

## **WHEN NORMALIZATION MEETS ESCALATION: THE ABRAHAM ACCORDS IN THE SHADOW OF THE ISRAEL–HAMAS CONFLICT**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This review explores the factors influencing the signing of the Abraham Accords and their implementation since 2020, focusing on the ways in which signatory countries have responded to the 2023 Israel– Hamas conflict. Through analyses of the regional implications of that conflict, the study considers how Iran’s influence and the national interests of signatory countries have shaped diplomatic policies toward Israel. For the UAE and Bahrain, the Iranian threat outweighs the importance of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, while for Morocco and Sudan, other national interests take precedence. Based on such comparisons of these countries’ responses to the Israel– Hamas conflict, this study offers a more nuanced understanding of the dynamic balance between regional security concerns and the implementation of the Abraham Accords, contributing to broader discussions on the future of Middle East diplomacy and the stability of the normalization process in the face of ongoing conflicts.*

**Keywords:** *Abraham Accords, Israel– Hamas war, Gaza, Israeli–Palestinian Conflict, normalization, Iran, Arab–Israeli relations*

### **ÖZ**

***NORMALLEŞME TIRMANIŞLA BULUŞTUĞUNDA: İSRAİL-HAMAS ÇATIŞMASININ GÖLGESİNDEKİ İBRAHİM ANLAŞMALARI***

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*Bu derleme makalesi, 2020'den bu yana İbrahim Anlaşmaları'nun imzalanmasının ardındaki itici güçleri inceleyerek, imzacı ülkelerin 2023 İsrail-Hamas çatışmasına nasıl tepki verdiği odaklanmaktadır. Bu çatışmanın bölgesel etkilerini analiz ederek araştırma, İran'ın etkisinin ve her ülkenin ulusal çıkarlarının İsrail'e yönelik diplomatik politikaları nasıl şekillendirdiğini incelemektedir. Çalışmanın temel argümanı, BAE ve Bahreyn için İran tehdidinin İsrail-Filistin çatışmasından daha etkili olduğunu, Fas ve Sudan için ise ulusal çıkarların öncelikli olduğunu ileri sürmektedir. Bu ülkelerin İsrail-Hamas çatışmasına verdikleri tepkileri karşılaştırarak, bu çalışma bölgesel güvenlik endişeleri ile İbrahim Anlaşmaları arasındaki dinamik etkileşime dair ayrıntılı bir anlayış sunmakta ve devam eden çatışmalar karşısında Orta Doğu'da diplomasinin geleceği ve normalleşme sürecinin sürekliliği üzerine daha geniş tartışmalara katkıda bulunmaktadır.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *İbrahim Anlaşmaları, İsrail-Hamas savaşı, Gazze, İsrail-Filistin çatışması, normalleşme, İran, Arap-İsrail ilişkileri.*

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## 1. Introduction

The question of Palestine, constituting a protracted conflict and a key problem at both the regional and the broader international level, remains unresolved. The foundation of Israel in 1948 triggered ongoing conflict between Israel and Arab countries and the First Arab–Israeli War marked a turning point in a new phase in the Middle East, unveiling two conflicting narratives. From the Israeli point of view, the war of 1948–1949 is considered a war of independence, while from the perspective of Palestinians, it is described as the *Nakba*, or catastrophe. The 1956 Suez Crisis and 1967 Six-Day War were subsequent wars fought by Israel against various Arab countries, such as Egypt, Syria, and Jordan. After the 1967 Six-Day War, the “Three No’s Policy” was adopted by Arab states at a summit of the League of Arab States (henceforth Arab League) in Khartoum, Sudan: no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, and no negotiations with Israel. This decision reflected a unified or coherent Arab position toward Israel at that time, which also contributed to the surfacing of a ‘normative structure’ within the Arab world (Barnett, 1999), tacitly or explicitly. The 1973 Yom Kippur War, the Lebanon Wars of 1982 and 2006, the First Intifada (1987–1993), and the Second Intifada (2000–2005) were further steps in the seemingly endless conflicts between Arabs and Israelis.

While stability and peace remained unattained in other regional countries including Yemen, Libya, and Syria, a new conflict broke out in Gaza between Israel and Hamas. On 7 October 2023, Hamas launched missiles against Israel in an attack called Operation Al-Aqsa Flood. The missile strikes by Hamas, the mutual seizing of numerous hostages, and the massive retaliation of Israel with ground operations in Gaza signified the beginning of another front of armed conflict in the Middle East.

In this context, this review article aims to explore the key actors and their choices in signing the Abraham Accords in 2020 and to shed a light on the future of these Accords in a changing regional political and security environment since the outbreak of the war on Gaza and its effects of which also reverberated and expanded across the region. The Israel–Hamas conflict has unquestionably had significant spillover effects on the prolonged Arab–Israeli conflict. Due to the stagnancy in reaching a comprehensive peace settlement between Israel–Palestine which has been clearly jeopardized since the Oslo Accords, in addition questions have arisen regarding the role of the Palestinian Authority (PA) in both Gaza and the West Bank. Furthermore, the Israel–Hamas conflict has had regional repercussions. Normalization processes in the bilateral relations of regional countries and Israel have been postponed and the possibility of a broader regional war has been heightened (International Crisis Group, 2024).

Despite the extent of previous conflicts, important peace initiatives have been achieved between Israel and Arab countries since Camp David in 1979, although the question of Palestine and the future of a Palestinian statehood has remained unresolved. In this context, the Madrid Conference (1991), Oslo Accords (1993), Israel–Jordan Peace Treaty (1994), Beirut Summit and Arab Peace Initiative (2002), and Deal of the Century (2019) are of particular importance. Building on those milestones, the present study focuses on the Abraham Accords, which were signed on 15 September 2020 and constituted a significant step in reshaping the relations between Israel and Arab states in the region. However, the Abraham Accords are not, and should not be seen as, a substitute for further Israeli–Palestinian negotiations in pursuing sustained regional peace with Israel (Sperling & Trumpfheller, 2025, p. 104).

Following this introduction, the qualitative research methodology of the study is explained. In Section 3, the current literature on the Israel–Hamas conflict and its impact on the Abraham Accords is reviewed with emphasis on the

similarities and differences among the selected studies in the existing literature, thereby establishing an analytical connection to the research agenda of the present work. Thereafter, Israel's relations with the signatory countries prior to the signing of the Abraham Accords are examined. In this way, the study analyzes how those countries have responded to the war on Gaza and its repercussions, evaluating the consequences of the enduring conflict on the stability and future of the Abraham Accords. The central aim of the study is to identify how the United Arab Emirates (henceforth: UAE), Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan as signatory countries of the Abraham Accords have approached the newest Israel– Hamas conflict and compare their policy approaches to the conflict.

Ultimately, the main argument of this study is that the national interests of the signatory countries of the Abraham Accords have played pivotal roles in their relationships with Israel. More specifically, national interests are of greater importance than the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. For the UAE and Bahrain, the threat posed by Iran is of greater importance than the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, while Morocco and Sudan prioritize their domestic national interests above all else. Within this framework, external and internal factors that reflect both similarities and differences among these countries will be analyzed.

## **2. Methodology**

In undertaking this review article, a qualitative research method was adopted. As described by King et al. (1994), qualitative research methods encompass various approaches that, by definition, depend on non-numerical measurements. This type of research typically emphasizes one or a few cases, utilizes interviews or in-depth analyses of historical documents, employs a discursive approach, and aims to provide a well-rounded or thorough description of a particular event or unit. However, despite having a limited number of cases, qualitative researchers typically engage with vast quantities of data from their research.

In accordance with the definition of King et al. (1994), this qualitative study draws its main data from secondary sources to investigate the policies of the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan and the future of the Abraham Accords. A comprehensive approach integrating primary and secondary sources, including newspapers and official statements, was adopted to bring an in-depth analysis.

### **3. Analytical Overview of Existing Literature on the Abraham Accords, Normalization Paradigm and its impact on Regional Stability**

The normalization of relations between Arab countries and Israel, encapsulated by the Abraham Accords, reflects a significant shift in the Middle East's regional political landscape, where economic interests and shared security concerns have begun to take precedence over traditional conflict-resolution approaches. A previous study by Abdullayev (2024) titled "Between Peace and Conflict: The Middle East after the Abraham Accords" highlights the incentives for Bahrain, the UAE, Sudan, and Morocco in normalizing their relations with Israel and the impact of the 2023 Israel– Hamas conflict on those relations. This study contends that the primary driver of the Abraham Accords was the desire of Arab states to deepen their military and technical cooperation with the United States (henceforth: US); this motivation is described as the decisive factor in the normalization of relations with Israel by the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco in 2020.

However, according to Abdullayev (2024), rather than ensuring regional stability, this normalization process has resulted in a reshaping of the balance of power that has marginalized the traditional Palestinian–Israeli peace process, and Palestinian perceptions of the accords as a "stab in the back" undermine their legitimacy. Abdullayev (2024) emphasizes that the long-term success of the Abraham Accords depends on a resolution to the Israel– Hamas conflict and the establishment of lasting peace in Gaza; the continuation of the conflict significantly diminishes the impact of the accords.

The UAE has maintained its diplomatic relations with Israel in spite of the escalation of violence in Gaza, with this decision indicating that strategic and economic interests outweigh other aspects of US or Israeli cooperation for the UAE. Bahrain has continued benefiting from economic and defense cooperation but withdrew its ambassador to Israel and suspended economic ties following the Israeli attacks in Gaza, constraining the durability of the Abraham Accords. Morocco has maintained its relations with Israel through a multilateral declaration signed under US leadership but must balance regional security with its existing treaty obligations, leading it to take a cautious stance in the face of the Gaza crisis. Finally, Sudan has distanced itself from the Abraham Accords, adopting a new geopolitical orientation as a result of domestic political turmoil and Iranian–Saudi

influence. As argued by Abdullayev (2024), the role of the Abraham Accords in the region will ultimately remain limited if lasting peace is not achieved in Gaza and Arab–Israeli relations are not restructured to address the Palestinian issue. The current motivations, however, are primarily shaped by national interests.

The recent study by Harutyunyan (2025) similarly explored diplomatic relations and normalization processes between Israel and the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan, focusing on the Abraham Accords. As described in that study, these countries appear to have begun prioritizing their national interests after the signing of the accords in 2020, with the Palestinian issue being relegated to a position of secondary importance. Partnerships in economic growth, security cooperation, and technology have become more prominent at the policy level, although pro-Palestine sentiments remain strong at the public level. The UAE has particularly emphasized economic diplomacy and scientific cooperation while Bahrain has focused more on security, establishing closer ties with Israel due to threats posed by Iran. Morocco participated in the normalization process with a focus on the issue of Western Sahara, motivated by both historical ties and the mediating role of the US. Various examples are used in the article to show that the agreements rapidly led to commercial, military, and diplomatic cooperation and improvement in economic indicators.

According to Harutyunyan (2025), the Israel– Hamas conflict brought a new dynamic to this normalization process. Hamas’s attack on Israel on 7 October 2023 and the subsequent Israeli response produced a massive anti-Israel backlash across Arab societies; both street protests and diplomatic pressure increased. However, the political leaders of Arab countries did not suspend agreements with Israel, considering both internal and external threats and economic advantages. Only some investments and projects experienced delays. Saudi Arabia proclaimed the temporary suspension of its normalization process with Israel due to the conflict in Gaza but did not completely sever relations, leaving future possibilities open. The article thus highlights the tension between public reactions and political balancing acts, concluding that public pressure in the signatory countries has forced politicians to act more cautiously. According to Harutyunyan (2025), the Palestinian issue had been pushed to the background after the signing of the accords, but it returned to the forefront with the Gaza conflict. However, national interests and security priorities have remained unchanged. Regional states have maintained their relations with Israel, particularly through US mediation, due to

structural factors including Iranian threats. Despite increased public pressure, Arab leaders have continued to pursue normalization efforts with aims of protecting regional stability and security. Harutyunyan (2025) argues that while the diplomatic cooperation established by the Abraham Accords has been relatively constrained by the conflict in Gaza, it has not been structurally damaged and remains sustainable in both the medium and the long term. These claims are supported by concrete data throughout the article.

The changing regional landscape and the repercussions of the events of 7 October inevitably raise the question of how the delicate balance of bilateralism can withstand such shocks. Does the durability of normalization between states and the very essence of the Abraham Accords result in mere ceasefires, maintained solely by a lack of viable alternatives in the face of increasing pressure from below? Will bilateral logic continue its seemingly inevitable existence, silently weathering the ongoing tumult of adversity, or will it be doomed to the weight of legacy grievances? Is there a way to move beyond this vicious circle.

Sperling and Trumpfheller (2025) highlight the resilience of the bilateral relations established within the framework of the Abraham Accords during the 2023–2025 Gaza conflict, examining it with a five-step analysis. They emphasize that the accords signed in 2020 initiated new Arab–Israeli economic and defense partnerships based on security, trade, and “pragmatic diplomacy”. First, in the economic dimension, exports from the UAE, Bahrain, and Morocco to Israel increased dramatically between 2020 and 2022, with total bilateral trade reaching approximately \$10 billion over that three-year period. This trade volume continued to grow during the conflict in Gaza despite the global recession. Second, security cooperation was shaped by Iran’s threats to the region; joint Red Sea naval exercises took place in 2021 and the UAE purchased the SPYDER air defense system from Israel in 2022 (Cornwell and Irish, 2022). The continuation of secret meetings at the US Central Command in Manama in June 2024 reflected the continuation of shared perceptions of threats. Third, public diplomacy was strained in this period and criticism of Israel increased within the sphere of Arab public opinion in line with Hamas attacks. However, relations were not completely severed due to the value placed on economic benefits and the balance of power between the US and Israel. Fourth, the UAE’s policy of separating economics from politics and Bahrain and Morocco’s adoption of similar stances indicated that the primary driver of normalization in this period was national

interests. Finally, Sperling and Trumpfheller (2025) argue that the long-term sustainability of these bilateral relations depends on the resolution of the Palestinian issue and the achievement of lasting peace in Gaza; otherwise, the impact of the Abraham Accords will be limited. This analysis reveals that the potential of the Abraham Accords lies not only in its “security/economy”-based framework; it is a critical model for regional stability.

Overall, both Sperling and Trumpfheller (2025) and Harutyunyan (2025) suggest that under changing regional conditions and against emerging regional tensions, normalization and bilateral engagement have been sustained by idealistic narratives of transformative peace. However, a rational accounting of security, economic interests, and geopolitical posturing is needed. The review study argues that the sustainability and changes in character of the Abraham Accords reflect the fact that these accords are the product of states’ national and rational interests, and framing normalization as a transactional, sovereignty-based process driven by rational self-interest justifies negotiation on political grounds.

On the other hand, Abdullayev (2024) argues that the main incentive of the signatory countries of the Abraham Accords was to strengthen their relationships with the US. The present study acknowledges the importance of those relationships but contends that the primary motivation behind these normalization efforts is the pursuit of broader national interests, not merely alignment with the US. Building on that claim, this study critically examines the distinct motivations of each signatory country, highlighting how the Abraham Accords reflect strategic calculations influenced by both Iran’s regional threat and specific national interests, as well as assessing the implications of the most recent Israel– Hamas conflict.

Ultimately, at the core of all three studies discussed here, there is a decisive conclusion: without a sustainable solution to the Palestinian issue, the transformational promise of the Abraham Accords is inherently limited.

#### **4. The Abraham Accords: Actors and Choices**

Under the auspices of the US during the first Trump administration, Israel and several Arab countries began initiating a normalization phase. In 2020, the UAE led the way in normalizing relations with Israel by signing the Abraham Accords and Bahrain soon followed. Later that year, Morocco also established diplomatic ties with Israel as part of a comprehensive deal. Sudan became a

formal signatory of the Abraham Accords in 2021, joining the other countries within a framework established to normalize the relations of Arab states with Israel (Guzansky & Marshall, 2020). This historic agreement, which came 26 years after the Jordan–Israel peace treaty, constitutes only the third instance of normalization between Israel and its Arab neighbors. Before 2020, only Egypt and Jordan had formalized peace and normalized relations with Israel.

Unlike the peace treaties signed between Israel and Egypt (Camp David Accords, 1978-79) and Israel and Jordan (Wadi Araba Treaty, 1994), which both ended active hostilities after wars between Israel and those countries, the signatories of the Abraham Accords, including the UAE, Morocco, Bahrain, and Sudan, had not previously been in a state of war with Israel. However, all four signatory countries had adopted the “Three No’s Policy” at the Arab League Summit in 1967. Therefore, the Abraham Accords constituted a paradigm shift toward the building of diplomatic cooperation and connectedness as well as economic ties with Israel. At the same time, Emirati leaders portrayed the accords as a mechanism that “would allow them to push for a just settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict”, although changes were not observed in Israel’s policies toward Palestinians (International Crisis Group, 2024).

The primary motivation for these full normalization agreements between Israel and Arab countries was to promote peace, prosperity, and regional stability, both among the signatories and across the broader Middle East (Singer, 2021). Rather than focusing on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict or pursuing a two-state solution, the Abraham Accords aimed to enhance cooperation across various civilian sectors, including healthcare, agriculture, tourism, energy, environmental protection, and innovation. Additionally, the accords focused on economic integration, offering potential economic benefits such as GDP growth, free trade agreements, job creation, the expansion of economic activities, and private sector development (Egel et al., 2021). Indeed, the results of globalization in enhancing regional connectivity were an important source of inspiration. The intensive circulation of goods, money, people, and information on a global level had given rise to the need for connectivity between Israel and neighboring Arab countries.

It is important to note that these efforts for the normalization of relations between Israel and the four Arab signatory countries were pursued without reaching a comprehensive solution for the Israeli–Palestinian conflict or taking steps toward the establishment of a viable and durable Palestinian state.

Furthermore, the UAE, Morocco, Sudan, and Bahrain have not historically been key parties unequivocally involved in Arab–Israeli conflicts. Nevertheless, the four signatories acknowledge the Abraham Accords as an important step for the development of a two-state solution. Specifically, Norlen and Sinai (2020) suggest that closer relationships with Israel could provide its new Arab allies with greater leverage to pressure Israeli leadership into pursuing a just and legitimate solution to the Palestinian issue, potentially leading to a two-state solution. To achieve this, Arab states must sustain mutually advantageous relationships with Israel, addressing both economic and political interests. These interests vary among the signatory countries, as will be analyzed in the following subsections, which provide detailed examinations of each country’s relationship with Israel.

#### **4.1. The United Arab Emirates (UAE)**

Relations between the UAE and Israel had been marked by mutual distrust and hostility before the signing of the Abraham Accords, in line with the long-standing Arab–Israeli conflict. Like many other Arab countries, the UAE advocated for the establishment of a Palestinian state. As a member of the Arab League, the UAE consistently supported the Palestinian people. It refused to acknowledge both Israel’s occupation of territories in the Middle East and the state of Israel itself, officially prohibiting the entry of Israelis into its territory in accordance with a general boycott of Israel that dated back to the Khartoum Conference following the 1967 Six-Day War (Zaga, 2018). This boycott aimed at politically, economically, and diplomatically isolating Israel as part of broader efforts to challenge its existence and strengthen support for the Palestinian cause. The UAE was clear in its intentions of maintaining its non-recognition of Israel until a comprehensive solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict could be found.

Relations between the UAE and Israel improved significantly after the signing of the Abraham Accords, which constituted a pivotal shift in Arab–Israeli relations. The primary goal of the accords was to promote peace and prosperity in the Middle East in line with the belief that such a goal could only be achieved with resolution of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The UAE accepted that establishing formal ties with Israel, rather than continuing to deny its existence, would better support that resolution process. The signatory countries of the Abraham Accords acknowledged that Palestinian–Israeli peace was not a central condition of the agreement, but they believed that the accords would nevertheless

contribute to peace in the region. According to Esfandiary and Jandali (2024), the UAE did not prioritize a two-state solution or support for the Palestinian cause in making its decision to sign the accords, but did cite those factors as secondary justifications for doing so.

The region has also faced an escalating Iranian threat, which served as another motivation for signing the accords. For the UAE, disputes with Iran pre-date the establishment of both the UAE as an independent state and the Islamic Republic of Iran, with Pahlavi Iran occupying the islands of Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb, and Abu Musa immediately after the withdrawal of British forces from the area in 1971. After its establishment, the UAE immediately claimed sovereignty over those islands, and this dispute has yet to be resolved (Habibi, 2010). On the other hand, from the Israeli perspective, the Iranian Revolution, driven by the ascension of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and the establishment of an Islamic Republic, introduced fundamental changes to Iran's foreign policy and reshaped the Iranian approach to Israel. With the consolidation of the new Islamic regime, opposition to Israel became a strategic and ideological goal (Itzchakov, 2023). Therefore, it can be said that Israel and the UAE both adopted the mindset of "the enemy of my enemy is my friend," which played a key role in fostering rapprochement between these two states.

In this regard, Bahgat (2009) argues that maintaining Arab peace is vital for containing Iran. He links the US policy of containment of Iran, which aims to isolate the country, to attempts to establish a bloc comprising the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) plus the two countries that had signed peace agreements with Israel, thus including Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, and Jordan. This bloc was intended to bring together the region's "moderate" Arab states to form a common defense mechanism against threats such as Iran's nuclear ambitions or Hezbollah and Hamas. Therefore, strengthening the peace and cooperation among Arab countries has been presented as a key tool for limiting Iran's influence in the region and achieving a balance consistent with the strategic objectives of the US.

It seems that the UAE signed the Abraham Accords with Israel for a more united and secure Middle East, resulting in the full normalization of their relations. These Accords established bilateral agreements encompassing a wide range of areas from finance and investment to visas and consular services. In addition, both countries pledged to engage in ties that would embrace trade,

tourism, culture and sport, energy, environment, education, maritime arrangements, agriculture, food security, and water (US Department of State, 2020). However, the attacks of 7 October 7 disrupted –if not entirely halted—the progress of the Abraham Accords, resulting in a diplomatic stalemate between the signatory countries. According to Khalil (2023), the UAE initially voiced “deep concern” over Israel’s ongoing escalation, stressing the urgent need to halt the violence and protect civilian lives. In theory, the UAE has opposed Israel’s far-right government since the conflict started, supported ceasefire and a two-state solution, and, in practice, aided Gaza. Nereim (2024) notes that, in response to the conflict, Emirati officials have thus far concentrated on providing supplies to Gaza, increased their vocal opposition to Israel, and demanded a ceasefire and the establishment of a Palestinian state. The UAE did not, however, withdraw itself from the Abraham Accords and it does not appear that it will.

The UAE’s reluctance to terminate the agreement may be attributed to the fact that the UAE, like the other signatories of the accords, is an Arab country, but is nevertheless not a direct party to the Israeli–Palestinian issue. In September 2024, Yousef Al Otaiba, the Emirati ambassador to the US and a central figure in the establishment of the accords, stated the following: “What the Abraham Accords did was just buy more space for diplomacy and for a two-state solution ... We cannot solve that. That has to come from the players in the region themselves” (as cited by Krasna, 2024, para. 14). Thus, from the perspective of the UAE, the accords were an important step toward achieving peace in the Middle East and withdrawing from them could put the question of Palestine in a new deadlock.

Economic factors also played a role in the UAE’s decision to maintain the Abraham Accords. The Accords have already provided significant economic advantages to the UAE. In this context, Guzansky and Feuer emphasize that with the signing of the Accords “the reported volume of trade between Israel and the Emirates (which is the second largest economy in the Middle East) has reached about half a billion dollars, including diamonds, which accounted for most trade between the countries even before normalization” (2021, p. 8). Israel, meanwhile, can buy oil from its new oil-rich trading partner without dependency on other countries. This allows the UAE to uphold its economic development plan and launch a transition policy to direct “its oil-based economy toward a leading position in the global knowledge economy” (Zafar et al., 2023, p. 71).

Furthermore, these mutually beneficial economic ties have the power to create a domino effect. Fostering economic ties will not only bring investment; it will also inspire cooperation in areas of defense and security. More importantly, strengthening ties with Israel also means strengthening ties with the US. Therefore, the Abraham Accords are mutually beneficial on many levels, fostering regional stability and security, which was the primary objective of the accords from the outset.

Finally, the UAE could potentially play a vital role in reconstructing Gaza when the conflict ends. If the UAE withdraws from the accords, it will lose any possible leverage in future negotiations, but if it remains a signatory, it may be able to influence Gaza's recovery. In Gaza City, destruction rates exceed 92%, with densely populated neighborhoods transformed to landscapes of rubble (Badawi, 2025, p. 1). In this regard, the UAE may be able to assume a role as a significant actor together with Saudi Arabia in the event of a lasting ceasefire. Financial and political support from the UAE for the reconstruction of Gaza could possibly result in "a US-backed initiative toward a two-state solution" (Magid, 2023, para. 1).

Roem (2024) further notes that the UAE, as a powerful Gulf monarchy and a key ally of the US, has made substantial investments in Israel's infrastructure and technology. Although military aid is not possible, the UAE is strategically placed to fund Gaza's rebuilding, bringing the UAE international prestige in the process. In this context, the UAE now enjoys bargaining power that it would lack in the absence of the Abraham Accords.

#### **4.2. The Kingdom of Bahrain**

Like many of the Arab states, Bahrain has supported the right of the Palestinian people to exist from the beginning and it joined the Arab League's boycott of Israel. Nevertheless, covert diplomacy existed between Bahrain and Israel after the 1990s despite Bahrain's official non-recognition of Israel, characterizing a relatively peaceful era in terms of Arab-Israeli relations, particularly with the Oslo I and II Accords.<sup>i</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> The Oslo I Accords of 1993 marks the first peace agreement between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). With this agreement, the two parties mutually recognized each other, the Palestinian Authority (PA) was later established, and the future

Manama played a limited overt role in the post-Oslo period, inviting Israel's Minister for the Environment to visit in 1994 (Black, 2019). Thus, the post-Oslo era was a crucial turning point in the advancement of Arab–Israeli relations. Following the 1993 signing of the Oslo I Peace Accords by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, Israel established diplomatic ties with Arab governments in the Gulf region, leading to the opening of commercial missions in each other's capitals; however, many of these missions were subsequently closed after the outbreak of Israeli–Palestinian violence during the Second Intifada in 2000 (Landler, 2020).

Although Bahrain acknowledged that Israel had a right to exist in 2017 by opposing Arab boycotts of Israel (Alhadid, 2022), its formal recognition came only after the Abraham Accords, which made Bahrain the fourth Arab country to recognize Israel. In November 2020, a Bahraini government delegation, headed by the country's foreign minister, arrived in Tel Aviv for the kingdom's first official visit following the normalization of relations with Israel in September (Al Jazeera, 2020). This rapprochement was based on both the Iranian threat in the region and national interests. When the Iranian Revolution took place in 1979, a regional security threat arose with Iran's new aggressive statements and policies. According to Munir and Cheema (2021), Bahrain has simultaneously been dealing with serious threats to its national security, including religious extremism and civil unrest in the north and south, exacerbated by Iran's uprising. Thus, Iran is a mutual point of interest uniting Israel and Bahrain in a collaboration to counter security challenges and threat perceptions in the region. Moreover, the so-called Axis of Resistance has presented a significant threat to countries in the Middle East; it was defined as including Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Assad regime in Syria, the Houthis in Yemen, and Iranian-backed militias in Iraq that are armed and trained by Iran (Steinberg, 2021). The mobilization of these groups reflects attempts by Iran to safeguard its own interests and increase its sphere of influence in the region; in doing so, it poses a security threat to some Middle Eastern countries.

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governance of Palestinian territories was outlined. The Oslo II Accords, signed in 1995, further expanded the structuring of Palestinian autonomy that began with Oslo I.

Additionally, national interests played a vital role in Bahrain's signing of the Abraham Accords. Political and economic power in the Kingdom of Bahrain both lie in the hands of Sunni Arabs although the population of the country is predominantly Shia. Since the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, the regime in Bahrain has faced various waves of militant Shia opposition (Knights & Levitt, 2018). One such source of opposition has been the Iranian-backed group Saraya al-Mokhtar, or the al-Mukhtar Brigades, and as a result of the signing of the Abraham Accords, Saraya al-Mokhtar was labeled as a terrorist organization under US law, aligning with and advancing Bahrain's national interests. As for Israel's national interests, the establishment of relations with Bahrain enhanced its regional influence by fostering ties with an Arab nation, thereby contributing to the broader acceptance of Israel within the Arab world. Thus, considering the Iranian threat in the region, Israel and Bahrain strengthened their security cooperation, a process that has served the interests of both countries. Bahrain's Minister of Interior has explicitly defended the Abraham Accords for building a stronger alliance against Iran (Yossef, 2021). Additionally, the trade volume between the two states has grown alongside increased investments. By 2022, the bilateral trade between Israel and Bahrain had increased to \$12.7 million from \$0 in 2019 (Postal, 2023). This development constitutes a mutually beneficial situation, yielding diplomatic, security, and economic gains for both countries.

After the attacks of 7 October, the initial reaction from the Bahraini government was to recall its ambassador to Israel and suspend its economic ties with Tel Aviv (Anadolu Ajansı, 2023). However, the Bahraini government simultaneously exercised caution in its statements about Israel, maintaining their newly established normalized relations and not withdrawing from the Abraham Accords. At the same time, Bahraini leadership was mindful of the dangers of alienating the Arab public by softening its tone on Israel. Thus, Bahrain aimed to continue its relationship with Israel while simultaneously upholding its support for the Palestinian cause, avoiding any actions that might anger the domestic population and navigating this relationship with a balanced approach.

### **4.3. The Kingdom of Morocco**

Morocco's approach to the Israel–Palestine issue has traditionally centered on support for the Palestinian cause. The country has advocated for the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and called for a viable two-state solution to

the conflict. Morocco also participated in the Arab League's boycott of Israel and did not officially recognize Israel before 2020. However, relations between Israel and Morocco existed in various fields before 2020, particularly in the 1990s, when more peaceful Israeli–Arab relations prevailed. In that decade, with the Oslo Accords, Arab countries looked at Israel with less suspicion and more openness to collaboration. As described by Levi (2018), relations between Israel and Morocco entered a “honeymoon” period in 1994 that would continue for six years. In late October 1994, King Hassan II hosted the first of the Middle East/North Africa Economic Summits, intended to promote business cooperation between the Middle East and North Africa in light of the Israel–Jordan peace treaty of 1994. The Arab boycott of Israel was thus lifted with the Casablanca Declaration and liaison offices between Israel and Morocco were opened in Rabat and Tel Aviv. The Second Intifada strained the relations between Arab states and Israel in 2000 but Morocco has generally been considered a “moderate” and “Western-friendly” country, functioning as a strategic bridge for the US, the European Union, and NATO. It has also been described as a key non-NATO ally in security cooperation since 2004 (White, 2024). The Abraham Accords marked a new chapter in cooperation, allowing Morocco to gain US recognition of its claim over Western Sahara.

In signing the accords, the Moroccan government recognized Israel with full normalization of the relations between the two countries. From Morocco's perspective, the Abraham Accords offered several advantages, the foremost of which was US recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara, a long-sought diplomatic achievement. On 10 December 2020, the US recognized full Moroccan sovereignty over all of Western Sahara (Allison, 2021), and this geopolitical gain was supplemented by several other economic and diplomatic benefits. Economically, both Israel and Morocco desired the expansion of bilateral trade, leading to agreements designed to facilitate trade and investment. Labor cooperation was also enhanced, with Israel creating opportunities for Moroccan workers in sectors such as construction and nursing. The diplomatic formalization of relations continued to progress; embassies have now been established in both countries. Security cooperation has also intensified, particularly in the form of intelligence sharing.

In response to the attacks of 7 October, Morocco expressed its concern over the escalating violence and emphasized the need for the protection of civilians.

The Moroccan government has consistently reiterated its support for a two-state solution as the only viable path to peace between Israel and Palestine (Faouzi, 2024). Simultaneously, there were significant public demonstrations in Morocco expressing opposition to Israel, reflecting widespread popular sentiment. According to White (2024), the Israeli–Palestinian conflict has become a new crisis threatening the stability of the Moroccan monarchy, with demonstrators opposing not only Israel itself but also the monarchy’s relationships with both Israel and the US. Accordingly, the “sovereignty bargain” established in Western Sahara by the Abraham Accords has produced a dilemma, with discordancy arising between Morocco’s foreign policy and its domestic stability. While the monarchy seeks to maintain cooperation with Israel and the US with the goal of protecting Western Sahara and gaining further international recognition, the pro-Palestinian public reaction and the growing unity of the domestic opposition are deepening the crisis and jeopardizing the monarchy’s long-term legitimacy (White, 2024).

Despite the attacks of 7 October, Morocco has refrained from terminating the Abraham Accords, recognizing that such a move could jeopardize critical international recognition of its sovereignty over Western Sahara. Therefore, the Kingdom of Morocco’s policy toward the Israel– Hamas conflict can be characterized as a balancing act for King Mohammed VI, who must try to maintain simultaneous support from Moroccan society, Western partners, and Israel, the latter of which has become an important ally in the safeguarding of Morocco’s political interests (CIDOB, 2023).

#### **4.4. The Republic of Sudan**

Historically, Sudan maintained a hostile stance toward Israel, aligning itself with the broader Arab world in support of the Palestinian cause. Sudan first began enforcing a law that prohibited any form of engagement with Israel in 1958, banning both direct state relations and professional cooperation with Israeli companies or any organizations linked to Israeli interests (Melman, 2021). As an active participant in the Arab League’s boycott of Israel, Sudan did not formally recognize Israel before the signing of the Abraham Accords. Nevertheless, there were instances of covert or informal interactions between Sudan and Israel over the years, particularly during periods when broader Arab–Israeli relations were more relaxed. Sudan, as an Arab nation, faced pressure to keep pace with broader

geopolitical shifts and confirm its solidarity with the wider Arab world (Abadi, 2006). Sudan's government temporarily escalated its rhetoric against Israel in conjunction with its concerns regarding domestic Muslim radicals, but the challenging realities of internal warfare and a floundering economy forced the government to reconsider its stance and engage with Israel.

In 2020, Sudan became the most recent Arab country to normalize relations with Israel through the Abraham Accords. The decision arose from several strategic considerations, the most important of which was the US agreeing to remove Sudan from its list of "state sponsors of terrorism" (Ulum, 2021). This was crucial for Sudan, a nation transitioning from decades of isolation and economic adversity, because it facilitated access to essential economic aid and debt relief. As described by Hamdi (2023), Sudan viewed normalization with Israel as an opportunity to attract new investments and gain support for stabilization efforts in the face of severe economic challenges. The government hoped to diversify the economy by moving beyond dependence on oil exports, and closer ties with Israel were viewed as a potential tool for achieving that goal. Sudan also recognized the potential value of economic cooperation with Israel in areas such as agriculture, technology, and energy.

In response to the events of 7 October, Sudan emphasized the importance of protecting civilians and voiced concern about the escalating violence in Gaza, reconfirming its belief in a two-state solution as the only path to peace in the region. Significant public demonstrations in Sudan simultaneously reflected strong popular opposition to Israel, but despite that domestic pressure, Sudan's leaders chose not to withdraw from the Abraham Accords. They recognized that such a step could jeopardize the economic and diplomatic gains previously achieved via the accords. Furthermore, Sudan's response to the Israel-Hamas conflict has been significantly constrained by the ongoing civil war between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, which has limited the country's ability to play active roles in international crises. The civil war began in 2023, largely due to historic political tensions between the two factions, particularly in the context of the country's transition to a civilian government following the overthrow of Omar al-Bashir in 2019. The conflict is complex and persistent, having burdened the country for decades (Nashwan et al., 2023), and its roots can be traced to colonial-era policies that favored certain

ethnic groups disproportionately and created a legacy of inequality and resentment.

Sudan's ongoing civil war and inherent instability make it a country with urgent national interests within the international system, complicating any potential decision to withdraw from the Abraham Accords. Sudan supports the Palestinian cause but its own national interests take precedence. The government must attempt to balance the demands of public opinion with its diplomatic obligations to Israel. By vocally supporting the rights of Palestinians (Xinhua, 2023), Sudan aims to reduce domestic dissatisfaction and manage public sentiment while aligning its foreign policy with broader regional concerns. At the same time, it aims to protect its national interests by maintaining its commitment to the Abraham Accords. Israel, meanwhile, aligns with Arab countries like Sudan with the aim of counterbalancing Iran's influence in the region. In its efforts to mobilize Arab and Muslim states to form a political and military alliance against Iran, Israel has reached out to Sudan for support (Afriyie, 2024).

## **5. Conclusion**

The Abraham Accords embody a historic and crucial effort to promote peace and prosperity in the broader Middle East region, facilitating the full normalization of relations between four Arab countries and Israel. This review article has critically analyzed the rationale of those four Arab countries in signing the agreement, tracing the development of the peace process with Israel and examining the impact of the most recent Hamas–Israel conflict on the accords. The findings indicate that although these four countries are similar in having never been at war with Israel before and thus not being direct actors in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, differences emerge because of perceptions of the Iranian threat in the region. A significant factor contributing to the decisions of the UAE and Bahrain to sign the Abraham Accords was the perceived threat posed by Iran. Both the UAE and Bahrain are Gulf countries and it can be argued that the Iranian threat has overshadowed the Israeli–Palestinian issue in the Gulf region. On the other hand, for the two North African countries of Morocco and Sudan, the decision to sign the Abraham Accords was primarily grounded in their respective national interests. For Morocco, this decision was significantly motivated by the goal of obtaining US recognition of its sovereignty over Western Sahara, a longstanding territorial issue central to its national priorities. Similarly, Sudan's

motivation stemmed from achieving its removal from the US list of state sponsors of terrorism, facilitating diplomatic reintegration and economic development.

The US Department of State noted that the Abraham Accords did not include any requirement for progress toward a Palestinian state (Cooper, 2024). Therefore, it is evident that compared to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, the perceived threat from Iran holds greater significance for the UAE and Bahrain, whereas national interests are of paramount importance for Morocco and Sudan. This is confirmed by the absence of any Arab nation withdrawing from the Abraham Accords, even in the context of the ongoing Israel– Hamas conflict. The violence now unfolding in Gaza might temporarily impact normalization efforts with Israel but are unlikely to halt them (Al-Ketbi et al., 2024). This prompts questions about whether the “Cold Peace” era, initiated by the 1979 Egypt–Israel Peace Agreement at Camp David, could escalate into a “Cold War” in the Middle East in the foreseeable future. In this scenario, Iran and its proxies, such as Iraq, Yemen, Lebanon, and Syria, would be positioned on one side, while the Gulf countries, in alliance with Israel, would be on the other.

These differences become more evident when analyzed through the lenses of these countries’ respective interests. Similar policy attitudes exist between the UAE and Bahrain, and between Morocco and Sudan. While the UAE and Bahrain have threat perceptions that arise externally, with Iran being the biggest source of concern, Morocco and Sudan have threat perceptions that arise internally, stemming from their national interests. In line with their interests, none of these countries have halted their relations with Israel by withdrawing from the Abraham Accords (Harutyunyan, 2025).

Considering the contributions of former studies (Abdullayev, 2024; Sperling & Trumpfheller, 2025; Harutyunyan, 2025), the major conclusion to be drawn is straightforward: the national and strategic interests of the signatory states are the driving factors behind the Abraham Accords. More specifically, actual security concerns, ranging from broader geopolitical considerations to perceptions of an Iranian threat, outweigh the Israeli–Palestinian conflict for these signatories. While aspirations for deeper cooperation with the US and the importance of the US role in brokering the accords are certainly relevant, the pragmatic alignment of national projects lies at the heart of the process, and these projects entail regional security for the UAE and Bahrain and internal concerns for Morocco and Sudan.

As long as there is no solution in sight to the question of Palestine, the Abraham Accords are clearly.

The US-Israel war on Iran launched on 28 February 2026 and its spill-over effects on the Gulf along with the repercussions on Lebanon and West Bank reveal the very fact that the future and durability of the Abraham Accords will occupy a central place within the context of regional fluctuations in the near future.

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