

THE ABRAHAM ACCORD SHAPING A NEW MIDDLE EAST

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts in International Affairs and Diplomacy

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by  
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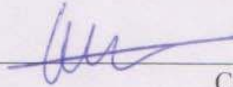
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## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	1
Introduction .....	2
Literature Review .....	5
The ABRAHAM ACCORDS.....	5
Arab and Jewish Conflict .....	8
Polarization of the MENA region .....	11
Arab Perspective on Normalization .....	13
Israeli Perspective on Normalization .....	15
American Perspective on Normalization.....	17
Theoretical Framework.....	20
Methodology .....	24
Discourse analysis .....	27
The End of a Historical Feud between Israel and Arab States .....	27
The Religious Significance of the Accords .....	28
Achieving Peace Among Three Religions Vis-à-Vis the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict .....	31
The Transition from a Religious Rivalry into a Hegemon Power Rivalry Between Arab States.....	33
Repercussions of the Accords .....	37
The Game Theory: Economic Cooperation Generating a Stronger Foreign Policy in the Middle East.....	41
The Real Interests Behind the ABRAHAM ACCORDS .....	41
The Economic Gains from the ABRAHAM ACCORDS.....	43
Saudi Arabia Hidden within the Game Theory Players .....	46
The Winning Players of the Trade Between States in the Middle East.....	47
The Fail and Success of the Game Theory Reflecting on the ABRAHAM ACCORD.....	49
Stronger Foreign Policy & Competition in the Region .....	51

Reconceptualizing Regional and international Relations in the Middle East .....	54
The Dynamics Between the Two Main Camps in the Middle East .....	54
The Abraham Accords Polarizing Effect on the Region .....	57
The Advancement of the Accords .....	59
Saudi Arabia’s Future Place in the ABRAHAM ACCORDS .....	63
The Possible Dynamics of New Alliances.....	66
Comparison between ABRAHAM ACCORDS and Previous Agreements .....	70
The US Vision on ABRAHAM ACCORDS Affecting the Region- from Trump to Biden .....	74
ABRAHAM ACCORDS Transition from Trump to Biden .....	75
The Historic Negev Summit and the Two States Solution- under an American Perspective. ....	79
The United States’ Position in the Middle East .....	83
The Ukraine-Russian War Impact on the United States Vision for the Middle East. ....	86
Conclusion .....	93
Limitations .....	98
References.....	99
Appendices.....	107
Appendix 1 .....	107
Appendix 2 .....	117

## Abstract

The following study examines the Abraham Accords (AA) shaping a new geopolitical era for the MENA region by testing if and how the Abraham Accords are polarizing the present scene in the MENA region.

The game theory is the main layer of the theoretical framework, giving a deeper understanding on how three autonomous player the United States, the UAE, and Israel can cooperate together amid a historical conflict and how it will affect the region of the middle east.

Following the theoretical framework, a qualitative methodology is used to gather in depth rich and diverse information on the effect of the Abraham Accords on the MENA region, as it seeks to unearth and analyze the opinions, thoughts and feelings of respondents and experts who are hesitant to give their opinion regarding such sensitive topic.

This study determined that the Abraham accords are ending a long historic religious feud between Israel and Arab states; second it examined how it is strengthening Arab's nations foreign policy with the game theory, third it cleared up to what extent the accords is shifting the regional geopolitical map of the middle east and finally discussed the American/Israeli vision affecting the continuity of the Abraham Accords in the region, especially with the Biden taking over presidency and the ongoing Ukraine/Russia War.

Keywords: Abraham Accords, Arab and Jewish Conflict, middle east polarization, American administration, Mohammed bin Zayed, Mohammed bin Salman, Game Theory, Negev Summit.

## Introduction

On August 13, 2020, the United Arab Emirates and Israel signed an accord mediated by the United States, dubbed the 'Abraham Accords,' meaning that the three parties represented the Abrahamic religions of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. The agreement's release is described as a first step toward the formation of a new "Strategic Agenda for the Middle East" that will increase diplomatic, trade, and security cooperation. (Sehgal, 202).

On the surface, the agreement aims to develop 'regular' relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, including business links, tourism, direct flights, scientific collaboration, and, eventually, full diplomatic contacts at the ambassadorial level. While the timing for this process is unclear, improved security cooperation against regional threats, particularly from Iran and its proxies, is a significant but not explicitly stated component of the Abraham Accords.

The Abraham Accords come after months of controversy about Israel's publicly disclosed plans to annex parts of the West Bank. If such a move is taken, it will preclude the mutually agreed-upon two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian problem from ever becoming a reality. The inked agreement now provides that Israel will delay such annexation as a plus point. However, Prime Minister Netanyahu has argued that the postponement simply implies that it can be done later, which, given the Emiratis' efforts to persuade Israel to forego such a step, could irreversibly impair the prospects for a two-state solution.

Egypt, Jordan, and Qatar are three Arab countries that already have diplomatic relations with Israel, and at least 12 additional Arab/Muslim countries have interactions at



various levels, therefore the Abraham Accords are widely expected to result in other Arab countries following suit.

The recently concluded Abraham Accords does not promise well for the Palestinians, despite the fact that the ramifications are still unknown. While Saudi Arabia has not yet officially positioned itself, Egypt and other Arab countries have applauded the move.

The Abraham Accords' expanded political, economic, and military collaboration between Israel and the four Arab governments raises significant worries among Middle Eastern regional powers such as Turkey, Iran, and Tunisia. Those who are enthusiastic about the recent normalization agreements believe that the Accords demonstrate a significant shift in Arab (Gulf) countries' threat perceptions of the Palestinian issue. However, other MENA region's countries that have not signed the Abraham Accords are expressing strong opposition. These countries see the agreement as a betrayal of Palestinians' basic rights.

This study's goal is to test the following thesis statement "The Abraham Accords are shaping a new geopolitical era for the MENA region" and to answer the research question: "How are the Abraham Accord polarizing the present scene in the MENA region". The study is divided into chapters, the first chapter consists of a literature review, elaborating on different outlooks regarding the Abraham Accords, the Arab and Jewish Conflict, the Polarization of the MENA region and finally the Arab/Israeli American perspective on normalization. The literature does have a gap regarding the topic as so little has been written and analyzed regarding the Abraham accords, therefore the study will fill this gap in the final findings chapters by determining whether the Abraham accords are ending a long historic feud between Israel and Arab states; second by examining whether the Abraham Accords are strengthening Arab's

nations foreign policy, third by confirming whether the Abraham Accords are shifting the regional geopolitical map of the middle east and finally by analyzing how is the American/Israeli vision affecting the continuity of the Abraham Accords in the region, especially with the ongoing Ukraine/Russia War.

The objectives outlined above are achieved by relying on the theoretical framework of the work throughout the chapters, with the game theory which is a theory delineated in the second chapter that tests how three autonomous player the United States, the UAE, and Israel can cooperate together amid a historical conflict and how it will affect the region of the middle east. It will also allow the paper to study their strategies, actions, the consequences and benefits of such actions on the long run, and the settlements each player will have to make. This will allow the paper to test if all three components can rise together or if one can have full control over the other.

Following the theoretical framework, under the same chapter, there is the methodology describing how the qualitative method will allows the study to answer the sub-questions and objectives outlined above alongside a detailed operationalization segment.

Nobody is certain of what will the Abraham Accords bring to the Middle East in the future, given the difficult circumstances in the region. But one thing is certain: they have exacerbated the differences that already exist within the Arab world and the Middle East, dividing the region into two competing blocs. As a result, the Abraham Accords are sowing the seeds of further fragmentation in the Middle East, which is already split.

## Literature Review

### The ABRAHAM ACCORDS

The Abraham Accords were signed on September 15, 2020 by the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Israel, under a U.S. brokered peace pact, to normalize the diplomatic relations between parties (Guzansky and Marshall, 2020). According to Khan & Sajid (2021), the Accords include several aspects in its agenda which make the accords an agreement of education, tourism, healthcare, security, an economic and trade bond, and a fully efficient bilateral diplomatic treaty. Furthermore, it covers regional political and military situations while addressing the conflict between Israel and Palestine only briefly (Khan & Sajid, 2021).

The Abraham Accords are more of a strategy rather than a mere diplomatic effort to normalize regional relationship. They are multifaceted involving religious, regional, economic and military factors. First, they have religious undertones, which apply, not only to UAE, but also to all other Muslim countries, and Israel today needs recognition from the Muslim states around, and in return the UAE needs a political upper hand in the region. The Abraham Accords have international implications, and if executed right, they could become the holy grail of all deals done between Israel and Muslim countries, paving way for Saudi Arabia to join the peace accords if circumstances require for it to take part for full normalization with Israel (Khan & Sajid, 2021).

Ketbi (2020), however notes as a factor, that it is more suitable for Israel to deal with the Iranian factor if Arab countries have the same views, however, its future consequences must be profoundly studied. "Since the outbreak of war in Yemen in 2015 and the signing of the nuclear treaty between Iran and the P5+1 in July of that year, the UAE has fixated its resources on resisting regional threats" (Ketbi, 2020).

Third, the economy of the Middle East is generally compromised because of homegrown conflicts, like the Israel-Palestine conflict, Israel-Syria conflict, Israel-Lebanon conflict, and the Iranian aspect in Saudi Arabia-Yemen- Houthi Movement relations. Therefore, Israel striking a peace deal with Arab states may alter the course of all these conflicts, or deter them in favor of the Jewish state (Khan & Sajid, 2021).

The signing of the Abraham Accords between Israel, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan is now expected to be a foundation of a new era for peace in the Middle East. With Bahrain being the second Arab (Gulf) country to achieve normalization with Israel after UAE at the time of writing, and Sudan and Morocco being the latest; a comprehensive number of IR analysts have already made plentiful observations about the newly inked Abraham Accords.

Positive expectations are proliferating regarding this new agreement that normalizes relations between Israel and some Arab states, with anticipation for other Arab states to join. The normalization deal is said to achieve a major change in the geopolitics of the Middle East, a change that marks the end of Arab states rejecting to engage in peace talks with Israel. The supporters of the AA deal under Middle East North Africa (MENA) milieu are claiming that three major changes will take place in the Middle East. First, according to advocates of the agreement, this normalization challenges the famous 'No's' that were laid down in the Khartoum Declaration of 1967 -'No' to recognition of, negotiation with, and peace with Israel- rendering them invalid for various Arab countries (Güney & Korkmaz, 2021).

According to Güney & Korkmaz, Israel is said to be introducing a new peace deal for the Middle East. However, this deal cannot be described as a peace deal when it is equated with the previous deals of Camp David in 1976 and Jordan in 1994. The two

Arab (Gulf) states have agreed to sign this normalization deal with Tel-Aviv only in acceptance of Israel's plan of suspending its annexation of occupied territory in the West Bank. And some EU officials have stated the Abraham Accords are far from meeting the necessities of a comprehensive peace in the Middle East since they do not address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. According to this viewing platform, unless Tel-Aviv's government agrees to fully abandon its annexation plans and stop settlement construction in the West Bank, this new deal will remain insufficient. Moreover, this normalization deal was straightforwardly sealed because the two Arab (Gulf) states that first signed it have never lived in any conflict with Israel in the past. The Tel-Aviv government currently favors a 'peace-to-peace' with strength' approach instead of a 'land for peace' approach in the Middle East (Güney & Korkmaz, 2021).

Second, Israel's achievement of a normalization agreement with these four Arab states, without making a compromise on the Palestinian issue, indicates the death of Palestinian veto power over Israel's capability of bringing new pro-Israeli alignments in the Middle East. Lastly, with the assumption of the Abraham Accords, Israel's preferences are witnessing a radical change associated to its Periphery Doctrine of the 1950s. Tel-Aviv today seems determined to proceed from its previous balance of power strategy, countering the pan-Arabism, in favor of adopting a new alignment strategy countering regional countries like Turkey and Iran, and this shift is partly due because of Tel Aviv's desire to develop its naval superiority, to have control on the connection lines on the and under the nearby seas. Therefore, we can assume that Israel is definitely one of the main benefiteres of the Abraham Accords (Güney & Korkmaz, 2021).

However, other scholars counter these observations stating that they do not change the truth that the Abraham Accords were introduced and negotiated by the Trump Administration. The Abraham Accords are part of the new 'Strategic Agenda for the

Middle East' delineated by the US following their War on Terror (WoT 2001) as a long-term US strategy to contain China and Russia, North Korea and Iran. In addition to trying to push back Russian and Chinese influence in the Mediterranean, Washington's backing for the Abraham Accords also aim to set the Gulf States' loyalty to the U.S. and to avoid China's penetration into Tel-Aviv's important economic projects. Some of their projects are directly linked to the Mediterranean like the Euro-Asia Interconnector, which purpose is to transfer electricity by joining Israeli grids to Europe via Greece and South Cyprus. After Pompeo's visit to Israel in December 2020, Tel-Aviv has been persuaded to reject China's bid to run the Sorek 2 Desalination Plant in Palmachim. In this regard, Israel has found itself caught between a Russian-American and also Sino-American rivalry for global geopolitical influence for the control of Mediterranean connectivity (Syed & Ahmed, 2021).

#### Arab and Jewish Conflict

The AA declarations express commonalities between the religious history of the three most influential, religions of the World: Islam, Judaism and Christianity that are also known as the Abrahamic religions. All Abrahamic religions are rooted in the region of Palestine therefore the new deal is directly addressing the chronic issue between Palestine and Israel and the Abraham Accords represent a parent agreement of Israel with two states situated in the Arabian Peninsula (Khan & Sajid, 2021).

The Abraham Accords are a peace pact between the descendants of the Prophet Abraham and the name itself also represents a correlation between the history of settlements and migrations of the three Abrahamic religions, overextended over thousands of years. A liberal Jewish state and Arab monarchs used religious connotations to build the basis of their relationships. It allows for liberalists and neo-liberalists to look through the futuristic aspects of diplomatic ties establishing through

religious normative. While the world is setting religion aside or claiming to, moving towards a political and strategic advancement and enquiring the motives of conservatives who are religious, this peace treaty has opened grounds to further study the religious path of Muslims, Jews and Christians. However, one thing is obvious that even the most liberal states are religiously deep-rooted and, in other words, conservative (Khan & Sajid, 2021).

The UAE's religious bodies have concluded that the deal with Israel was struck, in the name of their country's national interest and for this they have devised a religious connotation, as “the principal argument cited in the ruling by the Emirates Fatwa Council, the country's supreme religious authority, the agreement with Israel is an act that safeguards one or more of the fundamental goals of the sharia (Islamic law)”, and also it has been portrayed that “the argument between the two sides demonstrates that Islam as a religion has no consensual stance on peace and normalization with Israel” (Winter and Guzansky, 2020).

By choosing 'Abraham Accords' as the name, an effort has been made to find the 'right mid-eastern connection' between religions and politics to drive economy. The Abraham Accords primarily address the bilateral ties of countries bound to its fate and do not directly take up the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. So, the AA declaration cannot be seen from the perspective of the Palestinian people although it has significantly wider regional implications. The main draft of the Abraham Accords focus on the pledge to achieve comprehensive and enduring peace, which can later be harnessed to accomplish long-lasting regional peace. UAE-Bahrain-Israel deal has put the Muslim world under pressure which greatly favors Israel. The AA is giving the Jewish state natural lands to expand its spheres of influence and antagonistically challenge enemies, such as Iran, politically and militarily (Khan & Sajid, 2021).

Clive Jones and Yoel Guzansky, are two scholars that published a study about normalization before the agreement even happened and they discuss the Arab Jewish relationship.

Israel has always sought out relations with countries in its outer periphery with countries like Turkey, Ethiopia, Sudan, and Morocco (Jones & Petersen, 2013). The Arab countries of the Persian Gulf never shared the ideologies of the Arab nationalist states that carried the torch of the conflict with Israel and in fact they dreaded the radical ideologies of pan-Arabism, Nasserism, and Ba'thism. Gulf states were conservative, pro-Western, tribally based, and more concerned with commerce than confrontation (Teitelbaum, 2021).

According to Dorsey, the Saudi leaders displayed hatred for Israel and the Jews early on, with King Faisal bin 'Abd al-'Aziz Al Sa'ud and after the 1967 war, when Israel defeated Arab armies in the six days battle, diplomats in Riyadh began to notice a change. The Saudis changed their perspective on the Palestinian cause and they saw it as the Palestinians' problem after Israel demonstrated its continuing power and defeated the radical regimes that the Saudis feared. However, observers noticed in 2018 according to the Arab Opinion Index, 80 percent of Saudis still viewed the Palestinian issue as "an Arab rather than a purely Palestinian one" (Dorsey, 2020).

The relations between gulf Arabs and Jews have been achieved by the "soft power" of religious tolerance, as Guzansky & Winter studied. For example, there is a Jewish community in the UAE and the UAE is building an Abrahamic Family House in Abu Dhabi. Moreover, some Arab states are positioning ambassadors with Jewish ancestors and the media is also playing a huge role by portraying Jewish families in the movies and series. In addition, the Arab communities are starting to be more open to Judaism,



an example of that is the Saudi ambassador in the U.S sending good wishes for the Jewish new year and Hebrew (Guzansky & Winter, 2020).

On the ground, relations with the UAE are taking place at a dizzying pace in the public and private sector, and States today want to do business and do not want a cold peace like Egypt and Jordan have. In 1978, Egypt was working on relations with Israel, and opting out of the conflict signaled a change in the region, as state concerns substituted pan-Arab ones. Today, Emiratis and Saudis are exhibiting similar sentiments to Egypt and Jordan then, as state-centered nationalism is growing. At the session of the Arab League called in September 2020 by the Palestinian Authority, the league's rotating chair, the organization opted out of condemning normalization with Israel which pushed the PA to quit the chair in protest, therefore, Pan-Arabism took a coup de grâce (Teitelbaum, 2021).

#### Polarization of the MENA region

The new political, economic and military cooperation between Israel and the Arab states with the Abraham Accords raise many apprehensions among various regional actors of the Middle East, such as Turkey, Iran, and Tunisia. The UAE has long been interested in the affairs of MENA, using its soft and hard power in an attempt to be influential therefore they aligned with the anti-Turkey front within the other axes of alliances in the region which was met with great suspicion by the Turkish government (Güney & Korkmaz, 2021).

Furthermore, the Accords are also forming a counter-alignments among the rejectionist countries. For example, the Israeli-Emirati deal has already opened a path for the revitalization of relations between Hamas and Fatah, with help from Turkey, making Ankara once again the hero of the Palestinian cause. Today, it is not clear how the actors

who criticized the agreement, like the Gaza Administration and Iran will respond; but it is clear that if they feel like they are being pushed into a corner by the new front of states around Israel in the Middle East and in the Mediterranean, their negative rhetoric that they assumed against the Accord could transform into a real anti-Abraham Accords rapprochement. Therefore, the alignments of the Abraham Accords are expected to reinforce preexisting divisions in the region unless a fundamental change occurs (Güney & Korkmaz, 2021).

It is also important to understand that Israel is the center of polarization or lack of it, since it is a major player in the camp of regional stability, an entryway for diversity and development in economy, and a significant key in containing Iran, and attempting to alienate Islamist ideologies from the mainstream. Furthermore, since Islamists value the anti-normalization agenda as a cause, it would be ordinary for the pragmatists to assume the exact opposite alternative (Boms & Aboubakr, 2022)

Boms & Aboubakr (2022), see that the Abraham Accords are forcing changes suggesting that the Middle East is witnessing a dramatic alteration where a new Arab political perception is taking shape, changing the regional socio-political reality. This drive has been made possible only by a rare moment of alignment between the willpower of the most influential and stable leaders in the region, a new intellectual discourse, and a young population ready for change with different interests than the older generation. The Arab state system still lacks the means of a straight democratic governance, but this recent shift is building a political agenda based upon the interests and aspirations of a wide socio-political coalition, indicating that the Arab state system can no longer rest on the 20th century Arab rhetoric, nor on an absolute alliance with the United States (Boms & Aboubakr, 2022).

Arab states are likely to follow an agenda of global divergence of alliances and mutual commitments, and if the current momentum continues, the influence of resistance politics might decline; Islamism and political resistance in the region will have a weakened influence and the reliance on foreign allies might increase.

Today, the Middle East textbooks are also being re-written and recent studies are demonstrating a shift toward “worldliness” in Qatar, a lesser antisemitism and a certain support of Israel in Saudi Arabia (Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education (IMPACT-se), 2021). The Palestinian issue finds itself lost in this agenda which is not supported by all in the Middle East, however it is gaining strength among a new post-Arab-Spring-generation that still hopes to see a renaissance rather than a wave of violence and resistance (Boms & Aboubakr, 2022)

#### Arab Perspective on Normalization

The recent agreements between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Sudan will not achieve regional peace. Only a peace between Israel and the Palestinians will serve the ultimate goal of giving the Middle East peace, because the states that are normalizing their relationship were never at an actual war with Israel (How is Arab Normalization with Israel Playing Out, 2020).

A public opinion poll was conducted between 2019 and 2020 in 13 Arab countries with more than 300 million people: 89 percent of respondents said Israel is the greatest threat to the Arab region, followed by the United States (81%) and Iran (67%). A full 88% did not recognize Israel and only six percent welcomed establishing diplomatic relations with it, mentioning its expansionist plans and its racism toward Palestinians, and Seventy-nine percent said Palestine is still a major concern for all Arabs. These figures have been practically unchanged since 2011 (The 2019-2020 Arab Opinion

Index, 2020). However, the normalizing states' old commitment to an aggressive stance toward Israel has generally been restricted to compulsory solidarity at the United Nations and an Arab economic boycott. Furthermore, many Palestinians believe that the UAE leaders' argument that the normalization project was to avoid Israel's annexation of occupied West Bank territories is a scam and that Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed is using Palestinians as a fig leaf. In fact, it didn't take long before the UAE's claim of ending annexation was shot down by Netanyahu's announcement that Israel will merely suspend it instead of forsaking it altogether (Kershner & Rasgon, 2020).

According to Arab scholars, the hope that the new agreements will create an alliance supported by the United States, against Iran is merely instrumental and used to market normalization. The Gulf countries indeed have trepidations about Iran and its behavior in the Gulf and around the region, but no Gulf state is interested in creating tension with the Islamic Republic. Even if Iran aims to challenge its Gulf neighbors militarily, it is ill-judged to assume that Israel will jump to their defense (Harb, 2020). On the other hand, even if other Gulf states are willing to normalize relations with Israel, it is not clear if they will be ready to join any supposed effort to confront the Islamic Republic. For example, the UAE is a key trading partner of Iran, and Oman maintains its traditional mediator role between Iran and the world, and since the start of the Gulf crisis in June 2017, Qatar has sought closer relations with Iran while Kuwait wishes to maintain cordial relations with it. Finally, with Saudi Arabia's quagmire in Yemen and the kingdom's economic afflictions following troubles in the oil market, it is unlikely that King Salman bin Abdulaziz or the Crown Prince are keen to launch another dangerous policy choice in the Gulf region (“Despite anti-Iran stance”, 2020).

The Agreements are seen as achieved at the expense of Palestinians; the Emirati, Bahraini, and Sudanese agreements with Israel are evidence to Netanyahu's resolve and success in pursuing the "outside-in" approach to peace with the Palestinians. Simply put, the approach seeks direct Israeli-Arab peace followed by Arab bringing the Palestinians along to a peace deal that is dubious to succeed in addressing their legitimate demands. Therefore, it allows the Arab states to seize the Palestinians' right to speak for themselves and ends Israel's responsibility to make the essential concessions in a peace deal. However, it peels off the veneer of the Arab world's pledge to provide the Palestinians with the support and leverage of fellow Arabs in negotiations with Israel ("Despite anti-Iran stance", 2020).

Despite Arab regimes' pontification about the commitment to Palestine, the Palestinians realize that they are on their own, and what is more dangerous is that the abandonment comes with the Israeli project of colonizing more occupied Palestinian territories becoming more real every day. Netanyahu will continue with his annexation plan of the occupied West Bank, and the Jordan Valley, since neither the UAE nor Bahrain made their normalization conditional (Harb, 2020).

#### Israeli Perspective on Normalization

Israel has a stable historical doctrine for peace and normalization, it has a set Doctrine - From Jabotinsky to Netanyahu. The peace-for-peace doctrine and the logic of building relations between Israel and moderate Muslim states preceding to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not a new concept. Approximately 30 years ago, Netanyahu wrote about it in "A Place Among the Nations," stating that a durable peace will not be possible by pacification and unconditional concessions, but rather, only after the Arab world recognizes Israel's right to exist (Falk, 2020).

That doctrine was derived from the Zionist forefather: Ze'ev Jabotinsky's writings on the issue dating back to "The Iron Wall" of 1923, where he underlined the importance of a strong Jewish state that can defend itself, and refrain from concessions until its neighbors acknowledge the Jewish state's eternal existence. Jabotinsky was the first to state that peace in the Middle East will not be a result of pity, but it will be a product of power. Netanyahu internalized and implemented Jabotinsky's principles. He understood that peace and prosperity to Israel could happen only if Israel were to become an economic power that had something to offer potential partners (Falk, 2020).

For Israeli scholars, the accords suggest that peace between Israel and Arab countries can be achieved without Israeli withdrawals or uprooting Jews from their homes, and that moderate Muslims want peace as much as Jews do and will not hold back due to the tenacity of Palestinian leaders (Schwartz, Kalin & Strobel, 2020).

With Muslims being willing to stop the extension of Israel's sovereignty, as sanctioned by the U.S. peace plan, Netanyahu doctrine became "peace for peace", not "land for peace." But the AA did not come out of the blue, for years, the Trump administration alongside moderate Muslim state leaders, and Israeli administrative men were determined to fix wrongs and form a better future, and it started with Trump's "Riyadh address" calling on Arab leaders to do their share to fight Islamist extremism. It was followed by the U.S. withdrawal from the perilous Iran nuclear deal, which paved the path to an Iranian nuclear bomb and in fact helped finance its state terrorism and infiltration into Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Gaza and elsewhere (Schwartz & McBride, 2019).

Twenty-nine days after the UAE agreed to the Abraham Accords, Bahrain and Sudan joined with a declaration for normalization with Israel. Significantly, Saudi Arabia,

Oman, and other Arab states are expected to join the peace-for-peace-paradigm (Falk, 2020).

For the first time in a very long time the U.S. president is in harmony with his Israeli, Saudi, Egyptian, and many other key Sunni counterparts on the strategic issues, primarily those pertaining to Iran., even though not all is agreed upon, but the core issues and the rest can be resolved like the Palestinian predicament, and unlike the agreements between Israel and distant Arab countries, the agreement with the Palestinians will require compromise and concessions. In the meantime, by applying the Abraham Accords, pragmatic and peace driven leaders will continue to deeply shift a flawed paradigm and prove that prosperity and Peace for Peace in the Middle East is possible ('Peace to Prosperity', 2020).

#### American Perspective on Normalization

According to American scholars, Trump was successful in launching the Abraham Accords and he was met with a huge support by American electorate who care about Israel, especially the conservative base of Christian Evangelicals, who are supporters of Netanyahu, and his goal of Israeli ownership and birthright over the West Bank and East Jerusalem that also aligns with their religious doctrine (Kahana, 2020).

However, a poll was conducted by evangelicals after the announcement of the AA deal, and it showed that 68% supported the UAE-Israel agreement and only 7% said they preferred annexation (Tibon, 2020). This multifaceted political situation was made possible by pursuing any opportunity that puts Israel in a good light. The opportunities eased way for the administration and Netanyahu to competently play up the Israel-UAE agreement in their interest, explaining how and why it is momentous for Israel (Sales, 2020).

Nevertheless, Evangelicals are not the only ones pleased with the accords, while many American Jews traditionally vote for the Democratic Party, the more conservative sections, who support the Netanyahu government's policies on the settler movement, have been also very happy with Trump's pro-Israel stance. Jewish conservative voters are elated because the UAE-Israel deal rejects the land-for-peace recipe, and the entire philosophy of the Obama administration's "daylight" between the U.S. and Israel. Therefore, the deal allows the administration to direct Netanyahu away from annexation for the mean time which is also not a long-term U.S interest (Tobin, 2020).

The United States looks at the Abraham Accords with three important calculations, the first aspect is the Iranian nuclear agreement and the need for the U.S to shift the balance of power in the Middle East. Therefore, having the UAE work with Israel in support of the U.S. political and strategic interests is important, especially today as the UAE has become a bit of an undependable ally. The UAE did contribute to NATO operations in Afghanistan and their ISIS campaign have been noteworthy, however, its policies regarding Iran are not in harmony with the United States as they favored having a diplomatic approach instead of a security-focused approach. As for the region's balance, the firm ties between Israel and the Arab states should in return strengthen the anti-Iran coalition, and with the UAE being under the U.S. security umbrella, it will be pushed to support American policies (Norlen & Sinai, 2020).

The second aspect that Washington studies the accords with, is an economic aspect because the U.S always works for economic gains. Furthermore, with the accords the U.S. can evade the congressional ban on high-technology military sales to the Gulf States included (the QME Act of 2017), and now they have a wealthy market for American military equipment (Norlen & Sinai, 2020) This is a major gain because Chinese and Russian companies have stepped in to "fill orders" for military equipment



and arms that the U.S. could not fill. Today, China is Washington's number one rival in economy and it sees the Gulf states as the main source of oil and the main hub for commerce, making the region a potential new spot for great powers to compete. renewed great power competition. Till now, the Chinese interests in the region are still economic, however, as their economic influence grows, geo-strategic issues may become substantial (Lons, Fulton, Sun, & Al-Tamimi, 2019).

And finally, the last aspect of the American perspective, is its own security and the security of its allies. Israel is long lasting historical ally of the United States, therefore taking on an agreement like the Abraham Accords can achieve that. Domestic and international policies are intertwined in politics in the Middle East and Kissinger was the one to observe that Israel has only a domestic policy and no foreign policy. The Abraham Accords is creating a new era for an Israeli foreign policy and in addition they are an example on how foreign policy can serve not only domestic priorities, but also personal ones as all actors involved in this deal will have personal victories that are distinct from the long-term effects on peace and security (Norlen & Sinai, 2020).

## Theoretical Framework

This research paper will use the *Game Theory* to test the thesis:

Game theory is an elaborated theoretical approach to international politics that contrasts it with analogical and metaphorical uses of games. As it embraces a diversity of models, game theory is especially beneficial for capturing the most central contextual features of the international system that affect probabilities of international cooperation (Snidal, 1985).

By definition, Game Theory is the rational analysis of situations of conflict and cooperation. It is the theory of independent and interdependent decision making where the outcome depends on the decisions of two or more autonomous players, and where no one decision maker has complete control over the results (Kelly, 2003 as cited in Bhuiyan, 2016). It also investigates conflict situations, the interaction between the negotiators and their decisions (Hotz, 2006 as cited in Bhuiyan, 2016). Proper situations for conceiving the Game theory usually involve 1) a group of decision makers called players; 2) a group of strategies offered to each player, and courses of action which they can choose to act upon; 3) a set of consequences, because the strategies chosen by each player control the outcome of the game; and 4) a set of settlements given to each player in each of the possible outcomes. (Rapoport, 1974, p.1, as cited in Bhuiyan, 2016).

The 'Game Theory' was first introduced in the last century by mathematicians and economists as an instrument to analyze both economic competition and political conflicts. The initial dialogue of game theory happened in a letter written by James Waldegrave in 1713, where he provided a diverse strategy solution to a two-person card game le Her. However, it was James Madison who made today's game theoretic analysis of how it is expected of states to behave under diverse system of taxation, and

the initial example of an official game-theoretic analysis is the study of a duopoly by Antoine Cournot in 1838 (Crider, 2012, p. 4 as cited in Bhuiyan, 2016).

Another official theory of games was proposed by the mathematician Emile Borel in 1921, which was advanced by the mathematician John Von Neumann in a “theory of parlor games” in 1928. John Von Neumann and Oskar Morgenstern then published the *Theory of Games and Economic Behavior* in 1944, introducing the economic and mathematical basis for the field of ‘Game theory’. The ultimate theorem of John von Neumann’s game theory states that it is always possible to find an equilibrium where neither player should feel the need to deviate unilaterally. It is a *zero-sum* game: One player’s gain is exactly the other’s loss (Mérő, 1998).

Today, the Game theory is heavily associated with applications of game models to international political economy in addition to their standard role in military-political strategic analysis. The theory is an effective instrument in the hands of diplomats and politicians allowing them to analyze situations of conflict between individuals, organizations, states, and political parties (Sandler and Arce M, 2003).

Scholars and diplomats are studying “*How do links between domestic politics and international politics affect the way states interact in the global arena?*” now more than ever, because the theoretical developments in the field of international relations indicates a greater need to study the links between domestic politics and foreign affairs. Therefore, Game theory is a great tool to use in understanding the simultaneous effects of domestic- and international-level variables on state behavior and foreign policy behavior (Pahre & Papayoanou, 1997).

### *Game Theory and International Relations*

Game Theory was first used widely in IR in the late 1940s, 1950s and 1960s to understand U.S. & U.S.S.R. "Cold War", and strongly affected military and diplomatic strategies. The use of game theory to study IR has become more widespread in recent years, especially among "realists", who agree to the assumptions of rationality which infers those states and other international actors put priorities on various interests, and they seek actions to advance their interests. Rationality also implies that actors are able to perform cost-benefit analysis - calculating the costs acquired by a possible action and their benefits. In a realist model of decision-making, decision makers set goals, estimate their relative standing, analyze the costs and benefits of each possible action course, then choose the option with the uppermost benefits and lowermost costs (Goldstein and Pevehouse, 2013, pp. 76-7, 127 as cited in Kapor, 2016). Thomas Schelling, a Nobel Prize winner for Economic Sciences in 2005 called "The Strategy of Conflict", emphasizes that almost all difficulties in the decision-making process, involving a number of players, contains a mix of conflict and mutual interest, and that such relationships may be successfully analyzed through non-cooperative game theory method (Schelling, 1960)

Schelling gave special attention to bargaining, which entails some conflict of interest as each party tend to seek an agreement that is as favorable to both as possible, because any agreement is better for both actors than no agreement at all. Bargaining situations comprises two individuals or more who collaborate for mutual benefit in several way and no action taken by one of the individuals without the consent of the other can be beneficial to the other one (Nash, 1950).

This study will focus on the concept of nation-states as interdependent, goal-seeking actors lying at the heart of strategic game analysis. The ultimate potential of game theory lies in growing the realm of rational-actor models beyond the limiting restrictions of the traditional Realist perspective to a more complex world where apprehension is targeting less of the conflict's problem and more with cooperation problems. Therefore, this paper will use the game theory to test how international diplomates are using the game theory in the Abraham Accords, and test how three autonomous player the United States, the UAE, and Israel can cooperate together amid a historical conflict and how it will affect the region of the middle east. It will also allow the paper to study their strategies, actions, the consequences and benefits of such actions on the long run, and the settlements each player will have to make. This will allow the paper to test if all three components can rise together or if one can have full control over the other.

## Methodology

The Abraham Accords are luring in a good number of Arab States to join this new relationship like Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan in addition to Egypt and Jordan who both already have a peace treaty with Israel. Other than Arab states, this agreement attracted the United Kingdom to join this endeavor, the UK wants to enter this three-way venture and make I into a fourth with the aim to bolster the Abraham Accords, the leader of a British delegation visiting the Emirates to promote and expand the agreements.

This segment of the study will explain how the main research question “*How are the Abraham Accords polarizing the present scene in the MENA region*”, will be tackled. The methodology this study will use to test the thesis is a qualitative method, it will be used to gather in depth rich and diverse information on the effect of the Abraham Accords on the MENA region rather than just numbers and percentages. This methodology gives an explanatory perspective to the thesis studied, as it seeks to unearth and analyze the opinions, thoughts and feelings of respondents and expert. In addition, the qualitative method allows this paper to dive deep and pick at case studies and compare data to reach a conclusion. Furthermore, it is the most suitable methodology because it is usually used to help understand and inform on new concepts, theories and products, which is exactly what the Abraham Accords represent- a new foreign concept to the MENA.

The data of this study is based on desk research and analysis of academic journals, articles and books covering the issue of the polarization of the middle east throughout history to the present day. It will also cover an analysis on panels of experts on the middle east to gather different perspectives on the accords and the effect of this three-way plus cooperation on the condition of the domestic and foreign affairs of states; the

shifting regional powers; the possibility of peace in the region including the Israel-Palestine conflict; and the U.S vision for the future of the region going further to analyze the Ukraine-Russia war and its effects on the future of the Abraham

In addition, the research paper will include a comparative analysis of nation states that normalized their relationships after historical feuds and an in-depth study of the consequences of such cooperation and how did it effect their domestic power reflecting on their foreign power locally and internationally. The case studies included in this paper are of Jordan and Egypt after they normalized their relationships with Israel and another comparison is included in the study between previous peace agreements that took place in the region and the Abraham Accords: the items and the purpose behind the agreements and who was behind them will be compared and studied to reach a conclusion on what makes an agreement successful.

The Operationalization part of the methodology divides the study into chapters, each chapter will answer a sub-question complementary to the main research question which will enrich the thesis.

The first chapter under the data analysis will the answer the following sub-question:

- Are the Abraham Accords ending a century long feud between Israeli Jews and Arab Muslim nations?

This chapter studies the new diplomatic relationships between Israeli Jews and Arabs which aids the paper and research question by representing the new shape the MENA region will have with the Abraham Accords and the normalization of relationships.

The second chapter will tackle the question:

- Can the Abraham Accords strengthen Arab's nations foreign policy?

This chapter studies the new political and economy cooperation between states and how it will affect each nation and what will they gain from it through the game theory. In addition, it tackles the power Arab nations can have through Gulf Cooperation Council and how it can be used as a pressuring tool in the region.

The third chapter answers the following sub-question:

- Are the Abraham Accords shifting the regional geopolitical map of the middle east?

This chapter studies if the AA is a failed or successful agreement and compares it to other agreements. In addition, it tackles the issues of AA strengthening one camp over the other in the region by gathering more signatories, shifting regional realities and priorities and how is it handling the Palestinian cause with the new role Israel has in the region and how this new relationship can aid in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by pressuring and limiting the Israeli expansion in the West Bank.

The fourth chapter tackles the Sub-question:

- How is the American/Israeli vision affecting the continuity of the Abraham Accords in the region?

This chapter tackles the power of the U.S in the region, comparing Trump's administration to Biden administration and how they handled the Abraham Accords, in addition to their foreign policy in the region and what they have in common and they dispute about. Furthermore, it describes U. S's vision for the region after the ongoing Russian/Ukraine War and how it is affecting the Abraham Accords.



## Discourse analysis

### The End of a Historical Feud between Israel and Arab States

In the chronicles of ancient history in the Middle East, a man named Abraham received a promise from God that he will become the father of many nations. Indeed, Abraham became the father of many religious nations and today the name continues to bring together these nations under the *Abraham Accords*, signed by Israel and its Arab neighbors on August 13, 2020.

On the surface, it is an unforeseen signing of a diplomatic agreement, nonetheless according to former US ambassador to Israel David Friedman, the Abraham Accords embrace an important position from a biblical outlook. He said, “I always felt that the accords marked the reconciliation of Jews and Muslims, something which was viewed favorably among biblical authorities” (TBN Israel, 2021).

The Abraham Accords can be described as a symbolic end of an era of feud and conflicts. The Accord itself was facilitated by the United States led by Donald Trump, and while this is not the first time Israel has indulged in official diplomatic ties with an Arab country, it is still a breakthrough. Symbolically, the dimension this accord took is one of an actual ending to the Israel versus Arab countries paradigm, which molded the reality of international relations in the Middle East for almost 70 years.

The Middle East is a region associated with conflicts as it possesses the most significant and longest conflict in the world, “the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict”. When the State of Israel was proclaimed in 1948, it was met with a big Arab wave of rejection and not much has changed since then. However, with the Abraham Accords, the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco shifted the scene, even though they were not the first Arab countries to normalize relations with Israel.

Egypt was the first country to normalize relations with the famous Camp David agreement of 1978, which was ground-breaking because it was Egypt that led the anti-Israel coalition, but President Anwar al-Sadat, paid the price for his move by landing Egypt in isolation by other countries in the region and its elimination from the Arab League for over 10 years, and Al-Sadat ended up getting killed in 1981 by an attack triggered by the normalization of relations with Israel (Śmigiel, 2020). Another country that normalized with Israel was Jordan in 1994, but it was different from Egypt's normalization and was not met with sanctions and attacks due to the geopolitical situation and the Oslo Accords taking place. Today, the normalization of the UAE with Israel is similar to Jordan as it was not met with significant indignation from other Arab countries till now (Śmigiel, 2020).

#### The Religious Significance of the Accords

This Accord has a biblical hint to it which pushed the public opinion to regard it as the ultimate peace treaty between different religious nations even though the core of the accord held no significance to peace. To solidify this notion, a documentary was produced and aired in 2021 by Trinity Broadcasting Network, the largest Christian television broadcaster in the US, and in its second episode a biblical chronicle was described focusing on how the three monotheistic religions were intertwined: The people of Israel are the Jewish descendants of Abraham's son, Isaac from his wife Sarah. The children of Ishmael are Abraham's Arabic offspring from his handmaid Hagar. After the prophet Moses was born and the Torah was written, Christianity was born centuries later with Jesus, and the New Testament was written. Then, Prophet Muhammad was born and the Koran was written. Throughout the centuries, the three religions of the Abrahamic faith have collided heavily in Jerusalem, as the documentary states (TBN Israel, 2021).

However, Friedman noted that the biblical undertone is not the main goal of the peace between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Morocco, but he wants it to be part of the story. He explained, “We did not target faith, but we kind of weave in the notion that there is more going on than just a diplomatic breakthrough,” Friedman also added “The Abraham Accords are an event that can be seen to those who view the world through a biblical lens as the beginning of the actualization of Isaiah’s prophecy”. The prophecy is engraved in a wall across from the United Nations compound in New York with the following words: “They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.” (TBN Israel, 2021).

TBN President Matt Crouch recalled the day that Friedman called him about the documentary and told him something he’ll never forget “You’ll recall that the sons of Abraham, Isaac and Ishmael reconciled briefly to bury their father and have been warring ever since. The sons of Abraham are back together for the first time in 3,000 years”. Regarding a true biblical era of peace, Friedman the executive producer of the documentary said “I believe we have begun a process of creating peace between Israel and the Muslim world and that is a big part of bringing peace to the entire world.” (TBN Israel, 2021).

People around the globe are starting to recognize that on paper the Abraham Accords mark a fundamental shift in Muslim-Jewish relations, and they will certainly go down in world history as one of the most significant agreements to ever take place, inspiring peace and mutual prosperity in the Middle East. Once the Accord was signed, the lines immediately started connecting between the Gulf nations and the Jewish state, with preparations to set and exchange embassies.

“This is a once in a generation diplomatic achievement, but I predict it will be the first, not the last,” said Johnnie Moore, an evangelical leader involved in behind-the-scenes advocacy. Himself and bestselling novelist Joel Rosenberg led an evangelical delegation to the UAE in October 2018 and two delegations to Saudi Arabia, and Moore himself has personally visited three more times (Casper, 2020).

The three religions of Abraham dominating the middle east already started reconnecting before the accord happened. The UAE started the year 2019 under the slogan “Year of Tolerance” by welcoming Pope Francis in the first ever papal visit to the Arabian Peninsula, and ended the year with the announcement of the installation of the Abrahamic Family House, which is a complex housing a church, synagogue, and mosque near the capital of Abu Dhabi, dedicated to promote harmony. Add to that the “Human Fraternity Document” signed by the pope and the Cairo-based Grand Sheikh of al-Azhar, the leading seat of religious learning in the Sunni Muslim world, in Abu Dhabi which continued UAE’s efforts to preserve peace with Christians (Casper, 2020).

Many Arab nations followed through with diplomatic efforts or gestures to demonstrate the new will to put the past behind. For instance, countries like Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia are working on changing the internal regime to a regime that holds no place for anti-semitism and they started showing support by altering textbooks in schools and universities (Hoenlein, 2021).

In addition, the Institute for Monitoring Peace and Tolerance in School Education (IMPACT-se) noted that many old anti-Israel material has been moderated in Emirati textbooks. Passages that formerly demonized Israel and blamed “the Zionist enemy” for wanting to “exterminate the Palestinian people” have been removed and instead passages focusing on tolerance towards Jews have been added, and most importantly

passages presenting the Palestinian issue as the main reason for conflicts in the Middle East were removed (Weinberg, 2022).

The change in curriculum and regimes overall is teaching the new generation to value the principle of respect of other cultures, encourages curiosity and dialogue, and then allows the people to be exposed to different cultures and religions which make the notion of peace in the region more achievable.

#### Achieving Peace Among Three Religions Vis-à-Vis the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict

Peace initiatives in the middle east have a tendency to go sideways. The last peace initiative that took place in the Middle East was the Saudi-led Arab Peace Initiative in 2002 that promised normalization with Israel in exchange of full withdrawal from the occupied territories, a fair settlement for Palestinian migrants, and to establish a Palestinian state with the capital being East Jerusalem. This initiative was met with constant rejection and little acceptance by previous Israeli prime ministers, it was also recognized by the Arab League and supported by the Palestinian Authority. However, the Saudi peace plan failed and today the UAE is taking over with a different path and is no longer handing PA president Abbas the keys to peace in the region like Saudi-Arabia did.

An important notion to understand is that the region has changed in the past two decades and while the UAE and other Gulf states were busy quietly nurturing relations with Israel for years, political realignment was taking place in the region with increased tensions with Iran. In fact, according to Malcom Hoenlein, the vice chair of the conference of presidents of American Jewish organizations, this Accord is the fruit of 25 years' worth of efforts and connections, furthermore, it was President Abdel Fattah El Sisi, of Egypt who said he will bring the Gulf to Israel (Hoenlein, 2021).

Now even though Emirati officials, state that part of the deal stem from support for Palestinians, they were only able to get a promise from Israelis to suspend annexation to the West Bank land, which turned out to be impermanent. Therefore, the UAE is only unscrewing a time bomb that is threatening a two-state solution nothing more.

The peace between Israel and Palestine can only happen with justice in the eyes of both and till now the accord is only promising superficial peace and is hurting the Palestinian cause. However, this deal is indeed breaking the clash of civilizations chronicle and its stereotypes of the Arab and Muslim worlds and many experts observed that such deal would not fail because tarnishing the deal would mean humiliating the UAE thus making it into an enemy which is something Israel cannot afford.

On the other hand, Christians as minorities in the middle east and the UAE hold different perspectives on peace with Israel. Evangelical Christians have been supportive of Israel, while others want to have a fair solution for the Palestinians people (Casper, 2020). Many question the fact of how will the UAE use this new relationship to help the Palestinians, as many others think that the UAE and other Arab countries have already broken ranks by signing the Abraham Accords.

Other Evangelical leaders however have doubts of peace happening and are placing blame on the Palestinian leadership. Munir Kakish, president of the Council of Local Evangelical Churches in the Holy Land representing congregations and ministries situated in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip said that it is time to have new faces run Palestine noting that most Palestinian leaders are over 60 years old, and it is time for PA to assess itself, and apply real changes, before pointing their fingers at others. In addition, he mentioned that Palestinian divisions have also hurt their cause,

allowing Israel to take advantage, and now sovereign nations like the UAE will follow their own judgment in foreign policy rather than PA (Casper, 2020).

### The Transition from a Religious Rivalry into a Hegemon Power Rivalry Between Arab States

The rivalry in the region took many forms throughout the years and with the Abraham Accords, the region reached a phase where it has to transition its conflicts for one final time, as they are leaning towards an end to the historical feud. According to Lebanese Political Satirist and Journalist Nadim Koteich who is close to the Emiratis the Abraham Accords are an attempt to expand the common grounds between three religions but he wouldn't say the Abraham accords by themselves are a remedy to centuries or millenniums of disputes between three religions. However, the struggle in this region has taken the shape of a religious war in the past decades. Koteich added that if we look at the Palestinian Israeli conflict from at least a leftist analytical prism we can see that it started as a civil war between Arabs and Jews inside Palestine and with Zionism it transformed into a somewhat nationalistic war between the Palestinian nationality and Jewish nationality; then at a later stage it took the form of a religious dispute between Muslims and Jews as two religious' groups. However, the Jews started seeing themselves as a people and not as a religion, more akin to the Kurds and the Armenians so it's the Jewish people not the Jewish believers. Therefore, Jewishness within the conflict is more of an ethnic identity rather than a religious identity, it's actually both but it has a big dimensional ethnicity more than anything else and more than any other religion more than Muslims and Christians.

In addition, Koteich described the region as the platform for the three religions; a region that has conflicts and struggles developing a religious twist into them which probably prompted the kind of thinking of bringing these three religions to go beyond what divide

them and looks at what might be a common ground. This was preceded by a very ambitious step forward by UAE when they brought Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmed el-Tayeb, in 2019 to sign a Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together, which goes beyond what classical Islam preaches and what classical Christianity preaches, in a region that witnessed historic religions clashes.

On the surface this deal might seem for peace, cooperation, economy and tourism but the signing of the agreement was triggered by the growing desire of the Emirates to play a bigger role in the region. The nature of this signing is significant, because the agreement itself is symbolically confirming the real state of affairs, rather than setting a completely new policy. For a long time now, it was detected that the Sunni Arab nations, led by Saudi Arabia and the Emirates, are more concerned about conquering the regional aspirations of Shi'ite Iran and neo-Ottoman Turkey rather than fighting the "Zionists". Therefore, the agreement marks a symbolic end to the paradigm of international relations in the Middle East being focused on constantly opposing to Israel, and the focus today is shifting from the "Arab-Jewish" or even "Muslim-Jewish" conflict to the Sunni-Shiite conflict, which is an old conflict partially nationalized by the fact that the main face of Shiism is non-Arab Iran, and it is still being largely fought in the form of proxy civil wars in Syria and Yemen, where sectarian issues outline the opposing parties. In recent years, the religiously outlined rivalry between regional Middle Eastern powers changed to rivalry between growing Arab powers having mutual conflicts of interest for example, the leaders of Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Egypt make up the main pillars of the camp known as "Arabness" conflicting with "Turkishness" or "Persianity", however, the essence of the rivalry is the conflict of interests and not religion. Israel, on the other hand, is a player interested in weakening



Iran and Turkey, the two most active advocates of the Palestinian cause today, with the help of USA that led to the emergence of a common front, with the recent normalization of relations.

In addition, while the deal adopts better security cooperation between the UAE and Israel in countering Salafi jihadists, Iranians, and Turks, it also upsurges the intensity of those threats. Notably, Bahrain has previously faced an attempt of an attack by an Iran-backed group in response to its decision to normalize relations with Israel. Therefore, it is realistic to assume that there may be more efforts by Salafi jihadist, Iran or Turkey to dent the security and stability of UAE in retaliation for the alleged betrayal of the Palestinian people. Moreover, Turkey has sharply criticized the new agreement with Israel therefore there is a possibility of Turkey and Qatar supporting each other politically or backing Muslim Brotherhood attempts to wobble the security and political stability of the Emirates.

This possibility comes at a time when the level of tension is on the rise in the eastern Mediterranean between Turkey and its adversaries, including Egypt, Greece, and Cyprus and Israel. The conflicts are over natural gas projects, the pipelines and distribution routes to Europe, alongside Turkey's military and economic involvement in Libya, which could lead to a major escalation of armed clashes with Egypt, or even a military conflict between Turkey and Greece. With this growing potential for conflict the UAE, has now become more intimately connected with Israel

Similarly, by standing so publicly with the UAE, Israel is taking sides in the dispute between UAE and Qatar. Qatar is the most operative channel of communication with Hamas, and Qatar often transfers indispensable financial aid to Gaza. Both the UAE and Qatar try to avert a full-scale blaze between Israel and Hamas. However, The UAE

cannot fill Qatar's shoes in this role because it lacks tangible influence in both Gaza and the West Bank, so Israel will continue to need Qatar's mediation and support. But in these new built circumstances, Qatar may well choose to create hitches for Israel, by taking advantage of the lingering crisis in Gaza in order to advance its own regional spot and influence at the UAE's expense.

The Abraham Accords, include Palestine in its core as the price for normalization is Israel abandoning its plans to annex the territories occupied since 1967. This deal might be seen as a win for Arabs and Palestinian but in fact it only guarantees the return and consolidation of the previous status quo on the Palestinian issue. The relinquishment of the annexation plans was therefore only a ploy, and the reality is that the "two-state solution" is dead, and the Palestinians are once again played out in the global game and left to fence for themselves. Nevertheless, the agreement indicates a major change in future negotiations regarding the Palestinian issue, where the UAE will be taking the place of Egypt that was marginalized by internal problems. In addition, this new change is merely formalities as Israel received a clear signal that the Palestinian cause is no longer such an obstacle in establishing diplomatic relations in the region and coming out of isolation.

However, the issue is that the UAE's influence in Palestine has already been suffering, because it sees Hamas as an enemy and because it has previously severed its ties with the Palestinian Authority. The PA leadership under Mahmoud Abbas and his entourage have never made their peace with Emirati leader Mohamed bin Zayed's efforts to prepare the rival Palestinian opponent to power, Muhammad Dahlan. The PA's leaders even attribute some influence to Dahlan for Bin Zayed's decision to continue with the normalization deal.

The deal also further pushes the UAE from Hamas and the PA, opening more room for Turkish and Qatari influence, where they may encourage Islamist groups' efforts to weaken Gaza as a means of accentuating their own vital role there as a moderator, whose opinions must be taken into account. That being said, current increased U.S. pressure on Qatar might bring it to normalize relations with the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Egypt consequently making it easier for Doha to open its relations with Israel as well.

Emiratis hope this dramatic historical step, will improve their image and leverage on Capitol Hill and earn them points in the eyes of the administration in their rift with Qatar. However, in recent year Emirates has suffered to polish its image in Washington because of the Emirati military intervention in Yemen's and Libya's devastating civil wars. The UAE's controversial business with Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Muhammed bin Salman, frequently also harmed its reputation. The UAE has confirmed that it hopes through this deal to grow their cooperation with the United States and accomplish access to advanced weapons systems. Nonetheless, some concern exists in the UAE, and in many other Gulf Arab states, regarding Biden's soft policy on Iran unlike Trump's, and the Gulf countries fear the administration tough reaction regarding human rights issues and sale of U.S. arms.

#### Repercussions of the Accords

According to a middle east political expert, the accords is ending a long historical feud, because there is a number of countries that are willing to engage in political/diplomatic/economic relations with Israel and it's not causing any kind of repercussions in term of other states doubling their efforts vis-à-vis the conflict. The states that are disagreeing with the Abraham Accords are basically static in terms of their continued effort to exacerbate the conflict, whereby you have a number of

countries that are engaging. Quantitatively, it has definitely reduced the number of countries and amount of people involved in the conflict. Moreover, it's hard to measure in any reliable sense the degree of acceptance of the population of these countries because they are not liberal democracies where people go to elections or have reliable polls but generally to the expert's sense is that situation at least in countries such as Bahrain and the UAE and even more so Saudi Arabia, although they are not formally apart of the accords, there is widespread acceptance of the trajectory taken by the leadership of both countries. According to the expert, he thinks that the AA also have repercussions on countries like Syria that is very much desiring to build more productive relations with the UAE in terms of their involvement in the conflict, not completely obliterating it but definitely will have long term consequences and even on the Palestinians in the west bank and the Palestinian authority is highly dependent on good relations with the gulf states therefore gulf states funding for example for continued conflict whether on the part of Syria or Palestinians will definitely decrease.

On the long run, this deal may be an obstacle rather than a stimulus for other Arab countries to normalize relations with Israel. The UAE-Israel peace process removes the old alliance between Palestinian leaders, and Arab states responsible for Arab Peace Initiative, by creating new ties with Israel without a Palestinian-Israeli peace agreement. This change is an advantage to Israel and its interests, but Israel now faces restrictions on its future actions regarding the Palestinian territories, as it has confirmed partial support for the principle of "land for peace" by taking annexation off their agenda, for now. In addition, the UAE has now attained leverage over Israel, which will have to contemplate UAE requirements any time it seeks and pursues plans and actions regarding the Palestinian cause or regional issues that might not fall in line with Emirati interests. For example, Jerusalem and Abu-Dhabi have different perspectives regarding

the Syrian regime; the UAE has warmed its relations with Assad in recent years and Assad has paid 2 visits to the UAE recently while Israel still sees the regime's actions, of allowing Iran to use its territory to assault Israel, as *casus-belli*.

As these tensions play out, the future debates between Israel and the UAE, especially on Palestinian issues, will deter other Arab countries from normalization. Arab countries may wish to remain on the side and watch from a distance, as each country has its own interests, explicit set of calculations and its own critical domestic audience, and some will hesitate to take the jump and have open ties with Israel.

The Emirati-Israeli agreement, although announced unexpectedly to the world, it is not a big surprise given the current geopolitical situation in the region. This reality has a more symbolic dimension and validates the processes that have been taking place for some time in the Middle East, and it is very likely that soon other Arab countries will take similar steps. Surely, Saudi Arabia will not be part of the countries even though it has more interests with Israel than the UAE, but it will not take such actions due to "religious and image" reasons. Nonetheless, it will probably support them quietly, as it now has a convenient intermediary in case of an event happening that oblige Saudi to contact the Israeli. The agreement will barely contribute to the relative stabilization of the region at least in a few issues, but the case of Palestine remains the key obstacle and as long as the case is not settled and no protection rights are given to the Palestinians themselves, the Middle East will not witness full peace.

Overall, this emerging deal is indeed momentous, and its value should not be diminished. Yet one should also understand its challenging features, be cautious of its potential implications, and note well any complications and challenges hidden within it, in order to assess how to manage such possible challenges while there is still time.

Even though this agreement is ending a religious regional conflict that lasted decades it is feeding another conflict in the region, one that polarizes the region under an emirate/Saudi-Irani camps led by conflict of interest and need to become the hegemon power in the region and not a conflict of culture, religion or the Palestinian cause.

## The Game Theory: Economic Cooperation Generating a Stronger Foreign Policy in the Middle East

The Abraham Accords' potential to change regional realities rests on its extraordinary timing, as it was a work in progress. As the COVID-19 crisis took its toll on countries, priorities began to shift from out-of-date political contemplations to vital economic desires, and the need of Gulf Arab nations to diversify their economies and use new global business opportunities into immediate necessities was triggered by the decline in oil prices and decline in growth in Gulf Cooperation Council countries in 2020.

In this context, normalization with Israel a leading hi-tech hub, offers an undisputable opportunity to create a joint platform for cooperation in multiple fields like agriculture, tourism and health, in order to commence an economic growth as well as political growth in the region. In addition, this normalization is seen as an opportunity by other regional actors like Sudan that benefits from the US endorsement of the normalization process, so it can mend its relationship with the U.S in hope of lifting sanctions and getting financial aid.

### The Real Interests Behind the ABRAHAM ACCORDS

The Abraham Accords as described on paper are meant to fail because they are anti-progressive, each country involved has its own specific set of motivations for advancing normalization with Israel, and none of those motivations has anything to do with notions of peace and harmony, nor linked to the core principles outlined. The Gulf state parties in the accords were first motivated by military, political, and economic self-interest: Bahrain joined the Emirates in launching diplomatic relations with Israel due to shared fear of the power of Iran in the region, Sudan and Morocco also have

economic interests and a specific political agenda that was principally fulfilled by the United States.

Khartoum, benefited from the United States' aid by the removal of their "sponsor of terrorism" title, and for Rabat got a long-awaited American recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara.

Furthermore, the accords were a result of years long cordial and cooperative relations between Israel and the Gulf states, and a result of Netanyahu's political vulnerabilities at home as he was facing criminal charges ahead of fresh elections, Netanyahu then made a big foreign policy breakthrough that will label his political career with this agreement. As for the United States' interest in this accord, it is purely business-oriented which represented the transactional nature of the Trump administrations' foreign policies in the Middle East.

Arms and money are a big part of this accord, and upon the signing, an American promise was made to the Emirates to sell them F-35 fighter jets, MQ-9 Reaper drones and additional munitions worthy of billions. However, negotiations for the actual sale slackened as the Biden administration took over and expressed their concerns, over Emirates' immersion in the Yemen war, the QME legal regulations, and worries that delicate technology could fall into Chinese grasps because the Emirates use Chinese 5G as communications technology. The fate of the sale remains unknown but the deal is still on the table and simultaneously, Israeli companies are hoping to sell military equipment to the Emirates, relying on their shared military concerns of Iran and its proxies, and with the repetitive Houthis rockets attacks on Emirates, Israel might be ready to sell its Iron Dome defensive missile interception system to the UAE.



## The Economic Gains from the ABRAHAM ACCORDS

The other Arab partners in the agreement have had economic gains from the Abraham Accords, and they went head into the agreement due to promised and expected economic gains. Those gains are already starting to accumulate; in 2020, Israeli exports to the Emirates reached \$70 million, and Emirati exports to Israel reached more than \$117 million (Israel Exports to United Arab Emirates, 2022).

In 2021, the trade between these two went up to \$610 million in the first seven months of the year, mostly due to the rich diamond trade (Saba, 2021). In 2022, bilateral UAE-Israel trade in goods and services is likely to reach \$2 billion, which is a 50% increase over 2021, with substantial growth in tourism, agriculture, investment, technology and other services. In addition, the UAE-Israel Business Council has settled into a community of over 5,000 entrepreneurs, stockholders, companies and government officials who regularly meet through an expanding range of conferences, blenders, webinars, delegations, and in-person events. The Gulf-Israel Women's Forum is also the first association bringing female leaders together from across the Middle East and there is The Gulf-Israel Policy Forum that brings together academics, politicians, and cultural leaders from across the region (Weinberg, 2022).

Even though the main influence of the Abraham Accords is geopolitical, it does focus profoundly on strategic economic cooperation between the players in the Middle East. The RAND Corp.'s study of bilateral Free Trade Benefits for the five co-signers, offers an optimistic vision for the economy over a 10-year period, noting that if the Accords grow to include 10 other nations with an emphasis on Saudi Arabia, and integrate economically in a thorough way then the Arab signatories could gain as many as 150,000 new jobs, have \$1 trillion in new economic activity over a decade, with Israel earning the lion's share of the Accord's total economic benefits. Israel will gain \$46

billion in new economic activities, alongside a 2.3% change in GDP, and 19,100 new job opportunities, reflecting a 3.8% change in unemployment rates (Maital & Barzani, 2021).

The UAE has the second largest economy in the Arab world after Saudi Arabia, and is the most open to relations worldwide with a gross domestic product of \$414 billion in late 2018, and a third of the GDP is from oil revenues. According to RAND study, the UAE can have 17 million dollars in new economic activities, a 0.8% change in GDP, 11,100 new jobs created and a 2.4% change in unemployment rate (Maital & Barzani, 2021).

Bahrain is a state with an economy purely dominated by oil and natural gas, and despite many efforts to develop the economy, oil still makes 85% of Bahraini revenues, and throughout the last few years, before the Ukraine-Russian war started, the low and semi-stable world energy prices have generated sizeable budget deficits for Bahrain of about 10% of the GDP. The GDP of Bahrain is \$33.904 billion for a population 1.6 million; however, the RAND study claims that with the bilateral trade provided through the accord, Bahrain will have \$1,6 billion in new economic activity throughout the next 10 years in addition to a 0.8% change in GDP, 1,700 new jobs in the market meaning a 0,8% change in unemployment rate (Maital & Barzani, 2021).

Morocco, with a population of 36 million is the 5th largest African economy by GDP with \$119.040 billion under a relatively liberal economy. According to the RAND study, bilateral trades between signatories will allow Morocco to have \$4.5 billion in new economic activities, a 0.7% change in GDP, and 16,500 new employment opportunities meaning a 9% change in unemployment rates. Sudan is considered an oil country as it has enjoyed a short economic flourishing during soaring oil prices,

however it is unstable politically and recently the military deposed the democratically elected Prime Minister. Sudan has a population of 41.8 million with a \$30.9 billion GDP and 80% of the GDP comes from agriculture and it has an undervalued currency, however, the RAND Corp.'s study showed that with the new trades happening, Sudan will have \$0.7 billion in new economic activities, a 0.8% change in GDP and 16,400 new jobs created meaning a 16.6% change in unemployment rate (Maital & Barzani, 2021).

The main aim of the bilateral trade relations under the Abraham Accords is to be able to resolve the issue of youth employment among the Arab nations who signed the agreement, and produce blossoming opportunities for entrepreneurship. But it's the relation between the UAE and Israel that stands out the most because it is the most powerful relation between all Arab nations as they have been courting each other long before the Abraham Accords took place. To the UAE this is an investment opportunity as they have large revenues from oil and gas and see major benefits in placing investments on technology with Israel that is known to be a hub for technology. For example, a three-way energy water accord was signed recently in Dubai between Israel, the UAE and Jordan which plans to get a government owned firm in UAE to build a solar energy facility in southern Jordan, and sell the energy to Israel, which in turn, will either build a new desalination plant or provide Jordan with 200 million cubic meters of water per year, from existing sources, which will quadruple the amount of desalinated water Israel currently sells to Jordan (Maital & Barzani, 2021). The first and newly sworn in United Arab Emirates 'Ambassador to Israel Mohamed Al Khaja, said "We are focusing on the positive and how similar we are. We are working now on a free trade agreement" (Maital & Barzani, 2021). Before the Abraham Accords were signed, Israeli companies were already doing business with the UAE, and many flights

between the two countries were declared, and by the end of 2020 almost 50,000 people had flown from Tel Aviv to Dubai. By December 2020 Israel had exported up to \$200 million in products to the Gulf, and almost had \$600 million in trade by the end of the year (Maital & Barzani, 2021). In addition, at the Dubai Expo 2020 which opened in 2021 due to COVID-19 pandemic, many Israeli and UAE firms announced partnerships. For example, Israel Aerospace Industries and Edge, and a UAE defense technology company, announced an agreement to make unmanned surface vessels as UAE has an ambitious space exploration program and plan to explore the planet Venus before the end of the coming decade and land on an asteroid after already sending the UAE's Hope probe to Mars in February 2021, making the UAE the second country to ever successfully enter Mars orbit on its first try.

Israel and UAE are linking their financial markets, a Jerusalem based investment company Our Crowd, a VC that raises capital from small and institutional investors, recently became the first Israeli VC to be licensed to operate in the UAE and many UAE investors are heavily investing in Israeli startups (Maital & Barzani, 2021).

#### Saudi Arabia Hidden within the Game Theory Players

Saudi Arabia is the hidden player in the Abraham Accords and even though it is a silent unofficial partner it is a strong pillar that always need to be taken into account. After decades of refusing Israel, Saudi Arabia is now changing its attitude and laying groundwork that could culminate to possible bilateral relations. Saudi Arabia's economic, religious, and political status in the region gives Israel an interest in achieving a normalization agreement with the kingdom, however for Saudi Arabia, the question of relations with Israel relates to the kingdom's internal stability and regional status. If Saudi Arabia is ever ready to take this step it will have to consider and test two principal parameters: (1) the success and expansion of the Abraham Accords and

(2) improvement in relations between Israel and the Palestinians. Yet the success of the Accords is heavily dependent on the presence of Saudi Arabia in it, and Saudi is on the sidelines watching and studying their set up trial participation through Bahrain and the UAE as these two would not have undertaken such agreement without the kingdom's tacit agreement, therefore the silent approval of the Saudi is by itself an accounted for development in relations.

Even without a public Saudi signature, this agreement represents an important strategic development in the regional level as Israel now has new military allies in the face of the Iranian threat. A main drive behind the Abraham Accords is the continuing feud between Israel and Iran, and between Iran and the Gulf States, as the accords are mainly bilateral agreements that tackles lowkey security interests impelled by the Iranian matter. Therefore, Iran brought the two Gulf States UAE and Bahrain closer to Israel and opened to Israel an unprecedented access to the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf. While the economic benefits of the Accord are important, for Israel the primacy of the Iranian challenge has for now taken first place, in assessing its gains from the Accord, and as negotiations on the nuclear deal resumed between the European Union, United States and Iran, the nuclear capability of Iran has become a primary focus of Israeli strategic concern, and to some degree, a concern of the Gulf States.

#### The Winning Players of the Trade Between States in the Middle East

So far Israel is the major winner, economically, strategically and geo-politically. Yet the UAE-Bahrain-Israel deal has put the Muslim world under pressure which greatly favors Israel, it is giving the Jewish state of fewer than nine million people natural grounds to expand its spheres of influence and aggressively challenge enemies, such as Iran, politically as well as militarily. In addition, the accord displayed that it is possible for a small state such as Israel under the right circumstances and support to

become an important player in a region full of Arab nations that have over 420 million people. For now, the Abraham Accords have provided a small proof that common interests grounded in collaboration, trade and technology can at least temporarily overcome the interests of long-lasting regional peace.

The middle east has a low rate of intra-regional trade, in fact their intra-regional trade constitutes only 10% of their total trade, contrary to Europe and Asia where intra-regional trade accounts for 68% and 60% (Makovsky & Kram, 2021). This lack of economic integration represents disconnected logistics and supply chains, major trade and investment barriers, and a region that doesn't coordinate efforts on common challenges like COVID-19 and climate change. These disunions have chronically held back the region from economic growth and foreign direct investment in the region.

Therefore, without a constant structure that supports regular dialogue and cooperation between governments to have a more connected Middle East, the Abraham Accords will not fully reach its potential, and there have been efforts over the years to break down the barriers of trade but these efforts always excluded Israel or have fallen victim to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

However, today the middle east is changing and it is not the same middle east of the 90's; rich oil countries are looking to diversify their economies and produce start-up nations that will empower the young innovative generation, create hi-tech jobs, and solve national issues in energy, health, mobility, and others. Today, Arab countries perceive Israel as a success story of a country because it was able to build itself a global powerhouse that has more start-ups per capita than anywhere else in the world

Comparative polling asked the same question to Gulf Arab states, whether they should do business with Israel, the question was asked at a six-month interval in 2020, before

and after the Abraham Accords, and the figures rose sharply in all Gulf countries and Saudi witnessed a four-fold rise and it is not even signatory member (Makovsky & Kram 2021).

#### The Fail and Success of the Game Theory Reflecting on the ABRAHAM ACCORDS

This Accord needs constant cooperation over interests to succeed, therefore it needs to follow the Game theory, a zero-sum game to produce good results to the region. Under this theory there are players that interact, in this case the players are Israel, the Arab states including Palestine, and the United States, all playing in a large-scale politicized version of the Prisoners' Dilemma. The Prisoner's Dilemma, states that two or more players are engaged in conflicting interests, with the option to either cooperate or defect. If players decide to cooperate, they'll share a mutual reward; likewise, if both defects, they share a mutual punishment. If one player cooperates while the other defects, then the defector gets his reward because he followed his proper interest, while the cooperator receives fails.

Regarding the Abraham Accords, cooperation is required to boost the region on different sectors, Israel cooperating while compromising its plan of annexation is vital for the success of the agreement, and if Israel decide to continue its quest of attaining the west bank lands, the vision of a unified economic region would be over, and also with recent Houthis attack backed by Iran on the UAE, the American/Israeli duo did not take a concrete position and the Biden administration is showing softness towards Iran which in return puts the UAE at risk and endanger this agreement.

The easy solution would be for all players to cooperate fully and share the mutual reward of long-awaited peace, economic growth and stability in the region.

Signatories of the agreement should first come together and set a new paradigm for economic cooperation and shape a governing architecture to support that vision, like the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) did. APEC is a multilateral economic and trade medium that has many positive effects, it helped lower tariffs, improve travel, customs and supply networks, and promote good public governance. Since APEC was founded, in addition to the U.S support, the region's GDP has doubled and trade has increased sevenfold, with two-thirds of trade happening between member economies (Makovsky & Kram, 2021)

The same system could be created in the middle east, a regional economic structure in the Middle East would establish a regular process for governments, business entrepreneurs, and civil society groups to gather around a common economic agenda that will benefit the people of the region and fortify the Middle East's global economic competitiveness. A platform like this could develop actual economic cooperation, by lowering tariffs, opening up trade routes, and shaping policies across the region that address social, economic, and environmental challenges. By empowering domestic policies in each country, the foreign policies and power will automatically rise and the total power of all signatories' players will also incline and create an economic hegemony in the region.

According to an expert on middle east relations, the game theory cannot be broken in the region. Israel will not break it, obviously they are pleased with it and don't have to compromise much so they will not follow their interests because the Abraham Accords are their interest for security purposes and the same goes for Bahrain, Morocco, and the UAE. The Abraham Accords hold no downside for states so far on any level, in this sense, we won't be seeing countries limiting cooperation and the only challenge would be whether Saudi Arabia joins or not, and any rising challenges will enforce strategic



relationships and not diminish it. In fact, the partnership was put to the test in the latest Hamas Israel confrontation and it did not shake the treaty. All countries will benefit from each other, the UAE is investing in Israel which boosts the economy of Israel, and the emirates is benefiting from the advanced technology of Israel and weaponry. However, labeling the agreement as primarily economic is misleading, because the two states were already quite successful and powerful before the agreement took place. The main drive behind the accord is mainly a strategic security partnership of containing Iran and the Muslim brotherhood that are supported by cultural linkage and tourism and so on. Therefore, no economic dispute will cause a fallout between states, because usually for a fallout to happen the countries should at least have different types of economies, mostly export economies and trade. But the Israeli and Emirati economy will not produce disputes and their cooperation is not largely based on trade, the UAE is not a producing country but produce services and the Israeli do not produce much that the UAE would import, it's mostly technology. Economy will witness a boost in all signatories' countries but it will cause challenges or form obstacles which can lead to a fallout.

#### Stronger Foreign Policy & Competition in the Region

The region has proven it can manage economic cooperation despite political complexities, therefore a successful game theory is not so far off. For instance, in 2019, Egypt, Israel, Cyprus, Jordan, Palestine, Italy, and Greece launched the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) to coordinate utilization of the flow of natural gas discovered off the coasts of Israel, Egypt, and Cyprus. A competitive energy market has also pushed Abu Dhabi's Mubadala Petroleum to invest nearly \$1 billion in Israel's offshore fields which was empowered by the Abraham Accords (Makovsky & Kram, 2021).

A wider regional economic platform dealing with issues of trade, investment, and innovation would also serve US interests. The Middle East represents a small share of US total trade today, but the region is still an important growing market for US trade and investment.

With talk of American cutback abroad and the inroads China is making in the Mideast with its Belt and Road Initiative, the US has a growing interest in pushing countries together forming allies in order to maintain its influence. Regional economic cooperation is a proven successful way to create prosperity and curb conflicts, however, the middle east has always been labeled as the exception to this theory. But it is clear today that the middle east no longer wants to be exception, yet regional political power interests represent a big obstacle to how successful this experiment could be, therefore time will only tell how each country can resist personal gain and power over the region's overall prosperity.

This accord might create competition between Saudi Arabia and UAE, as who is the most powerful in the region and whose is the leader while the rest of the countries joined for economic financial benefits. The emirates now do not agree to be a state whose foreign and defense policy is run by Mohamed ben Salman, they want equal level partnership which is not easy for the Saudi to accept being the larger richer country and leader of Muslims, so it's a fraternal tension but at the end of the day there is so much that brings the two together that the fight is not expected to progress.

*Can gulf cooperation council put pressure on Israel regarding Palestinian cause?*

According to the experts interviewed, such case is not possible, at least not until Saudi joins the accords, it's good for Israel that many gulf states joined but it's not rewarding nor a strategic game changer on the short term, but on the long term it might

lead to Israel normalizing with other hesitant countries. Saudis are the only one able to negotiate for demands with Israel specially with the Palestinian cause that proved to be more complicated today with Hamas in Gaza and the fragile PA in the west bank having a civil war.

The situation in Palestine should first be solved between Palestinians for Saudi Arabia to consider negotiating for a small demand for them if they joined the accords, depending on who's in charge in Israel because the radical right wing dominating Israel for the last 10 years is not amenable to compromise. In addition, the Saudis today do not care for the Palestinian cause, it's more of a PR stunt to get the empathy of the Arab world and international community. Saudi Arabia is in position to leverage with Israel unless the Iranian threat grows to be a bigger obstacle, then they will be the ones running to Israel. There are countries opposing the accords, and there is a threat of countries like turkey and Qatar teaming up to endanger the accord, however this threat is neutralized since both are weak at this time with financial issues and the other wanting better relations with the United States, even the Iranian are visiting the UAE in spite of the accords and that points to how important economic relations are to all players.

## Reconceptualizing Regional and international Relations in the Middle East

In recent years, the Middle East has been perceived as a region in which country members compete as members of one of two huge blocs, centered on Iran and Saudi Arabia. This has always been the unpolished paradigm through which the Middle East has been evaluated, and the Abraham Accords may be changing that. The Abraham Accords could possibly be a model for a new system of regional cooperation, rather than nourishing an explosive and binary competition between big powers.

### The Dynamics Between the Two Main Camps in the Middle East

Through this lens, Iran leads the “Axis of Resistance” also known as “Shia crescent”, which includes Iran’s proxies or influence in Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, and Iraq and also has a supportive relation with Hamas and Islamic Jihad. Israel embraces and supports the binary axis image generally, and because of its links with Iran, it no longer sees Iran as its exclusive security concern. In fact, Israel’s persistent campaign against Iran’s nuclear program is not driven primarily by fear of a nuclear strike, since the density and proximity of the Israeli, Palestinian, Jordanian and Lebanese populations render a nuclear attack on Israel almost impossible, not to mention Israel’s second-strike capability. Today, Israel is significantly more intent on restricting Iran's influence through its proxies and, if supported by nuclear weapons, also by its ballistic missile programs.

The US-backed anti-Iran alliance, led by Saudi Arabia, Israel, and the majority of Gulf states, stands in opposition to the Iranian axis. Israelis frequently mention these “moderate Sunni states” as natural partners in the existential struggle against Iran.

The Middle East is more than countries having a bipolar face-off, but it is a region of a multi-vector set of discrete interests dominating their reason for action. The conflict in the middle east was never a bipolar face-off between sectarian religion as it might be portrayed, because the Sunni axis includes a Sunni-led but Shia-majority Bahrain, while the Shia axis includes support for the Sunni Hamas and Islamic Jihad, powerful bases in Sunni-majority and Alawi-led Syria, in addition, Iran has robust relations with Sunni-majority Qatar. The religious divide is a myth in the middle east, the divide mainly flows from prior normalization with Israel by Egypt and Jordan, and over the contradicting stances on the Muslim Brotherhood, as Qatar's support for both Iran and the Brotherhood led Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states to establish a boycott of Qatar, starting in 2017.

However, the binary-axis portrayal in the middle east has weakened even more intensely recently. In 2019, the UAE and Iran reached a quiet agreement to reduce escalation; Iran ended its attacks on Emirati ships in Emirati territorial waters of the Gulf and presumably in return the Emirates began to slightly withdraw its military support for Yemen against the Houthis (Understanding the Recent Contours of UAE's Foreign Policy, 2021).

In addition, just a week before Bennett's historic visit, the Emirati national security advisor Sheikh Tahnoun bin Zayed Al Nahyan visited Iran, and in his meeting with Iranian president Ebrahim Raisi, he stated that "warm and friendly relations" should not be influenced by "other countries," presumably referring to Israel. (Karimi & Gambrell, 2021).

In addition, the Saudi–Gulf blockade of Qatar was lifted in 2021 after the relevant parties reached an agreement. The promising diplomatic relations extended all the way

to adversaries, Saudi Arabia and Iran, and in 2021, the two countries held no less than four rounds of talks on a range of issues (Kerr, 2021).

Political Journalist Nadim Koteich sees the region under a different light with the Abraham Accords, he said that we actually have two middle easts under two camps, one middle east that is led by Iran that is trying to bind everything around sectarian lines and nonsectarian lines by using a broader religious language when it feels the need to accommodate Sunni Hamas or Sunni kaaeda. The other middle east fault line is not sectarian nor religious but it is defined by economic interests looking at the future problems and finding solutions starting with food security, climate change, lack of natural sources in the region, and these new sets of problems require new sets of solutions and skills and abilities. Those who will be part of the new driven middle east will by default have a bigger say in the region, better currencies, stable societies, equipped armies, become stronger states and they will be in a better place to react to crises. An example of that is how the UAE reacted to the covid crisis compared to how Iran poorly handled the crisis. Therefore, these countries will prevail and lead investments in countries in the region that needs such opportunities, therefore stabilizing the region.

Regardless of how different these two middle easts are, the normalization camp still desires to include the other camp and give them a chance to find common ground, as Iran is a country with big potential and the UAE has a lot of common interest with Iran even at this level of animosity. This accord is beyond security coordination and it is not against Iran, more like against the results of Iran's actions as the UAE does not want the region collapse. He concluded that the Abraham Accord are not exclusive, they open to those who decide to join and is a chance for those who still didn't join it to get encouraged and join.

## The ABRAHAM ACCORDS Polarizing Effect on the Region

The Abraham Accords created gaps in the anti-Iran security alliance, and these developments are exposing them. The region is shifting to a new never been done reality and the détente between the Emirates and the Israeli-U. S enemy Iran could mean that the latter might not be considered an enemy forever and that the Emirates could take over Qatar's position as mediator between Israel, Iran and the U.S since it is seen as more reliable by all players, it normalized relations with Israel contrary to Qatar that refuses to do so and is already walking on egg shells around the United States.

Nonetheless this détente did not last long, political Interests are still the main leading factors to all signatories of the Abraham Accords, and acting upon these interests is destabilizing the region. Partners to the Abraham Accords are likely to continue advancing on their own critical goals in the region, ignoring the progressive foreign policy values of de-escalating the Middle East promised by the Accords, which are advancing democracy, strengthening the international system, and advancing Israeli–Palestinian peace. For instance, when Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett visited Bahrain, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict was not included on the public agenda, and there is no clear intention of regional de-escalation as the Houthis directly attacked the Emirates in February, the United States sent F-22 fighter planes to the Emirates in response and most countries in the Abraham Accords have pushed the Palestinian problem aside, and seem unenthusiastic to introducing conditionality that links normalization to progress on peace. In addition, the Biden administration has signaled its pledge to arms sales to the Gulf, contributing to militarization of the region thus raising the danger of escalation and weakening the international system as the U.S is legitimizing military territorial conquest in Israel and Morocco.

However, the United States can still renovate the Abraham Accords into a tool of enhancement for the region, it can set a number of policies that can clarify its regional objectives, even if it can't directly transform the policies of other states in the accord. For instance, the United States hold the power in the agreement to pressure members of the Accord to take a conditional approach regarding the Israeli–Palestinian peace process. But the United States has consented to Israel's plan of suspending efforts to recover the peace process, instead of coercing Israel to build better conditions for a future peace.

Washington should clarify and direct this position to current and potential future partners, and also encourage the partners to leverage the economic opportunities for Palestinian economic development which is an approach consistent with the Biden administration's aim for Israeli–Palestinian relations. By allowing regional economic cooperation to happen based on the game theory and by including the Palestinian society the relations between all players can be substantially and symbolically valuable, as long as the players do not rely on economic improvement to replace political resolution of the conflict.

Furthermore, the US must support all peoples' right to self-determination, including Palestinians and the Sahrawi people of Western Sahara. The right of self-determination is a key element to strengthen the international system, and the United States' applying it would reinforce the principle around the globe. The United States has a responsibility of also reinforcing the international law of the prohibition on conquering territory by military force. Therefore, the United States should contemplate reversing its recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara, and instead of seeing Israel's expedient retreat from de jure annexation as if it changes the ongoing annexation juggernaut on the ground, the international community should adopt a strong stand



against Israeli annexation in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. This is critical as it is seen impossible now for the United States to reverse its recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights.

The Abraham Accords are shaping to be an agreement filled with wrongful policies and values led first by the interests of Americans second by Emirati and Israeli interests, instead of achieving peace and cooperation in a region in need of diplomacy and peace agreement.

#### The Advancement of the Accords

Intensive lowkey work is underway to advance the agreement by bringing new partners on board. Prime minister Bennett hinted it first on the UN podium by referring to the Abraham Accords and stating that more is to come (Bennett, 2021).

High Israeli officials concluded at a conference hosted by the Institute for National Security Studies that many states in the region are still on the fence and waiting to see what consequences the agreements can produce, as several states are interested in ensuring that the accords do not solely benefit one party (Israel-UAE-US, 2021).

If the current signatories succeed in anchoring the agreements and the positive momentum it created, then many countries that were hesitant will start to lean in the direction of the normalization process. Many think that the United States is the most powerful anchor in the region specially by sponsoring the accords, however, Israel is in fact the true anchor of the accords as it is keeping Iran's progress in developing their military nuclear capacity and expanding their influence in check while the U.S is deserting the region and leaving the rest of the Arab world to face the Iranian threat on their own.

After the strategically failed withdrawal from Afghanistan, and the current slow withdrawal from the middle east, in addition to the lack of international dependence on middle eastern oil, the Arab states might find themselves leaning towards this accord as to create significant tools to attain enough power to balance the polarization in the region and the Iranian threat. This new needed strength will only be available through Israel's capabilities and strong relationship with the US; also, the US is pushing this approach to compensate for its weakness in the region following recent disengagement policies and to reclaim some of its power in the region.

The Abraham Accords are getting criticized for being a failed agreement so far. However, in late March, Israel hosted the Negev Summit, an unusual gathering of foreign ministers from Arab countries in the country's southern desert. The message to the Middle East from the summit was that Israel has become a coordinating force in inter-Arab ties. On the heels of hosting US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Egypt's foreign minister met with counterparts from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, and Morocco, while Israel's foreign minister met with the dignitaries, who included envoys from six other countries (Frantzman, 2022).

This conference can be considered as expanding on the Abraham Accords of 2020, demonstrating that the alliances are still strong and that Israel seeks to strengthen them with new projects with Morocco-Sudan outreach, and improved relations with Egypt. Showing a unified front is important to them all now because Iran is increasingly threatening the United States, Israel, and their Middle East security partners with drones and missiles. On March 12, 2022, a missile attack on Erbil, Iraq's Kurdistan province, demonstrated that Iran feels it can target US forces and allies throughout Iraq, and Yemeni drone assaults sponsored by Iran have also struck the UAE this year.

The focus of Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's meeting with his UAE and Egyptian colleagues in mid-March was on regional security and combatting missile and drone threats. Another development in the region is the notion that the US is shifting its focus away from the Middle East and toward Russia or other foes such as China, as a result, Israel and its new allies understand the importance of cooperating. This might lead to air defense system collaboration, which would be a tremendous win for Israel, as its air defense systems are usually rated as among the best in the world. Not only the UAE, Bahrain, and Morocco may be interested in the systems, but Germany is also said to be interested in Israel's Arrow anti-ballistic missile defense system.

The Negev Summit's third ramification in this period of "Abraham Accords 2.0" is less tangible than air defense agreements or cooperation against Iran. There are tectonic global movements afoot, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine could signal the start of a new era of global turmoil, in which countries like Israel will require deeper regional ties. That is why Israel's Foreign Minister Yair Lapid flew to Athens on April 5th for a diplomatic visit, during which he met with Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias, as well as the Greek foreign minister and Cypriot Foreign Minister Ioannis Kasoulides.

In short, Israel is not only forming a willing alliance with Arab states, but also charting a new state system that connects Greece to Egypt and then to the Gulf and India. This will be woven together with Israeli technical know-how and shared concerns among these countries about belligerent neighbors or a world where countries like Russia can upend international relations. In addition, they are working to attract larger countries to the agreements, such as the United Kingdom. According to the leader of a British delegation visiting the Emirates to promote and expand the agreements, the UK is

interested in entering three-way joint ventures with the UAE and Israel to bolster the Abraham Accords (Duncan, 2022).

Dr. Liam Fox, the former UK defence secretary who now leads the UK Abraham Accords Group, met with Emirati leaders as part of a larger effort to strengthen ties with Israel, and Sharaka, a group created by young leaders from Israel and the Gulf who are determined to making "the vision of people-to-people peace" a reality, inked an agreement with the UK organization to support, promote, and grow the accords (Duncan, 2022).

The failure or success of these accords are depending on how strong is the game theory applied by all players, but since the states are primarily driven by their regional interests over the interest of the region some discrepancies will show and weaken the game thus shifting realities and polarizing the region even more. The question how strong the alliances really are, occurs frequently by the international and mostly Arab communities, and the answer differs from one state to the other and from one timeline to the next.

The UAE and Bahrain are not likely to be able to pave way for the establishment of formal and official relations between Israel and any of the other four Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members: Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, or Kuwait, even though these countries are becoming less focused on the Palestinian cause, however there is a popular and high opposition to normalization throughout the Gulf by the citizens.

On the other hand, Qatar remains very much aligned with Turkey and opposed to the UAE, so the authorities in Doha will probably majorly focus on the narrative of betrayal in normalization. As for Kuwait, it has a weak position in policymaking which makes it difficult to have an under the table relation with Israel., and it has a hostile view point

on the National Assembly; even establishing clandestine contacts with Israel was difficult due to its considerable weight in policymaking. Oman is hesitant to make a move towards normalization; there are indications that the UAE may support Muscat financially, therefore the UAE might have leverage over Muscat to join the accords at a time when the latter is looking to repair relations with the US, which were strained under the Trump administration, but remains wary of provoking Iran into believing their decades-long relationship is in jeopardy.

#### Saudi Arabia's Future Place in the ABRAHAM ACCORDS.

Saudi Arabia is a main key player in the region if not the most powerful, but they lack the flexibility the GCC countries have. Saudi Arabia would need certain conditions to enable a normalization, and special incentives from the United States to join, and although Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman has showed willingness to explore this option, his father King Salman has invested decades of his political work to support the Palestinian cause and would not be in harmony with such a move, therefore such move would be majorly polarizing and would challenge the current religious leader status, facing Iran and Turkey.

According to experts on middle eastern relations, that undoubtedly none of this would have happened without Saudi approval. The Emiratis and the Bahrainis have Saudi troops in the countries, so they are not going to make a decision of this magnitude without Saudi's approval or encouragement. The repercussions of Saudi Arabia signing the accords with Israel is a lot more consequential and riskier than other countries who joined like UAE, and there is no direct contact with UAE and Israel throughout history. In addition, Saudi Arabia holds a religious platform that the UAE doesn't have, with Saudi being the leaders of Islam worldwide and 1.3 billion Muslim in the world, I think

they study the repercussions of entering such an endeavor a lot more carefully than the UAE or Bahrain.

The king of Saudi Arabia is an old school Arab leader that has an emotional baggage related to the Palestinian cause and conflict, also someone who generally does not want to rock the boat. The son is so different on many counts, he is a Saudi nationalist and not an Arab nationalist, he thinks primarily in the terms of Saudi national interests and he is someone who very much wants to rock the boat and someone who is quite understanding of the threat of Iranian expansionism, being someone who lived first hand in the beginning of his term as defense minister, later as crown prince, the effect of American withdrawal from the region from Iraq and Afghanistan. So, with Mohamad ben Selman, Saudi Arabia would eventually join the accords in their own way, as we will not be seeing an Israeli president visiting Saudi Arabia in the next 10 years. However, they might start with tourism, diplomatic events, cultural events or sports events like a soft entry and make it less about politics.

Political Satirist Koteich agrees with this point and expressed that Saudi Arabia will definitely eventually join the accords, based on Mohamed ben Salman statement to the Atlantic magazine that Israel is a potential ally. He stated that we know for a fact that Benyamin Netanyahu visited Saudi Arabia even though it was not officially declared, many Israeli official also visited Saudi Arabia, the Israeli airlines landing in India, and the UAE pass over Saudi Arabia. In addition, he highlighted the fact that the United States, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Israel are negotiating the fate of the two islands Tiran and Sana fir that Saudi Arabia took from Egypt and are occupied by international forces. The Saudis that have sovereignty over the islands are demanding to have Saudi forces instead and whatever security stakes Israel has they are ready to address it with

them. These are the kind of moves and examples that indicate more or less that Saudi Arabia will be part of this wave in the region.

Throughout history Arab states have generally signed political agreements yet failed to develop diplomatic relations from every other level, like Egypt and Jordan, so with the Abraham accords it's being done in reverse, starting with cultural cooperation, technological cooperation, agriculture and business cooperation and then this will eventually develop into a natural status quo that is political alliance. So Saudi Arabia has many reasons to join and have much to gain, as they need a reliable partner in the region in confronting Iran and the Muslim brotherhood, after the U.S withdrawal, therefore the entry would be for political reasons as he is redefining the region in a more secular, liberal and progressive way which doesn't go well hand in hand with the preservation of a historic enmities, in an era where there is no reason to make Israel an enemy with the lack of an Arab Israeli conflict, and the Palestinian Israeli conflict is largely dormant, and even the Palestinians in the west bank are no longer fighting. Therefore Mohamad ben Selman see it as it's for the best interest of Saudi people in particular to build economic diplomatic relations with the states of Israel but for now there are many factors that will go into play mostly him being crowned as king, as he can't do much as crown prince and he will have to be careful as not to make this a faux-pas and not have a backlash against Saudi Arabia or his leadership because he already has a lot of speculations and eyes pointed at him regarding breaches of human rights with Khashoggi and prisoned people, and the royal family that he pushed outside the rule and are against him. In addition, throughout the last 50 years Saudi Arabia has fed into religious fundamentalism and it's going to take time and effort to be able to switch the mindset of people into acceptance of all, therefore the change will be gradual and well-orchestrated process over the next decade, focused on the younger generation that

is a lot less ideological and introducing to them the notion of citizenry. A delicate matter for the Saudi would be the image they hold as protector of all Islam, contrary to the UAE, Saudi Arabia will ask for a price, for example they are in a position to impose conditions like push Israelis to defuse tension by freezing settlements, an Israeli acceptance of Palestinian sovereignty over the 1967 borders, as well as acceptance that part of Jerusalem will stay in Palestinian hands. Now if there is a growing Iranian threat Mohamad ben Salman would be more amenable into accepting a settlement that is more favorable towards the Israelis.

#### The Possible Dynamics of New Alliances

The Abraham Accords have a limited impact on the geopolitical dynamics in the region, the major player benefiting from the agreements is the UAE, because it will gain a new military position with the purchase of arms and technology from Israel which might push it over Saudi Arabia. Bahrain has a less active profile than the UAE and the new relations won't have any strategic impact on the region alone and the UAE is aiming to gain recognition as a strategic partner alongside Israel in the eyes of the US. The United States aim is to balance its relationship with all partners, starting with the UAE, even Qatar and Turkey, however, the accords on their own will not cause a great impact on the region nor will it shift realities positively. The accords are not likely to mend the rifts in the region between gulf countries or the UAE and Turkey, in addition, Israel which is a main player will avoid getting involved in gulf clashes because it still seeks Qatar as a valuable player in Gaza engagement. Kuwait remains on the sidelines and adamant on its position to refuse any contact with Israel, however Oman and Qatar have a pragmatic relation with Israel and they do not feel the need to formalize their relation unless the UAE and the U.S put pressure on them due to the two gulf countries wanting to amend relationships with the United States and Oman



benefiting from financial Emirati help. As for Saudi Arabia, as long as King Salman is on the throne and have the final say, Riyadh will not normalize with Israel with no direct pressure from the United States. The only shift we might witness is within Turkey and its role in the region as the UAE and Israel move closer to each other in partnership. Turkey would become a player in the other block where Iran and its proxies move, the Abraham Accords are pushing Turkey and Iran to cooperate together, sweeping their differences under the rug to face this new partnership that took over the Gulf, and Qatar might still align with them if things go sour with the United States. However, on April 5<sup>th</sup> of 2022 Turkey and the United States announced the culmination of months of talks to set up a procedure for improving their strained ties, eyeing cooperation in the areas of economy and defense, which might complicate the trust between the triple membered pillar of Iran, Qatar and Turkey (Turkey and the United States, 2022).

The accords will not heal nor polarize the region with the current signatories, the significance of the accords lies in countering Iran and its proxies in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen, and to create an environment for economic cooperation in fields of commerce, intelligence, military, medical, and foreign direct investments. However, if the Accords are pushing Turkey in the lap of the Iranians, then that will cause a shift since the main signatories of the accords do want to stop the Iranian spread and simultaneously restrain the support for the Muslim Brotherhood via Turkey and Qatar who also support and invest in Gaza's Hamas, and the Islamists in Libya and Syria; as a result, the Muslim Brotherhood maintains a strong presence in the region. The dilemma for UAE and fellow gulf countries is how to contain Iranian power and Turkish influence in the Middle East and North Africa region with Turkey's new era in relations with Israel that allows them to intervene in numerous Middle Eastern governments and thwart UAE efforts. Both the UAE and Bahrain recognize that they

cannot curb Iranian regional dominance while bolstering Turkey's role in the Levant and North Africa. In other words, the UAE-Bahrain-Israel peace accords will need to mature on multiple fronts and solve the little issues in alliances before the rest can commit to coming to the table, especially when it comes to Saudi Arabia, the guardian of the Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina, who is silently agreeing to the Accords yet standing on the sidelines and observing the results out of concern of abandoning the Palestinians by making such a move and thereby handing Erdogan's Turkey the preeminent role of protector of Arab/Muslims.

When observing the accords, two years later some significant impact was detected in the region only under the shape of economics and tourism, Gulf states are looking to diversify their economies from oil and to partner up with Israeli institutions, mainly in technology and tourism. For example, the UAE and Israel created the UAE-Israel Business Council on June 2020, and the Abu Dhabi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ADCCI) has signed an arrangement with the Tel Aviv Chamber of Commerce (TACC) to boost trade cooperation in a variety of business industries on February 2021 (Mansoor, 2021). Furthermore, the UAE sovereign wealth fund recently permitted a memo of understanding for the acquisition of an Israeli natural gas field for \$1.1 billion dollar (Wallace, Odenheimer, Ratcliffe & Di Paola, 2021).

After the wave of normalization, many investment announcements took place, especially investments that incorporate the tourism sector, technology deals, even sports with an attempt from the Emirates to purchase an Israeli football club. However, the Hamas conflict in the Gaza strip continues to be a main issue impacting negatively the Abraham Accords on a longer term.

The Abraham Accords make no attempt to resolve the Palestinian issue, and neither does the treaty nor did the signatories intend for peace. Nevertheless, with the mainstream public opinion in the Arab world being highly critical of Israel and supports the Palestinian cause, the UAE emphasized the possibility for peace that could ascend from the process of normalization to justify the treaty. At a panel event in the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, the UAE's ambassador to the US, Yousef Al Otaiba, stated that the Abraham Accords were set essentially to limit the Israeli annexation of the West Bank and to recollect the possibility of a two-state solution (Magid, 2021). Even so, as Israeli repression in the West Bank and Jerusalem deepened and the death toll in Gaza amplified, there were almost no statements from the UAE concerning the impact of these policies on Palestinians, or how the Abraham Accords are supposed to promote Palestinian rights.

The accords are in the end more concerned about Iran than the Palestinian cause and the annexation of the Palestinian lands. The partnership between the UAE and Israel is set to corner Iran in the region, despite a possible relationship the UAE might hold with Iran because the UAE's relation with Iran is a taciturn brief peace and not a positive rapprochement.

Therefore, the Abrahams Accords is a step in a new direction of regional foreign policy, because the wave of normalization with Israel, is changing current geopolitics in the region with a new axis built within the Gulf supported by the United States to confront Iran and ensure a route for tight security and economic ties between the signatories without touching on the Israel-Palestine conflict. Many critics of the Abraham Accords emphasis on the bloodshed in Gaza and violent protests in the occupied West Bank to explain that the accords have no positive effect on the Palestinian situation, and such atrocities did not stop the formation of the Israel-Gulf Cooperation Council Chamber

of Commerce and Industry in the UAE. It is evident that the UAE would prioritize bilateral trade agreements with Israel over support for Palestinian rights.

#### Comparison between ABRAHAM ACCORDS and Previous Agreements

The belief of normalization with Israel is often encouraged on the basis that it will bring wealth, stability, and economic development to those who take part in it and it will simultaneously have a positive reflection for the region. Nevertheless, earlier normalizations with Egypt and Jordan did not result in the anticipated prosperity, and some experts believe the Abraham Accords will follow in the footsteps of prior agreements, however, this agreement is different from the rest because the ultimate objective of the AA is to build bilateral relations and cooperation, and provide a collective security approach to confront Iran.

To be able to properly capture the process of normalization of the Abraham Accords, one must understand its core context and how it contrasts from the previous normalizations between Israel and Arab countries. Egypt and Jordan's agreements with Israel were primarily aimed at ending the conflict and were based on the idea of peace in exchange for Egypt and Jordan recognizing Israel's rule over areas taken from Palestinians. In contrast to these agreements, the Abraham Accords largely ignore the topic of Palestine, focusing instead on regional and economic considerations.

The previous peace agreements had significant political consequences and costs, particularly for Egypt, which was temporarily expelled from the Arab League as a result of the Camp David agreements, which were signed in September 1978, followed by a peace treaty in March 1979, and the assassination of Egypt's former president, Anwar Sadat, in October 1981. The normalization efforts in the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain have had little to no regional or global impact.

The 1979 peace treaty between Israel and Egypt included a common acknowledgement of the end of their continuous conflict, which had lasted since the 1948 Arab–Israeli War, normalization of relations, as well as the withdrawal of Israeli military and civilians from the occupied Sinai. Egypt, the most powerful Arab country, became the first Arab country to publicly recognize Israel as a result of the accord. It was part of a fundamental geopolitical shift in which an adversary of Israel became a friendly neighbor.

Nonetheless, the truce is usually referred to as a "cold peace," in which diplomatic relations are steady but Egyptians reject the normalization. As for the Wadi Araba Treaty, signed in 1994 between Israel and Jordan, it was primarily intended to resolve the hostilities between the two countries following the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. The pact also resolved land and water disputes, provided chances for tourist and commerce cooperation, and committed both countries to prevent their land from being used for military confrontations by a third country.

The Abraham Accords, unlike prior agreements, are not about preventing conflict because there is no direct confrontation between the members. Rather, the trilateral pact focuses on shared security interests fueled by regional challenges like Iran, bringing the two Gulf countries closer to Israel for economic and geopolitical reasons. It will give Israel unrivaled direct access to the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf area, with the goal of fostering economic development and partnership on a variety of levels. Its creators positioned it as part of a "new Middle East" that included Israel. The Abrahams Accords are designed to aid in the end of Palestine's unlawful occupation, but in actuality, they do little to help.

*Can the Abraham Accords bring Peace?*

According to experts and professors on middle east relations, that technically vis-à-vis Israel there is peace in the region, putting aside the flare ups of Hezbollah or Hamas or very tactical bombing of the Iranian militant in Syria, there are no wars in the middle east, the last war properly happened in 2006 which wasn't a state-to-state war but more between a militia and a state. But the building of relationships between the gulf and Israel will lead to a containment of Iranian expansionism, and they will be a lot less belligerent to arm militias and their proxies in the region when there is a big security and political and diplomatic alliance.

Satirist Nadim Koteich gave his own perspective on peace and normalization, and pointed out that with the Abraham Accords, the emirates took a new approach that is being missed by many observers looking at the Abraham Accords. He added that Mohamed ben Zayed stated you cannot bring peace by a decision to have it but what can be done is to normalize the sphere between players, normalize the sphere between Abu Dhabi and Israel on business levels, education levels, diplomatic level. Therefore, by normalizing the relationships, peace will become a byproduct of normalization, and if we take this approach and think of what happened with Egypt and Jordan, they did exactly the opposite. They went for peace but the normalization didn't go any step further, it stayed a cold peace between Jordan/Egypt and Israel, and the normalization didn't go beyond security coordination between these entities. Koteich continued and said that what Mohamed ben Zayed said is let's go the other way around and start with normalization and when relationships are normal peace will be found within populations and they will find ways to think of themselves and others in a peaceful approach. The beauty and uniqueness of the Abraham Accords is that it puts normalization before peace and not the other way around. An example given by Koteich

of this new approach is the peace between Egypt and Jordan with Israel that developed into normalization. The new method of normalization had them talking about issues beyond security at expo 2020 for the first time, and the result was tangible. An agreement took place between Jordanians, Israelis and funded by the Emiratis to produce electricity to the Israelis and in return they would desalinate 200 cubic meters of water, and this is the first time these two countries have such a significant agreement since 1994, and without the Abraham Accords it wouldn't have been possible.

As a conclusion, the greatest persistent geopolitical characteristic of the Abraham Accords is the creation of a new bloc in the Gulf based on the fact that most Gulf governments and Israel share the same goal of containing the perceived Iranian threat to the region. After all, by ignoring the peace process and giving Israel unprecedented access to the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf, the accords change the geopolitics of the region. This new axis has the support of the United States, which sees this brand-new geopolitical axis of Israel and Gulf states as an efficient way to undermine Iran's regional hegemony. In contrast, the "cold peace" that emerged with Egypt and Jordan improved diplomatic ties but did not result in the formation of a new axis. The fact that the agreement exists shows that the UAE prioritizes its national interests before sympathy with the Palestinian people.

Now that Trump is no longer in power, the question is whether other Gulf countries will join the normalization bandwagon. For the time being, it appears that other Gulf countries will wait for a political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict before taking similar moves as the UAE and Bahrain have taken. Saudi Arabia continues to back Palestinian positions on important issues. Meanwhile, Kuwait and Qatar remain opposed to unilateral Israeli annexation of West Bank territories, claiming that it is incompatible with the Palestinian cause and international law.

## The US Vision on ABRAHAM ACCORDS Affecting the Region- from Trump to Biden

The Abraham Accords reinforce the notion of a Middle East divided into great-power coalitions competing through force, and in the highly militarized competition with Iran, the partner countries are set to augment the flow of weapons and technology, directly intensifying the prospect of conflict. Furthermore, the new alliances foster authoritarian regimes' ties and actions, and potentially weaken the international system and also increase the region's moral hazard by growing militarization and potential escalation over Iran.

At least four basic goals should be counted in in any American progressive foreign policy vision, as they claim: fostering peace, minimizing regional militarism, advancing democracy, and strengthening the international system. However, after more than a year and a half, the Abraham Accords have proven to be ineffective in advancing progressive American foreign policy goals, and in many cases, openly violate them.

Nonetheless, the Abraham Accords' future could be very different, as there is scant indication that the accords will contribute to regional democracy. The agreements, on the other hand, may have other advantages, and as a condition for countries participation, current and prospective future parties to the accords could demand that Israel take actions to achieve Israeli–Palestinian peace, and the US could encourage such conditionality.

The accords may also contribute to the creation of a new Middle East dynamic based on diplomacy rather than rhetoric and force, the US can also halt and even reverse initiatives that are harmful to the international system. However, the Abraham Accords



can only be positively redirected with US leadership, based on the four key principles of progressive policy stated above.

In the Middle East, the values outlined above include prioritizing the resolution of the Israeli–Palestinian fight; de-escalating and reducing militarization of the region, as well as eroding the binary pro- and anti-Iran axis; democratic movements; and reinforcement of the postwar rules based international order where it is specifically threatened. Furthermore, collaboration in the important areas of climate, health, and environmental policy, as well as economic development, should be part of a progressive foreign policy.

#### The ABRAHAM ACCORDS Transition from Trump to Biden

The Abraham Accords were drafted by the US under Trump, solely to satisfy his and Netanyahu's personal political goals in contrast, Joe Biden's government pledges to embrace a more progressive, higher-minded foreign policy. That idea should be more than a slogan, as the accords are at a fork in the road, and they're heading down the wrong direction. Washington must make a strategic decision to amend the path of the agreements and fulfill Biden's commitment of a progressive foreign policy.

The trump administration responsible for the Abraham Accords launch is quite different from the Biden's administration that took over in 2021, at a first glance. However, both administrations have the same end goal in the middle east yet the methods differ, as trump is more cutthroat, harsh and unpredictable with his decisions, Biden is softer and walking on eggshells in the region as not to commit the same mistakes as Obama did.

Biden committed to support the Arab-Israeli agreements once he took over presidency, however, such support has been lukewarm at best. At his August 29th Oval Office meeting with new Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, he made a passing reference to the accords without expressing any apparent commitment. But then again, the

meeting was overshadowed by the Kabul airport suicide explosion, which killed over 180 people, including 13 US military personnel. Later, the White House social aide informed reporters that the White House has been working behind the scenes to encourage other Arab countries to join Israel (Hunnicut, 2021).

The Biden administration's lack of excitement originates from a number of causes, including its efforts to mend fences with the Palestinians, which is both a legitimate concern of US policy and a growing political cause among activist Democrats. In addition, the administration is pursuing a broader plan to minimize US involvement in the Middle East while focusing on geopolitical competition in Asia. At the same time, Biden is clearly uneasy about a diplomatic victory that is so directly associated to Trump, whom he scorns. That includes using the name "Abraham" to refer to the accords, which the US State Department allegedly prefers to refer to as "normalization agreements" (Wagenheim, 2021).

It's a shame to get rid of the biblical patriarch, because that name was a coup in formulating the agreements that broke down every possible political and emotional barrier that has long divided Israelis and Arabs. What the Trump team got that the Biden team missed is the power of religious symbols, which find mutual appeal in these ancient lands; the name Abraham was central to the acceptance of the agreements, as the man is revered by Muslims, Christians and Jews. Therefore, when critics attacked the Abraham Accords as a betrayal of the Palestinians and a cover for a massive arms deal, the signers coldly responded that the pact represented a historic reconciliation between old cousins united by common cultural roots and the Middle East should serve as a springboard for this peace.

Before breaking political taboos to forge open ties with Israel, the UAE was already arranging the groundwork for agreements by exposing the country's secretive Jewish community and bringing Pope Francis to Mass in Abu Dhabi, where there is a significant Christian community of expatriates. Preaching a new way of interfaith communion, the oil-rich Gulf state built and launched in 2021 a monumental prayer complex in its capital called the Abrahamic Family House, which contains a mosque, church and synagogue. Emirati leaders argued that making Jews more acceptable to their own citizens would be useful before revealing the close strategic ties the government had already cultivated with Israel, the Arab world's main enemy for most of the last century.

The apathy with which the Biden administration has treated the first anniversary of the Abraham Accords reflects a nonchalant approach. Allowing Trump to keep this breakthrough in Arab-Israeli peacemaking and Biden not aggressively working to expand his outreach is a mistake that Republicans will be sure to capitalize on if Trump comes back as president.

By refusing to co-opt the Abraham Accords and muttering only mild praise for Israel's new ties with old Arab adversaries, US President Joe Biden is helping pull down the Arab-Israeli peace, to partisan politics. But Biden have had more pressing issues to contend with, of higher priorities than the accords and the peace it might bring, such as the hasty withdrawal from Afghanistan, the resurgence of the COVID19 pandemic, and the devastation from hurricanes and wildfires. The pressure the Biden administration have going on, has given Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, who brokered the deals as a White House adviser, an opportunity to generate some buzz and remind Washington power brokers of the administration's foreign policy achievement, as there's many achievements to revel in. For example, the accords were the first peace accords an Arab

country had signed with Israel in 26 years, and in contrast to the coldness and hostility that followed the 1979 pact with Egypt and the 1994 treaty with Jordan, the four Arab states that signed the Abraham Accords pledged to develop cordial human relations with Israel. While Israel and several Gulf states have long secretly cooperated on defense and intelligence, a recent list compiled by the UAE includes 63 examples of public cooperation with Israel beginning in the first year of peace alone. These include a new UAE embassy in Tel Aviv, a joint coronavirus investigation and a deal by Abu Dhabi's Mubadala sovereign wealth fund to buy a \$1 billion stake in a Mediterranean gas platform, the Chevron and several Company owned Israeli energy companies (Delek Drilling, 2021). Tourism is also booming, despite pandemic restrictions, some 200,000 Israelis flew to the United Arab Emirates in 2020, particularly Dubai, where hotels are now catering to Jewish travelers with kosher buffets and ballrooms converted into synagogues for the Rosh Hashanah holiday, add to that the Dubai Expo where Israel was among 191 nations with an official pavilion for the first time in the Arab world (Batraway and Debre, 2021).

Surprisingly, the agreements also passed their first and very serious test. After Trump announced the deals, the Palestinian anger at a separate peace boiled over, and It was one of the abuses that sparked unrest in East Jerusalem and cities across Israel before the 11-day Gaza War broke out. Although Hamas and other militant groups fired more than 4,000 rockets at Israel during the May conflict and Israeli airstrikes devastated parts of Gaza, killing 260 people in Gaza and 13 in Israel, none of the Arab partners in the accords that have ties with Israel aborted as they might have in the past (Roblin, 2021).

However, there have been setbacks as well. The Biden administration first halted a \$23 billion weaponry deal that accompanied the agreements, which included F-35 stealth

fighters and MQ-9B Reaper drones, much to the chagrin of the Emiratis, and in April, the purchase was finally approved (Mehta, 2021). Environmentalists in Israel are criticizing and protesting an agreement in which the UAE will utilize a trans-Israel pipeline to transfer oil to the Mediterranean and markets in Europe and North America, bypassing the Suez Canal. Protestors attempting to halt the project claimed that it could jeopardize endangered coral reefs and beaches near the pipeline's southern endpoint in the Red Sea port of Eilat. They also fear a replay of the 2014 oil leak in the Arava Desert, where a pipeline ruptured and 1.3 million gallons of oil spilled polluting a nature reserve (Staff, 2021).

It's unclear whether the accords' legacy will aid Republicans as much as they expect. After all, Trump and former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, were not able to rescue themselves from being voted out of office despite the historic diplomatic victory. Both had hailed the deals as the result of their own political acumen, but voters had plenty of other reasons to reject them, not least the mismanagement of their countries' pandemic response.

The Historic Negev Summit and the Two States Solution- under an American Perspective.

After being criticized for triggering a failing course impacting the accords; in a recent event, Biden's administration was able to highlight the Abraham Accords with the historic Negev Summit in Sde Boker, where Foreign Minister Yair Lapid welcomed Secretary of State Tony Blinken among the foreign ministers of the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, and Egypt, which was widely praised as a new milestone in the regional normalization drive. Even if judged solely on the basis of appearances, the fact that Israel held this diplomatic event was a step forward, and it did not appear to be a revolutionary moment or out of place, as it might have been a few years ago. The

progress was made not just because the summit was held on Israeli soil or because such a large number of people were there. The summit's substance indicates how the normalization process is expanding and maturing, going beyond what the Abraham Accords' authors envisioned in one essential way.

The Abraham Accords are frequently assumed to have been largely motivated by the common danger of Iran, and that a direct line can be made from the 2015 JCPOA to Gulf governments' desire to normalize relations with Israel as a means of restricting Iranian regional hegemony.

Iran is undoubtedly a thread that connects these countries, but as Jacob Magid pointed out in his report on the Negev Summit, Iran—particularly its nuclear aspect—looms considerably larger for Israel than it does for the other summit participants. From commerce to sustainable energy, they care about a wide variety of issues that they want to address through regional collaboration, and the fact that this was not just an emergency meeting on Iran indicates how normalization agreements breeds proper normalization. Only one of the six new working groups mentioned is concerned with regional defense and combating Iran; the other five are concerned with energy, tourism, health, education, and food and water security (Magid, 2022).

It's a positive thing for the Abraham Accords' long-term viability that they're more than just a regional security coordination tool. Threats and strategic approaches evolve throughout time, and if normalization were based solely on a single common interest based on current threat perceptions, it would be partial and deceptive. The fact that Israel's new partners prefer to focus on other issues rather than Iran may frustrate Israel in the short term, given Jerusalem's concerns about a possible US readmission into the JCPOA and the implications for Iran sanctions, but it will be useful in the long run.

The Israeli-Palestinian matter, which has nothing to do with Iran, was perhaps the most fascinating component of the Negev Summit. When the Abraham Accords were first announced, it was clear that the Accords' architects, the Trump administration and then-Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, saw normalization as a way to get around not only the Palestinians, but the idea that resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was still relevant. There were only two passing references to Palestinian statehood and a two-state solution in the speeches on the White House South Lawn preceding the signing of the Abraham Accords, by both the Emirati and Bahraini foreign ministers; and the message was that Israel and the region were moving on.

The contrast the Negev conference held was apparent. It started with Blinken saying, "We have to be clear that these regional peace agreements are not a substitute for progress between Palestinians and Israelis," and went on to say that the day would be spent discussing how the countries in the room can work together to create the conditions for a two-state agreement (Blinken, 2022).

Following him was Bahraini Foreign Minister Abdullatif bin Rashid Al Zayani, who listed settling the Israeli-Palestinian problem as one of the common regional challenges to be addressed, while asking Israel and the Palestinians to come together for Palestinian statehood negotiations. Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry went even farther, highlighting the need of sustaining the credibility and feasibility of a two-state solution that results in a Palestinian state with a capital in East Jerusalem before discussing any other topic in his remarks. Moroccan Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita echoed Shoukry in pushing for a Palestinian state with a capital in East Jerusalem that protects Israeli security and interests (Harkov, 2022).

While Lapid did not go as far as his colleagues, he did mention opening the door to Palestinians in order to assist the area establish a brighter future. Emirati Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan was the sole summit delegate who did not mention the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Harkov, 2022).

The focus on Israeli-Palestinian relations was not primarily through the prism of the Palestinians, which is also significant. Except for Shoukry, all of the ministers openly condemned the terrorist assault in Hadera the day before, in which two Israelis were killed, and Blinken, Al Zayani, and Bourita began their speeches by expressing their condemnation and condolences to the victims' families. Nearly all of the references to two states also cited Israeli interests and security, indicating that Israeli worries about the potential negative consequences of a two-state solution are not being discounted by Israel's Arab neighbors (Harkov, 2022).

In order for any of this to be evocative, it must go yonder words. There have been few concrete steps taken in tandem by the Abraham Accords states to address Israeli-Palestinian issues, either on the Palestinian or Israeli side, and Jordan's absence from the summit was interpreted as a protest over the fact that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not front and center, and the Palestinians have been left out. Any discussion of this would be incomplete without mentioning that the Palestinians continue to reject the reality of the new regional dynamics, and the Palestinian Authority, predictably, condemned Israel for convening the summit, condemning it of being a cover-up for annexation, settlement expansion, and thwarting a Palestinian state.

According to accounts, Blinken pushed hard for measures to improve Palestinian quality of life and build a political horizon for two nations, but the summit was mostly focused on other issues. However, because the public messaging represents a shift in



how the normalizing states themselves explain their interests and the benefits of more collaboration, it should not be dismissed out of hand. There is still a long way to go before normalization has a tangible positive impact on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the difficulties of discussing a two-state solution have been amplified by multiple terrorist attacks that have killed 11 Israelis. Though, the fact that normalization is increasingly being linked to a two-state solution rather than a route around an Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a critical first step. It also emphasizes the critical role that the United States can and must play in this area, because the shift in tone is in response to the Biden administration's priorities, just as the initial rhetoric around normalization was in response to the Trump administration's lead. It's important to keep things in perspective because this isn't even close to a breakthrough. However, it could signal the start of a new phase for the Abraham Accords, in which economic and security cooperation accelerates as greater attention and effort is focused on leveraging these new partnerships to help Israel and the Palestinians reach a similar point.

#### The United States' Position in the Middle East

According to an expert and professor on middle eastern issues that wishes to remain anonymous, America no longer desires to be present in the middle east and no longer wants to be a hegemon power in the region. He stated that it's proven to run across party lines and the first who expressed this desire clearly is Obama with the Obama doctrine that very much spoke about how America is needlessly immersed in the middle east and how it no longer relies in terms of natural resources on the middle east because America now is a self-sufficient nation in terms of gas and oil, and they can live without the middle east providing it, and at the same time Obama thought that the Iranian-Arab dispute is largely a result of the Arab not being understanding of the Iranian security concerns. After Obama we had the Trump administration, and it had a much better

relation on the surface with the gulf states but the relations are largely extortionary, and it was based on money sales, and he didn't express a trump doctrine that was counter to the Obama doctrine where he said that the middle east is important and countering Iranian influence is a major US concern in the region, nor did it express that the security partnership with the gulf states is a central pillar of U.S foreign policy. He added that Trump followed an ad hoc, day to day basis approach where he was unreliable and erratic and we cannot expect his next move. The trump era did not really assuage the concern of the Obama era. Now with Biden era, the 2.0 version of the Obama era, from day one wanted to go into reviving the JCPOA, negotiate with Iran for a potential new nuclear deal, and also appointed Robert Mali, who is very sympathetic to Iran and not towards Arab gulf states. Now by di-facto Israel wants better relations with the gulf, but Israel feels that they can rely less on the Sates therefore develop a strong relationship with Syria and Russia or at least coordinate their relationship better with China, for example they gave their Haifa port to the Chinese bid which is something the United States did not like and then they pushed further for the Abraham Accords. One last point is that, is that Jarred Kushner in particular from the trump administration was very central to the development of this relationship but it's unlikely that Trumpism provided the gulf states with a feeling that the U.S is back to stay and there is no need for them to engage in further building of a strategic relations that are not natural to our political history.

The gulf states did feel at some point that trump is transient and unreliable contrary to media reports and he did not have a concrete stable doctrine for the middle east. In addition, there are strategic factors that are not particular to Obama or trump, Biden or the next president that makes the U.S incentive to be involved in the middle east a lost less, like the fatigue in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the failures in these two countries. He

concluded that these factors pushed American politicians to be much less likely to push for more involvement in the middle east and even the challenge of Islamic terrorism and fundamentalism has likely subsided as there are no explosion or terrorism acts happening around the globe like it was happening in the previous 10 years, therefore with Ukraine and China going on there was a feeling in the United States that this region is trouble and not worth being involved in. However, the issue with this region is that you can ignore it but it will not ignore you, according to the expert. So, they always end up coming back whether because of daaesh or Iran or for other reasons, but the general vibe in the US across party lines is a vibe that is both disassociated with the middle east and not very friendly to gulf states. the expert gave an example of Mohamad ben Selman who is generally viewed as a revolutionary reformer in the region, and he is transforming Saudi Arabia in a more progressive direction but all that is heard from America is that he killed Jamal Khashoggi ignoring everything else he achieved thereby they labeled him as a killer not because he breached human rights in a grotesque manner but because the democratic party and some republicans don't view the gulf well and they have a sympathy of a kind to revolutionary Iran even though they chant for the death of America but they still like Iran more than the gulf. It's quite flabbergasting and strange but that's the end result, so as a Khaleeji leader not able to rely on America and facing the double threat of the Muslim brotherhood and Iran, and with Arab Israeli conflict having largely transformed into a Palestinian Israeli conflict; this was the natural path to take to re-engineer the regional security infrastructure. Specially for the UAE and Saudi Arabia, the way the U.S behaved whether rightfully or wrongfully towards the growing threat of Muslim brotherhood and the Arab spring by welcoming the Muslim brotherhood with open arms in Egypt and Tunis, it alarmed the leaders of the UAE because to them the U.S don't understand the region, these people are coming

to power through democracy but are not actual democrats therefore eventually they will turn into Islamic dictatorship. All these factors together led the leaders to rethink how the region can and should be managed.

The Ukraine-Russian War Impact on the United States Vision for the Middle East.

The development of regional powers, culminating in the Abraham Accords and the feeling of an authoritarian win over regional democratic movements, has defined the past decade throughout the Middle East and North Africa. The chaos that followed Russia's invasion of Ukraine created perfect conduits for middling states to gain more authority and independence, the first was diplomatic hedging by countries like Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Morocco, and Israel, whether at the UN or through outreach to Moscow. The second was taking advantage of the energy situation, Algeria promoted itself to Europe, while Saudi Arabia fought back, defying President Joe Biden and refusing to enhance oil supply to Europe.

The West's existential view of the battle opened up new possibilities, Turkey and Israel took advantage of this by attempting to mediate. The UAE utilized the cover to push for the normalization of Syrian despot Bashar al-Assad, furthering its regional ambitions of reasserting authoritarianism and preserving Russia as a counterweight to the United States. Finally, Western sanctions presented unexpected chances to weaken US economic hegemony, which many were determined to achieve by putting secondary sanctions on Iran, and Chinese power will rise as a result of symbolic oil sales from Saudi Arabia to China or Russia to India via the Petro yuan. Meanwhile, Russian oligarchs' reliance on havens like the UAE for shady financial dealings expands options for avoiding potential Western penalties. As a result, Ukraine's greatest, and maybe most underrated, impact will be as yet another hammer blow to the Pax Americana, as well as another step towards the brave new world of multipolarity.

The invasion of Ukraine by Russia has demonstrated that US objectives differ dramatically from those of key Arab security partners. Despite their continued reliance on the US for security, the Saudis and Emiratis have made clear that they also prioritize their relations with Moscow by abstaining from a UN Security Council vote condemning Russian aggression to refusing to increase oil production to offset the price spike caused by sanctions on Russian oil. In terms of the long-term implications of this increased clarity, the United States has two options: continue to assist these rulers despite their clear refusal to do so, or radically reassess its relationship with these autocratic countries.

The Ukraine crisis could be a watershed moment in American Middle East policy, when the US government decides that American principles like support for human rights no longer outweigh arms sales to Arab autocracies, and it could also be the point at which the US redoubled its efforts to appease Saudi and Emirati officials, notwithstanding their contempt for American objectives. If the US opts for the former, it will signal to foreign partners that US support is not unconditional; if the US opts for the latter, we may anticipate more states to act against US goals knowing they would face no penalties.

According to an expert on middle eastern relations, in large part, the Abraham Accords are a result of two major geostrategic factors one which is the going enmity with Iran as a result of their highly belligerent military stick and sectarian expansion in the region, and so there is a shift in term of priorities, who can you have enmity with and you can't do both by any strategic count. The second factor is the gradual somewhat inevitable withdrawal of the U.S from the region starting with Iraq and Afghanistan and then the way they have behaved towards Iran nuclear deal; all part of the growing strategy of

shifting their attention to Asia, so focusing more on the rising power of China, vis a vis Taiwan and the south China sea etcetera.

A third factor to the AA is linked to the American withdrawal. As not to leave Israel helpless in the region with no allies the Abraham Accords were sponsored by the Americans to ensure the security of Israel and to make up for them leaving Israel to face the threats of Iran alone. Throughout the last couple of years a lot of Israelis officials and Americans felt that the United States is throwing Israel under the bus, especially in the days of Obama, so this might be seen as a compensation prize for the lack of US involvement.

It's important to know that the relationship between Israel and UAE is replacing the loss of American presence as a direct ally to the UAE, so the situation might not improve but it will also not deteriorate. Israel is making up for that loss by becoming an ally who shares a common threat of Iran nuclear program, militias and expansionism. Both can benefit from each other's expertise and intelligence, but it will not make up for the withdrawal of American influence, because as strong as Israel is it can't replace a humongous power that is the United States that has big bases and allies around the world. Therefore, one could conclude that the Abraham Accords is a response to said withdrawal and can only fill part of the gap left by the United States.

However, today the U.S has a new concern which is the Ukraine-Russian war, which affects the region, the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain are more aware that the US is no longer a reliable partner in terms of regional security, so they need to hedge and diversify the sources of protection so to speak, so they are developing their relationship with Russia, China and with Israel. Add to this that the UAE and Israel are quite similar, their economies are complementary, they're both into high tech, they're both into Agri-

technology and the type of economy they represent is complementary as opposed to for example the UAE partnering with China which has a manufacturing economy which is really different, or partnering with Russia which is largely a natural resource economy with 80% of their income is from gas and oil. So, it works well for them and the more the US withdraw from the region the more the US won't cater to the kind of concerns that the gulf states have vis-a vis Iran, and the more there is an incentive to develop security and strategic partnership with Israel.

#### *How the War Complicates Biden's Iran Diplomacy?*

One remarkable facet of the US-Russia relationship is how specific collaborative initiatives, at least prior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, were able to endure more general enmity. One of these operations was diplomacy on Iran's nuclear program and measures to contain it, including the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA, the 2015 nuclear deal from which Trump withdrew in 2018.

When the US argued that Russia could not utilize commercial links with Iran—which would be facilitated by the relaxation of certain sanctions on Iran—to avoid sanctions resulting from its invasion and occupation of Ukraine, the talks to resurrect the JCPOA were engulfed in invasion politics. Russia's involvement in the development of Iran's civilian nuclear capacity, a lucrative business for Russia, was at question.

The problem seemed to go away after a few days, and as a State Department spokesperson said "It has been logical to us, and it should be logical to all parties, that we would not sanction Russia's participation in nuclear programs that are part of a full return to the JCPOA." However, If Russia manages to get over Ukraine-related sanctions, the issue could resurface (Sly & DeYoung, 2022).

The impact of the Ukraine conflict for the JCPOA discussions does not end there. Iran is now demanding that Trump's classification of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a "foreign terrorist organization" be lifted. It's a sanction that Trump administration officials continue to defend as a crucial deterrent to Iranian extremism in the region. It demonstrates, they argue, that the US will stand by sanctions that are unaffected by other priorities (Coates & Greenway, 2022).

The lifting of the terrorist designation has ramifications, among them are those owned by powerful Gulf monarchies and Israel, who all regard the IRGC as a lethal adversary. President Biden is attempting to entice Saudi Arabia and others to join the anti-Russia coalition, a vital step toward increasing oil output and alleviating some of the agony Americans are experiencing with gas prices. Even though Russian oil imports are minor, sanctions on Russia have an impact on the global oil market. However, Israel's unwillingness to take sides in the Ukraine conflict is a disappointing conduct from a purported ally, but it has significant ramifications in American politics, where it wields tremendous clout in Congress and the media.

The political risks for Biden by relaxing sanctions on the IRGC, or on Iran in general, while pushing for sanctions against Russia are the most potent implications of the Ukraine-Middle East nexus. Republicans and the pro-Israel lobby are railing against the resurrected JCPOA, claiming it is a capitulation to Iran, and this was predictable given that they did the same thing in 2015, endorsing Trump's actions against the nuclear deal and the Revolutionary Guards. If a Republican is elected president in 2024 the same would happen, leading Iran to assume the agreement is just temporary, and now, Biden's delicate tango in Ukraine is bracing such political opposition in the United States, where Polls show a broad support for more action against Russia and skepticism



of Biden's war policy in Ukraine (U.S. Response to Russia's Invasion of Ukraine, 2022).

Because of his political precarity, Biden will find it difficult to "appease" Iran on the IRGC issue. If he does decide to relax the sanctions, the Republicans will make a lot of fuss about it, which might have a cascading effect: For example, the 2015 agreement resulted in US assistance for the Saudi-led and UAE-led war in Yemen. A JCPOA restoration might have similar negative consequences; certainly, the Saudis, Emiratis, and Israelis will regard a new JCPOA as a betrayal and will continue to oppose Iran vehemently and continue to be uncooperative regarding the Ukraine war. Because Biden has the power to veto almost any bill aiming at repealing the JCPOA, the agreement would be secure from Republican anger for the next two years. However, the Ukraine war complicates Biden's political calculations—and, according to some, gives him the image of weakness—at a time when he cannot afford such complexities, and the JCPOA may not be able to resist them.

#### *The Emergence of New Regional Power Blocs*

The most immediate and long-term impact of the war is the expected realignment of power and formation of new power blocs in the Middle East. The global security and energy politics that come with American demands that its allies join it in sanctioning Russia will likely play out in one of two ways. In one scenario, countries may be forced—or choose—to select a side and align their policies with one of the great powers' professed goals, similar to the Cold War. In the second, and more plausible, scenario, countries such as Israel, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and others may build their own regional bloc capable of resisting being drawn too far into the orbit of one of the great powers. The United States' influence in the region would decline under this scenario. Israel, for example, will never be completely free of

US influence, but it will be significantly less reliant on Washington's support in international fora and other areas where there have been few if any alternatives for much of the past century.

## Conclusion

The signing of the Abraham Accords is dubbed to be the biggest controversial agreement to take place in the middle east sine decades. Some hail the diplomatic agreement as a historic breakthrough that foretells a new era of peace in the Middle East; however, the Abraham Accords between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, announced on August 15, 2020, have received little attention beyond the initial news cycles. Some experts argue that the agreement is not as groundbreaking as claimed and that its impact is greatly exaggerated, while others argue that the agreement is far from insignificant. The expectation that all twenty-two Arab states will make peace with Israel in a domino effect is vastly overplayed, and the addition of Bahrain and Morocco, among other silent partners, demonstrated that their impact on regional security and prosperity could be far-reaching. However, there is a potential impact for years to come and in more ways than its architects could foresee, as there is a widespread acceptance of the trajectory taken by big leaders.

The Accords holds political, religious and economic gains for a region that has longed struggled with non-ending conflicts. First, through the Abraham Accords, the region is transitioning into an era of religious peace, ending with it a long historical feud because there is a number of countries that are willing to engage in political/diplomatic/economic relations with Israel and it's not causing any kind of repercussions in term of other states doubling their efforts vis-à-vis the conflict. This agreement is bringing the three Abrahamic religions to go beyond what divide them and look at what might be a common ground. A momentous symbol of this new unity is the presence of the Abrahamic house in the UAE containing a church, synagogue and mosque and also the Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together signed by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmed el-Tayeb,

in 2019. However, this agreement is still feeding another conflict in the region, one that polarizes it under a Saudi camp supported on the surface by the United States, emirates and signatories of the agreement versus the Irani camp. This ongoing conflict is triggered by conflict of interest and the need to become the hegemon power in the region and not a conflict of culture, religion or the Palestinian cause.

Second this accord brings vast economic opportunities to all players with discrepancies, nonetheless for this Accord to succeed and harvest its full potential it needs to prioritize constant cooperation over interests; therefore, it needs to follow the Game theory, a zero-sum game to produce good results to the region. The success of the game theory rely on cooperation and open mutual services like the UAE is investing in Israel which boosts the economy of Israel, and the emirates is benefiting from the advanced technology of Israel and weaponry. But then again, even if it's good for Israel that many gulf states joined, it's not rewarding nor a strategic game changer on the short term if Saudi Arabia is not part of it, but on the long term it might lead to Israel normalizing with other hesitant countries.

Even though this region has conflicts in its core and stability is led by interest first, the game theory cannot be broken because no player among the signatories' states has to compromise large interests compared to the great economic advantages, they'll receive by being part of this camp. In addition, the accords can strengthen the foreign policy Arab leaders have to a certain amount, they'll have bigger say in the region, better currencies, stable societies, equipped armies, become stronger states and they will be in a better place to react to crises. However, these new powers are limited when it comes to the Palestinian cause, at least not until Saudi Arabia joins the accords, as it is the only state powerful enough to put pressure on Israel regarding Palestine. Therefore, the Abraham Accords have a limited impact on the geopolitical dynamics in

the region, and the accords are not likely to mend the rifts in the region between gulf countries themselves.

Labeling the agreement as primarily economic is misleading, because the main two states in the agreement Israel and the UAE were already quite successful and powerful before the agreement took place. The main drive behind the accord is mainly a strategic security partnership of containing Iran and the Muslim brotherhood; a strategy supported by cultural linkage and tourism and so on. The Abraham Accords, unlike prior agreements, are not about preventing conflict because there is no past or current direct confrontation between the members. Rather, the trilateral pact focuses on shared security interests fueled by regional challenges like Iran, bringing the Gulf countries closer to Israel for economic and geopolitical reasons. In addition, it is a normalization agreement and not a peace agreement, because technically vis-à-vis Israel there is peace in the region, putting aside the flare ups of Hezbollah or Hamas or very tactical bombing of the Iranian militant in Syria, there are no wars in the middle east. The Abraham Accords differ from all the previous agreements because this time around the approach taken is “peace a byproduct of normalization” and not cold peace producing security relations only instead of true diplomatic cooperative relations.

The sponsor of this accord which is the United States plays a huge role, with previous President Trump being the one to initiate such relations. However, with Biden taking over, the accord is moving at a slower pace with Washington pulling out of the middle east and pivoting towards east Asia. Under this administration, the Saudi-Emirati camp including Israel can no longer rely on the United States as an ally specially with Biden reviving the JCPOA, leaving the middle east to fight off Iranian threats alone. In addition, this accord can be seen as a consolation prize for Israel losing its most powerful security chip in the region, as the United States is withdrawing its

armies, therefore such accord is a vital agreement to stabilize the region and produce healthy relations as UAE and Israel have complementary economies.

However, today the U.S has a new concern focused on the Ukraine-Russian war, which affects the region and the whole world. The UAE and Saudi Arabia are aware that the US is no longer a reliable partner in terms of regional security, so they need to hedge and diversify the sources of protection so to speak, so they are developing their relationship with Russia, China and with Israel. These new over the table relations with Russia and China, in addition to the gas/oil crisis happening due to the war, might push the United States to become friendlier with the gulf states and involve itself again in the conflict, and a proof of that is Biden's expected visit to Saudi Arabia.

To conclude, the Abraham Accords are not polarizing the MENA region as it is already polarized dealing with several conflicts and issues within two camps, one of the Iranian axes and the second of the Saudi Arabia axis backed up by the United States. The real polarization and change will only happen if Saudi Arabia joins the accords officially as more than a silent partner, and all experts found a point to agree on, which is that Saudi Arabia will for sure be joining perhaps under the rule of the Crown Prince and not king Salman who is loyal to the Palestinian cause. However today, based on the actions of Arab leaders the Palestinian cause holds no importance anymore as it is dubbed as a lost cause as long as there is conflict between Palestinian themselves. The accord itself is not one of peace but normalization leading to peace and stability, and so far, the new relations with Israel withstood the challenges and conflicts between Hamas an Israel and did not deter the process of it.

This momentous deal is open to many speculations, and its value should not be diminished. Whether the Abraham Accords are a failed or successful agreement is still

being debated. Yet one should also understand its challenging features, be cautious of its potential implications, and note well any complications and challenges hidden within it throughout the next decade, in order to assess how to manage such possible challenges while there is still time.

## Limitations

A research study of this nature is prone to many limitations that establish obstacles preventing the research from reaching its full potential.

The topic itself “the Abraham Accords shaping a new middle east” is a controversial and sensitive topic to study. As this study is being conducted by a Lebanese citizen living in Lebanon a country that has ongoing animosity with Israel which is a main country taking part in the Abraham Accords, the main obstacle was contacting representatives from Israel and the frail inclusion of Israeli perspective in the research in order to avoid legal exposure.

In addition, such topic made finding and interviewing experts and professors difficult as many refused to participate in the study and give their own analysis also in order to avoid trouble and legal exposure, and the ones who did accept to speak on the matter preferred not to be mentioned by name and remain anonymous. The COVID-19 situation and economic crisis in Lebanon also made it hard to carry out interviews easily.

Moreover, this topic is quite recent and open to speculations, therefore there is a limited almost a lack of previous research studies on the topic which is important to have because a rich literature review provides the theoretical foundations for the research question tested. Additionally, numerous developments keep taking place within the timeframe of the execution of this research, making it difficult to follow each reaction of an action.



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## Appendices

Appendix 1: Transcribe interview with a Ph.D in political science and expert in Middle Eastern & Central Asian Studies \*prefers to remain anonymous\*

Q: is the AA ending a long historic feud between Jews and Arab Muslims?

A: It is. If you have a number of countries that are willing to engage in political/diplomatic/economic relations with Israel and it's not causing any kind of repercussions in term of other states doubling their efforts vis-à-vis the conflict. The states that are disagreeing with the AA are basically static in terms of their continued effort to exacerbate the conflict, whereby you have a number of countries that are engaging. Quantitatively, it has definitely reduced the number of countries and amount of people involved in the conflict. Moreover, it's hard to measure in any reliable sense the degree of acceptance of the population of these countries because they are not liberal democracies where people go to elections or have reliable polls but generally my sense is that at least in countries such as Bahrain and the UAE and even more so Saudi Arabia, although they are not formally apart of the accords, there is widespread acceptance of the trajectory taken by the leadership of both countries. I think that the AA also have repercussions on countries like Syria that is very much desiring to build more productive relations with the UAE in terms of their involvement in the conflict, not completely obliterating it but definitely will have long term consequences and even on the Palestinians in the west bank and the Palestinian authority is highly dependent on good relations with the gulf states therefore gulf states funding for example for continued conflict whether on the part of Syria or Palestinians will definitely decrease. In large part, the result is two major geostrategic factors one which is the going enmity with Iran as a result of their highly belligerent military stick and sectarian expansion in the region, and so there is a shift in term of priorities, who can you have enmity with

and you can't do both by any strategic count. The second factor is the gradual somewhat inevitable withdrawal of the U.S from the region starting with Iraq and Afghanistan and then the way they have behaved towards Iran nuclear deal; all part of the growing strategy of shifting their attention to Asia, so focusing more on the rising power of China, vis a vis Taiwan and the south China sea etcetera. Today the U.S has a new concern which is the Ukraine-Russian war, which affects the region, the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain are more aware that the US is no longer a reliable partner in terms of regional security, so they need to hedge and diversify the sources of protection so to speak, so they are developing their relationship with Russia, China and with Israel. Add to this that the UAE and Israel are quite similar, their economies are complementary, they're both into high tech, they're both into Agri-technology and the type of economy they represent is complementary as opposed to for example the UAE partnering with China which has a manufacturing economy which is really different, or partnering with Russia which is largely a natural resource economy with 80% of their income is from gas and oil. So it works well for them and the more the US withdraw from the region the more the US won't cater to the kind of concerns that the gulf states have vis-a vis Iran, and the more there is an incentive to develop security and strategic partnership with Israel.

Q: Does America no longer desire to be present in the middle east completely and no longer be a hegemon power in the region?

A: Yes. And it's proven to run across party lines. The first who expressed this desire clearly is Obama with the Obama doctrine that very much spoke about how America is needlessly immersed in the middle east and how it no longer relies in terms of natural resources on the middle east because America now is self-sufficient nation in terms of gas and oil, and they can live without the middle east providing it, and at the same time

Obama thought that the Iranian-Arab dispute is largely a result of the Arab not being understanding of the Iranian security concerns. After Obama we had the trump administration, and it had a much better relation on the surface with the gulf states but the relations are largely extortionary, and it was based on money sales, and he didn't express a trump doctrine that was counter to the Obama doctrine where he said that the middle east is important and countering Iranian influence is a major US concern in the region, nor did it express that the security partnership with the gulf states is a central pillar of U.S foreign policy. Trump followed an ad hoc, day to day basis approach where he was unreliable and erratic and cannot expect his next move. The trump era did not really assuage the concern of the Obama era. Now with bidden era, it's the 2.0 version of the Obama era, where from day one wanted to go into reviving the JSPOA, negotiate with Iran for a potential new nuclear deal, also appointed Robert Mali, who is very sympathetic to Iran and not towards arab gulf states. Now by di-facto Israel wants better relations with the gulf, but Israel feels that they can rely less on the states therefore develop a strong relationship with Syria and Russia or at least coordinate their relationship better with China, for example they gave their Haifa port to the Chinese bid which is something the United States did not like and then they pushed further for the Abraham accords. One last point is that, is that jarred Kushner in particular from the trump administration was very central to the development of this relationship but I don't think that Trumpism provided the gulf states with a feeling that the U.S is back to stay and we don't need to engage in further building of a strategic relations that are not natural to our political history.

The gulf states did feel at some point that trump is transient and unreliable contrary to media reports and he did not have a concrete stable doctrine for the middle east. In addition, there are strategic factors that are not particular to Obama or trump, Biden or

the next president that makes the U.S incentive to be involved in the middle east a lost less, like the fatigue in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the failures in these two countries. Basically, these push American politicians to be much less likely to push for more involvement in the middle east and even the challenge of Islamic terrorism and fundamentalism has likely subsided as there are not explosion or terrorism acts happening around the globe like it was happening in the previous 10 years, therefore with Ukraine a China going on there or a feeling in the united states that this region is trouble and not worth being involved in. however the issue with this region is that you can ignore it but it will not ignore you so they always end up coming back whether because of daaesh or Iran or for other region, but the general vibes in the US across party lines is a vibe that is both disassociated with the middle east and not very friendly to gulf states. For example Mohamad ben Selman is generally viewed as a revolutionary reformer in the region, and he is transforming Saudi Arabia in a more progressive direction but all you hear from America is that he killed Jamal Khashoggi ignoring everything else he achieved thereby they labeled him as a killer not because he breached human rights in a grotesque manner but because the democratic party and some republicans don't view the gulf well and they have a sympathy of a kind to revolutionary Iran even though they chant for the death of America but they still like Iran more than the gulf. It's quite flabbergasting and strange but that's the end result, so as a Khaleej leader not able to rely on America and facing the double threat of the Muslim brotherhood and Iran, and with Arab Israeli having largely transformed into a Palestinian Israeli conflict, therefore this was the natural path to take to re-engineer the regional security infrastructure. Specially for the UAE and Saudi Arabia, the way the us behaved whether rightfully or wrongfully towards the growing threat of Muslim brotherhood and the Arab spring by welcoming the Muslim brotherhood with open

arms in Egypt and Tunis, it alarmed the leaders of the UAE because to them the U.S don't understand the region, these people are coming to power through democracy but are not actual democrats therefore eventually they will turn into Islamic dictatorship. All these factors together led the leaders to rethink how the region can and should be managed.

Q: Can we see Saudi Arabia joining the AA in the future? Competition between uae and Saudi

A: I very much think so. Undoubtedly none of this would have happened without Saudi approval. The Emiratis specially the Bahrainis have Saudi troops in the countries, so they are not going to make a decision of this magnitude without Saudi's approval or encouragement. The repercussions of Saudi Arabia signing the accords with Israel is a lot more consequential and riskier than other countries who joined like UAE, and there is no direct contact with uae and Israel throughout history. In addition, Saudi Arabia holds a religious platform that the uae don't being the leaders of Islam worldwide and 1.3 billion Muslim in the world, I think they study the repercussions of entering such an endeavor a lot more carefully than the UAE or Bahrain.

The king of Saudi Arabia is an old school Arab leader that has an emotional baggage related to the Palestinian cause and conflict, also someone who generally does not want to rock the boat. The son is so different on many counts, he is a Saudi nationalist and not an Arab nationalist, he thinks primarily in the terms of Saudi national interests and he is someone who very much wants to rock the boat and someone who is quite understanding of the threat of Iranian expansionism, being someone who lived first hand in the beginning of his term as defense minister, later as crown prince, the effect of American withdrawal from the region from Iraq and Afghanistan. So, with Mohamad

ben Selman, Saudi Arabia would eventually join the accords in their own way, as we will not be seeing an Israeli president visiting Saudi Arabia in the next 10 years. However, they might start with tourism, diplomatic events, cultural events or sports events like a soft entry and make it less about politics.

Throughout history Arab states have generally signed political agreements yet failed to develop diplomatic relations from every other level, like Egypt and Jordan, so with the Abraham accords it's being done in reverse, starting with cultural cooperation, technological cooperation, agriculture and business cooperation and then this will eventually develop into a natural status quo that is political alliance. So Saudi Arabia has many reasons to join and have much to gain, as they need a reliable partner in the region in confronting Iran and the Muslim brotherhood, after the U.S withdrawal, therefore the entry would be for political reasons as he is redefining the region in a more secular, liberal and progressive way which doesn't go well hand in hand with the preservation of a historic enmities, in an era where there is no reason to make Israel an enemy with the lack of an Arab Israeli conflict, and the Palestinian Israeli conflict is largely dormant, and even the Palestinians in the west bank are no longer fighting. Therefore Mohamad ben Selman see it as it's for the best interest of Saudi people in particular to build economic diplomatic relations with the states of Israel but for now there are many factors that will go into play mostly him being crowned as king, as he can't do much as crown prince and he will have to be careful as not to make this a faux-pas and not have a backlash against Saudi Arabia or his leadership because he already has a lot of speculations and eyes pointed at him regarding breaches of human rights with Khashoggi and prisoned people, and the royal family that he pushed outside the rule and are against him. In addition, throughout the last 50 years Saudi Arabia has fed into religious fundamentalism and it's going to take time and effort to be able to switch

the mindset of people into acceptance of all, therefore the change will be gradual and well-orchestrated process over the next decade, focused on the younger generation that is a lot less ideological and introducing to them the notion of citizenry. A delicate matter for the Saudi would be the image they hold as protector of all Islam, contrary to the UAE, Saudi Arabia will ask for a price, for example they are in a position to impose conditions like push Israelis to defuse tension by freezing settlements, an Israeli acceptance of Palestinian sovereignty over the 1967 borders, as well as acceptance that part of Jerusalem will stay in Palestinian hands. Now if there is a growing Iranian threat Mohamad ben Salman would be more amenable into accepting a settlement that is more favorable towards the Israelis.

Q: Can we reach peace with AA?

A: Technically vis-à-vis Israel there is peace in the region, putting aside the flare ups of Hezbollah or Hamas or very tactical bombing of the Iranian militant in Syria, there are no wars in the middle east, the last war properly happened in 2006 which wasn't a state-to-state war but more between a militia and a state. But the building of relationships between the gulf and Israel will lead to a containment of Iranian expansionism, and they will be a lot less belligerent to arm militias and their proxies in the region when there is a big security and political and diplomatic alliance.

Q: How do you describe the new relation between Israel and UAE?

A: It's important to know that this relationship is replacing the loss of American presence as a direct ally to the UAE, so the situation might not improve but it will also not deteriorate. Israel is making up for that loss by becoming an ally who shares a common threat of Iran nuclear program, militias and expansionism. Both can benefit from each other's expertise and intelligence, but it will not make up for the withdrawal

of American influence, because as strong as Israel is it can't replace a humongous power that is the United States that has big bases and allies around the world. Therefore, one could conclude that the Abraham accords is a response to said withdrawal and can only fill part of the gap left by the United States.

Q: What is the U.S interest with Israel interest?

A: A third factor to the aa is linked to the American withdrawal. As not to leave Israel helpless in the region with no allies the Abraham accords was sponsored by the American to ensure the security of Israel and to make up for them leaving Israel to face the threats of Iran alone. Throughout the last couple of years aa lot of Israelis officials and Americans felt that the United States is throwing Israel under the bus, specially in the days of Obama, so this might be seen as a compensation prize for the lack of US involvement.

Q: Will the game theory be breached and AA fail?

A: Israel will not break it, obviously they are pleased with it and don't have to compromise much so they will not follow their interests because the Abraham accords is their interest for security purposes and the same goes for Bahrain, Morocco, and the UAE. The Abraham accords hold no downside for states so far on any level, in this sense, we won't be seeing countries limiting cooperation and the only challenge would be whether Saudi Arabia joins or not, and any rising challenges will enforce strategic relationships and not diminish it. In fact, the partnership was put to the test in the latest Hamas Israel confrontation and it did not shake the treaty. All countries will benefit from each other, the UAE is investing in Israel which boosts the economy of Israel, and the emirates is benefiting from the advanced technology of Israel and weaponry. However, labeling the agreement as primarily economic is misleading, because the two



states were already quite successful and powerful before the agreement took place. The main drive behind the accord is mainly a strategic security partnership of containing Iran and the Muslim brotherhood that are supported by cultural linkage and tourism and so on. Therefore, no economic dispute will cause a fallout between states, because usually for a fallout to happen the countries should at least have different types of economies, mostly export economies and trade. But the Israeli and Emirati economy will not produce disputes and their cooperation is not largely based on trade, the UAE is not a producing country but produce services and the Israeli do not produce much that the UAE would import, it's mostly technology. Economy will witness a boost in all signatories' countries but it will cause challenges or form obstacles which can lead to a fallout.

Q: will the Abraham accords strengthen foreign policy in the middle east?

A: This accord might create competition between Saudi Arabia and UAE, as who is the most powerful in the region and whose is the leader while the rest of the countries joined for economic financial benefits. The emirates now do not agree to be a state who is foreign and defense policy is run by Mohamed ben Salman, they want equal level partnership which is not easy for the Saudi to except being the larger richer country and leader of Muslims, so it's a fraternal tension but at the end of the day there is so much that brings the two together that the fight is not expected to progress.

Q: Can gulf cooperation council put pressure on Israel regarding Palestinian cause?

A: I don't think they can until Saudi joins the accords, it's good for Israel that many gulf states joined but its not rewarding nor a strategic game changer on the short term, but on the long term it might lead to Israel normalizing with other hesitant countries. Saudis are the only one able to negotiate for demands with Israel specially with the

Palestinian cause that proved to be more complicated today with Hamas in Gaza and the fragile PA in the west bank having a civil war.

The situation in Palestine should first be solved between Palestinians for Saudi Arabia to consider negotiating for a small demand for them if they joined the accords, depending on who's in charge in Israel because the radical right wing dominating Israel for the last 10 years is not amenable to compromise. In addition, the Saudis today do not care for the Palestinian cause, it's more of a PR stunt to get the empathy of the Arab world and international community. Saudi Arabia is in position to leverage with Israel unless the Iranian threat grows to be a bigger obstacle, then they will be the ones running to Israel. There are countries opposing the accords, and there is a threat of countries like turkey and Qatar teaming up to endanger the accord, however this threat is neutralized since both are weak at this time with financial issues and the other wanting better relations with the United States, even the Iranian are visiting the UAE in spite of the accords and that points to how important economic relations are to all players.

## Appendix 2

## Transcribed Interview with Political Satirist and Journalist Nadim Koteich

Q: Is the Abraham accord ending a long historic feud in the region between Israel and Arabs (religions)?

A: It is an attempt to expand the common grounds between three religions but I wouldn't say the Abraham accords by itself is a remedy to centuries or millennia of disputes between three religions. However, the struggle in this region has taken the shape of a religious war in the past decades. If you look at the Palestinian Israeli conflict from at least a leftist analytical prism you can see that it started as a civil war between Arabs and Jews inside Palestine and with Zionism it transformed into a somewhat nationalistic war between the Palestinian nationality and Jewish nationality; then at a later stage it took the form of a religious dispute between Muslims and Jews as two religious' groups. However, the Jews started seeing themselves as a people and not as a religion, more akin to the Kurds and the Armenians so it's the Jewish people not the Jewish believers. Therefore, Jewishness within the conflict is more of an ethnic identity rather than a religious identity, it's actually both but it has a big dimensional ethnicity more than anything else and more than any other religion more than Muslims and Christians.

This region being the platform for the three religions and having conflicts and struggles that developed a religious twist into it probably prompted this kind of thinking of bringing these three religions to go beyond what divide them and looks at what might be a common ground. This was preceded by a very ambitious step forward by UAE when they brought Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmed el-Tayeb, in 2019 to sign a Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together,

which goes beyond what classical Islam preaches and what classical Christianity preaches, in a region that witnessed historic religions clashes.

Q: Is the Abraham accords a treaty of Peace and Diplomacy beyond political and security interests?

A: With the Abraham accords, the emirates took a new approach that is being missed by many observers looking at the Abraham accords. Mohamed ben Zayed stated you cannot bring peace by a decision to have it but what can be done is to normalize the sphere between players, normalize the sphere between Abu Dhabi and Israel on business levels, education levels, diplomatic level. Therefore, by normalizing the relationships, peace will become a byproduct of normalization, and if we take this approach and think of what happened with Egypt and Jordan, they did exactly the opposite. They went for peace but the normalization didn't go any step further, it stayed a cold peace between Jordan/Egypt and Israel, and the normalization didn't go beyond security coordination between these entities. What Mohamed ben Zayed said is let's go the other way around and start with normalization and when relationships are normal peace will be found within populations and they will find ways to think of themselves and others in a peaceful approach. The beauty and uniqueness of the Abraham accord is that it puts normalization before peace and not the other way around. An example of this new approach is the peace between Egypt and Jordan with Israel that developed into normalization. The new method of normalization had them talking about issues beyond security at expo 2020 for the first time, and the result was tangible. An agreement took place between Jordanians, Israelis and funded by the Emiratis to produce electricity to the Israelis and in return they would desalinate 200 cubic meters of water, and this is the first time these two countries have such a significant agreement since 1994, and without the Abraham accords it wouldn't have been possible.

Q: Will the new middle east under the Abraham accords polarize the region?

A: We actually have two middle easts under two camps, one middle east that is led by Iran that is trying to bind everything around sectarian lines and nonsectarian lines by using a broader religious language when it feels the need to accommodate Sunni Hamas or Sunni kaaeda. The other middle east fault line is not sectarian nor religious but it is defined by economic interests looking at the future problems and finding solutions starting with food security, climate change, lack of natural sources in the region, and these new sets of problems require new sets of solutions and skills and abilities. Those who will be part of the new driven middle east will by default have a bigger say in the region, better currencies, stable societies, equipped armies, become stronger states and they will be in a better place to react to crises. An example of that is how the UAE reacted to the covid crisis compared to how Iran poorly handled the crisis. Therefore, these countries will prevail and lead investments in countries in the region that needs such opportunities, therefore stabilizing the region.

Regardless of how different these two middle easts are, the normalization camp still desires to include the other camp and give them a chance to find common ground, as Iran is a country with big potential and the UAE has a lot of common interest with Iran even at this level of animosity. This accord is beyond security coordination and it is not against Iran, more like against the results of Iran's actions as the UAE does not want the region collapse

As a conclusion, the Abraham accord is not exclusive, it's open to those who decide to join and is a chance for those who still didn't join it to get encouraged and join.

Q: will Saudi Arabia be joining the AA?

A: Definitely it will eventually join, based on Mohamed ben Salman statement to the Atlantic magazine that Israel is a potential ally. We know for a fact that Benyamin Netanyahu visited Saudi Arabia even though it was not officially declared, many Israeli official also visited Saudi Arabia, the Israeli airlines landing in India, and the UAE pass over Saudi Arabia. In addition, we know for a fact the United States, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Israel are negotiating the fate of the two islands Tiran and Sana fir that Saudi Arabia took from Egypt and are occupied by international forces. The Saudis that have sovereignty over the islands are demanding to have Saudi forces instead and whatever security stakes Israel has they are ready to address it with them. These are the kind of moves and examples that indicate more or less that Saudi Arabia will be part of this wave in the region.