Turkey again as Bomber Attacks Kurdish Wedding," *The New York Times*, (21 August 2016). https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/22/world/europe/turkey-wedding-attack-i-sis-blamed.html

Sixth, the massive influx of primarily Sunni Syrian refugees into Türkiye since the civil war intensified in 2011, which numbered an estimated 2,726,980 (as of August 25, 2016), out of a total of more than 4.7 million Syrian refugees, included an unknown number of IS sympathizers or operatives, who were intent on attacking not only Türkiye but Western Europe, as well. Here, Türkiye cooperated with its Western allies in attempting to vet these refugees, while receiving Western financial assistance in managing their well-being at their refugee camps.

Seventh, after an initial period in which Türkiye largely tolerated the presence of foreign Sunni Islamists who were using the country as a cross-border transit point into Syria to join the jihadi insurgents – which also served Türkiye's efforts to undermine the Assad regime – the Turkish government began tightening their freedom of movement, which, this time, resulted in a boomerang, as they turned against their previously tolerant Turkish hosts.

Eighth, with Türkiye restoring full diplomatic relations with Israel in June 2016, ending a five-year diplomatic estrangement, IS also targeted this rapprochement, which conducted several attacks in 2016 against Israeli tourists and the Israeli Embassy in Ankara. Türkiye's strengthened cooperation with Israel in counterterrorism, particularly in 2022, has likely upgraded the country's CT capability (although specific details are not publicly known).

Finally, Russia's military intervention in Ukraine in early 2022, which was followed by closer diplomatic and military relations with Türkiye's NATO partners (and, particularly, the United States), has likely led to increased cooperation in countering terrorism – although, the nature and extent of such cooperation are not publicly known.

Conclusion

The insurgent threats against Türkiye by its terrorist adversaries remain unceasing, as demonstrated by the major attacks taking place in 2022. Still, Türkiye's counterterrorism campaign was likely aided by strengthening its diplomatic and military ties with regional partners, such as Israel and NATO, and international partners, such as the United States. With the civil war in Syria still unresolved, and with the Iraqi government unable to exert its rule over the country, as Kurdish and IS terrorists continue to use both countries as their safe haven, the terrorist threats presented by both groups will continue to present counterterrorism challenges to the Turkish government in the coming years.

COMPLEMENTARY FACETS: TÜRKİYE-ISRAEL RELATIONS AND THE ABRAHAM ACCORDS

The Abraham Accords between Israel and four Arab states in 2020 were seen negatively and heavily criticized by Türkiye. At the time they were signed, some interpreted them as a balancing act not only against the rising Iranian threat, but also against Türkiye's growing activism in the region. However, less than two years later, after Türkiye began normalizing its relations with the United Arab Emirates and with Israel, there appear to be several complementary aspects between the Abraham Accords and the Türkiye-UAE and Türkiye-Israel normalization processes. Still, there is room to push even further for trilateral cooperation between Türkiye-Israel-UAE, as these are among the economic powerhouses in the region.

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In August 2022, Türkiye and Israel decided to return high-level diplomatic representation to the respective country and normalize ties between the states. The current attempt at normalization comes at a time when Israel is developing a new set of relationships, most notably with some of the Arab Gulf states. At the same time Ankara is also emphasizing improving relations with these same actors. How do these processes relate to one another? Which aspects are contradictory and which are complementary? Can these processes be combined? While currently these normalizations are occurring in parallel, one may envision trilateral cooperation among the actors in the future. More specifically, there is potential for Israel-UAE-Türkiye to join hands, as these are all regional economic powerhouses, and this may prove to be the leading route for furthering regional cooperation.

Three Normalizations

At the beginning of 2020, Israel and the UAE did not have diplomatic relations with each other, and both countries had tense relations with Türkiye. Between 2020 and 2022, three normalizations happened in parallel, between Jerusalem and Abu Dhabi, Ankara and Abu Dhabi, and Jerusalem and Ankara, and dramatically changed the situation.

Signed in 2020 under the impulsion of U.S. President Donald Trump, the Abraham Accords opened new opportunities for defense and security cooperation between Israel and the UAE. They offered additional possibilities for cooperation on shared interests, including energy, food and water security, and health (together with Morocco and Bahrain, while the agreement with Sudan is yet to be materialized).
After the resolution of the Qatar crisis in January 2021, Türkiye moved to normalize its relations with the UAE. In November 2021, the UAE Crown Prince came for a visit in Türkiye, which was Türkiye's first major success in its 'charm offensive' to repair relations with the countries in the region. A reciprocate visit of the President of Türkiye, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, in the UAE took place in February 2022.
Concerning Türkiye's relations with Israel, President Erdogan had already voiced his desire to repair relations with Israel in December 2020. Israel was cautious in its response to the Turkish overtures since it felt burnt by the collapse of the previous normalization agreement in 2018.

Besides the significant work of the President of Israel, Isaac Herzog, as an indispensable avenue of communication between the sides, three events contributed to the rebuilding of trust between the Israeli side and the Turkish side – one was the quick release of the Israeli tourists that were arrested in Türkiye on the charge of

espionage in November 2021, the second was the cooperation between the Israeli and Turkish intelligence services to quell Iranian plans to harm Israelis on Turkish soil in June 2022 and lastly an aviation agreement was signed in July 2022, in which after more than a decade of disagreement on the subject, Türkiye agreed to Israeli security procedures with regard to Israeli air carriers flying out of Türkiye. These events added to the ongoing discussion over Hamas military activity on Turkish soil, which, while still a point of contention, is an area where Türkiye seems to be attentive to some of Israel's demands.[1]

"Following the aggravation of its regional isolation, accentuated by the election of Joe Biden to the White House and the worsening of the crisis shaking its economy, Türkiye adopted a conciliatory tone and reached out towards all its neighbors in the region, among others, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Israel, and the UAE."

From A Zero-Sum Game to Complementary Processes

The normalization between Türkiye and Israel and the normalization between the UAE and Israel, as part of the Abraham Accords, have had complex connections.

On the one hand, the Abraham Accords and Turkish-Israeli relations have appeared as a zero-sum game in specific fields. First, it weakened the symbolic value of Ankara in the eyes of Israel. When Türkiye recognized Israel in 1949 *de facto* and in 1950 *de jure*, it was then the first Muslim-majority country to do so, and it remained for a long time the only country in the Middle East that acted in this manner. The peace agreements signed with Egypt and Jordan had ended this Turkish exceptionalism, even though Israeli-Jordanian and Israeli-Egyptian relations did not develop as some of the peacemakers had hoped. The Abraham accords, whose name alludes to religious history, dealt an additional blow to the Turkish symbolic value for Israel. With these agreements, good relations with Türkiye are not a key for Israel's integration within its region or within the Muslim world.

In the economic field too, there is a certain competition between Türkiye and the UAE from an Israeli point of view. Abu Dhabi and Dubai present themselves as an

[1] Ahmad Abu Amer, "Hamas Fears Setback in Warming of Israel-Turkey Ties," *Al Monitor* 15 March 2022, Hamas fears setback in warming of Israel-Turkey ties - Al-Monitor: Independent, trusted coverage of the Middle East

alternative to Istanbul both as touristic destinations and as aviation hubs on the way to the Far East. Similarly, the development of energy links between Israel and the UAE could be at the expense of Türkiye. All these fields are considered crucial for the Turkish economy.

Finally, at the time the Abraham accords were signed, some interpreted them as a balancing act not only against the rising Iranian threat but also against Türkiye's growing activism in the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean, where Ankara supported the UAE's rivals, like in Libya or in Qatar, and threatened Israel's new friends in Athens and Nicosia.[2]

Therefore, Ankara's first reaction to the Abraham accords was negative and echoed the Palestinian criticism of the accords. Türkiye objected to the Abraham accords and threatened in August 2020 to suspend diplomatic ties with the UAE and pull out its ambassador from the country as a reaction to the accords.[3] The political cost of the threat was not that high at the time because it was anyhow still in the context of the Qatar crisis, in which Türkiye backed Doha against the other Gulf States. Either way, Türkiye did not follow through on its threats.

With the change of tone in Turkish policy at the end of 2020 and in 2021, part of this zero-sum game was transformed.[4] Following the aggravation of its regional isolation, accentuated by the election of Joe Biden to the White House and the worsening of the crisis shaking its economy, Türkiye adopted a conciliatory tone and reached out towards all its neighbors in the region, among others, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Israel, and the UAE. By choosing to bandwagon the regional alignments happening around it, Ankara thus changed the determinants and the relations between the three normalizations, as mentioned earlier.

Israel's response to Türkiye's appeal also proved that Ankara remained important for Jerusalem's regional policy. The fact that the Israeli government, after some hesitations, answered the Turkish call and accepted to normalize the relations between the two countries within less than two years shows that even the Abraham accords had not revoked Türkiye's importance for Israeli decision leaders. Moreover, compared to the aftermath of the 2016 normalization agreement between Israel and Türkiye, there was a much more impressive list of high-level meetings in the context

[2] Nurşin Ateşoğlu Güney and Vişne Korkmaz, "A New Alliance Axis in the Eastern Mediterranean Cold War: What the Abraham Accords Mean for Mediterranean Geopolitics and Turkey," *Insight Turkey*, 9 March 2021.

[3] Daren Butler and Tuvan Gumrukcu, "Turkey May Suspend Ties with UAE over Israel Deal, Erdogan Says," *Reuters,* 14 August 2020, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-emirates-turkey-idUSKCN25A0ON

[4] Gokhan Cinkara, "Interpreting Turkey's Current Diplomatic Rapprochement Toward the Gulf," *Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington*, 22 March 2022.

of the 2022 normalization – starting already in March 2022 with the visit of President Herzog to Türkiye, followed by Foreign Minister Yair Lapid's visit to Türkiye in June. A meeting between Prime Minister Lapid and President Erdogan in New York in September, a visit of Israel's Minister of Economy and Industry in October in Türkiye, Israel's Minister of Defense visited Ankara in late October, where he met his counterpart and Erdogan, and in November Israel's Minister of Tourism visited Türkiye. The visit of the Defense Minister was quite a surprising development as it was assumed that Türkiye and Israel would find it hard to cooperate again in the defense realm.

"The existing framework between Ankara and Jerusalem has proved valuable in normalizing the relations. President Herzog's personal contacts with Turkish officials created a good basis for his visit to Türkiye in March 2022. Similarly, the relaunch of security cooperation between the two countries relied on existing models, although people activating them had changed."

The normalizations happening since 2020 have strengthened one another. In particular, the end of Turkish hostility to the normalization between Israel and its neighbors had decreased the regional pressure on the normalizing countries. The three processes have both benefitted from and strengthened the atmosphere of reconciliation that has characterized the Middle East since 2020.

Two Different Models of Normalization

For Türkiye, the normalization with Israel and with the UAE had strong similarities. It meant for Erdogan a need to radically change his narrative on two countries that he had presented as regional threats. Benjamin Netanyahu and Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan were frequent targets of the Turkish president's diatribes. However, by presenting his moves as led by realistic motives, he could justify the two U-turns that the normalization with Jerusalem and Abu Dhabi were.

For Israel, on the contrary, the normalization with the UAE and the normalization with Türkiye had very different characteristics.

In the case of the normalization with Türkiye, this was more the rebuilding of

broken ties. Despite their ups and downs, diplomatic ties with Türkiye had never been severed. Trade between the two countries has grown in almost a linear manner in the past decade making Türkiye one of Israel's most important trade partners and Israel a significant trade partner of Türkiye.[5] After a sharp fall in the early 2010s in the number of Israeli tourists traveling to Türkiye, tourism numbers bounced back towards the end of the decade. Intelligence cooperation also remained, albeit on a much smaller scale than was in the 1990s. After Türkiye lifted its veto on Israel's participation in NATO activities in 2016, this was another venue where the countries cooperated, although limitedly.

However, these existing paths for cooperation were balanced by a decade of significant tensions between the two countries. The flotilla incident in May 2010, which resulted in Israeli defense forces killing nine Turkish citizens, caused a shock to bilateral relations. Although relations were tense between the countries from 2008 in the context of Israel's first operation in Gaza, *Operation Cast Lead.,* the flotilla incident was an unprecedented case in which Israel killed Turkish citizens.

Despite the attempt to normalize the situation between the two countries, encouraged by the U.S. President Barack Obama's visit to Israel in 2013, which led to a short-lived normalization agreement in 2016, the relations between Türkiye and Israel during the 2011-2021 decade were characterized by numerous points of friction. The rapprochement between Israel, Greece and the Republic of Cyprus, in itself a consequence of Ankara's assertive tone, was seen in Türkiye as creating a threatening axis. In various Middle-Eastern conflicts, Ankara and Jerusalem found themselves on opposed sides, like in Egypt, where Erdogan supported former President Mohamed Morsi. At the same time, Israel-Egypt relations experienced a significant improvement under the rule of Abdel Fattah El-Sisi. Moreover, the good links between Türkiye and Hamas and Ankara's growing involvement in Jerusalem were negatively perceived by Israel.

Although the Abraham Accords came after years-long discrete contacts between the two sides, Israeli-Emirati relations were in a sense empty when they were signed, both of positive and negative elements—as such, analyzing both processes together also means comparing an enthusiastic, pioneer-spirited, normalization from scratch and improving relations that were once deep and broad but were shadowed by later intense, although indirect or rhetoric, showdowns leading to mistrust between the sides. In other words, can the existing links between Israel and Türkiye be such assets that they balance a decade of antagonism and serve as more efficient fuel than

[5] Lahav Harkov, "Israel to Reopen Trade Office in Istanbul in a Further Sign of Warming Ties," *Jerusalem Post*, 6 July2022, Israel to reopen trade office in Istanbul, in sign of warming ties - The Jerusalem Post (jpost.com)

the positive spirit driving Israeli-Emirati relations?

Given the longevity of Turkish-Israeli relations, one can argue that this relationship has particular strengths and prevailed despite different challenges. The existing framework between Ankara and Jerusalem has proved valuable in normalizing the relations. President Herzog's personal contacts with Turkish officials created a good basis for his visit to Türkiye in March 2022. Similarly, the relaunch of security cooperation between the two countries relied on existing models, although people activating them had changed. Although an important symbolic step, the decision to exchange ambassadors between the two countries in August 2022 was easy to implement since it needed only to come back to a previous situation.

As such, in the short term, Türkiye and Israel's common past has enabled a smoother improvement of their bilateral relations that only needed to be put back on track compared to the Israeli-Emirati relations that had to be built (almost) from zero. However, it remains doubtful if, in the long term, both countries will be able to overcome all their points of frictions while the Jerusalem-Abu Dhabi normalization benefits from the voluntarism shown by both sides.

Between Washington and Ramallah

Beyond the dynamics shaping the development of Israel's relations with Türkiye and the UAE, the two processes may be impacted by developments in the U.S. and the Palestinian territories.

Türkiye, the UAE, and Israel are three countries with essential links to Washington. Israel sees its most important ally in the U.S., and the U.S. administrations have underlined again and again the significance they give to Israel's security as a critical partner in the Middle East. The UAE is also important ally for the Americans, as a significant knot between key strategic arenas and the U.S. support is a major consideration in Abu Dhabi's policy. Despite more tense relations with the U.S. in the last decade, Türkiye remains a crucial NATO member.

The U.S. has played a vital role, sometimes even without actively intervening, in the various normalization processes. This role was pronounced in the case of the Abraham Accords, pushed by Trump and signed in Washington. At a time when the continued U.S. presence in the Middle East remains an issue of debate, both in the U.S. and in the Middle East, opinions differ as if these agreements are an additional U.S. commitment to the region or an attempt to strengthen local allies' cooperation and enable a U.S. withdrawal.

The meeting of Prime Minister Lapid and President Erdogan in New York also highlights the importance of the U.S. angle to Turkish-Israeli relations, with Ankara considering that the road to Washington goes through Jerusalem. While the last three U.S. administrations differed in the level of their involvement in trying to repair Turkish-Israeli relations, it seems clear that Washington favors Jerusalem and Ankara working together. The same can be said of the Turkish-Emirati normalization. However, it is uncertain how long the U.S. will play a positive role in these various processes. Despite Turkish efforts, Ankara and Washington have not fully repaired their relations, and dissensions remain, like the blocking by the U.S. Congress of the Turkish purchase of F-16 fighter jets, the Turkish opposition to the entry of Sweden and Finland to NATO, or the Kurdish issue. The UAE has shown certain autonomy in its foreign policy by developing relations with China beyond what Washington would have wanted. Despite its strong foundations, fragilities have started to appear also in U.S.-Israeli relations.

Given these elements, the normalizations between Israel, Türkiye, and the UAE may have to face a situation in which the U.S. impulse decreases or disappears or, like in the case of an open crisis between Ankara and Washington, the U.S. factor plays against them.

Another important factor is the Palestinian issue. Over the years, Türkiye-Israel relations have been affected by developments in the Israel-Palestinian arena. President Erdogan has positioned himself as one of the most important pro-Palestinian leaders in the Middle East. The UAE also claims that they remain true to the Palestinian cause and the two-state solution.

Both countries have shown since the improvement of their relations with Israel that they could deal with low-intensity cycles of violence between Israelis and Palestinians without severely hurting the ties with Israel. They have also found ways to compensate for the normalizations with gestures towards the Palestinians, at the UN for example.

It is also important to underline that Ankara and Abu Dhabi do not focus on the same Palestinian players. While the UAE has a solid anti-Hamas stance, the group has Türkiye's support. This situation makes it easier for Israel to discuss the Palestinian issue with Emiratis than with Turks. However, an optimistic scenario of the normalizations could include a bridging role of Ankara and Abu Dhabi between the Palestinian groups themselves and with Israel.

As far as more pessimistic scenarios are concerned, Israel's current normalizations

with Türkiye and the UAE have not had the test of an intense showdown between Israel and Palestinians. Such a deflagration or an event focused on Jerusalem, whose probability has increased with the return of Netanyahu to power in Israel and his right-wing coalition, could have repercussions on the relations between Jerusalem and Ankara or Abu Dhabi. Tracks of contacts that do not go directly through the government, like President Herzog, could end up being a key in the capacity of Israel to limit these repercussions.

Looking Ahead

So far, the situation in the region is one of the parallel normalizations or re-normalizations happening simultaneously rather than the construction of a real triangle or regional cooperation. Each partner seems to prefer dealing with the others within the framework of bilateral relations.

However, growing cooperation between the Arab Gulf states, Türkiye, and Israel can lead to several initiatives that will benefit regional stability. Since the Middle East is a 'hotspot' and the effects of climate change are worse in this region, there is also much room for cooperation in the region in mitigating the effects of climate change. As the UAE will host the next UN Climate Change Conference (COP 28), this also opens room for trilateral UAE-Israel-Türkiye environmental cooperation. As Türkiye's trucks usage of Israel's roads to bypass Syria previously exemplified,[6] land and rail routes connection between the Gulf and Israel can be beneficial. The decision of the U.S. central command (CENTCOM) to absorb Israel into its area of responsibility instead of the European command also opens more opportunities for regional cooperation that Türkiye may have an interest to be involved in. Cross-border initiatives that sell religious pilgrimage packages can also be an exciting way to proceed.

Although each of the countries has a different approach to Iran's regional ambitions and diverse points of frictions with them, Iran's becoming a nuclear threshold state and its regional policies are a growing concern.[7] Israel is particularly worried by the strengthening of an Iranian axis from Teheran to Beirut, Türkiye and Iran are rivals in Syria and in Northern Iraq, and the results of the second Nagorno Karabagh war have caused growing tensions between Iran and Azerbaijan – a conflict in which both Israel and Türkiye side with Baku. The UAE sees Iran as the main threat to its national security. The UAE has reacted by developing a range of defensive responses

[6] Ari Rabinovitch and Tova Cohen, "Truck by Truck, Israel Builds Trade Gateway to Arab world," *Reuters,* 1 July 2014,Truck by truck, Israel builds trade gateway to Arab world | Reuters

[7] Fehim Tastekin, "Iran Emerges as Catalyst for Closer Ties on Turkey-UAE-Israel Triangle," Al Monitor, 8 February 2022, Iran emerges as catalyst for closer ties on Turkey-UAE-Israel triangle - Al-Monitor: Independent, trusted coverage of the Middle East

while simultaneously seeking to maintain open economic and diplomatic ties with Iran as much as possible. The UAE's efforts to draw closer to Iran are also designed to balance its image as cooperating with Israel on intelligence and operational matters. Still, while the Iranian threat has been an essential drive in Israel's normalizations with Türkiye and the UAE, the capacity of each country to mobilize the others against Teheran remains unclear. Nonetheless, the fact that these three actors now have more formalized avenues to share information is a possible constraint on Iran's regional ambitions.

ISRAEL'S ONE-STATE REALITY AND THE CHALLENGE OF DEMOCRATIZATION

Decades of massive Israeli settlement of the West Bank reflect a fundamental transformation of Israel from a state with a social democratic ethos to one dominated by a militantly nationalist political culture. Consequently, the two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian problem has become unattainable. De facto Israeli rule of the entire country between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea is not a one-state solution but a one-state reality. The remaining path to a better future for both Jews and Palestinians is the democratization of that state. Factors that can contribute to this process are considered. The struggles and political emancipation of blacks in the United States, Irish Catholics in the United Kingdom, and women in most industrial democracies, suggest this process is likely to take decades or generations rather than months or years, but early signs of change are apparent.

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On 1 November 2022, Israel held its fifth parliamentary election in than four years. Following both elections in 2019, one in 2020 and one in 2021, political divisions, personal hatreds, and partisan squabbling either prevented any coalition majority from forming or yielded governments too weak to agree on a prime minister or to last more than a year or two. This time round it appears that if he can resolve the horse-trading proplems he is likely to face in negotiations with Itamar Ben-Gvir's Jewish supremacist Religious Zionism Party, Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu will return to the Premiership with the support of a narrow but unprecedentedy extreme right-wing coalition.

Meanwhile, the West Bank is on fire. The Palestinian Authority's legitimacy and capacity to enforce Israeli security mandates has disappeared. Waves of Palestinian resistance, including killing at least 20 Israelis, have triggered a massive and bloody reaction. A continuing, and continuing crackdown by the Israeli military features nightly raids into Palestinian cities, widespread use of collective punishment, a rise in vigilante attacks on Palestinians by settlers, more than 180 Palestinians shot to death in 2022, thousands injured, and many more arrested.

Casual observers might imagine that Israel's confrontation with masses of defiant Palestinians is what has produced the political turbulence associated with repeated and indecisive elections. They would be wrong. While the few voices calling for restraint have been drowned out by demands for removing legal restraints on Israeli soldiers operating against Palestinians, the overwhelming majority of Israeli Jews voted this year without thinking much about the nuances of Israeli policy toward Palestinians. This disinterest is reflected in political advertising, which contained virtually no mention of the subject apart from racist and ultranationalist invocations of Palestinians as savage enemies.[1] Instead, argument and invective focused on the personality of former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the redemptive or catastrophic implications of his return to power (depending on your point of view), on the cost of living, and the celebration of the Israeli military and Jewish nationalist values. Israel, in American parlance, used to be a blue state (like New Jersey). In the 1980s and 1990s it was purple (Pennsylvania or Wisconsin). But today, and indeed for the last decade, it is deep red. Think Oklahoma or Idaho.

This is the new world of Israeli politics—where struggles for power rage within a population of Israeli citizens that includes only 60 percent of all the people ruled by the governments those citizens elect. Israel occupied the West Bank and Gaza Strip fifty-five years ago. For several decades, the question of what to do with those territories,

[1] Ofer Shelah, "Your Palestinian Problem Is Back," *Yedioth Ahronoth*, September 6, 2022. Translated by the S. Daniel Abraham Center for Middle East Peace, available at: https://paradigmlostbook.files.wordpress.com/2022/09/warning-of-slide-to-binationalism.pdf

and their swelling Palestinian populations, dominated Israeli politics, dividing the country between advocates of withdrawal in return for a peace agreement and those committed to ensuring that would never happen. But at least for the last decade, that has not been the case. The question of what policies to adopt toward Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza is simply absent from the political agenda. That is because the old debate over whether to withdraw or not; whether to agree to a Palestinian state or not, has been settled. There will be no negotiated withdrawal and no Palestinian state. Among the mass of Palestinian non-citizens living across the green line are nearly 700,000 Israelis—eleven cent of Israel's entire Jewish population. Their entrenched presence, along with the political and cultural constellations of power than allowed the settlement juggernaut to succeed, explain why no candidates for national office offer plans for negotiations that anyone believes could lead to a peace settlement based on establishment of a Palestinian state.

> *"While the few voices calling for restraint have been drowned out by demands for removing legal restraints on Israeli soldiers operating against Palestinians, the overwhelming majority of Israeli Jews voted this year without thinking much about the nuances of Israeli policy toward Palestinians."*

Yet commentators and analysts also agree that the situation cannot continue indefinitely. The problem of the future of five and a half million Arabs living in the territories occupied in 1967 is not now politically decisive, but it was and will be again. Its suppression is due to the disappearance of the option of removing them from Israel, by mass expulsion or by a two-state solution, *and* to their simultaneous exclusion from the Israeli political process. Although they live within the ambit of Israeli state power, they have no voice in choosing the governments that control their fate.

When the Palestinian problem does return to Israeli politics, it will not look like it did in the past. The system of control Israel has imposed on Palestinians based on blanket surveillance, systematic coercion, mass imprisonment, vigilantism, elaborate economic sanctions, and elaborate bureaucratic requirements, has transformed the very meaning of the "State of Israel." The West Bank and Gaza Strip ("Judea and Samaria" and the "coastal enclave" in Israeli parlance) no longer exist as territories

held by the Israeli state, but separate from it. These areas and their populations are now parts of the State of Israel, albeit ruled according to norms different from those prevailing in other regions. That is a fact. It is a fact just like the fact that most of the Arab citizens of Israel (demarcated by the 1949 armistice lines) were ruled by a military government from 1949 to 1966, and yet certainly lived within the State of Israel. And it is a fact just like the fact that prisons in Ramle, Meggido, and Ketziot, whose internal affairs are largely controlled by Palestinian prisoner organizations, are located within the State of Israel. So too is it a fact that Nablus, Jenin, and Gaza, are located within the State of Israel, by virtue of being subject to the regular exercise of Israeli military power and the oversight of COGAT, the Israel Defense Ministry's "Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories."

So what are the political implications of the radical, if undeclared, transformation in the Israeli state's geographical scope and demographic composition? If a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is no longer available, what path toward a better future remains? And how are we to understand the motives of those, such as Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid in his speech to the United Nations General Assembly, who pretend commitment to a negotiated two-state solution when their audiences know their words have no practical meaning?

Most profoundly, the emergence of Israel as the state that encompasses all the territory and all the people between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River is that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has returned to being a struggle over whether and how Arabs and Jews can live together in the same polity after having been, for half a century, a struggle over whether and how a border between an Arab and a Jewish polity could be established. The crucial operational question is democracy. Jews hold power in a state inhabited by as many or more Arabs than there are Jews. Can such a state democratize? If so, how?

Facing these questions requires a drastic extension of the time frame observers have been accustomed to using when thinking of positive ways the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can evolve. This is a difficult challenge for those willing to face the implications of the one-state reality. Another implication of that reality is more heartening. Most of the month-to-month or year-to-year developments and issues that have for so long tormented two-state solution advocates have, as a result of the one-state reality, become either irrelevant or a boon for those struggling for a more inclusive and tolerant future. No longer must they, or should they, be concerned with such perennially frustrating questions as whether this or that settlement is about to be expanded, whether a new Israeli housing project will or will not be built in some greater East Jerusalem neighborhood, whether the United States will overcome

domestic political constraints and finally serve as a forceful facilitator in a revived "peace process," whether political moderates in Israel will prevent yet another right-wing government from coming to power, or whether Israel will end up a binational society. In the one-state reality these questions are irrelevant, at least when it comes to gauging prospects for peace based on partition. What forty years ago was called the "point of no return" has been passed. Whether Israel builds new neighborhoods or settlements here or there does not matter for future peace negotiations. No negotiations of any consequence will occur anyway. And the more Jews living on Arab land in the West Bank, the fewer will be residing on Arab land in the Negev or the Galilee. Instead of agonizing over Washington's failure to pressure the parties toward a a two-state solution, progressives can begin to appreciate the shift in Washington away from diplomacy toward emphasizing the goal of equality of rights, statuses, and opportunities for both Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs—objectives attached to the operation of Israel as a state advertising itself as democratic, rather than to its "foreign policy."

"There are of course no guarantees that democratization will occur; nor is the process of democratization necessarily peaceful. Increasingly ruthless oppression, spasms of violence, expulsions, and even civil strife are all possible."

For the forseeable future, and, in fact, for a considerable time beyond the forseeable future, the only governments that will be formed in Israel will be right-wing. They will not all be as extreme as the government that seems likely to emerge following the 2022 elections. Still, none of them will entertain any proposals or processes based on placing large portions of the West Bank and Gaza Strip under sovereign Palestinian control. From time to time, these governments will announce plans to annex portions of these areas or declare Israeli sovereignty over them. Far from fearing such developments, and instead of rewarding Israel for refraining from doing so, the world community should welcome the formalization of de facto Israeli rule and insist that legal measures be implemented fully, consistently, and reasonably so that all inhabitants of the areas Israel treats as its territory enjoy equal rights to citizenship, voting, and a proportionate share of national resources.

Whether Israel does or does not make its rule of the entire country official, of one

thing we can be sure. Calculating prospects for successful negotiations between the Israeli governments and Palestinian "state-on the way" representative is no longer an effective way to think about the country's future. Once we internalize the fact that Palestinians living in the West Bank (including expanded East Jerusalem) and Gaza are living within the State of Israel, we can appreciate that negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority or Hamas will never achieve more than do negotiations between wardens in Israeli prisons and the Palestinian prisoner organizations who represent those incarcerated. Such so-called "peace" negotiations, or even talk about conditions under which they might be resumed, are nothing but a pretense for avoiding the real and decisive question posed by the one-state reality: How can the state that rules 14 million people from the river to the sea be democratized?

Autocracies can be toppled quickly, as they have been many times in Eastern Europe and Latin America, and replaced by democratic regimes, which may or may not survive. This form of "change at the top" democratization can come suddenly. Color revolutions, democratic uprisings, and coups offer uncertain but real opportunities for shifting from dictatorship to democracy in weeks or months. But the kind of democratization challenge that Israel faces is different. It entails the extension of rights to large populations who have long been excluded from participation in the demos; people who have been stigmatized as unworthy, unqualified, threatening, or irrelevant to politics by the long-enfranchised.

If we consider how long were the struggles for political equality of enslaved black people in the United States, of non-whites in apartheid South Africa, of the Catholic Irish after the incorporation of Ireland into the British state in 1801, and of women in almost all industrial democracies, we can expect that Arabs under Israeli rule could face decades and even generations of struggles for citizenship and full political rights. Many factors can be identified as necessary in the development and success of these struggles—cultural and generational change, international pressure, severe economic strain that raises the value of traditionally excluded groups, and large-scale wars that upend norms and force the mobilization of all available human resources. These are macro circumstances that democratization advocates can exploit, but not effectively manipulate.

On the other hand, regimes whose democratic character is contradicted by limits on the availability of citizenship or voting rights do present distinctive opportunities for the excluded. A key feature of democratic competition is that incumbents and challengers are willing to do almost anything to win elections. This means that excluded populations, once they mobilize and demand rights, can be viewed as crucial political resources, either by incumbents who want their support against

challengers in return for extensions of political rights, or by challengers who can see similar opportunities if they believe their ranks would be swelled by dissatisfied new voters. If the competition between them is very close, and the beneficiary of political emancipation of the traditionally excluded population is uncertain, challengers and incumbents may both support franchise extension.[2]

This perspective on the one-state reality highlights the practice of most pundits and analysts of Israeli politics to rely overmuch on current events, election outcomes, and polling data. As noted, an entirely different time frame is in order. From the blatant racism of American whites toward blacks in the 1890s or even in the 1930s, or from the Democratic Party's commitment to Jim Crow, there was little to suggest that in the 1980s George Wallace would win re-election as Alabama's governor by kissing black babies, that a decade later the Democratic Party would become utterly reliant on black turnout to win national elections, that not long afterward Barack Obama could be president and Kamala Harris vice-president.

There are of course no guarantees that democratization will occur; nor is the process of democratization necessarily peaceful. Increasingly ruthless oppression, spasms of violence, expulsions, and even civil strife are all possible. We must not forget that a civil war costing 600,000 lives was one feature of the American journey toward multicultural democracy. The point is that taking this long view allows us to imagine many pictures of the future prettier than the present—a state for all its citizens, a binational state, a state comprised of cantons federally linked with one another, and even a two-state outcome. This latter future could emerge eventually, though not by virtue of a new Washington diplomatic initiative or a clever negotiated compromise. Rather, following the Irish example, the secession of "Palestine" from Israel could develop by processes of mobilization, political competition, emancipation, civil disobedience, violence, and secession that led downtrodden Irish Catholics from an oppressed and excluded minority in the one-state reality created by Great Britain in 1801 (when it annexed Ireland without granting political rights to Irish Catholics), to a force holding the balance of power in British politics from the 1880s to the achievement of Irish statehood in most of Ireland in 1921.

Regardless of whether one of these more democratic futures does emerge, given the ferocity of politics within the Israeli "ethnocracy,"[3] the centripetal effect of elections—the pulling in and elevation of peripheral or excluded groups as a result of intense competition among the already enfranchised--will be of increasing

[2] For analysis of the contribution this mechanism made to the emancipation of women in Britain, France, and the United States see Dawn Langan Teele, *Forging the Franchise: The Political Origins of the Women's Vote* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

[3] Oren Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy: Land and identity Politics in Israel/Palestine* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

importance. Indeed, Arab participation in Israeli politics has already become an order of magnitude more salient than in the past, and is widely considered one of the two decisive factors in the outcome of this year's election. With peace negotiations and territorial withdrawal no longer on the Israeli political agenda, the question of how to "solve the Palestinian problem" no longer organizes Israeli electoral competition. Instead political parties aligned themselves into the "Netanyahu bloc" on one side, comprised of Likud, the ultra-orthodox parties, and the Religious Zionists; and the "anti-Netanyahu bloc," led by Lapid's secular centrist "Yesh Atid" (There is a Future), along with the anti-Netanyahu right of center "Statist Camp" or "National Unity" party, and an array of small parties—the formerly dominant Labor Party, the liberal Zionist "Meretz," the Israel Our Home party of Russian speakers, and one Arab party, Ra'am, which participated in the Bennett-Lapid unity government. Before the election, savvy observers commented that, given what has happened in each of the four elections within the last three years, and given the stability of polling showing each bloc on the edge of either gaining the 61 seats needed to form a government, whether a government would be able to be formed, and which bloc would create it, was likely to depend on voter turnout among Arab citizens of Israel. The fragmentation of the mainly Arab "Joint List," which won 13 seats when it competed in 2015 and in September 2019 and fifteen seats in 2020, threatened those committed to blocking a Netanyahu government with the loss of parliamentary seats attendant upon failure of one or more of the fragment Arab parties to pass the 3.25 percent threshold needed to qualify for any representation.[4] It is both striking and ironic that, as final election results were being calculated in 2022, it appeared to the anti-Netanyahu bloc that if there still was a chance to "save the country" from Netanyahu and his Jewish supremacist allies, it lay in the possibility that the explicitly Palestinian nationalist Balad party might squeak past the threshold and provide four crucial Knesset votes in favor of new elections.

It now appears that many Balad voters overcame their inclination to sit out the election. They voted late and produced a surge toward Balad, but the party still failed to pass the 3.25 percent threshold. The two other mainly Arab lists will have ten Knesset seats between them, just as they did in the April 2019 election when a similar split in the Joint list occurred. Regardless of the details of the outcome in the 2022 election, a remarkable transformation in the salience of Arabs in Israeli politics can be observed. Although rare for most of Israel's history, it has now become standard practice among Israeli commentators to treat Arab political parties as potential coalition makers or breakers and for Israeli pollsters to include in their surveys and their reporting the political preferences and probable turnout

4 See for example, Amir Ettinger, "Battle Over Arab Vote," *Israel Hayom*, 3 October 2022. Available here: https://paradigmlostbook.files.wordpress.com/2022/10/ettinger_battle-over-arab-vote.pdf

of Arab voters. From the 1950s through most of the 1980s, Arab political parties (including the primarily Arab Communist Party) were either prevented from forming or automatically excluded from coalition calculations. The fierce and even split between Likud and Labor in the late 1980s helped Arab politicians launch independent political parties and begin to play a role in coalition politics, if only informally.[5] In 1992 Arab support from outside the coalition enabled Yitzhak Rabin to form a government which, among other things, set the stage for the Oslo peace process. In 2021 the Bennett-Lapid government's inclusion of the Ra'am Party as a coalition member—a party which emerged from the same cultural and ideological community as Hamas—is stunning evidence for how political competition can expand opportunities for traditionally excluded populations. One can also interpret the passage of the controversial "Basic Law: Israel as the Nation-State of the Jewish People" as evidence of just how real and how disturbing, for ultranationalist Israeli Jews, is the political potential of Arabs within the one-state reality. What never needed to be said, that Jewish priorities would ultimately be decisive in Israel, now needs to be legally entrenched. Unsurprisingly, right-wing parties, less likely to benefit from future extensions of the franchise to West Bank and Gaza Palestinians, were the motive force behind this law. In contrast, Yair Lapid, who opposed the law, has promised to change what he calls "insulting" legislation to affirm the equality of Arab citizens; this as a means of increasing Arab turnout and thus his prospects for forming a government.

Though some talk has begun, among both right-wing and left-wing annexationists, about the eventual implications of extending Israeli citizenship to Palestinians living in the West Bank, developments in expanded Jerusalem suggest that repercussions of the one-state reality are already appearing there. Since June 1967, Arabs holding Jerusalem residency cards have already had the right to vote for city councilors and the mayor. Traditionally, however, in protest against the occupation, Palestinians have boycotted municipal elections. In 2013 fewer than 1 percent of eligible voters cast ballots. But consolidation of the one-state reality has had an effect. In 2015 52 percent of Arabs living in East Jerusalem told pollsters they "would prefer to be citizens of Israel with equal rights -- compared with just 42 percent who would opt to be citizens of a Palestinian state."[6] Five months before the October 2018 municipal election another poll showed that 22 percent of eligible Palestinians in the city intended to vote or were thinking about voting in what appeared to be an

[5] Ian S. Lustick, "The Political Road to Binationalism: Arabs in Jewish Politics," in *The Emergence of a Binational Israel: The Second Republic in the Making,* Ilan Peleg and Ofira Seliktar, eds. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989): p. 97-123.

[6] David Pollock, "Half of Jerusalem's Palestinians Would Prefer Israeli to Palestinian Citizenship," 21 August 21 2015. https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/half-of-jerusalems-palestinians-would-prefer-israeli-to-palestinian-citizen

extremely close election.[7] Several Palestinian parties seeking representation on the council announced campaigns, but were pressured by both Palestinian and Israeli authorities into withdrawing. However, one such movement remained in the race, "al-Quds, Baladi," (Jerusalem, My Hometown). Despite threats against the family of its leader, Ramadan Dabash, and the withdrawal of other candidates from its list, the party attracted 3000 votes out of more than 4000 votes cast in the first round of the election by residents of Arab neighborhoods.

Assuming there were approximately 280,000 Arabs eligible to vote in the 2018 Jerusalem election, that is a turnout rate of 1.4 percent, not high enough to make Dabash a member of the city council, but still higher than in previous elections. What makes this outcome significant as a harbinger of things to come is not only vastly increased discussion among Palestinians about the advisability of voting, but the exquisite narrowness of the election's outcome. In the runoff between the right-wing and ultranationalist candidate, Moshe Lion, and the liberal, secular oriented Ofer Berkovich, Lion won by fewer than 4,000 votes—only 0.7 percent of the votes cast. If only fifteen per cent of those Arabs who were thinking of voting had actually voted that would have likely changed the outcome of the election, transforming the landscape of politics and policy in the Israeli capital, and dramatically demonstrating the potency of Jewish-Arab political partnerships.

Of course, the Palestinian Authority and Israel have a variety of options for suppressing Arab participation. But increasingly explicit coercion, threats to remove residency rights, or actions to deprive all those Palestinians living east of the separation barrier of their residency rights, have high costs and themselves testify to the lengths Palestinian and Israeli political establishments now need to go to forestall the broad-based struggles for democratization and equality incubated by the one-state reality. It is also of interest that while the PA pressured East Jerusalem Arabs not to vote in municipality elections, it has strongly urged Palestinian citizens of Israel to vote in this year's Knesset elections.

The final question to be answered is why so many Israeli politicians, authors, and commentators, from the left to the center-right, still publicly advocate, at least occasionally, some version of the two-state solution. Most who do so know there is no viable way to achieve it. They also know that most of their audience knows that. The one Zionist party in the last Knesset that strongly advocated resuming diplomatic initiatives toward the two-state solution, the liberal Meretz party, failed to win any seats in the new parliament. So why, for example, given the evident

[7] Jonathan Blake, Elizabeth M. Bartels, Shira Efron and Yitzhak Reiter, *What Might Happen if Palestinians Start Voting in Jerusalem Municipal Elections?* (Santa Monica: Rand, 2018): p. 24.

disinterest of Israelis in the two-state solution, did Prime Minister Yair Lapid include commitment to it in his address to the United Nations General Assembly? Some observers interpreted that move as a message to Arab voters in Israel, but that is wrong. Palestinian citizens of Israel know better than anyone else how hollow were his words and how little real support existed for a viable two-state solution, even within his own government. When the Prime Minister returned to Israel, he travelled to the Arab city of Nazareth to campaign for Arab votes. There he knew better than to prattle about the two-state solution. There he talked about political equality, economic progress, and public safety in Arab communities. Why? Because those are the issues that Palestinians in Israel care about and with respect to which an Israeli government might at least theoretically be responsive.[8]

Lapid and other Israelis and Israeli advocates still talk about two-states, in fora such as the United Nations, because they are desperate to avoid acknowledging that Israel already is a state that includes as many or more Palestinian Arabs as Jews. To the extent the country and the world imagine Israel and the Palestinians as hoping for, or at least waiting for, the two-state solution, the fundamental issue of democracy can be dodged. This is the issue that Abraham Lincoln identified when he declared, in 1858, that government "cannot endure, permanently half slave and half free." By preserving the image of a negotiated two-state solution, at least officially, in the public and international imagination, policies of coercion and mass political exclusion can be justified as stop-gap, temporary measures to be enforced only until a revived peace process produces a treaty establishing a Palestinian state west of the Jordan.[9] The actual effect, and the real (if unstatable) purpose, of such posturing is to preserve the status quo of silent apartheid, a form of systematic discrimination achieved without official and explicit use of the legal system to formalize racial or ethnonational inequality.

The struggle for democracy in Palestine-Israel will be long, but it will not begin in earnest until the mirage of the two-state solution is understood for what it is and does. The current challenge, for those committed to democracy, equality, and opportunities for both Palestinian and Jewish projects of non-exclusivist national self-determination, is not to turn the one-state reality into a one-state solution. The imperative of the moment is two-fold: to resist, in the name of democracy and equality, the racist and violent policies likely to be implemented by the Netanyahu—Ben-Gvir—Ultraorthodox government, should be be formed, while, at the same time, exposing the disingenuous, self-interested, and self-protective rationales that

[8] "In Nazareth, Lapid urges Arab Israelis to vote in election—for their own sakes," *Times of Israel*, 25 October 2022. https://www.timesofisrael.com/in-nazareth-lapid-urges-arab-israelis-to-vote-in-election-for-their-own-sakes/

[9] Ian S. Lustick, *Paradigm Lost: From Two-State Solution to One-State Reality* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019): p. 113-118.

undergird continued allegiance to the two-state solution. In the coming decades the challenge will be Palestinian emancipation, to work within the one-state reality to trade today's problems, based on coercive exclusion of Palestinians from politics, for better problems associated with politics in an inclusive multinational democracy.

SAUDI-ISRAELI RELATIONS: PROGRESS, RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Will Saudi Arabia be the next Arab state to sign a peace treaty with Israel? What does the Saudi-Israeli relationship look like two years after the Abraham Accords? Why hasn't Saudi Arabia joined the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan in formalizing its ties with Israel? This brief article examines the drivers of normalization between Israel and Saudi Arabia and explores the complex calculations that have thus far postponed an official agreement.

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The State of Israel, established in 1948, has never been officially recognized by Saudi Arabia, although Saudi policy toward Israel has been gradually converted from erstwhile hostility to normalization in all but name. In recent years, Saudi Arabia and Israel have exchanged high-level diplomatic contacts and visits. Saudi citizens visit Israel on their Saudi passports by special arrangement. Israeli businesspeople and civil society leaders carrying Israeli passports visit Saudi Arabia by special invitation. Saudi airspace is open to Israeli commercial flights. Israeli athletes can now compete in Saudi Arabia. The two states engage in technological, economic, military, and security cooperation. Saudi Arabia is invested in the Israeli economy through the private equity firm of President Donald Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner. The need to conduct transactions through shell companies outside of Israel is one of the few remaining vestiges of the unconventional nature of the bilateral relationship.

Since 1981, Saudi Arabia's offer of official recognition, defined as the exchange of ambassadors, has been held out as an incentive for Israel's complete withdrawal to the 1967 borders, a just solution to the refugee problem, and the creation of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip with East Jerusalem as its capital. Nonetheless, Saudi Arabia has given its blessing to the Abraham Accords, which formalized ties between Israel and two Gulf Arab states, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), in September 2020. The Abraham Accords, which did not furnish a settlement in the Israeli-Palestinian arena, elicited harsh rebukes from the Palestinian leadership.[1] Israel seeks to normalize ties with Saudi Arabia, just as it normalized ties with Bahrain and the UAE, while maintaining the status quo as far as the Palestinians are concerned. The endgame for Mohammad bin Salman, the Crown Prince, and the de-facto ruler of Saudi Arabia, is less apparent. When it comes to the question of making the relationship official, Bin Salman appears to be holding out for a rainy day. But the old axiom about how Saudi recognition of Israel is contingent upon certain Israeli concessions to the Palestinians seems to be unreliable. Leaders in Jerusalem, Ramallah, and Gaza, all doubt the sincerity of Bin Salman's commitment to the Palestinian cause. Moreover, all Arab-Israeli peace treaties, including the most recent ones, have prioritized narrow state and regime interests over pan-Arab goals.

The primary strategic driver of normalization has been the rise of Iran in the regional power equation. Israel views the Islamic Republic of Iran as an existential threat, while Saudi Arabia views Iran as a revisionist state whose goal of regional dominance would come at the expense of Saudi Arabia; moreover, Iran's methods of achieving its goals undermine Saudi Arabia's position in the region as well as

[1] "Abbas: Israel normalization 'violation of just and lasting' peace," *Al Jazeera, 25 September 2020.*

its domestic security. Open collaboration between Israel and Saudi Arabia dates from June 2015, when former Saudi general bin Majed bin Anwar Eshki and former Israeli ambassador Dore Gold, shared a stage at the Council on Foreign Relations in Washington to discuss their countries' shared concerns about Iran.[2] The impetus was the impending Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), commonly known as the "Iran nuclear deal," concluded between Iran and the P5+1 (the U.S., U.K., France, China, Russia and Germany) just over a month later.

"In Saudi custom, any male from among the progeny of the Kingdom's founder is eligible to be the successor. Traditionally, familial consultations and consensus-building played a vital role in the selection. But Mohammad bin Salman's rise to power and his first few years in power have marked a dramatic shift away from the traditional consultation and consensus building within the Al Saud family, and a shift toward a one-man style of rule."

The Iran nuclear deal was interpreted in Jerusalem and Riyadh as a capitulation to Iran and an abnegation of Washington's commitment to the security of the region and its regional allies. They rightly predicted that the lifting of sanctions and the infusion of cash to Iran would benefit the Iranian Revolutionary Guard and strengthen Iran's extraterritorial operations in Sunni Arab states, particularly in states that were fractured by civil wars, such as Syria and Yemen. Today, Israel faces a much more formidable threat on its northern border owing to the enlarged Iranian military presence in Syria and the expansion of Hizballah's capabilities in south Lebanon. Mohammad bin Salman, the architect of the Saudi military intervention in Yemen which began in 2015, likely feels that he has been robbed of a victory in Yemen, owing to the infusion of Iranian weapons and technical expertise to the Houthis. Iran's penetration of weak Arab states bordering Israel and Saudi Arabia and its demonstrated willingness to engage both in proxy wars have helped forge some common ground between the unlikely allies.

Saudi engagement with Israel has been one component of a complex strategy designed to address domestic and external threats as well as concerns for regime survival. Mohammad bin Salman is heir to the throne held by his octogenarian father, King Salman, though he is widely regarded as the de-facto ruler of Saudi

[2] *The New York Times, 4 June 2014.*

Arabia. His accession to the throne will mark the first transition from rule by the sons of Ibn Saud, the Kingdom's founder, to a grandson. Saudi custom did not require that the throne should pass to Bin Salman. In Saudi custom, any male from among the progeny of the Kingdom's founder is eligible to be the successor. Traditionally, familial consultations and consensus-building played a vital role in the selection. But Mohammad bin Salman's rise to power and his first few years in power have marked a dramatic shift away from the traditional consultation and consensus building within the Al Saud family, and a shift toward a one-man style of rule. As a result, Saudi policies today are strongly skewed toward Bin Salman's need to consolidate and strengthen his grip on power and lay a strong enough foundation for a 50-year reign.

Modernization is vital to Bin Salman's long-term plans. In light of that, he has moved decisively to tame the powerful Wahhabi religious establishment, to pave the way for the new directions he wants to pursue in domestic and foreign policy. One of those directions is the incorporation of women into the labor force. Allowing them to drive was a step in that direction. Another priority is planning for the world's future transition away from fossil fuels. How will the Saudi regime cope when it can no longer buy domestic stability with subsidies and generous social welfare programs? Bin Salman's response is Vision 2030, an ambitious plan to develop the private sector, and foster a self-sufficient economy that will support the standard of living that citizens have become accustomed to. Promoting territorial nationalism in a region where it has always been scarce is another long-term initiative.

Preparations for formal ties with Israel are also underway. One indication is the appointment of a cleric, known for having visited Auschwitz and for promoting interfaith dialogue, to an influential role as secretary of the Muslim World League, headquartered in Jeddah. The cleric's name is Muhammad bin Abd al-Karim al-Issa.[3] Another indication of the slow preparation for formal peace is the scrubbing of some anti-Semitic content from national school textbooks.[4] Mohammad bin Salman's many public statements have also been used to signal his intent. He reportedly told a group of Jewish leaders in Washington D.C. that the Palestinians were not a top priority for Saudi Arabia and that his patience with them was running out. He said the Palestinians should either use one of the many proposals to reach a deal, or "shut up and stop complaining."[5] Most recently he described Israel as a "potential ally."[6]

[3] "Saudi cleric known for Auschwitz visit, interfaith dialogue gives main hajj sermon," *The Times of Israel, 10 July 2022.*

[4] Sarah Dadouch, "Saudi Arabia has been scrubbing its textbooks of anti-Semitic and misogynistic passages," *The Washington Post, 30 January 2021.*

[5] Barak Ravid, "Saudi Crown Prince: Palestinians should take what the U.S. offers," Axios, 29 April 2018.

[6] Saudi Press Agency, 3 March 2022.

These kinds of statements can serve multiple purposes: They can serve as a trial balloon, as a means of gauging the reaction of Saudi citizens; as a sermon about the moderate and pro-American attributes of Saudi foreign policy; as a warning to Iran about the pain that Saudi Arabia could inflict if the Islamic Republic doesn't modify its behavior; and as a carrot, to remind Israel of the rewards it stands to gain by making certain concessions.

> *"Israel is the regional leader in all these areas while Saudi Arabia's workforce lacks the skills needed at the outset to realize his vision."*

Israel has always welcomed, indeed sought out, the establishment of peace treaties with Arab and Muslims states. Historically, Israel has viewed Saudi Arabia as a grave threat. This was manifested in the way that Israel went to great lengths in 1981 to try to block the sale of American military surveillance planes to the Kingdom. Until recently, Israel viewed Saudi Arabia as a state-sponsor of terror owing to its financial support for Palestinian groups that carried out terror attacks in Israel. A key turning point in how Israel viewed Saudi Arabia was the 2006 Israel-Hizballah war. As 4,000 rockets rained down on northern Israel, Jerusalem braced for the usual Arab statements expressing solidarity with the Arab resistance movement and commitment to the cause of liberating all of Palestine. When a Saudi statement accused Hizballah of threatening Arab interests by using Iranian-supplied rockets to engage in "rash adventures,"[7] Jerusalem recognized that Saudi Arabia shared its perception of Iran as the main threat in the region and began to explore the idea that perhaps there were grounds for collaboration. Israel's strategic assessments identified Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain as particularly vulnerable to Iran's expansionist goals and methods of achieving them. Fresh outreach initiatives were launched by officials, civil society entrepreneurs and influencers to build social, economic, academic, religious, strategic, and political bridges with the Gulf Arab states. Among the enticements that bore the most fruit, was the offer of Israeli-made intelligence technologies and cyber products.

A key catalyst for normalization has been the intersection between Israel's leadership in military technology, cyber security, and counter-insurgency techniques and the evolving threats to the Gulf Arab regimes, both from within and from without. The succession of uprisings and rebellions in 2010-2011 collectively referred to as the

[7] Saudi Press Agency, 14 July 2006.

"Arab Spring," gave the Gulf regimes a wake-up call. Seeing long-established Arab regimes toppled in quick succession by the angry masses horrified the Gulf Arab rulers who worried that the wave of protests would wash up on their shores. Tehran advertised its eagerness for the "Islamic awakening" to topple the rulers of the Gulf Arab states just as it had toppled Ben 'Ali in Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak in Egypt.[8] Moreover, Gulf rulers viewed the 2011 Arab Spring protests in Manama as part of Iran's ongoing efforts to export its Shi'i revolution to an archipelago inhabited mostly by Shi'a. Gulf rulers feared that the success of the Egyptian Muslim Brothers in the aftermath of Mubarak's ouster encouraged a formula that could destabilize their own rule. The dreaded formula was the combination of Islam and democracy. Just as the rulers in Riyadh, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Manama were looking to reinforce their coup-proofing strategies, Israel offered some tried and tested counterinsurgency and spyware tools.

Israel looked for opportunities to build trust and demonstrate its usefulness to the Gulf states that were on the frontlines against Iran. For example, when Saudi ARAMCO became the victim of an Iranian-backed cyber-attack in 2012, Saudi Arabia accepted an offer to allow Israeli cybersecurity firms to come in and repair the breech.[9] Eyeing this as an opening and a window of opportunity, the Israeli government and defense establishment quietly granted permission for the sale of Israeli-made cyber security and surveillance technologies to Gulf Arab states. Firms that were greenlighted to sell technologies including, Quadream, Candiru, Paragon and NSO Group, were byproducts of Israel's military intelligence and security apparatuses, whose veteran labor force had put their skills to work in Israel's booming high tech private sector.[10] Gulf Arab states found in these Israeli companies a source of technologies and expertise that could be used not only to protect themselves from Iranian aggressions and secure their infrastructure, but also to gauge public opinion and surveil their oppositionists. Among the more coveted technological tools was NSO Group's spyware, Pegasus, a sophisticated hacker tool capable of compromising smartphones. It came to light that Israel had greenlighted the sale of Pegasus to most of the states with which it signed peace agreements in 2020, who had in turn deployed it against human rights activists and civil society figures. Rumors also circulated to the effect that the Israeli government had also sold Pegasus to Mohammad bin Salman as a means of soliciting his support for the 2020 Abraham Accords.[11]

[8] IRNA (Persian), 4 February 2011; *Siyasat-e Ruz*, 16 August 2013.

[9] Jonathan Ferziger and Peter Waldman, "How Do Israel's Tech Firms Do Business in Saudi Arabia? Very Quietly," Bloomberg, 2 February 2017.

[10] Yoav Limor, "The hackers: A closer look at the shadowy world of offensive cyber," *Yisrael HaYom, 13 August 2021.*

[11] Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, "Pegasus as a case study of evolving ties between the UAE and Israel," Gulf State Analytics, 9 June 2022.

Saudi Arabia continues to view Israeli technologies as valuable instruments for addressing challenges to its domestic security—from the marginalized Ismaili and Zaydi tribes in the Saudi-Yemeni border region to the restive Shi'i minority in the Eastern oil-rich province. Likewise, for a country that has identified the Muslim Brothers as one of its most dangerous threats, the same tools can be used to deal with the threat of Islamists and the proliferation of Islamist ideology.

With encouragement from the Trump Administration, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the UAE explored the risks and opportunities of official normalization with Israel. The UAE and Bahrain were more intrepid in their willingness to visit Israel and host Israelis. Still, it was no secret that Israeli and Saudi officials held regular meetings in Washington.[12] It also came to light that in November 2020 Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu took a short flight to meet Bin Salman and U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in the Saudi desert.[13] Israel's close coordination with Saudi Arabia was reflected in its support for the Saudis' purchase of two Red Sea islands from Egypt in 2017. In exchange, Israel received a Saudi commitment to honor the terms of the Egypt-Israel peace treaty particularly as it concerned Israel's freedom of navigation through the Strait of Tiran.[14] The acquisition of the two islands was a necessary precursor to Bin Salman's plans to build a new megacity called "Neom," on the Red Sea, in the northwestern Tabuk province, at the intersection of Israel and Jordan and adjacent to Egypt's Sharm el-Sheikh. A causeway is also planned to link Sharm el-Sheikh with Neom.

It is likely that Mohammad bin Salman also envisions other avenues of Saudi-Israeli cooperation to give his planned city the best chance of success. He envisions Neom as a technologically sophisticated and environmentally sustainable "smart city," which will function as a hub for tech entrepreneurs and start-ups.[15] Israel is the regional leader in all these areas while Saudi Arabia's workforce lacks the skills needed at the outset to realize his vision. The Crown Prince envisions Neom as a high-tech ecosystem, along the lines of Silicon Valley, which will attract foreign investment and expertise and serve as an incubator for research and development, entrepreneurship, and innovation, so that one day the Kingdom will be able to supply its own needs for high tech products from within. Toward that end, Bin Salman is likely trying to attract Israeli tech companies to invest in Neom, which is being built in close proximity to Eilat, Israel's Red Sea resort town.

[12] Vivian Salama, "'An open secret': Saudi Arabia and Israel get cozy," NBC News, 15 November 2017.

[13] Oliver Holmes, "Netanyahu holds secret meeting with Saudi crown prince," *The Guardian, 23 November 2020.*

[14] "With the Permission of Israel: Tiran and Sanafir were Transferred to Saudi Arabia," *Israel HaYom* (Hebrew), 8 January 2019.

[15] See Saudi Arabia, "Vision 2030 Projects: Neom," n.d., https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/v2030/v2030-projects/neom/ (accessed 23 October 2022).

Mohammad bin Salman has also shown an interest in having a role to play at Islam's third holiest mosque, the al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem. It came to light that part of the efforts to gain Saudi support for Trump's "deal of the century" peace plan (which Palestinians rejected outright), Israel toyed with the idea of granting Saudi Arabia a special role on the al-Aqsa compound.[16] Concurrent with that, Saudi media figures began to promote the idea that Jerusalem's holy sites should be under Saudi administration, while Palestinian political and religious figures in Jerusalem told the media that Saudi Arabia appeared to be challenging Jordan's role. Saudi Arabia, they said, reached out to local actors to coordinate visits of Saudi nationals to the holy places and invited Palestinian groups to the Kingdom for talks about al-Aqsa.[17] It appears that Mohammad bin Salman, whose official title will one day be "custodian of the two holy mosques," was intrigued with the prospect that Israel might help him claim custodianship of all three holy mosques. Jordan's King Abdullah, whose custodianship of the al-Aqsa compound is recognized by the 1994 Jordan-Israel peace agreement and a subsequent agreement with the Palestinian Authority, was furious when these machinations came to light.[18] He moved quickly against individuals in Jordan who had been collaborating with Bin Salman and reminded Israel and the U.S. that Jordan's role on the holy esplanade is recognized by international law.[19]

While Palestinians view Mohammad bin Salman as self-centered, untrustworthy, and insensitive toward their plight, Saudi Arabia continues to reaffirm its support for the Arab Peace Plan in official statements. Saudi Arabia's proposal was unveiled in 2002 by the late King Abdullah; it offered normalization with Israel in exchange for full withdrawal to the 1967 lines, a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital, and a just solution for Palestinian refugees. To turn the Saudi plan into a pan-Arab plan, Saudi Arabia had to accommodate Syria's demands, which toughened the language about several issues, most notably the demand concerning refugees. Israeli officials were careful to praise the Saudis' efforts, while at the same time urged them to modify the Arab Peace Plan to strengthen the chances that it could form the basis of negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.[20] When asked about the possibility for normalization with Israel, Saudi officials continue to refer to the Arab Peace Plan, but there are hints that Saudi Arabia may be flexible about

[16] Nadav Shragai, "A Mount of Tensions: On the Struggle between Jordan and Saudi Arabia," *Israel HaYom (Hebrew), 11 March 2021.*

[17] Rasha Abou Jalal, "Is Riyadh really pushing for control of Jerusalem's holy sites?" Al-Monitor, 2 July 2018.

[18] "The Hashemite Custodianship of Jerusalem's Islamic and Christian Holy Sites, 1917-2020 CE," The Royal Aal Al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought (The National Press of Jordan, 2020).

[19] David Ignatius, "Inside the palace intrigue in Jordan and a thwarted 'deal of the century'," *The Washington Post, 11 June 2021.*

[20] See Joseph Kostiner and Chelsi Mueller, "Egyptian and Saudi Intervention in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict (2006-09): Local Powers Mediation Compared," in *International Intervention in Local Conflicts: Crisis Management and Conflict Resolution since the Cold War, ed. Uzi Rabi (I.B.Taurus, 2010).*

some of its specific stipulations. Recent Saudi statements have been less detailed about thorny issues, such as borders and the return of refugees, suggesting that there may be room for compromise. For example, in a July 2022 interview with CNN, Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir described the primary goal as a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital.[21]

For any Israeli government, a public ceremony and exchange of ambassadors with Saudi Arabia would be a crowning foreign policy achievement. For Mohammad bin Salman, growing relations with Israel have been part of a complex, multi-purpose and highly adaptable scheme which have already borne fruit in several areas. But calculations about regional, domestic, economic and regime security have all been drivers of unofficial normalization just as much as they have been restraints to full recognition. For example, Saudi Arabia has acquired useful counterinsurgency technologies from Israel but going too far with Israel could awaken Islamist sleeper cells and threaten domestic or regime security. Israel and Saudi Arabia have together lobbied Washington to try to prevent an American accommodation of Iran, but Saudi Arabia prefers to keep its option open for rapprochement. Israel's posture toward Iran is confrontational, whereas Saudi Arabia's posture toward the Islamic Republic has always been a balancing act which has produced periods of tension as well as periods of conciliation. Though Saudi Arabia engages in proxy conflicts with Iran, it is too vulnerable to risk a direct confrontation; thus far, it has preferred to deepen relationships with Iran's enemies to use its influence with them as a bargaining chip and as a pressure tool in its transactional negotiations with Tehran, rather than conclude an arrangement that limits its ability to maneuver. At the same time, full normalization with Israel is like a resource being held in reserve, a resource that can be exploited when the gains outweigh the costs and the risks.

[21] CNN, "The Situation Room," Transcript, 15 July 2022. https://transcripts.cnn.com/show/sitroom/date/2022-07-15/segment/01 (Accessed 11 November 2022).

WARM PEACE IN THE MAKING – EXAMINING P2P RELATIONS TWO YEARS TO THE ABRAHAM ACCORDS

The Abraham Accords have offered a new and different model for regional relations and already shaped a different reality in the region by offering a dynamic of cooperation in just about all fields: business, security, diplomacy, tourism, and People-to-People (P2P) relations. However, there is more than meets the eye when it comes to bridge building between people and cultures following decades of animosity and some of the initial effort to build these bridges had actually backfired. This article seeks to analyze the challenges and opportunities of P2P relations under the framework of the Abraham Accords and to point toward a more constructive path that will enable them to develop and flourish.

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The Abraham Accords, now past their second anniversary, have offered a new and different model for regional relations and, in many ways, have already shaped a different reality in the region. The accords have thus far offered a dynamic of cooperation in just about all fields: business, security, diplomacy, tourism, and People-to-People (P2P) relations. However, there is more than meets the eye behind the headlines and statements on tolerance, and there are still challenges that must be addressed, particularly when it comes to people-to-people (P2P) relations, where our work has only just begun.

The Accords were crafted in a very different spirit than the earlier peace agreements between Israel, Jordan, or Egypt. The Camp David Agreement of 1978 outlined plans to establish normal relations between Egypt and Israel, including diplomatic, economic, and cultural ties. Furthermore, in 1982, a cultural agreement called for the establishment of two academic centers in order to promote cultural exchange between the two countries. Despite the fact that these P2P relations remain essentially nonexistent. Although an Israeli Academic center has been established in Cairo, Egyptian intelligence makes it clear that Egyptians are not welcome there. Similarly, the Egyptian academic center in Tel Aviv remains unopened after 40 years.

A very different energy permeated the multilateral relations that followed the Abraham Accords. In the years since the signing of the agreement, over 127 memorandums have been signed, establishing new connections, trade, and collaboration in various fields. These new ties have resulted in increased trade between Israel and the UAE by $1.46 billion. In March 2021, the UAE announced the establishment of a $10 billion investment fund for Israeli companies. In fact, in 2021, trade between Israel and other Abraham Accords members increased by approximately 222 percent, totaling $900 Million. In 2022, following a free trade agreement, it is expected to cross the $2 billion mark.[1]

Furthermore, several significant collaborations were formed in the field of health, education, tourism, and even people-to-people connections, with plans to foster further collaborations in the fields of academics, culture, and sports. During peak season, over 30 flights per week transport Israelis, Emirates, and Bahrainis across the Gulf (with Qatar opening its gates just in time for the World Cup and Saudi Arabia allowing planes to fly over).

We have witnessed some of these newly formed academic and peer-to-peer relationships during our engagements. We have repeatedly encountered a positive,

[1] Asher Fredman and Robert Greenway, "Abraham Accords' true potential goes far deeper than business ties," in *Jerusalem Post*, 6 January 2022. www.jpost.com/opinion/article-691791

open, and friendly atmosphere at Zoom events, meetings, and visits.

However – and despite the good progress made – we should not assume that positive statements and good economic indicators will be able to overcome a well-established discourse of suspicion and animosity that active detractors of Israeli-Arab relations are still feeding. In order to strengthen their relationship and gain a better understanding of one another, the Abraham Accords partners should also incorporate the lessons learned from previous efforts.

"Despite the warm statements, the relationship between the parties to the Abraham Accords remains primarily on the governmental level. Cultural exchanges, student or other "cultural experience" programs are only in their incubated phase."

Despite the warm statements, the relationship between the parties to the Abraham Accords remains primarily on the governmental level. Cultural exchanges, student or other "cultural experience" programs are only in their incubated phase. Some P2P programs that began with much enthusiasm as the accords were signed were eventually rolled back or terminated. Non-profit organizations in Israel were among the first to jump into the Abraham Accords wagon, searching for partners in the Gulf without realizing why their emails were not being answered. Israeli and Jewish organizations established some of the first P2P encounters while inviting delegations from the Gulf to visit the holy land. Dramatic images of white Kandoras in Jerusalem and Temple Mount quickly surfaced.

One Gulf delegation to Jerusalem was instructive on this issue. While Kandoras in Jerusalem spoke to Jewish and Israeli-Jewish audiences, the optics of the visit created unneeded friction with the Palestinians. Likewise, a lack of protocol for coordinating such trips made the Israeli delegations and the organizations that facilitated them unwelcome guests in several Emirati and Bahraini corridors. This mismatch continues, as the majority of the civic society organizations associated with the Accords were founded by Jews and Israelis who were quick to respond to what was seen as a significant validation of their presence in the Middle East. In contrast, their Arab counterparts were still unprepared to move forward, given the situation's complexities domestically, and they lacked the necessary structures to engage in P2P work.

Few Israelis have noticed or acknowledged the differences in pace and style between their country and the Gulf. Moreover, in the rush and excitement, many Israelis may have failed to recognize that the corresponding situation in the Gulf among their Arab counterparts presented a more complex reality. For example, the Emirati and Bahraini ambassadors declined to meet with the civic society delegations that arrived in Israel. The relevant ministries responded similarly to these overtures by sending a lukewarm message regarding the P2P efforts. This was not done for lack of will to encourage or support P2P work but rather as an attempt to navigate and establish a 'protocol' that will put it on the right track. After all, these initiatives were managed as a P2P effort and not under the blessings of the government involved, which put the relevant embassies in an uncomfortable position. Still, two years into this work, this protocol is not yet established.

Another considerable challenge is the asymmetric flow of visitors. In the first four months following the signing of the agreement, 130,000 Israelis flooded into the UAE.[2] In contrast, only 130 Emirates and Bahrainis made the other way, mainly on official business rather than as tourists. Two years later, these numbers have not significantly changed. On the one hand, it is not surprising that Israelis would take advantage of traveling to one of the few open destinations available to them in the Middle East, as they did previously in Türkiye. Many Israelis seemed to view Dubai as the second promised land, a magical Arab place of acceptance where they could feel at ease – even when they travel without meeting a single Emirati. For the Gulf partners, however, the result was more complex, and they still hesitated to go.
The few Gulf visitors who slowly began exploring Tel Aviv started to discover Israeli realities in some less-expected ways. Tourists from the UAE receive a text message from their government welcoming them to Israel while asking them not to cross the green line, enter Palestine, Jerusalem or visit the Temple Mount where some Emiratis were greeted with insults as they made their way to prayer. Two Emiratis were briefly arrested while running from a shooting scene in Tel Aviv last August, mistakenly identified as terror suspects. The numbers follow suit. Israeli Tourism Ministry data show that since only 3,600 tourists from the UAE, Morocco and Bahrain have visited to Israel in the past six months.[3]

Nor has this been the only roadblock. Despite the good intentions, Israeli security protocols and administrative shortcomings have made the basic process of obtaining a visa difficult for Emiratis and Bahrainis. In contrast to Israelis who can obtain a

[2] Statement by Israeli Ambassador to the UAE, Eitan Naeh, in Mahmoud Mohamed Barakat, "About 130,000 Israelis visited UAE since normalization," in *Anadolu Post*, 2 January 2021.

[3] Hadar Kane, "Abraham Accords Two Years On: Israelis Flock to Dubai, but Where Are the Emirati Tourists?" in *Harretz*, 15 September 2022, www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2022-09-15/ty-article/.highlight/abraham-accords-two-years-on-israelis-flock-to-dubai-but-where-are-the-emirati-tourists

visa to the UAE, Morocco, or Bahrain through a simple process on the internet, the reverse process involves complex forms and interviews. Colleagues who have attempted to pursue a visa to travel to Israel eventually changed their minds after attempting to navigate this lengthy process until the visa waiver program was introduced at the end of last year. Negative airport experiences were added to that list as some travelers reported humiliation and anxiety rather than a welcoming feeling as their first Israeli experience.

"After being isolated from their Arab neighbors for a long time, Israelis are now eager to explore their cultures. They also wish to extend a warm welcome to the people of the Abraham Accords—but may not have the cultural awareness to do so."

Even though the average Israeli may enjoy seeing the Israeli flag waved in Dubai and the ability to find Kosher food, few seem to have contemplated what else a "warm peace" can look like and what else needs to be done to enhance P2P relations on both sides. In other words, while P2P ties have continued to develop, they have sometimes fallen out of sync with the official process of the Abraham Accord, and it is still unclear which government entity is supposed to lead that charge.

After being isolated from their Arab neighbors for a long time, Israelis are now eager to explore their cultures. They also wish to extend a warm welcome to the people of the Abraham Accords—but may not have the cultural awareness to do so. As for the Arab side, the past and current public opinion make them more cautious. Some welcome these new spirits of change, others are unhappy but keep it to themselves, and the rest shout their rejections from the rooftops. On all sides, it is essential to remember that there remains a lack of familiarity with the other. Both parties operate differently and are subject to different internal sensitivities.
At a stage where political distrust still exists while a track record of successful and warm peace between Israelis and Arabs does not, it is also vital to ensure that P2P work will be granted with the right sail-wind. History matters, and mutual decades-long demonization cannot be ignored. Attempting to bring these societies together just with the hope that its will "magically work" cannot serve as a working assumption.

P2P relationships have a great deal of value, which suggests that the relevant

government structures should pay attention to them, back them, and support them. In an environment where official government approval is sought for most things, going against the established structures is unlikely to succeed. However, if sustained, civic Society work and P2P relations can serve as the needed bridge between societies in the region and help convey our similarities, differences, cultures and even the everyday habits of conducting life and business. This will enable us to build the partnership we need.

To ensure the success of the Accords, it is crucial to understand that the relationship between societies and the relationship between governments must be developed in tandem. The hope for mutual collaboration and success must be carried and shared by the people—but some caution and wisdom must be applied when building these channels so that they will succeed. These efforts are possible, and indeed critical, to the new chapter of history in our region as we march into the third year of the Abraham Accords.

THE IMPACT OF TÜRKİYE AND ISRAEL'S RAPPROCHEMENT ON THE MARITIME DELIMITATION DISPUTE IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

Türkiye and Israel relations have recently improved with ambassadors' mutual appointment to the respective countries. This recent rapprochement between the two essential states of the Middle East also influences the ongoing political disputes in the seas of this region. As is well known, Türkiye, Greece, and Cyprus (North and South) have been in conflict regarding the delimitation of maritime borders in the Eastern Mediterranean. In this conflict, Greece and Southern Cyprus have developed strong alliances with western countries, the most important ones being the U.S. and the EU. The recent rapprochement between Türkiye and Israel may change the game in the region and improve Türkiye's hand with regard to the Eastern Mediterranean dispute.

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Brief History of Türkiye-Israel Relations:

Türkiye recognized the state of Israel, which was declared on 14 May 1948 on 28 March 1949. This decision made Türkiye one of the first countries to recognize Israel. The Turkish embassy was opened in Tel Aviv on 7 January 1950. In the following years, the ups and downs in relations between Türkiye and Israel have been mostly a result of Israel's policies about Palestine and the greater Middle East. That said, both countries have tried to sustain good relations with each other as two important states of the highly volatile region.

The Baghdad Pact established in 1955 between Türkiye, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, and the United Kingdom, negatively influenced Türkiye-Israel relations. After Egypt nationalized the Suez Canal, Türkiye protested against Israel's landing of troops on Egyptian soil on 29 October 1956. The relations between the two countries were reduced to the level of chargé d'affaires on 26 November 1956. Afterward, seven years passed for the situation to return to its former state, and during the early 1960s, the two countries had good relations again.

However, with the Six-Day War, which started with Israel's sudden attack on Egypt in 1967 and continued with its occupation of East Jerusalem, the West Bank, the Sinai Peninsula, and the Golan Heights in Syria, Ankara took a stance on the side of the Arab countries. Türkiye wanted Israel to withdraw from the occupied areas, including the Golan and Jerusalem. As a result, bilateral relations remained tense in the following years and during most of the 1970s.

After a challenging decade in bilateral relations, the representatives of the two countries were again elevated to the embassy level as of 1 January 1980. But after Israel annexed East Jerusalem and declared Jerusalem the eternal capital on 30 July 1980, Türkiye closed the Jerusalem Consulate and reduced the level of representation in Tel Aviv to the lowest level.

During the Özal years in Türkiye, bilateral relations improved again. Türkiye's vote against the 1989 resolution banning the representation of Israel in the UN started the softening process in relations. Also, with the Middle East peace process that began with the Madrid Conference, the tension in Arab-Israeli relations tended to decrease. In 1991, both Palestine and Israel raised their representations in Ankara to the level of embassies. This step was followed by the start of Türkiye's consulate general activities in Jerusalem.

However, the relations between Türkiye and Israel, which developed under the

influence of the atmosphere brought by the Middle East peace process in the 1990s, deteriorated due to the anti-peace radicalism of then Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. Sharon's very harsh policy towards the Palestinians worsened relations with Türkiye. In the early 2000s, steps were again taken to improve relations. Then Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, representatives of the newly elected Justice and Development Party, started to visit Israel and Palestine regularly.

"Mainly, Türkiye-Israel rapprochement is crucial for Türkiye as it has difficult times with its neighboring Greece and Southern Cyprus in the seas of the Eastern Mediterranean."

During the early 2000s, the two countries had very good relations. But Israel's attack on Lebanon on 12 July 2006 and the Gaza Strip on 27 December 2008 received a great reaction from Türkiye. At a session at the World Economic Forum held in Davos at the beginning of 2009, then Prime Minister Erdogan reacted to former Israeli President Shimon Peres' words legitimizing the Gaza attacks. This famous so-called "One-minute" debate was the beginning of the deterioration of bilateral relations in the following decade.

To make matters worse, the Mavi Marmara incident, which took place on 1 May 2010, has become one of the most significant breaking points in Türkiye-Israel relations. Israel intervened in international waters to the convoy carrying humanitarian aid to break the blockade on Gaza. 9 Turkish citizens were killed on board, and one seriously injured citizen died later. While withdrawing its Ambassador from Tel Aviv after the incident, Türkiye demanded that Israel immediately apologize, pay compensation to the victims' families, and lift the blockade on Gaza. Followingly, Israel did not take any steps, and Türkiye reduced the relations to the minimum level. Türkiye also reduced diplomatic representation to the chargé d'affaires level and suspended all military agreements.

Later, former U.S. President Donald Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as the 'capital of Israel' on 6 December 2017, and the official relocation of her country's embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem on 14 May 2018, caused outrage in the Middle East and particularly in Türkiye.

After a decade of tension in bilateral relations, the dialogue that developed between President Erdogan and the new Israeli President Isaac Herzog, who took office on 7 July 2021, finally enabled the steps to be taken for re-normalization between Türkiye and Israel. During the visit of Israeli President Herzog to Türkiye on 9-10 March 2022, bilateral relations were reviewed in all their dimensions. Israeli President Isaac Herzog became the first Israeli leader to visit Türkiye since 2008.

After this visit, Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid, who was also his country's foreign minister at that time, revisited Türkiye. During this visit from Israel to Türkiye, which was held at the level of foreign minister for the first time in 16 years, Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu and Lapid announced that they had started the work to increase the level of diplomatic representation to the ambassador level. Another important step in cooperation in bilateral relations has been the newly signed bilateral aviation agreement between the two countries, which enabled Israeli airline companies to resume their flights to Türkiye.

More recently, the Appointment Committee of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs has decided to appoint Irit Lillian, Charge d'Affaires of the Embassy in Ankara, as Ambassador of Israel in Türkiye. Correspondingly, the Turkish government appointed Ambassador Şakir Özkan Torunlar, who served as the Consulate General of Jerusalem in 2010-2014 and the Embassy in New Delhi between January 2017-May 2021, to the Turkish Embassy in Tel Aviv.

Today, Türkiye-Israel relations have improved significantly, and both countries regularly state that they need each other in this challenging geography. Mainly, Türkiye-Israel rapprochement is crucial for Türkiye as it has difficult times with its neighboring Greece and Southern Cyprus in the seas of the Eastern Mediterranean. Also, the improvement of relations between the two countries is to the benefit of Israel, as its loneliness in the middle east continues, and it desperately needs powerful allies such as Türkiye.

The Eastern Mediterranean Dispute and Türkiye-Israel Relations:

Following the exploration of hydrocarbon reserves since the early 2000s, the conflicting claims of the littoral state on the maritime jurisdiction areas in the Eastern Mediterranean region have resulted in a jurisdictional crisis. The Eastern Mediterranean is an important region due to energy resources, not only in terms of the law of the sea for sharing but also because it is located in a strategic position that enables the transportation of hydrocarbon resources from the Middle East to Europe.[1] The changing global and regional conjuncture after the Cold War has

[1] Ş. V. Ediger, B. Devlen, and B. D. Mcdonald, "Levant'ta Büyük Oyun: Doğu Akdeniz'in Enerji Jeopolitiği," *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Vol. 9, No. 33, 2012.

increased the importance of the Eastern Mediterranean as a new strategic interaction region. Among these interactions, the most prominent one today is the claims of the littoral parties of the Eastern Mediterranean over the maritime jurisdiction areas in the basin.[2]

> *"Instead of following such a neutral position, the EU clearly supported the Greek and Southern Cyprus' claims in the past, making the solution to the Eastern Mediterranean maritime borders dispute an arduous task."*

In particular, the claims of Greece, Türkiye, Southern Cyprus, and Northern Cyprus have been on the agenda since the early 2000s and have quickly become one of the main issues in the region in the last decade. The reflections of this conflict directly affect other states such as Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, and the UK. It also concerns global actors' economic and political interests, such as the USA, Russia, and the EU. What makes this dispute regarding maritime jurisdiction areas in the region so critical is the potential oil and gas reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean.[3] The 2,5 billion barrels of oil deposits and the 7 trillion cubic meters of natural gas explored in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of numerous littoral states in the region, especially in Cyprus (Aphrodite, 2011), in Israel (Tamar, 2009; Leviathan, 2010) and Egypt (Zohr, 2015) have led to a revaluation of the importance of the region.[4]

In this context, the recent rapprochement between Türkiye-Israel can be a game changer for Türkiye with regards to the ongoing dispute in the Eastern Mediterranean. Up to now, Türkiye's main problem in the Eastern Mediterranean has been its loneliness in regional energy cooperation. The developments have shown that a broad coalition in the region ignores the rights of Türkiye and Northern Cyprus. Especially Southern Cyprus, Greece, Israel, and Egypt tried to isolate Türkiye and Northern Cyprus by leaving them out of the game in the past. The fact that Türkiye did not have a maritime jurisdiction agreement (EEZ or continental shelf areas) with

[2] Kirval, Levent & Özkan, Arda, "The Delimitation Dispute of the Maritime Jurisdiction Areas in the Eastern Mediterranean: Turkish Perspective Based on the Equitable Principles," *The Turkish Yearbook of International Relations,* Vol. 52, 2021.

[3] B. Shaffer, "Eastern Mediterranean Energy: A Decade After The Major Discoveries", *Turkish Policy*, 27 November 2018. http://turkishpolicy.com/article/936/eastern-mediterranean-energy-a-decade-after-the-major%20discoveries (Accessed on 5 August 2022).

[4] Energy Information Administration, (EIA), "Overview of Oil and Natural Gas in the Eastern Mediterranean Region," https://www.eia.gov/beta/international/analysis_includes/regions_of_interest/Eastern_Mediterranean/eastern-mediterranean.pdf (Accessed on 20 September 2022).

the other littoral states decreased the effectiveness of Türkiye.

However, with the Continental Shelf Delimitation Agreement signed between Türkiye and Northern Cyprus in 2011 and the Memorandum of Understanding on the Delimitation of the Maritime Jurisdiction Areas signed between Türkiye and Libya in 2019, Türkiye has achieved a significant gain in the Mediterranean energy equation. Moreover, on 3 October 2022, Türkiye's foreign minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu also signed a deal in Libya's capital allowing for oil and gas exploration in Libya's Mediterranean waters, three years after the maritime border deal that angered the EU.

During the last decade, the EU and the U.S. have supported the position of Greece and Southern Cyprus in the maritime delimitation dispute in the Eastern Mediterranean. Remarkably, the EU clearly supported Greece in the conflict of Eastern Mediterranean as Greece is an EU member state. The so-called Sevilla Map, drawn by professors at Seville University with a mandate from the European Commission, summarizes the Greek position in the Eastern Mediterranean. Based on the International Law of the Sea, the official Greek position is that all islands generate EEZ. The Seville map is based on this position. That said, the Seville Map is not an official EU document but just a study conducted by an external institution. However, the EU has used this map regularly in the past in some of its publications such as official documents and websites.

The rapprochement between Türkiye and Israel may also influence the EU's position in the Eastern Mediterranean. Moreover, it may alter the U.S. stance with regards to the delimitation of maritime borders in the region. Currently, the EU and the U.S. support the Greek and South Cypriot position. However, improving relations between Türkiye and Israel may change this position. The EU and the U.S. obviously do not want to see a hot conflict between Greece and Türkiye, important NATO allies in the region. Therefore, they might be willing to act as mediators to solve this conflict. In this context, the recent rapprochement between Türkiye and Israel may also help the solution of the dispute in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Also, with regards to the transportation of the Eastern Mediterranean's gas reserves to Europe, Türkiye is the most feasible route. The biggest aim of Israel, which discovered natural gas on its shores starting in 2010, is to sell this gas to Europe. And the most economical way to transport Israeli and Eastern Mediterranean gas to Europe is through Türkiye. Therefore, Türkiye and Israel can reap economic and diplomatic gains if they act together to reduce Europe's dependence on Russian natural gas.

Also, Israel needs to make geo-strategic balancing with Türkiye in the region. Recently, Israel has strengthened its relations with Cyprus and Greece regarding diplomatic, economic, security cooperation and even tourism. However, leaving Türkiye entirely out of the game, the strongest country of the region with a big Muslim population, may create several problems for Israel. In this context, Israel will surely wish to improve relations with Türkiye in the future.

In the past, Israel decided to deliver gas to Europe not via Türkiye, but through the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Pipeline (Eastmed Pipeline) line, which follows the Crete-Greece and Italy routes. In this context, the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum was established, which brought together eight countries, including France, Italy, Israel, Egypt, Greece, Cyprus, Palestine and Jordan. However, the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Pipeline Project, which was standing with the tacit support of the EU and the USA, was stopped due to the USA's withdrawal of its support from the project. This line was longer and more arduous than the Turkish option and was very costly as it involved deep sea crossings. In this context, following the cancellation of this project, the Türkiye route again increased its importance with regards to transportation of Eastern Mediterranean gas to Europe.

Recently, Israel and Lebanon have also reached an agreement on where to draw the maritime border between their countries. The crux of the conflict was who gets to drill for natural gas in disputed waters off the Mediterranean coast. With this agreement, both Israel and Lebanon will be able to drill gas peacefully in the waters of the Mediterranean in their respective areas, and the transportation of this gas to Europe will again be a fundamental issue. The distance between the Israeli and Lebanese fields and mainland Türkiye is approximately 500 kilometers. Hence, the pipeline length that needs to be built is only a quarter of the recently canceled Eastmed project. This means that the project's cost is reduced at the same rate. In addition, the depth of the route is more reasonable than the other. Also, there are existing pipelines that traverse Türkiye from one end to the other and connecting this new line to Türkiye's existing systems is easy. In this context, Türkiye is the most advantageous option in terms of both shorter and cheaper routes, and construction time.

With regards to the Eastern Mediterranean maritime borders dispute, it is evident that Türkiye, Greece, and Cyprus should find a peaceful solution. At its current stage, both Türkiye's and Greece's positions are rather maximalist. A medium position between the claims of both sides should be indeed searched for. In this context, a mediator power such as U.S. or EU can help the solution of the current dispute in the Eastern Mediterranean. Similarly, the U.S. recently played the mediator role in the latest agreement between Lebanon and Israel concerning their maritime borders.

In this context, without a mediator, it is complicated for the conflicting claims of Türkiye, Greece, and Cyprus (North and South) to reach a peaceful solution.

The EU may indeed act as a mediator; however, for this to happen, it should also understand and value the Turkish position to some extent, which, for Türkiye and Northern Cyprus, is indeed compatible with the International Law of the Sea. Instead of following such a neutral position, the EU clearly supported the Greek and Southern Cyprus' claims in the past, making the solution to the Eastern Mediterranean maritime borders dispute an arduous task.

Keeping Türkiye, the most powerful country with the longest coastline in the Eastern Mediterranean, lonely in this dispute surely does not help. In this context, Israel's rapprochement with Türkiye may also decrease Türkiye's loneliness in this dispute. One other significant development is the recent improvement of relations between Türkiye and Egypt. This may further reduce Türkiye's loneliness in the Eastern Mediterranean dispute. In addition to all these, if the U.S. or EU also intervene as neutral actors and potential mediators, the solution to the problem will be found more easily.

BETWEEN CRISES AND FRAGILE STABILITY: TÜRKİYE-ISRAEL AFFAIRS

Since the establishment of Israel, the Turkish-Israeli relations have been marked by continuous periods of swings – from crises to cooperation and back. This article aims to shed light on the turbulent bilateral ties by focusing on the role of the current Justice and Development Party (JDP) rule in Türkiye. In doing so, it firstly provides a background on the two countries' relations, covering the period between their foundational years and 2002. Secondly, it explores a series of significant crises against which the Turkish-Israeli relations reached an all-time low starting with the Operation Cast Lead in 2008. Given the recent developments unfolding in Türkiye's domestic sphere and its close geography, this work lastly assesses the impact of the Abraham Accords in 2020 on bilateral relations and speculates about the future trajectories.

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Türkiye became the first Muslim-majority country to recognize Israel a year after its creation.[1] This move was followed by Ankara's opening of a diplomatic mission in Tel Aviv in 1950. Although the Suez Canal crisis in 1956 provoked short-term diplomatic tension between both countries, bilateral relations progressed relatively well throughout the 1950s. During this period, the two states signed trade and construction agreements, while agreeing to cooperate on military intelligence. This was primarily because both countries were observing the regional and global developments with deep concerns, especially after the rise of pan-Arabism led by Gamal Abdel Nasser's Egypt and the growing Soviet expansionism.

However, a sequence of events unfolding in the 1960s interrupted this cooperative impetus. First, after U.S. President L. Johnson prevented Türkiye from involving in the Cyprus conflict in 1964, Türkiye aimed to garner support from the Arab countries. Türkiye's rapprochement with the Arab actors continued during the Arab-Israeli Wars in 1967 and 1973. During these wars, for example, Türkiye did not permit the U.S. forces to transfer military supplies to Israel by using NATO bases.[2] It also opposed Israel's land accusations over the West Bank and Gaza following these wars. Türkiye voted for UN Resolution 3379, associating Israel's foundational paradigm, i.e., political Zionism, with racial discrimination.[3] These moves later prepared the sociopolitical background for Türkiye's recognition of the PLO in 1974. It even permitted the PLO to open a political bureau in Ankara in 1979.[4] In the same vein, these developments went parallel with Türkiye's downgrading of its diplomatic relations with Israel in 1980 after it declared Jerusalem its capital.

After the end of the Cold War, the Turkish-Israeli relations gained another momentum, particularly following the eruption of the first Gulf War, during which both states were in the same coalition against Saddam Hussein's Iraq. Akin to the episode in the 1950s, the two states found themselves on the same page again, being watchful against the post-Cold War security threats in the region with the rise of Islamic extremism and international terrorism. These theoretical concerns intersected with the close events that sought to bring stability to the region by the U.S.-brokered treaties, i.e., the 1991 Madrid Peace Conference, the 1993 Oslo Accords, and the 1994 Israel-Jordan Peace Treaty. In the same year of the Madrid Peace Conference, Türkiye upgraded its relations to the ambassadorial level with Israel.[5]

[1] Yet, Türkiye, India, Greece, and other major Muslim countries, such as Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Iran, voted against the partition of Palestine into an Arab and a Jewish state in 1947.

[2] Umut Uzer, "The Impact of Islamist Ideology on Turkish Foreign Policy and Its Casualty," *Israeli Studies Review*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (2022), p. 34.

[3] Michael B. Bishku, "How Has Turkey Viewed Israel?," *Israel Affairs*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (2006), p. 188.

[4] M. Ercan Yılmaz, "Turkey-Israel Relations in the Post-Cold War Era," *Akademik Fener*, Vol. 6, No. 10 (2008), p. 163.

[5] Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1991 Log. http://diad.mfa.gov.tr/diad/tarihce/1991-2.pdf

"Since Türkiye was seen as the natural inheritor of this Ottoman legacy, it was attributed to a historical mission to "unify the elements of the fragmented nation [referring to the former Ottoman societies]". "

The Turkish leadership perceived these reconciliatory developments as unique opportunities on two dimensions. As briefly mentioned, Türkiye had adopted a sympathetic position towards the Palestinian issue since the 1940s. Thus, closely observing the Israeli-Palestinian peace process would first provide a space for Türkiye to scale up its regional profile and become an active player working towards regional peace and stability. It would second help the country to strengthen its developing relations with Israel, mainly based on strategic lines. In this sense, furthering bilateral relations would support the two countries' efforts to weaken the PLO-PKK linkage and balance Syria, which imposed a security threat to both Israel and Türkiye considering, among others, the Golan Heights issue and Hafez Assad's assistance to the PKK and ASALA. Echoing this rationale, bilateral relations reached their zenith in the 1990s. They not only extended their security cooperation in this decade, such as organizing joint military trainings[6] but also initiated free trade agreements and cultural and educational programs.

Having said this, the Turkish-Israeli relations were severely damaged, almost hitting rock bottom, under the JDP rule (2002-present). The following section first sheds light on the JDP elites' sociopolitical background, which traces back to the mid-1990s. It analyzes the critical events that have left significant imprints on bilateral relations under the JDP rule.

Türkiye-Israel Relations During the JDP Rule

The JDP elites, for example, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Bülent Arınç,[7] have begun their political careers in the ranks of the Virtue Party, founded by the self-proclaimed Islamist Prime Minister (1996-1997) of Türkiye, Necmettin Erbakan. Although he did not serve long in office, Türkiye established strong relations with

[6] Orhan Babaoglu, "Reliable Mermaid Naval Exercise: Increasing the Peacetime Role of Navies" https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/reliant-mermaid-naval-exercise-increasing-peacetime-role-navies

[7] Arınç was also a member of Erbakan's former party, National Salvation Party (1972-1981), but did not take any prominent role.

political Islamists in the region, such as Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Hamas in Palestine, under the Erbakan rule. In a short time, he also visited Libya, Egypt, and Malaysia and even proposed the establishment of "the Muslim Eight" as an alternative to the West's G-8.[8]

The JDP came to power after the 2002 general elections. The party has acted as the leader of the Islamist movement in Türkiye, resuming Erbakan's foreign policy route to enhance Türkiye's ties with the Muslim Arab world. In advancing this goal, however, the JDP has increasingly adhered to religious narratives and conservative-traditionalist ethos at the expense of Türkiye's alignment with the West, which was criticized as being a top-down agenda imposed by the old military-bureaucratic elites who had no genuine connection with the country's sociopolitical fabric. This identity-based contestation went hand in hand with the JDP cadres' selective reading of the country's imperial past. Ottoman rule was not only imagined to be multicultural and multiethnic by the party elites; it was also portrayed as the peak point of the Islamic civilization.[9] Since Türkiye was seen as the natural inheritor of this Ottoman legacy, it was attributed to a historical mission to "unify the elements of the fragmented nation [referring to the former Ottoman societies]".[10] This ideology would justify the JDP's efforts in developing stronger relations with the Muslim Arab actors along the pro-Islamic lines.

Frequently coined as neo-Ottomanism, this proactive foreign policy agenda was not powerfully materialized until the JDP's second term (2007-2011).[11] It was primarily because the party was concerned with consolidating its capacity to weaken the influence of the secular state intelligentsia and military over the state bureaucracy. Thus, the developing Turkish-Israeli relations did not witness a radical detour until 2008. For example, even though Türkiye denounced Israel's harsh management of the Second Intifada, the highest-level official visits continued between the two countries. This era also witnessed the continuation of strategic and economic cooperation. For example, Israel participated again in the Anatolian Eagle training in Konya, while the two countries' trade volumes reached their records in each

[8] It should be noted that although Erbakan adopted strong Islamic stance at home and sought to articulate this self-image abroad, he personally signed the free trade and military cooperation agreements with Israel. The main reason behind this move was the strong influence of secular state bureaucracy and military over the government that restrained the expansion of Erbakan's Islamic vision.

[9] Umut Can Adısönmez and Recep Onursal, "Governing Anxiety, Trauma and Crisis: The Political Discourse on Ontological (In)Security after the July 15 Coup Attempt in Turkey," *Middle East Critique*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (2020), p. 8.

[10] Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Dışişleri Bakanı Sayın Ahmet Davutoğlu'nun Türk Ocakları'nın Kuruluşunun 100. Yılını Kutlama Etkinlikleri Kapsamında Düzenlenen 'Büyük Türkiye'ye Doğru' Sempozyumunda Yaptığı Konuşma", http://www.mfa.gov.tr/disisleri-bakani-sayin-ahmet-davutoglu_nun-turk-ocaklari_nin-kurulusunun-100_-yilini-kutlama-etkinlikleri-kapsaminda-duzenlenen.tr.mfa

[11] Having that said, Turkey established strong links with the Muslim Brotherhood, and other Islamist groups. It also strengthened its relationship with Iraq, Iran, and Syria following the resurgence of the PKK threat after the Iraqi War in 2003.

consecutive year between 2002 and 2007.[12] Nonetheless, the 2008 Operation Cast Lead marked a turning point in bilateral relations. This rupture was followed by two major crises that unfolded between 2009 and 2010: the One Minute crisis and the Blue Marmara flotilla crisis.

"With these pressing issues in mind, the Turkish leadership has been closely observing the shifting regional relations in the post-Arab Spring Middle East, being fostered by the Abraham Accords in 2020."

The first rupture arrived in 2008 when Israel initiated a military operation against Hamas in Gaza. Referring to the former's disproportionate use of coercive power, Prime Minister Erdogan criticized Israel and even described its actions as state terrorism.[13] Following his condemnation, he visited significant Arab actors in the region, including Egypt and Saudi Arabia, seeking to establish a joint platform that would pressure Israel.[14] This was followed by Türkiye's suspension of its military cooperation with Israel.[15] A related watershed, known as the One Minute crisis, was revealed a year after at the World Economic Forum in Davos. At the 2009 summit, Prime Minister Erdogan criticized Israel's harsh handling of the Palestinian issue and said Israel's President Shimon Peres, who was sitting next to him, that "…the loudness of your voice has to do with a guilty conscience…when it comes it killing, you know well how to kill".[16] Following his speech, Erdogan stormed out of the summit, shocking the speakers and audience alike.

These bold moves had threefold outcomes. First, they prepared a fertile background for the JDP to enhance its regional profile along the party's contours shaped and spurred by then Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu. Second, they deteriorated the Turkish-Israeli relations further, being the Lower Seat crisis as a paragon.[17] Accompanied by

[12] "Turkey Exports to Israel", *Trading Economies*, (15 November 2022). https://tradingeconomics.com/turkey/exports/israel#:~:text=Türkiye%20Exports%20to%20Israel%20was,updated%20on%20November%20of%202022

[13] Bülent Aras, "Turkey and the Palestinian Question," *SETA Policy Brief*, No: 37 (2009). https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/pbei/seta/0015602/f_0015602_13607.pdf

[14] A. Oğuz Çelikkol, *One Minute'ten Mavi Marmara'ya Turkiye-Israil Catismasi,* (Doğan Kitap, İstanbul, 2014).

[15] A. Oğuz Çelikkol, (2014), 77.

[16] "Leaders of Türkiye and Israel clash at Davos Panel", *The New York Times*, (29 January 2009).

[17] It occurred following the airing of a TV series in Türkiye that was argued to be anti-semitic by the Israeli officials. Türkiye's ambassador to Israel, Oğuz Çelikkol, was called for a meeting on this matter. However, he was offered a lower sofa during the meeting, creating a humiliating setting which was closely monitored by the Israeli media.

the JDP's populist appeal, they third helped the party to draw electoral support from the nationalist-conservative enclaves for the 2009 municipality elections.[18] Against this turbulent background, the Blue Marmara flotilla incident erupted in 2010 – the most profound crisis in the history of bilateral relations, where it hit rock bottom.
As a part of the Operation Cast Lead, Israel imposed a naval blockade on Gaza, isolating the territory from the international sphere. Then, the Turkish NGO called Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH) planned to deliver massive humanitarian aid to Gaza via flotilla, which would use international waters in the Mediterranean Sea. It, however, raised significant concerns among the Israeli leadership as the IHH was believed to share links with extremist Islamist groups.[19] Echoing this alarmist mindset, the flotilla was intercepted and onboarded by the Israeli commandos during its course in international waters in May 2010, killing ten Turkish nationals. The immediate impact of this incident was far-reaching. For example, the Turkish leadership downgraded its diplomatic relations with Israel and sought an emergency gathering in the UN Security Council, which concluded with the council's condemnation of Israel.[20] Türkiye did not invite any NATO members (and Israel) to its annual Anatolian Eagle drills held in the same year.[21] It also refused Israel's access to radar intelligence collected in Malatya and designated Israel as a "major threat", while removing Iran from its threat list.[22] The Foreign Minister Davutoğlu even compared the Blue Marmara crisis with the 9/11 attacks, indicating that its traumatic impact would be a watershed for Türkiye's relations with the West in general and with Israel more specifically.[23] Yet, bilateral economic relations had not seemed to be negatively affected by the escalating tensions their trade volume increased by 12 percent between 2010 and 2012.[24]

In this sense, the flotilla crisis was the most destabilizing incident in the Turkish-Israeli relations. It, however, intersected with the Arab Spring protests, preparing another platform for the two states to resolve their issues along national interests, albeit marked by ups and downs. In this sense, after U.S. President Barrack Obama's visit to Israel in 2013, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu agreed to apologize for the Blue Marmara incident and pay reparations to the families who lost their

[18] Banu Eligür, "Crisis in Turkish–Israeli Relations (December 2008–June 2011): From Partnership to Enmity," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 48, No. 3 (2012), p. 431.

[19] Ariel Cohen, "Turkey and Israel: Unraveling Relations and the Netanyahu Apology," *Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies* (2013), p. 27.

[20] "Statement by the President of the U.N. Security Council", *UNSC*, (1 June 2010). http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N10/382/79/PDF/N1038279.pdf?OpenElement

[21] "Tarihçe", *Anadolu Kartalı*, (14 June 2021). https://www.anadolukartali.tsk.tr/Custom/AnadoluKartali/121

[22] Cohen, *Türkiye and Israel*; "Turkish Document cites Israel as major threat", Ynetnews, (30 October 2010). https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3976899,00.html. This was particularly important as the data gathered in Malatya was primary used to watch Iran's possible aerial threats against Israel.

[23] "Saldırı bizim '11 Eylül'ümüz olmuştur", *Yeniçağ*, (6 June 2010). https://www.yenicaggazetesi.com.tr/-35631h.htm

[24]"Turkey Exports to Israel".

relatives during the raid.[25] He also granted Türkiye to construct a hospital in Gaza. Nevertheless, Netanyahu hesitated to deepen bilateral relations as Türkiye demanded Israel lift its naval blockade on Gaza.[26] Subsequently, Türkiye halted its trade, military, and defense ties with Israel, while downgrading its diplomatic relations to the second-secretary level. This was accompanied by Türkiye's growing connections with the Hamas regime, which another military campaign of Israel would soon hit in 2014, Operation Protective Edge. That being said, a series of focal developments unfolding both at external and internal space have directly influenced the trajectory of bilateral relations, driving the JDP elites to normalize its relations with Israel based on strategic calculations. The following section sheds light on this chain of events, starting with the Arab Spring protests.

Failed Regional Expectations, Domestic Struggles, and the Abraham Accords

The JDP elites initially perceived the Arab Spring protests as positive developments as these popular movements facilitated the transition of power from decades-old autocratic governments to the Muslim Brotherhood-linked groups, whom they had close links, in Algeria, Tunisia, and Egypt.[27] These major regional changes would help Türkiye expand its sphere of influence and promote itself as a major geopolitical player in line with the JDP's agenda. In fact, the JDP leadership emotionally invested in this project at a scale that blinded their capability to bring a democratic regime change in Syria following the massive demonstrations against Bashar Assad. As the conflict in Syria quickly turned into a civil war (2011-present), Türkiye carried out frequent cross-border operations in North Syria, especially after 2016, such as the Operation Euphrates Shield, Operation Peace Spring, and Operation Spring Shield, seeking to protect its territories from the attacks of the ISIS and the YPG, the PKK's Syrian branch. In this period, Türkiye also trained Sunni opposition groups against Assad regime, the most prominent example being the Free Syrian Army. However, these extensive efforts did not instigate a regime change in Syria since Türkiye overestimated its military capacity, while ignoring Assad's international alliances. Along with the toppling of Egypt's Mohamed Mursi in 2013 by general Abdel Sisi, the case in Syria heralded the gradual downfall of the so-called neo-Ottomanist foreign policy in theory and practice even though the JDP elites did not let it disappear entirely at a discursive level, e.g., Erdogan criticizing Israel's increasing security measures around the al-Aqsa mosque.[28]

[25] "Netanyahu apologises to Turkish PM for Israeli role in Gaza flotilla raid", *The Guardian*, (22 March 2013).

[26] Nimrod Goren, "An Unfulfilled Opportunity for Reconciliation," *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 14, No. 2. (2012), pp. 127-129.

[27] Hossein Aghaie Joobani and Umut Can Adısönmez, "Turkey's Volte-Face Politics: Understanding the AKP's Securitization Policy toward the Syrian Conflict," *New Middle Eastern Studies,* Vol. 8, No. 1 (2018), p. 43.

[28] "Turkish President Criticizes Israel Over Al-Aqsa", *VoaNews*, (25 July 2017). https://www.voanews.com/a/turkish-president-criticizes-srael-over-al-aqsa-/3958357.html

While these critical events were disclosed in its close region, Türkiye experienced a turbulent development at home. In July 2016, an Islamist group called Fetullahçı Terör Örgütü organized a coup attempt to overthrow the JDP government. This traumatic event resurrected Türkiye's old separation anxieties, i.e., *Sévresphobia*, under which the state leadership has increasingly adhered to the survivalist rhetoric that nurtures nationalist and nativist sentiments. As a result, an ever-resonant Western skepticism in Turkish politics and society came to the surface again.[29] Coupled with Türkiye's unilateral moves and militaristic turn in foreign policy, these major developments culminated in Türkiye's regional isolationism and sparked international criticism. In the nexus of the Turkish-Israeli relations, for example, the latter accused the former of following a neo-imperialist agenda and thus portrayed Türkiye as being a major source of regional instability in 2019.[30]

It would not be misleading to argue that Türkiye still suffers from regional ostracism to some degree and has sought to rationalize this case as "precious loneliness" for a long time.[31] It has, however, come with missed opportunities in bilateral relations, such as the natural gas research in the East Mediterranean, where Israel has been cooperating with Greece, and Cyprus (and later Egypt) left Türkiye outside this crucial regional partnership. This loneliness in the foreign sphere becomes even more challenging for the JDP leadership considering the country's poor economic performance, hammered by debt crisis and high inflation. With these pressing issues in mind, the Turkish leadership has been closely observing the shifting regional relations in the post-Arab Spring Middle East, being fostered by the Abraham Accords in 2020. Israel and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) signed the U.S.-brokered agreement in 2020 to enhance their bilateral relations on the topics of, among others, energy and agriculture. Following this reproachment with the major Arab actor, Israel also signed normalization treaties with Morocco, Bahrain, and lastly with Saudi Arabia. This was the most striking opening of Israel to the Arab powers since 1948, that was facilitated by the de-escalating atmosphere in the region. In parallel to this, the Accords diminished the impact of the Palestinian question in developing relations with Israel.[32]

Against this backdrop, the UAE's Crown Prince Mohammed Nahyan visited Türkiye to normalize bilateral relations as the UAE was among Türkiye's actors

[29] Umut Can Adısönmez and Recep Onursal, "'Strong, but Anxious State': The Fantasmatic Narratives on Ontological Insecurity and Anxiety in Turkey," *Uluslararası İlişkiler,* Vol. 19, No. 73 (2022), pp. 61-75.

[30] "Israel's UN envoy: Erdogan has turned Türkiye into a 'regional hub for terror", *Times of Israel*, (29 October 2019). https://www.timesofisrael.com/israels-un-envoy-erdogan-has-turned-turkey-into-a-regional-hub-for-terror/

[31] Yusuf Kanlı, "Precious Loneliness" https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/opinion/yusuf-kanli/precious-loneliness-112503

[32] Oğul Tuna and Gökhan Çınkara, "The Potential for Azerbaijani Mediation of Turkish-Israeli Relations" https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/potential-azerbaijani-mediation-turkish-israeli-relations

accused of supporting the July 2016 coup attempt. In the same vein, President Erdogan visited Saudi Arabia in 2022. It was seen as another critical move in light of Jamal Khashoggi's murder in Istanbul. These efforts were lastly followed by the Israeli President Isaac Herzog's visit to Türkiye in March 2022, marking another historical turning point in the two countries' relations. Taken together with the recent normalization wave in the region, Herzog's visit was evaluated as the end of Türkiye's "precious loneliness", which was backed by Israel's readiness to work with Türkiye on the East Mediterranean gas.[33]

Nonetheless, the continuation of this promising path in the Turkish-Israeli relations will be determined by various factors, particularly by the domestic politics in both countries. On the one hand, the former Prime Minister of Israel and the leader of the right-wing party Likud, Benjamin Netanyahu, was recently invited to form a new government after the collapse of the coalition government. Considering it would be the first time that the far-right "Religious Zionism/Jewish Power bloc" could have a powerful presentation at the state level,[34] Netanyahu's approach towards the Palestinian question would be a critical parameter for the trajectory of bilateral relations. On the other hand, Türkiye will hold national elections in June 2023. Similarly to its Israeli counterpart, the JDP's election campaign gains gravity at this critical juncture. Thus, whether the party would stick to nationalistic-polarizing discourse towards the internal and external 'Others' would be a key indicator to test the sustainability of the Turkish-Israeli relations.

[33] Sinem Cengiz, "The end of Turkey's 'precious loneliness' may be on the horizon" https://www.arabnews.com/node/1824506

[34] Hadas Gold and Richard Allen Greene, "A far-right surge is set to put Netanyahu back in power. Who are his extremist allies?" https://edition.cnn.com/2022/11/02/middleeast/netanyahu-allies-intl/index.html

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