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The New Normal?
Arab States and Normalization with Israel

Cover Photo: U.S. President Donald Trump, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bahrain Abdullatif bin Rashid Al Zayani, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Minister of Foreign Affairs for the United Arab Emirates Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan sign the Abraham Accords on the South Lawn of the White House, Sept. 15, 2020. Credit: White House/Tia Dufour.

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Introduction: The New Normal

Joshua Krasna

The recent wave of public normalizations of relations between Arab states and Israel – the Abraham Accords between United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain in September 2020, the agreement with Sudan in October, and the renewal of relations with Morocco in December – are indicators of an extremely significant change in Middle East political and strategic dynamics which has occurred over the past decade or more.[1]

Overt normalization of relations is the middle, not the beginning, of a process. It stems from a long-lasting congruence of interests between Israel and the conservative alignment of states in the Arab world. The cohesion of this alignment – which includes Saudi Arabia, UAE, Egypt under President al-Sisi, Bahrain and Morocco – was solidified after 2013. Its main preoccupation, in response to the dynamics unleashed by the 2010-2011 popular uprisings, was and is confronting domestic challenges to the regimes' legitimacy and authority. Key partners in this grouping have long had deep, discreet cooperation with Israel regarding the threat of Iran. Close, operational cooperation between Jerusalem, Riyadh, and Abu Dhabi developed especially in 2015, surrounding their joint political campaign to counter the Obama Administration's approval of the Iran nuclear deal. These states have found also common ground with Israel on facing challenges stemming from Turkey, the Muslim Brotherhood (including Hamas), and political Islam in general; Egypt has cooperated closely with Israel on containing Hamas and on combating Islamic State (IS) affiliates in Sinai. Israel has been increasingly seen by these regimes as a source of support for internal security, and surveillance technology and expertise, as well.

The turbulence in the Middle East catalyzed by the disintegration of Iraq in 2003, and the emergence of a new and younger generation of leadership in the region, have led most Arab regimes in the region to largely abandon the cloak of pan-Arab rhetoric and speak openly of their pursuit of national interests. This, combined with the general comprehension that solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on significant territorial exchange between two states is not likely in the short to medium term; the de-facto bifurcation of Palestine into two divergent and loosely-linked political entities; and the freezing of Palestinian political dynamics, has led to a marginalization of the Palestinian issue in regional politics. This marginalization, added to the existence of youthful publics less preoccupied with historical narratives, ostensibly freed these countries from the paradigm making bilateral relations with Israel contingent on progress regarding the Palestinian issue. However, as many of these essays illustrate, the willingness of the leaderships to engage openly with Israel is not often shared by the public and other components of the elites, a fact that serves as a brake for many regimes to open (or deeper) normalization.

Two developments associated with the United States created the direct context and momentum for the normalization agreements to emerge. The first was the understanding among key American allies in the region – Israel, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and UAE – that the United States seeks to bring to an end its costly direct military involvement in the region, which has existed for twenty years. This is both due to U.S. domestic fatigue and unhappiness with the high human and material costs, and its desire to concentrate both on domestic issues and on other geostrategic threats. It is also due to the reduced importance of Middle East energy sources for the U.S. and its allies. It has therefore become more important for these regional powers to compensate for a reduced U.S. military involvement, and to create a regionally-based power alignment which will at least partially fulfill the balancing role played by the U.S. during the past twenty years.

The second was the Trump Administration, which pushed for a regional alignment against Iran and normalization with Israel as key elements of its foreign policy agenda, especially in its final year. It also clearly conveyed its disinterest in continuing the traditional U.S. policy of supporting a two-state

solution to the Palestinian issue, opposing settlements, and Israeli withdrawals in the West Bank, as well as the linkage of Arab bilateral relations with Israel to resolution of the Palestinian issue. The Trump Administration's "hard sell," and its willingness to provide valuable inducements in return for open normalization in order to ensure a measure of legacy of success in foreign policy, created the stage and timeframe for the overt "leap forward" in Israeli-Arab relations in the past half year.

There is much speculation regarding which states will be next to improve relations with Israel, what their considerations will be, and how the development of relations will unfold between Israel and those countries that have already undertaken to improve relations with it. This collection of short essays seeks to provide some insight into these questions.

A few preliminary words on the scope of this publication: There are 22 member states in the Arab League. Researchers from the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies (MDC) analyze fourteen of them and their attitudes towards normalization with Israel in this volume. It includes those countries which have not yet normalized, but might do so – or are widely reported as poised to do so – in the next few years. In addition, while **Egypt** of course has had full diplomatic relations with Israel for over forty years, its regional importance dictated that its attitudes toward the current trend be examined in depth. Two of the countries which are examined – **Sudan** and **Morocco** – have begun the process of normalization, but are still in the midst of it, and have not yet taken some cardinal steps. Non-state **Sunni jihadi organizations** (al-Qaeda and the IS) – which have been one of the major influences in the region over the past two decades have been included. And as a research organization based in Israel, it is incumbent on the Moshe Dayan Center to examine the highly significant position regarding normalization of **the Arab minority in Israel**.

Jordan, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and **Bahrain were not included**. They have already established full diplomatic relations with Israel and are therefore less relevant for a study aimed at assessing the potential future of normalization. Four other Arab countries are assessed to be so far from normalization that they are irrelevant for a study concentrating on the short- to medium-term: **Syria** and **Lebanon** are too embroiled with Iran and with internal turmoil, and their relations with Israel too fraught, to be viable candidates at this time. The political systems of **Yemen** and **Libya** are too fractured, and they are too enmeshed in the intra-regional struggles, to be relevant currently. And **Comoros**, while a member of the Arab League, is too marginal to the region to be included.

1 This is despite efforts by publicists and policy analysts about and inside the region to downplay its significance, due to opposition to the Trump or Netanyahu Administrations, to concerns about the impact on the centrality of the Palestinian issue, or to a combination of these concerns. See e.g. Dalia Dassa Kaye, "Why Israel-UAE deal doesn't merit the hype," Al-Monitor, August 17, 2020; Diana Buttu, "Trump and Netanyahu's Big Fat Fake Peace Deal," Haaretz, September 16, 2020; Jason Pack, "The Israel-UAE Deal Won't Bring Peace, but It Will Prolong the War in Libya," Foreign Policy, August 21, 2020; Daniel Levy, "The Missing Piece in the Abraham Accords," The American Prospect, September 17, 2020.

Israel and North Africa: Out of Sight, Not Out of Mind

Daniel Zisenwine

Israel's ties with key North African countries (Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia) are unusual among Arab-Israeli relations. These countries were never openly in a state of war with Israel, but also not at peace with the Jewish state. At the time of Israel's establishment, these countries were still subjected to colonial rule. After gaining independence, they were very much part of the Arab-Israeli conflict (e.g., Tunis housed PLO headquarters from 1982-1994, Morocco sent troops in 1973 to the Syrian Golan front), despite their significant geographic distance from the conflict's epicenter. Over time, Morocco and Tunisia pursued ties with Israel, while Algeria remained hostile, viewing Israel as a relic of the region's colonial past. Mauritania, located in Northwest Africa, is considered both a part of North Africa and West Africa's Sahel region. It established full diplomatic relations with Israel in 1999 (later suspending them), as part of a broader effort to improve its standing in the international community, and help address its significant socio-economic challenges.

Israel's interest in relations with Morocco and Tunisia was initially motivated by concerns for the Jewish communities in these countries, and facilitating Jewish immigration to Israel.[1] This was followed by broader regional interests rooted in its "Periphery Doctrine," which sought to cultivate ties with countries on the margins of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Morocco and Tunisia had their own reasons to cultivate ties with Israel, ranging from internal security concerns in strengthening their regimes, to a later Moroccan interest in mediating between Israel and Arab countries (as it did between Egypt and Israel in 1977) and enhancing the kingdom's regional diplomatic position. Tunisia's moderate positions towards Israel in the early 1960s did not lead to cooperation with Israel. Morocco, on the other hand, intensified security ties with Israel, which supplied the kingdom with weapons, training, surveillance technology, and training for the Moroccan intelligence service. Israel also reportedly offered advice on rural development, and helped promote the sale of Moroccan cotton in European markets.[2] This cooperation did not replace Morocco's strong support for the Palestinian cause, but did indicate a tacit recognition of Israel's existence. Beyond these official considerations, many Moroccan Muslims over the years harbored fond (if not always historically accurate) memories of their relations with former Jewish neighbors who had settled in Israel, and viewed possible relations with the Jewish state as a symbolic restoration of those ties.[3]

After years of secret contacts, in the aftermath of the Oslo Accords signed between Israel and the Palestinians, Moroccan established low-level diplomatic relations with Israel in 1994, and Tunisia followed suit in 1996. The main raison d'etre of the diplomatic missions opened in each country was to advance trade and tourism, and promote cultural and economic exchanges. But the development of these of relations remained sluggish (with the exception of Israeli tourism), reflecting Morocco's hesitancy in advancing them absent progress on the Israeli-Palestinian track. Moroccan Islamists and other groups, which fiercely opposed normalization, also affected Morocco's unwillingness to proceed, although security contacts remained undisturbed. The Israeli flag, for example, did not fly on the exterior of the liaison office in Rabat. Efforts to establish direct flights between the countries came to naught. An Israel cultural week organized in 1996 faced harsh criticism and reduced attendance.[4] Both Morocco and Tunisia severed these ties in 2000, following the outbreak of the second *Intifada*, but maintained varying degrees of unofficial contacts with Israel (Mauritania severed its ties a bit later, in 2009). Indeed, since 2000 Morocco has demonstrated a form of "normalization without normalization," which included allowing Israeli tourism, trade, and to a lesser degree diplomatic meetings and contacts.[5] These discreet ties seemed to satisfy Morocco, which refrained from expanding them. Morocco did seek Israeli

assistance in gaining American support of its rule over the disputed Western Sahara region, which eventually developed into the formula for normalization with Israel. Tunisia's engagement with Israel was more modest, limited mostly to accepting Israeli tourists, and effectively ceased after the Tunisian revolution in 2011. All of these features and historical background underscore the unique infrastructure of North African relations with Israel, and affect the prospects for future developments.

Over the past two months, Israeli-North African relations have witnessed dramatic developments. The most significant is the December 10, 2020 announcement regarding the renewal of Israel and Morocco's low-level diplomatic ties, a move facilitated by the United States and the outgoing Trump administration. Morocco's decision was part of a broader diplomatic breakthrough for the kingdom, which received American recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over the disputed Western Sahara region in exchange for renewing its ties with Israel. For Morocco, this was the key motivating factor of this decision, as evident in the Moroccan official announcement, which extensively outlined the American recognition and only then proceeded to discuss the resumption of ties with Israel.[6] Therein lies the main challenge of this agreement. Rabat's apparent linkage of its relations with Israel to the broader Western Sahara issue could potentially affect the scope and pace of expanding these ties (which will be dependent on continued U.S. commitment to the Moroccan position), and could also indirectly generate renewed conflict in the Western Sahara region. Morocco has emphasized that the renewal of ties with Israel was not akin to the "Abraham Accords" between Israel, the U.A.E. and Bahrain. Although the December announcement raised the prospect of upgrading Moroccan-Israeli relations, Moroccan officials have not indicated that they are in any rush to do so. Moreover, the resumption of formal ties has elicited criticism from opposition groups in Morocco, and placed the current Islamist-led government in a delicate position. Morocco's king Mohamed VI has been in touch with Palestinian leaders, reiterating his commitment to the Palestinian cause and the two-state solution.[7] Morocco seems to be clearly indicating that it intends to proceed very cautiously in managing its relations with Israel, and be attentive to the Palestinian issue.

Regarding the nature of the bilateral relations, Morocco has so far officially made progress. The Moroccan monarch held a telephone conversation with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu (who invited him to visit Israel), an official Israeli delegation flew to Rabat to formalize the agreement, liaison offices were reopened, and Moroccan officials, particularly from the tourist sector, have spoken enthusiastically about advancing relations and welcoming a large number of Israeli tourists to the kingdom. One measure that does go beyond the scope of earlier bilateral ties is an aviation agreement signed between the two countries, which facilitates direct flights between them: this is a slight evolution of existing ties, which have allowed thousands of Israeli tourists to visit Morocco via Europe. Other realms of potential cooperation include agricultural technology and irrigation, health and medical projects, and educational initiatives. For Morocco, the main challenge underpinning these relations will be the transition from the "normalization without normalization" platform to a more formal, established bilateral framework. Criticism of relations with Israel has been voiced across the Moroccan political spectrum, from human rights groups to Islamist political circles. While it is unlikely that in the current Moroccan political climate anyone will openly challenge the king's decision to renew ties, opposition to relations with Israel remains potent. The linkage to the Western Sahara issue, the sensitivity to public opinion, and the Palestinian cause will likely dictate a sluggish pace to developments in the near future.

Prospects for other North African countries' pursuing with Israel remain dim. Neither Tunisia or Algeria have indicated interest in normalization. In 2018, the Tunisian parliament discussed a legislative initiative that would have criminalized ties with Israel, which was not endorsed by the late president Essesbi, but indicated widespread opposition. Tunisia's president Kais Saied has been a staunch opponent of normalization, asserting that ties with Israel were "national treason," and the Tunisian prime minister asserted that relations with Israel were not on the country's agenda.[8] The recent Moroccan-Israeli agreement is a further compli-

cating factor for the other North African countries. This is certainly the case for Algeria, which opposes Morocco's Western Sahara claims and now has even more reasons to reject relations with Israel, after accusing the Moroccan-Israeli agreement of fulfilling "the Zionist entity's desire to come close to our borders".[9]

Mauritania has also been recently mentioned by former Trump administration officials as a country they were in touch with about restoring its previous ties with Israel.[10] As a recipient of substantial economic aid from the U.A.E., it could potentially follow in the Emiratis' footsteps.[11] The prospects for this have generated substantial opposition in Mauritania, ranging from religious injunctions issued by some 200 Imams prohibiting relations with Israel, to a joint statement issued by members of parliament from several political parties calling for legislation that would criminalize normalization with Israel.[12] Much of this has to do with internal Mauritanian politics, and the extent of President El-Ghazouani's willingness to cope with significant Islamist opposition, should he decide to pursue relations with Israel.[13]

The coming months will indicate the direction and velocity of North African-Israeli relations, as a new American administration takes office and both examines the diplomatic concessions made by its predecessor, and calibrates the effort it plans to invest in preserving and further encouraging the normalization effort.

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Sudanese Perceptions of the Sudan-Israel Rapprochement

Eline Rosenhart

Unlike other states in the region, including those who also began formalizing relations with Israel in the past year, Sudan never had formal or informal diplomatic relations with Israel, until it joined the Abraham Accords in January 2021. Sudan's ideological stance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was reflected in its policy regarding Israel. Most symbolically, in 1967 the Arab League held a summit in Khartoum in which it spelled out the infamous "three no's:" no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, no negotiations with Israel. Under the regime of Omar al-Bashir (1989-2019), Sudan was known to support groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah, which Israel classified as terrorist organizations, and for a period had close relations with Iran.

In April 2019 a popular revolution, initially coordinated by the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA), led to al-Bashir's downfall. After the Sudanese armed forces committed atrocities against unarmed protesters, mediators brokered a power-sharing deal which provided for a transitional government composed of both civilian and military leaders, meant to lead to new elections after three years. The main objectives of Sudan's transitional government are to unify Sudan and to transform the country's decrepit economy; The "civilian camp" would add to that the goal of transforming Sudan into a democratic state. In order to attract foreign investment, the transitional government has exerted great efforts to remove Sudan from the U.S. State Sponsors of Terrorism list. Even before the revolution, normalization with Israel was seen as the key to improved relations with the U.S. and therefore attractive, in spite of ideological considerations. Since the revolution the main proponent of normalization has been General Abd al-Fatah al-Burhan, the Chairman of the Sovereignty Council of Sudan. The civilian component of the government generally opposes the idea of normalization.

Using Sudanese newspapers as its sources, this article aims to shed light on the range of opinions on Sudan-Israel relations, and to link these opinions to the current challenges facing Sudan. First, it will analyze notable opinions on the topic published before the revolution; second, it will examine opinions expressed after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met with al-Burhan in Uganda in February 2020; and third, it will present the range of Sudanese opinions expressed when it became clear that Sudan was normalizing relations with Israel.

Notable Opinions Before the Revolution

After neighboring Chad normalized relations with Israel in November 2018, carefully-worded articles appeared in Sudanese newspapers discussing whether Omar al-Bashir should follow suit. Islamist preacher Mohamed Hashem al-Hakim, affiliated with the University of the Holy Qura'n and the Foundation of Sciences in Wad Medani, favored a "tactical reconciliation" with Israel.[1] He clarified that he saw this as a temporary measure for the purpose of the survival of Sudan, and that outright normalization is not permissible. Yousef al-Kuda, the head of the Islamic Center Party, went farther and even favored normalizing ties with Israel. He justified his position with analogies from Islamic history and pointed out that Egypt and Jordan had also normalized ties with Israel.[2] Both of these leaders assumed a rapprochement with Israel would eventually lead to Sudan's removal from the U.S. State Sponsors of Terrorism list. These unusual voices, however, were not to be significant until after the 2019 people's revolution.

Responses to the al-Burhan-Netanyahu Meeting

When al-Burhan travelled to Uganda to meet Netanyahu to discuss the possibility of normalization, Sudanese newspapers emphasized that he had "gone it alone," without informing the rest of Sudan's transitional government.[3] Zain al-Abidin al-Tayyib, a leader of the civilian protest movement, the Forces of Freedom and Change (which includes the SPA), asserted that the meeting was not acceptable because the power-sharing agreement that was in effect did not allow for the military to make unilateral decisions about foreign policy. He added that "[w]e firmly believe in the justice of the Palestinian cause, but we support normalization with all countries of the world that love peace, democracy and freedom." [4] Sudanese writer and analyst Altaqi Mohammed Othman expressed that negotiations like those al-Burhan held with Netanyahu are not in line with the spirit of the "new Sudan based on freedom, justice and equality... Negotiate in the open."[5] He adds that he does not object to normalization with Israel "as a neighboring country of Palestine."[6] It could be inferred that these commentators viewed the al-Burhan meeting as problematic not for its intrinsic content, but mostly because it tested the fragile balance between the civilian and military components of the transitional government.

Responses to Normalization

In October 2020 it became clear that the transitional government was ready to move forward on normalizing relations with Israel, that the U.S. was pressing Khartoum to do so as a prerequisite for improved bilateral relations, and that most of the Sudanese civilian leadership opposed the move. The SPA and Sudanese political opposition alliances such as the National Consensus Alliance (NCA) and Sudan Call all expressed solidarity with the Palestinians.[7] Others expressed concern that normalization was being forced upon Sudan by the United States and the United Arab Emirates in exchange for financial aid: the National Umma Party, part of the NCA, called it "unacceptable blackmail";[8] the Sudan Change Now movement saw it as a "cheap deal that came at the cost of Sudan's integrity";[9] and Sudanese commentator Abd al-Rahman Haneen said that instead of Palestinians receiving "land for peace," Sudan received "food for peace."[10] It goes without saying that the most radical Islamist parties vehemently opposed normalization. Many Sudanese took to the streets to protest the move on ideological grounds.[11] Interestingly though, the principal complaint most civilian parties expressed, is that the decision to normalize Sudan's ties with Israel was made by a transitional, and not an elected government.[12] In their view, the military made important decisions without consulting popular opinion, just as it had under al-Bashir. The way in which normalization was decided upon, therefore, went against the democratic spirit of the revolution.

On the other hand, some Sudanese political parties and rebel alliances welcomed normalization, precisely because they viewed the deal as embodying the spirit of the revolution. The Sudanese Congress Party – while part of the NCA which opposed the deal – emphasized that normalization would improve Sudan's foreign relations, which had been ruined by the former regime.[13] After the death of the Umma Party's famous leader Sadiq al-Mahdi, the new Umma Party leader mentioned that he was "not against peace with Israel."[14] The coalition of rebel movements from the conflict-ridden Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile provinces saw the normalization as necessary for Sudan to re-establish contacts with the nations of the world.[15] All of those in favor of normalization saw the move as an opportunity to extricate Sudan from international isolation that the former regime of Omar al-Bashir had brought on.

Conclusion

The open debate concerning normalization with Israel that played out in the Sudanese newspapers demonstrates that the 2019 Sudanese Revolution paved the way for greater freedom of expression. This is in itself a victory for the spirit of the revolution. Yet it is difficult to gauge to what extent the opinions published in Sudanese newspapers reflect the discourse "on the street." Additionally, Sudan's dynamic civil society is still fragile. For it

to grow stronger, freedom of expression needs to be reinforced and strengthened in Sudan so that it will become a durable institution.

To see Sudan-Israel relations in perspective : it is clear that this issue is not the main priority of Sudan's transitional government. Even relations with Israel is not a major concern for Sudan when it comes to normalization. Most Sudanese – whether they are in favor or against normalization – see it mostly as a way to improve relations with the United States. These could be reasons why the pace of normalization between Sudan and Israel might be significantly slower than that of the other normalizing states of the region. And while rapprochement with Israel has opened the door for removing Sudan from the US State Sponsors of Terrorism list, the transitional government's main challenges remain: to transform this opportunity into a real change for the Sudanese economy , as protests continue, and to unify the Sudanese people, while violence in numerous areas is still part of daily life.

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11 Abdel Nasser Al-Hajj, "Sudan's Normalization with Israel... Khartoum: The Three No's Open Up Other Outlets for History [Arabic]," Al-Jareeda, October 26, 2020, p.3.

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Saudi Arabia and Israel: Preparing for the American Downsizing in the Middle East

Brandon Friedman

The status of Saudi Arabia's relationship with Israel is closely linked to the United States's goals of reducing its engagement in the Middle East and investing more of its political capital and military resources in Asia.[1] For the first two years of the Trump administration, the Saudi concern about American disengagement from the region was mitigated to an extent by the personal rapport between the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed and Trump's son-in-law and counselor Jared Kushner.[2] However, when the Trump administration chose not to respond to Iran's attack on the Saudi oil facilities at Biqayq and Khurais in September 2019, the Saudis felt themselves isolated and vulnerable.[3] The Saudi interest in advancing its ties with Israel is rooted therefore in its anticipation of the U.S. disengagement from the region and its potential effects on Saudi security. Yet the question of whether and when Saudi Arabia will normalize its relations with Israel will ultimately be conditioned by Saudi domestic politics. Therefore, despite the Saudi interest in continuing to expand its strategic relationship with Israel, the official status of Saudi-Israeli ties will depend on an uncertain combination of the Biden administration's policy in the Middle East and Saudi internal political constraints.

Historically, Saudi-Israeli relations have been characterized by quiet diplomacy.[4] However, the Trump administration's efforts since 2017 to solve the Palestinian issue "from the outside in," and its success in brokering normalization between Israel the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain in the summer of 2020, forced Saudi Arabia's ties with Israel into the limelight. This in turn has exposed sharp differences within the Saudi royal family about the appropriate nature and future status of Saudi Arabia's ties to Israel.[5] In early October, *al-Arabiya*, published a three-part interview with Bandar bin Sultan, who served as the Saudi ambassador to the U.S. for 23 years. Bandar's father was the Saudi Defense Minister for 48 years, and his 45-year old daughter, Reema bint Bandar, is the current Saudi Ambassador to the United States. Bandar provided an insider's account of the Saudi support for the Palestinians from the late 1970s to early 2010s, and harshly condemned the Palestinian leadership as failures for repeatedly missing opportunities. He said, "we are at a stage in which rather than being concerned with how to face the Israeli challenges in order to serve the Palestinian cause, we have to pay attention to our national security and interests."[6]

On the other hand, Turki al-Faisal, who was head of Saudi intelligence for 22 years and a former ambassador to the U.S. and U.K., launched a blistering attack on Israel at the IISS Manama Conference in December 2020, when he emphasized that a Palestinian state with its capital in East Jerusalem and a fair solution for the Palestinian refugees is the only peaceful option, and the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative must be implemented.[7] The differences between Bandar and Turki appear to reflect the differences between 35-year old Crown Prince Mohammed, who believes the Israeli-Palestinian conflict should be subordinated to Saudi national interests, and his 85-year old father, King Salman ʿAbd al-ʿAziz Al Saʿud, who views support for the Palestinian cause and the status of Jerusalem as a core Saudi obligation as custodian of Islam's two holiest mosques (in Mecca and Medina).

Nearly two-thirds of Saudi nationals are below the age of 35; Thirty percent are below the age of 15. Unlike King Salman's generation, many Saudis have no living memory of the key developments in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.[8] Nevertheless, the royal family is sensitive to popular sentiment at home and in the broader Muslim world. It is hard to say how strongly the Saudi population feels about the Palestinian cause,[9] but the royal family's concern is

that normalizing with Israel might trigger popular dissent on religious grounds, both at home and in the broader Muslim world. Therefore, if the Crown Prince ultimately pushes forward with normalization, he may seek to do it alongside Pakistan, a country with a large Muslim population.[10]

Some have argued that Crown Prince Mohammed would like to use normalization to blunt the impact of the expected confrontation between the Saudi Arabia and the Biden administration.[11] During campaign debates, Biden himself referred to Saudi Arabia as a "pariah" whose government had "very little social redeeming value."[12] The Democrats have strongly opposed the Saudi war in Yemen, which was launched in the spring of 2015, and has led to "horrific humanitarian consequences."[13] The Democrats have also vocally criticized the Saudi blockade of Qatar, which is viewed as a U.S. military partner; It is not a coincidence that the Saudis ended the four-year blockade two weeks before Biden took office.[14] Less than week after taking office, the Biden administration announced that it was temporarily freezing arms-sales to the Kingdom (and UAE), pending a review of the war in Yemen.[15] It is unlikely that the Crown Prince believes normalizing ties with Israel will be a panacea that solves all of the Saudi problems with the Biden administration. Instead, the Saudis may be seeking something more modest: formal U.S. support for greater strategic defense cooperation between Israel and Saudi Arabia.

The conventional wisdom argues that Saudi ties with Israel strengthen Saudi deterrence with regard to Iran. And yet the Saudi interest in strategic cooperation with Israel is not driven by the expectation of a mutual defense commitment in confronting Iran, but rather by the belief that Israel can help Saudi Arabia improve its defense capabilities, and the hope that Israel – acting in its own interest – will take steps to confront or weaken Iran. Since the Iranian attack on the Saudi oil refineries, the Saudis have shown a strong interest in partnering with Israel in three key areas:, developing a multilayered, missile defense systems against cruise missile and drone attacks;[16] developing cyber-defense capabilities to protect Saudi Arabia from cyberattacks, like those targeting the Saudi oil and petrochemical industries between 2012 and 2018; and, combining artificial intelligence, machine learning, biotechnology, and big data analytics in key defense areas. The last area underlies Saudi interest in incorporating Israel into its ambitious plans to make Neom, $500 billion megacity it is building in Tabuk province, a showcase for Saudi artificial intelligence.[17]

Saudi interest and cooperation with Israel in each of these areas predates the September 2019 attack. Nevertheless, three new dynamics may lead the Saudis to use normalization as a means to formalize U.S. support for its strategic relationship with Israel. The first is the Saudi concern that the Biden administration may place greater restrictions on the U.S.'s defense cooperation with the Kingdom in some of these areas. Second, Israeli-Saudi cooperation on missile defense technology may require some level of U.S. government approval, given the role of American technology in Israel's three primary missile defense systems. Finally, the U.S. may view greater Saudi-Israeli strategic cooperation as a positive development that helps the Biden administration's realize its goals of reducing the U.S. military commitments in the region and transforming the U.S. into an "offshore balancer" in the Middle East. It may also allow the Biden administration to tell Congress that it has succeeded in changing Saudi behavior, which may be important for its Democratic political base. It would seem that the potential for normalization with Israel is part of the Saudi effort to reluctantly come to terms with its new security needs, in light of the U.S.'s aim to reduce its role as a security provider in the Middle East.

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Israel and the Gulf: Future Prospects for Normalization

Uzi Rabi

Following Israel's signing of the Abraham Accords with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain, there has been much speculation regarding their impact on the other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member states, and the possibility they might follow suit. This paper analyzes the import of the wave of normalization of relations with Israel for Oman, Kuwait, and Qatar.

Oman: Practicing the Art of Fence-Sitting

The Sultanate of Oman has frequently been mentioned as one of the prime candidates to soon follow the UAE and Bahrain in formalizing full-fledged ties with Israel.[1] Muscat's positive reaction to the Abraham Accords was consonant with its long-standing position on normalization. An Omani government statement a month after the signing typified Oman's careful approach: "...this new strategic path taken by some Arab countries will contribute to bringing about a peace based on an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands and on establishing an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as capital."[2]

Since 1970, when Sultan Qabus came to power and inaugurated the Omani *nahda* (renaissance), the Sultanate has emerged as a moderate Arab state, where tolerance is firmly embedded into the national ethos, based largely on the prevalent Ibadhi sect of Islam. Oman was one of only three Arab League members that refused to take diplomatic action against Egypt following the Camp David peace treaty in 1979. Oman has for many years had low-profile, productive relations with Israel, which were illuminated publicly by visits of then Israeli Prime Ministers Yitzchak Rabin in 1994 and Shimon Peres in 1996, and most recently, by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in October 2018.

Yet, at least thus far, Muscat has refused to join the UAE, Bahrain (and Sudan and Morocco) in further normalizing relations with Israel. Prizing its position as a reliable diplomatic interlocutor (the hallmark of its foreign policy and a key component of its political culture), Oman has carefully balanced itself geopolitically between Tehran and Riyadh. For many years, Omani-Iranian ties have been based on mutual respect and trust. These close relations with Tehran began with the aid that the late Shah gave to Sultan Qabus to quell the Dhofar insurgency in the early 1970s. The cordial relations between Muscat and Tehran continued following the Islamic Revolution in 1979, and it was in Oman that the initial negotiations between the American and Iranians took place, which lead to the Iran nuclear deal in 2015. As a result, formalization of relations with Israel — even if desirable from the standpoints of trade, tourism, and investment — would be premature from an Omani perspective, as it would deeply alienate Iran.

The timing of the UAE and Bahrain's normalization of relations with Jerusalem was likely connected to the U.S. presidential election and American domestic political considerations. Oman, which has been very sensitive about foreign countries interfering in its internal affairs, was keen to avoid taking any side in U.S. domestic politics. It also had its own domestic political considerations to consider. The death in January 2020 of Sultan Qabus and the ascent to power of the new Sultan, Haitham bin Tariq, has led to substantial changes in the government bureaucracy, as he consolidates his rule and builds his own base of support. By holding off on formalizing diplomatic relations with Israel, Sultan Haitham has allowed himself to concentrate on important domestic concerns while, at the same time, maintaining Oman's careful balancing act between fellow GCC states and the Iranians.

In the near term, Muscat would rather "wait and see" what the policy of the incoming Biden

Administration will be, and how the Abraham Accords and the subsequent Sudan-Israel and Morocco-Israel deals will pan out. However, it might change its outlook, as it is facing a double crisis – public health and economic – with a considerable drop in oil prices brought on by the coronavirus pandemic. Out of the three Gulf states under review, Oman seems to be the most likely to normalize relations with Israel.

Kuwait: An Exception to the Rule

Unlike its GCC partners, the Emirate of Kuwait has remained firmly wedded to its traditional position, rejecting normalization with Israel. The Palestinian question has been a key issue in the Emirate ever since Yasser Arafat founded Fatah there in 1959. A Palestinian community estimated at 450,000 – only slightly smaller than the local Kuwaiti population – resided there until the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. This community paid a heavy price for Arafat's choice not to condemn this invasion, being forced into exile without hope of return, but Kuwait's ruling family, National Assembly (Parliament), and civil society have not since wavered in their support for the Palestinian cause.

Forty-one civil society groups and organizations, such as the Bar Association, the Teachers' Association, and the Kuwaiti Economic Association, were vocal in criticizing the Abraham Accords and called upon the National Assembly "to quickly pass a law criminalizing normalization with the Zionist enemy."[3] The ruling Al-Sabah family, which has always been careful not to alienate its own population – historically the most politicized in the GCC states – judges that vocal opposition to the Abraham Accords would appease dominant political currents, both Islamists and nationalists. Sheikh Nawaf Al Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah, who ascended to power on September 30, 2020, is unlikely to change his half-brother Sheikh Sabah's policy of support for the Palestinians.

Under these circumstances, Kuwait does not seem ripe for decision on the highly sensitive issue of normalization, as it would probably put the Emirate under tremendous internal pressure, especially from Islamists with ties to the Muslim Brotherhood, who are aligned with Turkey's position. Kuwait seems in this to benefit from the position of its larger neighbor, Saudi Arabia, which has so far linked normalization with Israel to progress in the peace process in accordance with the Arab Peace Initiative that Riyadh proposed in 2002, and that was approved as an Arab framework for a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The battle for normalization in Kuwait is far from over, even if it is the Gulf state least expected to normalize relations with Israel.

Qatar: Keeping All Channels of Communication Open

The small, wealthy Emirate wedged between Iran and Saudi Arabia has always sought to have an independent foreign policy, outside Riyadh's orbit, which would allow it greater diplomatic flexibility and influence. Keeping all channels of communication open has dictated a careful nurturing of links with Turkey and Iran, while at the same time maintaining its special ties with the U.S.: Qatar hosts the largest U.S. base in the Middle East. From the Turkish perspective, Qatari support and financial largesse provide them with a base from which to expand outreach in the Arab world, and the Gulf in particular; for Qatar's part, Turkey affords it the protection of a significant regional power. Qatar's ties with Iran are practical as well as geopolitical, as Doha shares with Tehran ownership of the South Pars/North Dome Gas Field, which is the largest gas field in the world.

This geopolitical orientation, as well as its active support of the Muslim Brotherhood, makes it an outlier among the Gulf States. This led to strong tensions between it and Riyadh and Abu Dhabi since 2011, culminating in June 2017 in a state of open – though not violent – conflict, with Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain and Egypt breaking off diplomatic relations, and organizing an air, land, and sea embargo of Qatar.[4] In January 2021, however – contemporaneously with the change of administrations in the United States and with the normalization process (and apparently affected by both these processes) – the embargo was lifted

and bilateral relations renewed. Many underlying issues and tensions between the sides persist, however; significantly, Qatar does not seem to have dramatically changed its positions regarding Turkey, the Muslim Brotherhood, or Iran. The potential for another severe flare-up between Qatar and its GCC partners, therefore, still exists.

The Qatari balancing act is also evident in the relations with Israel. Qatar was the first Gulf state (together with Oman) to establish direct trade relations with Israel by establishing trade offices in their capitals in 1996. The second Intifada in 2000 brought these diplomatic relations to a halt, but behind the scenes, Qatar has continued to play a useful role for Israel. Doha has used its support for Hamas, the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, and for the Palestinian issue in general, as an important item in its diplomatic toolbox. Qatar's support for Hamas has also brought it into close cooperation with Israeli interlocutors, who frequently use Doha as an intermediary to reach understandings with the Hamas leadership in Gaza, and who rely on Qatari financial assistance to shore up the governmental apparatus in Gaza and stave off humanitarian crises.

Qatar, despite its ties with Turkey and Iran, and its non-conformist stance on many regional issues, is nevertheless often mentioned as a target for Israel's efforts to normalize with the Arab world. Israel has a significant interest in proactive engagement with Qatar, beyond the Palestinian sphere. While Doha has always assiduously guarded its freedom to maneuver and would probably balk at being brought into formal, wider geopolitical alignment that would see them closely tied to Riyadh, the restored relations with the conservative Arab axis could eventually lead to the attenuation of the Ankara-Doha partnership. If Israel could capitalize on a prospective weakening of the Qatar and Turkey relationship through greater diplomatic engagement with Qatar, this would be a sound policy for Israel that could lead to normalization and friendlier bilateral ties. It is important to note, however, that in any case the potential for normalization will continue to be bounded by Qatar's cordial and necessary relations with Iran, to which any change could have severe potential economic repercussions for the world's largest exporter of liquified natural gas.

Qatar has refrained from official criticism of the normalization process, while declaring that it would not normalize relations with Israel until there is a comprehensive settlement with the Palestinians, in line with the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative. While Qatar might be open to re-normalization with Israel, especially in the context of the intra-Gulf reconciliation, its willingness to do so will be to a large extent a function of its need to balance future developments in its relations with Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, and Hamas.

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Iraqi-Israeli Normalization: Economic Solution or Accelerant of Internal Division?

Rachel Kantz Feder

Not long ago, peace between Jerusalem and Baghdad was dismissed as a social media fantasy promoted by Israel's Foreign Ministry and Iraqi intellectuals. The public indignation directed at prominent Iraqis who visited Israel or expressed favorable views of it seemingly supported this.[1] However, today, Iraq's economic turmoil and transformations in the political landscape already have to a large extent normalized public debate on how connections with Israel, with its population of Iraqi Jews, might advance national strategic interests. Although Iraq is by no means an imminent candidate for normalization, the issue has come onto the agenda in conjunction with sensitive fault lines in Iraqi politics and society, and a potential economic inflection point.

On January 4 2021, after a parliamentary committee revealed that $239.7 billion has been siphoned from Iraq since 2003, Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi, pledged to pursue aggressive anti-corruption reforms and to deliver justice to those who have emptied Iraq's coffers – "even if it costs him his life".[2]

Kadhimi – who ascended to his position in May 2020 – is striving to maintain Iraq's precarious equilibrium, while addressing demands of the 'October Revolution', the unprecedented popular reform movement that erupted in late 2019. This decentralized movement, strongest in Shi'i populated centers and supported by Iraq's religious establishment, contests the informal quota-based power-sharing arrangement that has produced Iraq's endemic corruption. In recent years, journalists and whistleblowers have exposed the mechanisms of the ruling elite's abuse of national wealth, particularly in the oil industry and through egregious monetary policies of the Central Bank of Iraq, long controlled by Former Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's allies.[3] Unlike previous anti-government mobilizations, the movement has repudiated Iranian influence and the politicians and oligarchs who enable Iran's predatory economic relationship with Iraq.

The geopolitical realignment illustrated by the Abraham Accords therefore coincides with Iraq's broader reckoning with Iran's role in the plundering of the post-2003 economy, cascading domestic crises, and fear of economic collapse wrought by low oil prices and the coronavirus pandemic.[4]

During his visit to Washington, days after the agreement was unveiled, Kadhimi touted progress towards trilateral collaboration with Egypt and Jordan, members of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum.[5] He announced further talks on the "New Levant Plan," a European-like free trade agreement conceived by the World Bank in 2014 and embraced by Iraqi elements seeking to decrease dependence on Iran.[6] Kadhimi's pursuit of a Levantine axis and his remark that the Abraham Accords are an Emirati decision in which Iraq should not interfere, reverberated among the political class, already roiled by Iraq's deficit crisis and inability to pay government salaries.[7]

Normalization in Iraqi Public Discourse

Soon thereafter, leaks about clandestine talks on Israel and politicians' hyperbolic statements shocked Iraqis. Former Deputy Prime Minister Bahaa al-Araji, who previously led the Sadrist bloc, declared that Iraq is prepared to normalize with Israel and that the decision might be issued from Najaf (the seat of the religious establishment), not Baghdad. Araji, who is known to be close to Maliki and head of the al-Fateh Alliance and Badr Organi-

zation Hadi al-Ameri, pointed out that many Iraqis "see the corruption of the ruling system as the real danger."[8] In November, former MP and leader of the Umma Party Mithal al-Alusi, an unapologetic proponent of relations, divulged that an Iraqi delegation discussed normalization with Europeans on the sidelines of meetings to address Iraq's acute fiscal crisis.[9] Leaks also revealed that representatives of political blocs convened to address the salary crisis, the possibility of an Israeli consulate in Erbil, and an Iraqi-Israeli agreement.[10]

With these revelations fueling wider public debate about Iraq's national interests and the benefits of ties – from energy collaboration to development of Jewish heritage sites to promote tourism – parliamentarians are counter-employing economic arguments to reject an Iraqi-Israeli agreement.[11] A Sadrist MP criticized Kadhimi's borrowing requests as an effort to advance normalization, alleging that the salary crisis was manufactured.[12] Similarly, in opposing relations, an Islamic al-Da'wa Party MP dismissed the "Levantine axis" because it requires significant investment.[13] These comments seemingly acknowledge that traditional arguments against relations with Israel, stressing the need for solidarity with the Palestinians, are no longer sufficient.

Despite influential voices of unequivocal rejection that denounce normalization as an instrument of Iraq's division, Iraqi analysts increasingly regard relations with Israel as a *fait accompli,* and acknowledge that the political-economic calculus has changed.[14] A prominent politician from Shi'i cleric Ammar al-Hakim's Hikma Party confirmed that political forces comprehend the magnitude of change in the street, stating "Sunnis, Kurds, and half of Shi'a do not have a problem with normalization." Sources close to pro-Iran factions concede that many see normalization as a panacea to Iraq's manifold crises.[15]

Obstacles to Iraqi-Israeli Normalization

Notwithstanding these perceptions of evolving public opinion, the forces arrayed against normalization are powerful, and therefore most political players do not want to endorse an Iraqi-Israeli peace agreement. Even the Kurds of Iraq, who have maintained well-known relations with Israel, cautiously balance their interests and relations with Baghdad, Ankara, and Tehran, and find no incentive in advocating for normalization publicly.[16]

Given that anti-Iranian sentiment is not tantamount to desire for normalization with Israel, the issue is a minefield for October Movement leaders transitioning from street mobilization to the ballot box ahead of elections. Civil society activists who supported but did not drive the movement are generally critical of newer activists' willingness to participate in the political system, and the issue of normalization compounds these divisions.[17] Some are trying to prevent the conflation of new parties' positions on Israel with their vision of the movement's anti-corruption, anti-sectarian, economy-first objectives.[18]

High profile arrests of officials and businesspersons hitherto shielded by ties to Iran and militias have created pressure on the movement's pro-Iranian adversaries, and counter-measures by them.[19] As the struggle to exert state authority over Iran-backed militias hangs in the balance, these actors are sabotaging efforts to diversify the economy and harnessing the issue of normalization to more generally discredit Kadhimi's stewardship of the economy and the state.[20]

Despite calibrated moves against conduits of Iranian exploitation, Kadhimi – a technocrat still working to build a political base – does not possess the power to wholly expunge political actors and economic networks vested in Iraq's status quo. These actors and networks are not limited to Iran and Iraqi Shi'i militias (nor are they defined by sectarian affiliation). Lebanese Hezbollah, which has played a mediating role between Shi'i political and paramilitary forces, also possesses entrenched economic interests entangled with Iraqi oligarchs close to Nuri al-Maliki and others who wield power.[21] Many Iraqis looking to Kadhimi to deliver on his anti-corruption promises wish to see justice meted out to the major purveyors of graft and cronyism, like Maliki and his ilk, the most vocal opponents of normalization.[22]

An increasingly popular view is that normalization is an Iraqi interest and is possible, but, as simply put by a prominent Iraqi writer, "it depends on separating the Shi'i house from Iranian hegemony...".[23] It also would seem to require a critical mass of the ruling elite identifying normalization as a national interest, for which is worth forgoing personal enrichment and risking whatever a separation from "Iranian hegemony" could entail.

This is not to be expected in the near to medium term. It is all the more unlikely if President Biden and the US State Department do not appreciate the gravity of change expressed by the October Movement enough to prioritize support for the mandate given to Kadhimi to reclaim Iraqi sovereignty.

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Between Rejection and Acceptance: The Normalization Agreements with Israel in the Egyptian Public Discourse

Michael Barak

The public discourse in Egypt regarding the signing of the normalization agreements between Israel and the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco is complex and ranges from opposition and reservations, to acceptance. The critics, who mainly include leftists and Islamists, describe the treaties as a serious blow to the Palestinian issue and to Arab solidarity. Supporters, who mainly include the regime and liberals, emphasize that every Arab state is entitled to pursue its national interests, even if it means establishing normalization with Israel that could obscure the Palestinian issue. The discourse also reflects concerns about the decline of Egypt's status in the Arab world in favor of the Gulf states, who it is feared may use the new agreements to further leverage their regional and international power and influence. These arguments have intensified the already existing conviction of Egypt that it is obliged to invest greater efforts in order to regain leadership of the Arab world.

Responses to the Normalization Treaties

The circumstances in which the normalization wave took place were broadly analyzed by Egyptian journalists and academics. Many agreed that this was a "historic peace" and a political achievement for the Prime Minister of Israel. Journalist Jamal Abu Hassan, for example, claimed that "the Arab Spring is the land that yielded the new peace agreements [...] while President Obama is the one who sowed the seeds," pointing to the nuclear deal with Iran, that provoked criticism and close diplomatic cooperation by the Gulf states and Israel.[1] Other factors mentioned accelerating the rapprochement between Israel and Arab countries were particular aspects of the national identity of the normalizing states, their desire to distance themselves from outmoded notions of Arab solidarity and from political Islam, and the growth of a new generation that does not live the conflicts of the past.[2]

'Abd al-Fatah al-Sisi, President of Egypt, was the first Arab leader to welcome the peace treaties between Israel and the two Gulf countries, as well as the later agreements. His ambition to stabilize the region and his desire to maintain a strategic alliance with the US administration and the Gulf states, as well as Egypt's economic dependence on the UAE, were among his motivations in doing so.

In contrast to his welcoming attitude, leftists claimed that the treaties were signed out of political weakness and harmed Palestinian interests and Arab solidarity. Abdullah al-Sanawi, a prominent Nasserist, described the normalization agreements as a strategic failure of the Arab states, giving Israel an opportunity to achieve what it had failed to gain in all its wars, without giving up a single piece of land.[3] Mustafa Kamel, a leading Egyptian academic, stressed that "the biggest losers are, without a doubt, the Palestinians and Arabs who identify with them [...]".[4] Islamists for their part claimed that the treaties were illegal and contradicted Islam. Yasser Burhami, a senior Salafi leader, stressed that the Palestinian territories are occupied Islamic land, hence no peace can be established with an occupying state that also violates Palestinian rights.[5] Moreover, he has criticized using the term "Abraham Accords" on the grounds that it has corrupted Abraham's Islamic identity and aimed at creating a new religion in which all religions are equal.[6] Interestingly, the al-Azhar establishment has chosen to remain silent on the issue, despite its traditional support for the Palestinians. This is due to a reluctance to confront the Egyptian regime, which expressed full support for the peace treaties, especially in a challenging period of economic and epidemiological crisis. It also may reflect the good

relations of al-Azhar Sheikh Ahmad al-Tayyib with the UAE regime.[7]

Yes to Peace, No to Normalization

Another aspect of the public discourse is concerned with the refusal to normalize ties with Israel beyond the government-to-government level, described as a major difference between the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty and the recent normalization treaties. Ahmed Abu al-Ghayt, Egyptian diplomat and Secretary General of the Arab League, explained that the main reason for the lack of comprehensive peace between Egypt and Israel lies in the continued Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories; The key to full peace, in his view, lies in ending the occupation and establishing a Palestinian state.[8] Egyptian MP Mustafa Bakri stressed that "Egypt has strong principles on the Palestinian issue, it has not changed and will never change. The establishment of a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital, and the implementation of the UN resolution demanding that Israel withdraw from the occupied lands of 1967, including the Golan Heights and occupied Jerusalem, are the only source of authority for the Egyptian leadership [...] ".[9]

On the other hand, voices who support the normalization process between Israel and Arab countries demand to prioritize national interests and not to "surrender" to criticism about "abandoning" the Palestinian issue. Muhammad Ibrahim al-Douiri, a former Egyptian military officer and analyst at a research institute, described criticism of Israeli-Arab normalization as an attempt to undermine the state's authority and to harm its national interests and goals.[10] Academic Abd al-Munim Sayyid argued that Arab states cannot give up their national interests in favor of a "divided Palestinian group" that has its own deep normalization ties with Israel. In his view, the Palestinians cannot dictate to the Arab states not to normalize relations with Israel while they themselves maintain ties with Iran and Turkey, which have been harassing Saudi Arabia and the UAE.[11]

Both advocates of the agreements and those opposed to them have called on the Palestinian leadership to recalculate its course in view of the new reality. Some argued that Palestinians should be rational about the conflict and use the new ties established by four Arab states to persuade Israel to bring about real change regarding Palestinians' rights.[12] Others called on the Arabs and especially the Palestinian national movement to formulate a new plan of action.[13]

Implications of the Peace Treaties for Egypt

Another prominent theme in the discourse regarded the negative implications of the new peace agreements on Egypt's regional position. Mustafa Kamel al-Sayyid, a leading Egyptian academic, warned that the treaties posed risks to Egypt's national and economic security, mainly due to the Gulf states' ambitions to lead the Arab world instead of Egypt. He mentioned as an example the Israeli-Emirati plan for laying oil pipelines in the UAE that would reach to the Israeli ports in the Mediterranean, which could compete with the Egyptian SUMED oil pipeline; an alleged Israeli-Emirati plan to establish a joint naval force that will operate along the shores of the Red Sea; and the possibility of establishment of an Israeli naval base in Sudan, on Egypt's southern border.[14]

In conclusion, the Egyptian responses indicate a struggle between two approaches, one which advocates Arab solidarity and the second one "sanctifying" the national interests. As a former Egyptian officer phrased it, "there is no a permanent friend and no a permanent enemy, only permanent interests."[15] The discourse reveals an understanding that Egypt must carve its way back into the leadership of the Arab world and compete for regional hegemony. This is, among other things, through the development of the economy, human capital, and playing a growing role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

1 Jamal Abu Hassan, "On the Margins of the Peace Treaties with Israel [Arabic]," Al-Masri al-Yawm, December 14, 2020.

2 Mustafa Kamil al-Sayyid, "The Normalization with Israel: Between its Supporters and its Adversaries [Arabic]," al-Shorouk al-Yawm, January 3, 2021.

3 Abdullah al-Sinawi, "The Suicide of Logic in the Normalization Barter [Arabic]," al-Shorouk al-Yawm, December 16, 2020.

4 "There is a Struggle on the Arab World's Leadership.. the Gulf believes that they will lead the Region [Arabic]," Al-Ahali, October 7, 2020, p.5.

5 Yasir Burhami, "Why do We Reject the Normalization [Arabic]," Ana Salafi, August 16, 2020.

6 Yasir al-Burhami, "The Abraham Religion between Truth and Delusion (1) [Arabic]," al-Fath, January 13, 2021.

7 "Why Imam al-Tayyib keeps silent about the Emirati-Israeli agreement? [Arabic]," NoonPost, September 6, 2020.

8 "How Arabs Are Going to be Ready to Deal with the Storming Regional Shifts [Arabic]," al-Arab, December 2, 2020, p.6.

9 "The fourth Wave of Normalization with Israel ... Sedition in the Egyptian Street and Complexity for the Government [Arabic]," RT, December 14, 2020.
A clear expression of aversion to normalization was evident last November when Egyptian singer Muhammad Ramadan came under attack due to snapping selfies with an Israeli singer in Dubai. Many called for boycotting of him, and he was described in in social media as a "dog of the Zionists". Egypt's union of artistic syndicates suspended him, and the mainstream media demanded him that he apologize for insulting the feelings of the Egyptians. "Statement of Representative Professions Syndicate [Arabic]," *Facebook*, November 22, 2020; Assaf Gibor, "The Image of Omar Adam in Dubai Aroused Dormant Demons of Hatred of Israel in Cairo [Hebrew]," *Makor Rishon*, November 22, 2020. ;#محمد_رمضان_خاين#محمد_رمضان

10 Muhammad Ibrahim al-Douiri, "Reading Israeli-American Trends towards the Normalization Process [Arabic]," ECSS, October 30, 2020.

11 Farouk Gouida, "Dr. Abd al-Munim Sayyid and the Normalization [Arabic]," al-Ahram, December 26, 2020.

12 "Makram Mohamed Ahmed on the Peace treaty with UAE and Bahrain: Israel has Become an Existing Fact [Arabic]," September 15, 2020; Amin al-Shalabi, "What After the Normalization? [Arabic]," al-Masry al-Youm, December 21, 2020.

13 Jamal Abu Hassan, "On the Margins of the Peace Treaties with Israel [Arabic]," Al-Masri al-Yawm, December 14, 2020; Abd al-Monem Saeed, "The Palestinian Issue in Times of Peace [Arabic]," al-Ahram, November 4, 2020.

14 Mustafa Kamil al-Sayyid, "The Normalization with Israel: Between its Supporters and its Adversaries [Arabic]," al-Shorouk al-Yawm, January 3, 2021; "Dr. Mustafa Kamil al-Sayyid in an interview to al-Ahali: There is a Struggle on the Arab World's Leadership... the Gulf believes that he will lead the Area [Arabic]," Al-Ahali, Issue 1991, October 7, 2020, p.5.

15 Muhammad Ibrahim al-Douiri, "Reading Israeli-American Trends towards the Normalization Process [Arabic]," ECSS, October 30, 2020.

The Palestinians and the Normalization Agreements with Israel

Harel Chorev

The Palestinian response to Israel's normalization agreements with the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco began with total rejection, across the Palestinian political spectrum. However, it is currently evolving, reflecting adaptation to the new regional reality of normalization. This Palestinian flexibility stems from recognition of international and regional political constraints, as well as from an intra-Palestinian clash between approaches. It also reflects growing acknowledgment of regional processes that in the past two decades pushed the Palestinian issue from the top of Arab priorities.

The status of the Palestinian cause has always been a mirror of the state of the inter-Arab sphere and the ability of its players to cooperate. The beginning of this relationship can be traced to 1959, with the establishment of the "Palestinian entity" designed to ease the pressure on Egyptian President Nasser to manage the Palestinian cause, or even earlier. Arab regimes' attention and dedication to the Palestinian cause often stemmed from weakness, and their desire to channel internal popular frustration outwards, towards Israel. However, there also existed an authentic element of solidarity, especially at the popular level. The most recent manifestation of this phenomenon was probably the Saudi-proffered Arab Peace Initiative in 2002 (reaffirmed in 2007).

The current leaders of the Arab states are overwhelmingly members of a generation that emerged after the decline of Nasserist pan-Arabism, and are less empathetic to the Palestinians, as well as less attentive to the Palestinian issue due to the intensity of the internal and external challenges they face. Some of these challenges are a direct result of the "Arab Spring," such as the Syrian civil war, the refugee crises in Jordan and Lebanon, continued instability in Egypt, the ongoing conflicts in Libya and Yemen, the rise of ISIS, and the intra-Sunni Cold War. The threat of Iran, and more recently, the coronavirus, have also preoccupied Arab states. Other problems are much older and reflect an ongoing process since the defeat of pan-Arabism in the 1967 war: each country is focusing on its own national interests. State interests have been predominant in the recent normalizations, such as: UAE's desire to have advanced American weapons; Morocco's aspiration to gain American recognition of its sovereignty in Western Sahara; and Sudan's desire to be removed from the list of State Sponsors of Terrorism and thus gain American aid.

Hazem Saghieh recently wrote that as long as the Arabs are divided into states and societies with diverse interests, it will be difficult to expect "pan-Arab commitment that no longer has meaning in anyone's eyes." He added that those who are claiming that normalization encourages the public to overthrow the Arab regimes – apparently referring to warnings by Palestinian Authority (PA) spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeina – are wrong. In practice, Saghieh claims, the Camp David Accords did not provoke widespread protest in Egypt and as the years went by, the number of countries fighting against Israel decreased. Therefore, he concludes, the Palestinian issue is nothing more than "sad nostalgia, and those who live in nostalgia – risk serious consequences."[1] Saghieh's remarks are an expression of a broader public discourse that reflects erosion in Arab support for the Palestinians, ranging from bloggers to high officials such as Saudi diplomat Prince Bandar bin Sultan.[2]

For a long time, the Palestinian leadership has been in denial about the erosion that has taken place in the last decades in the inter-Arab status of the Palestinian issue. This fact is evident in its response to the normalization agreements, which reflected surprise and unpreparedness. The PA recalled its ambassadors to the UAE and Bahrain for consultations and on September 3, 2020, the leaders of the Palestinian factions announced that they are rejecting any initiatives seeking to "eliminate our national interest and violate our legal rights."

They stressed that the Palestinians condemn all manifestations of normalization with Israel, and see them as a "stab in their backs and in the backs of the Arab and Islamic states." The declaration called on the "free people all over the world to oppose with all the power at their disposal against these plans."[3] On September 15, the day the White House normalization agreement was signed, PA President Mahmoud Abbas and Hamas political bureau chief Ismail Haniyeh agreed on "cooperation between all factions against recognition and normalization with the occupying state." The decision was accompanied by the PA's statement that "what is happening today in the White House will never promote peace in the region, as long as the U.S. and the Israeli occupation do not recognize the right of the Palestinian people to establish an independent and continuous state on June 4, 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital and the inevitably to resolve the refugee issue in accordance with Resolution 194."[4] Abu Rudeina explained that the leadership's measures would be based on the cessation of normalization and annexation, the renunciation of President Trump's so-called Deal of the Century and the fact that no one has the right to speak on behalf of the Palestinian people, while examining ways of dealing with the "plots that are being hatched against the Palestinians."[5]

Additional statements reiterated the claim that the PLO is the only legal representative of the Palestinians, reflecting its belief that normalizations with Israel has violated the Palestinian leadership's exclusive claim to represent the Palestinian people as established in the Arab Summits of Rabat and Algeria in 1974. These statements therefore reflected the old paradigm, which saw the Arabs as one body, whose organs are not allowed to act independently. They also reflected a refusal to recognize the decline in both the centrality of the Palestinian issue and in inter-Arab cohesion.

It appears that the core Palestinian opposition to normalization came predominantly from the entrenched older generation in the Fatah-dominated PA, including figures like Hanan Ashrawi and the late Saab Erekat, the most senior Palestinian diplomat. A day after the signing of the normalization agreement, Erekat called it a "poisoned dagger" that the normalizing states repeatedly stuck in the backs of Palestinians like him who were willing to compromise on a two-state solution. He added, "after all, together with the Arabs, we approved the Arab Initiative in 2002 and suddenly they decide to establish a kind of Arab NATO with Israel against Iran … We tell the Arabs that the real threat to the Arabs is not Iran or Israel but the Arabs themselves, who need to fix the difficult problems within them."[6]

Erekat's death (from coronavirus) a few weeks after the interview, may have bolstered those in the PA among the younger cadres currently enjoying Abbas' support, who think a more practical approach should be adopted. The political and economic constraints that both the PA and Hamas face are quite clear. First, the Palestinian leadership did not expect to reap any domestic political benefit from boycotting the normalizing states. Second, the Gulf states still economically support the PA and even the Gaza Strip, which is under Hamas rule. Some 600,000 Palestinians work in the UAE and others in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, the undeclared patron of the normalization agreements. Third, the PA has an interest in restoring its relations with Israel and reaching agreements with it regarding the transfer of Palestinian funds that Israel holds. With the election of President Biden, the PA announced the resumption of security coordination with Israel, as an expression of its desire to improve relations with the new U.S. administration. The resumption of security coordination further marginalized the "Old Guard" leaders belonging to Erekat's group, including Hanan Ashrawi, who announced her resignation on December 9.

Most importantly, the change in Palestinian policy seems to reflect an approach that calls for working with the normalizing states to lead to a settlement between the Palestinians and Israel "from within," through close engagement, as opposed to the traditional Arab pressure on Israel "from without," through boycotts, military measures, etc. This turnaround, which included returning the Palestinian ambassadors to their stations in the Gulf, and was received relatively quietly even in Hamas, aligns with the normalizing states' claim that their access to Israel in fact protects Palestinian interests: An example would be the UAE's claim that by normalizing relations with Israel it halted

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's plan to annex portions of the Jordan Valley in the West Bank. This raises the question of whether the Palestinians will build on the strategy of dealing with Israel "from within," and whether by working more closely with the UAE and others, it will produce the tangible results the Palestinians expect.

1 Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, December 13, 2020.

2 Al-Arabiya TV, October 5, 2020, "Prince Bandar bin Sultan's interview on Israel-Palestine conflict,"https://english.alarabiya.net/features/2020/10/05/Full-transcript-Part-one-of-Prince-Bandar-bin-Sultan-s-interview-with-Al-Arabiya

3 "The general secretaries of the factions confirm their absolute rejection of all projects aimed at liquidating our national cause and violating our legitimate rights [Arabic]," Wafa, September 3, 2020, https://www.wafa.ps/Pages/Details/8689

4 "He received a call from Haniyeh ... The President: We support all efforts that confirm the unity of the Palestinian position [Arabic]," Wafa, September 15, 2020, https://wafa.ps/Pages/Details/9319

5 "Abu Rudeineh: The leadership's next steps will be based on the unity of the Palestinian position [Arabic]," Wafa, September 15, 2020, https://wafa.ps/Pages/Details/9295

6 IDF Radio, September 16, 2020.

Israel and the Horn of Africa: What are the Odds with the Countries That Still Don't Recognize Israel?

Irit Back

In view of the recent changes in Israel's ties with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco, it is worth examining the prospects for diplomatic relations with additional countries that do not recognize Israel.[1] Of the 29 UN member states that still do not have full diplomatic relations with Israel, nine are African countries: Algeria, Comoros, Djibouti, Libya, Mauritania, Somalia, and Tunisia (all also members of the Arab League), as well as Mali and Niger. This article will evaluate the odds that countries that have not recognized Israel yet will establish some form of diplomatic relations with it in the near future. It will focus on the countries of the Horn of Africa, a region of particular strategic significance for Israel, due to its proximity to the Red Sea, the Arabian Peninsula, and the Gulf of Aden.

In the early 1960s, of all the newly independent African states south of the Sahara, only Somalia and Mauritania refused to establish diplomatic relations with Israel. Although most African states severed their diplomatic relations with Israel in 1972-1973, particularly after the Yom Kippur War, bilateral relations with Israel were gradually resumed after the 1980s.[2] Even before the most recent wave of normalization in the Arab World, Israel has had significant success in the past decade in renewing and deepening relations in Africa.

As noted, due to its geostrategic importance and geographical proximity, the Horn of Africa was always a crucial target of Israeli diplomatic interest (and concerns). While the diplomatic relations with two of the Horn's countries, Ethiopia and Eritrea, are quite stable today, relations with two remaining countries, Somalia and Djibouti, are much more complicated. Somalia is arguably the most hardline African state south of the Sahara on the issue of establishing diplomatic relations with Israel. This turbulent, war-torn country, which since 1991 has been repeatedly defined as an extreme case of a failed state,[3] has traditionally voted against Israel in various international fora, regardless of the issue at hand. In 2019, a Somali Director at the Foreign Ministry, Abdullahi Dool, was fired over controversial tweets he posted concerning Israel and Palestine.[4] While there have been occasional rumors about preliminary contacts between Israelis and Somalis at various levels, they are consistently denied by the Somali side.[5] A broader look at the diplomatic possibilities between Israel and Somalia may, however, illuminate another option for establishing diplomatic relations, which is Somaliland.

Somaliland is a self-declared country since 1991, that the international and African diplomatic communities consider to be part of Somalia. In many respects, it is considered a rare success story within the Horn's turbulent reality. Despite political isolation and limited foreign investment, Somaliland demonstrates impressive political, economic, and technological achievements, and is even considered by some experts as the only performing democracy in the Horn of Africa.[6] In comparison to Somalia's vehement opposition to any form of diplomatic relations with Israel and its unequivocal support for Palestinian positions, many official and unofficial voices in Somaliland stress its commonalities with Israel – both being "success stories despite the odds" – and embrace the potential benefits of economic and technological cooperation with Israel.[7] For Israel, the potential benefits of cooperation with strategically located Somaliland are obvious. At the same time, the chances that Israel will become one of the first countries to officially recognize Somaliland are scant, as such a step could be considered a provocation (recognizing separatist entities) that would threaten Israel's diplomatic aspirations in Africa.

The second Horn country which remains adamant in its refusal to establish diplomatic ties with Israel, is Djibouti. With less than one million citizens, the tiny country that became independent from France only in 1977 has gradually become one of the Horn's most strategic and economic "hot spots." Apart from its strategic alliances with Western powers that maintain military bases there (foremost, Camp Lemonnier, a former base of the French Foreign Legion leased by Djibouti to the USA in 2002, and currently home to many international and African forces), China recently inaugurated a military port in Djibouti, and has expanded its activities and investment to other sectors, including infrastructure construction.[8] Interest in Djibouti's geostrategic location and economic potential (as a major port on the Horn) extends beyond the USA, France and China, to regional actors such as Turkey, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia, who view it as pivotal in their competition for regional preeminence.[9]

Djibouti's refusal to establish diplomatic ties with Israel was recently reinforced in November 2020 by President Ismail Omar Guelleh, who stated in reference to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: "The conditions aren't ripe. All we ask that the government [of Israel] do is make one gesture of peace, and we will make 10 in return. But I'm afraid they'll never do that." At the same time, the President added that Djibouti had no problem with Jews as a people, or with Israelis as a nation: "Some of them even come to Djibouti on business with their passport, and Djibouti's citizens have been able to travel to Israel for 25 years now."[10] Thus, it seemed that in contrast to Somalia, Djibouti holds a somewhat more pragmatic stance.

There is, however, another issue indirectly related to Djibouti that might indicate another path forward for Israel's diplomatic efforts in Africa. This is the sphere of the growing significance of regional organizations for economic, political, ecological, and other forms of cooperation and collaboration between African countries. In the first two decades of the twenty-first century, regional cooperation became more noticeable and extended with increasing frequency into areas such as conflict resolution and intervention in democratic transitions of many African countries.[11]

Since 1986, the headquarters of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) have been located in Djibouti. The establishment of this regional organization, whose member states are Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda, and Eritrea, was motivated primarily by environmental reasons, yet the organization is increasingly involved in security and conflict resolution efforts. One of IGAD's major achievements was its role as a mediator in various phases of the negotiations between the north and south in Sudan, from the initial talks to the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005, which led the foundation to the independence of South Sudan in July 2011.[12] Later, IGAD effectively mediated between the rival parties in the civil war in South Sudan that broke out at 2013.[13]

One might wonder how the mediation efforts of a regional organization such as IGAD are relevant to Israel's diplomatic prospects in the Horn of Africa? One of the major concerns of IGAD member states is environmental crises. Most of them share common vulnerabilities, such as 80% arid and semi-arid lowlands, which, combined with a series of ecological disasters, led to recurring waves of famine since the 1970s.[14] As a pioneer and innovative force in areas such as renewable energy, agro-tech, and water management, Israel's cooperation with IGAD could offer a foothold from which it might establish stronger ties with IGAD member states, including those that currently refuse to establish relations with Israel. So far, Israel's cooperation with IGAD is scant, or even nonexistent.

Strengthening its ties with IGAD – as well as other regional organizations in Africa, such as ECOAWS in the West and SADC in the South – could also serve Israeli aspirations to regaining observer status in the African Union (AU). In fact, Israel was an observer at the AU's predecessor, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), but former Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi blocked a renewal of Israel's observer status when the AU was created in 2002. As an observer at the AU, Israel could mobilize diplomatic support, build strategic partnerships, and gain access to African markets.[15]

Israel's recent diplomatic agreements revealed, however, that Israel's prospects in Africa, both in

the Horn of Africa and elsewhere in the continent, are not too bright at the moment. Its agreement with Morocco was considered by some observers as a "slap in the face of the African Union" (due to its embroilment with the U.S. recognition of Morocco's claims in Western Sahara).[16] These prospects are obviously dependent on broader future developments, such as the Biden Administration's policies regarding Africa, Israel's foreign policy priorities in the aftermath of its upcoming March 2021 elections, and the attitudes of leaders and public opinion in various African countries toward Israeli-African collaboration.

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15 "Israel/Africa: Efforts to Enhance Ties Face Barriers," Oxford Analytica Daily Brief Service, January 12 2018.

16 "Morocco-Israel Normalisation is a Slap in the Face of the African Union," Middle East Monitor, December 11, 2020.

The Arab Minority in Israel and the Normalization Agreements with Arab Countries

Arik Rudnitzky

The role of Israeli Arab citizens in peace relations between Israel and the Arab world has undergone several transformations. Until the 1967 Six-Day War, leftist political parties and some state officials promoted the notion of the Arabs in Israel serving as a "bridge to peace" between Israel and the Arab world. However, in the 1970s and 1980s the Jewish-Arab Israeli Communist Party (ICP), which was the leading political power in the community at the time, promoted an alternative equation, "peace and equality". ICP combined the Arab minority's aspiration for a Palestinian independent state in the 1967 territories and a peace settlement between Israel and the PLO, with the demand for civic (and national) equality for the Arab minority within the Green Line. [1]

Historically, Israeli Arab leadership attitudes on peace between Israel and Arab countries have been derived from a Palestinian perspective. For this reason, they exhibited fierce opposition to the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, which encompassed only autonomy for the Palestinians in the 1967 territories. Describing the treaty as a "betrayal agreement" and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, as an agent of imperialism, ICP leader Tawfiq Zayad called it an "imperialist conspiracy against the Palestinian people, the Arab world and the progressive regimes in the region."[2] A completely different approach was voiced regarding the 1994 Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty. Arab political leaderships fully endorsed it, as this peace settlement came only after Israel officially recognized the PLO in the signing of the 1993 Oslo Accords.

Arab Leadership Reactions to the Normalization Agreements

The normalization agreements between Israel and the Arab countries, signed in the second half of 2020, came as no surprise to the Arab public in Israel. The UAE, Bahrain, and Morocco had already supported the Trump Administration's peace plan, launched in January that year. The political leadership of the Arab public – including members of the Joint Arab List in the Knesset (comprised of the four leading parties in the Arab sector), as well as popular and religious leaders – highlights the common denominator of the "Deal of the Century" and the normalization agreements and expresses fierce opposition to them, on the grounds that these agreements harm the Palestinian cause. The Joint Arab List voted against these agreements in the Knesset plenum. The day after the signing on the normalization agreements on the White House lawns, Ayman Odeh, chairman of the Joint List said: "The day when we celebrate peace will come – but it has not arrived yet. Tomorrow the occupation will continue, Palestinians will continue to live under military rule, settlers will continue to take over their lands and soldiers will continue to stand on barriers and enter their homes. The fancy ceremony in Washington is not a historic peace treaty but a historic weapons deal."[3] Ahmad Tibi, a veteran Arab Knesset member, insisted that "the state should strive for a peace deal with its Arab citizens before any normalization with the Gulf states or Sudan [...] a peace based on one paragraph: all citizens are equal."[4]

Criticism is also directed at the rulers of the UAE and Bahrain for signing agreements with Israel, while completely ignoring the will of their own peoples. Jamal Zahalka, leader of Balad nationalist party (a component of the Joint List), said: "Should

a public opinion poll be carried out now in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia or Oman, it will indicate that a vast majority of the public is opposed to the agreements with Israel and to the abandonment of the Palestinians."[5] Zahalka also criticized the signing of the Sudanese-Israeli normalization agreement in January 2021, calling upon the Sudanese people to overthrow its government.[6] Ahmad Hazem, a political commentator, said that while in the West the political leadership's decisions reflects the popular will, "the Arab case is absolutely contrary, especially with regards to the Palestinian problem and the question of recognizing Israel."[7]

The criticism by the Islamic movement is based on religious grounds. Sheikh Ibrahim Sarsur, former head of the Islamic movement and former Knesset member, said that there is no political or moral justification for the agreement between Israel and the UAE, and above all, no religious one. Sarsur noted that the use of the historical Treaty of Hudaybiyyah as a justification to normalization with Israel today is wrong, as Prophet Mohammed did not intend to normalize his relations with Mecca's infidel residents, nor did he recognize their rule in the city. Sarsur concluded that normalization with Israel is no less than "a betrayal of the religious and national fundamentals."[8] Sheikh Hussam Abu Leil, an Imam and leader of the non-parliamentary Trust and Reform party, criticized the normalization agreement between Morocco and Israel, stating that "the fact that a regime heading the 'Jerusalem Committee' promoted normalization is not just a knife in the back of the Palestinian problem, but also in that of Jerusalem and the Al-Aqsa Mosque."[9]

To sum up, the political and religious leadership is following its traditional position holding that the Palestinian problem stands at the heart of the peace process between the Arab World and Israel. According to this viewpoint, the demand for a "comprehensive peace," which ensures the Palestinian people receive its right to a state, means that no Arab country is allowed to break Arab unity and make a separate peace with Israel.

Popular Attitudes on Normalization with Arab Countries

However, the Arab public, as opposed to its leadership, is no longer preoccupied with the Palestinian problem as it was in the past. This is the result of a gradual process of integration into the state, which is termed in the literature as "Israelization".[10] It is also affected by the crisis in the Palestinian national movement following the political split between the Fatah regime in the West Bank and the Hamas rule in the Gaza Strip. There are other voices in the Arab public explicitly supporting the normalization agreements. Salman Masalha, a well-known publicist, said "every intelligent person knows that the normalization agreement between Israel and the United Arab Emirates does not intend to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict," adding that "the Arabs in the country should not hesitate to welcome every measure of normalization undertaken between Israel and the Arab world."[11]

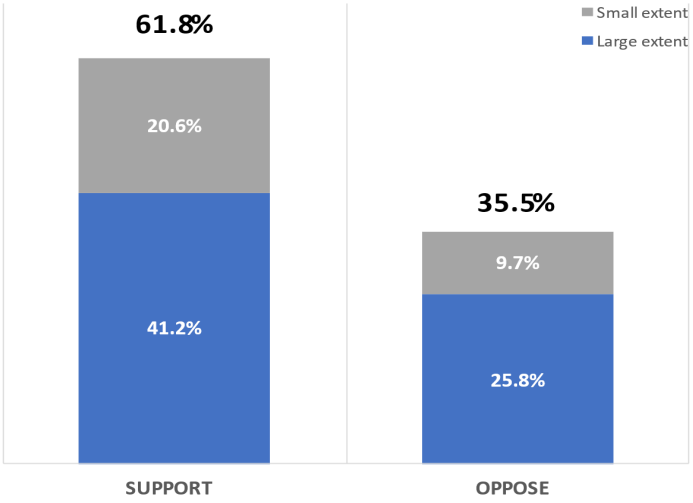
Prominent opinion leaders in the Arab society directed fierce criticism at the Joint List's opposition to the normalization agreements. Jalal Bana described the Joint List's conduct as "an unforgivable mistake for history to judge. [...] By voting against the agreement the Joint List members proved that not only they are against war, they are also against peace, and to a large extent – against each Arab country which is interested in having a normal and friendly relations with Israel."[12] Riyad Ali, a well-known media figure, said that while one can understand why the Joint List insists that peace in the Middle East must be achieved through a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he "cannot understand how such a vote [against the Israel-UAE agreement] serves the voters who have sent the Joint List to the Knesset."[13]

Contrary to the position of the political leadership, it appears that the public no longer links between the promotion of peace in the Middle East and a settlement of the Palestinian problem. A public opinion poll among Arab citizens of Israel, carried out by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung a couple of months after the signing of the Abraham Accords, clearly indicates that the majority

of the Arab community in Israel (61.8% of the respondents) support the normalization agreements between Israel and the Arab countries. The reasons are mainly the hope for economic prosperity, as well as for a better integration of Israel in the Middle East region and a greater understanding of the Jewish majority for Arab culture. However, one third of the Arab public (35.5% of the respondents) opposes these agreements, first and foremost because of the traditional belief that the normalization agreements come at the expense of a solution to the Palestinian problem.[14]

Conclusion

Arab citizens of Israel wish to enjoy the fruits of peace, here and now. They no longer want to serve as "bridge to peace," nor do they combine the desire for peace with their struggle for full equality within the country's borders. However, their struggle for full equality is not over yet as Jewish-Arab relations within Israel are still affected by the wider Jewish-Arab conflict. They hope that the wider the circle of normalization between Israel and its Arab neighbors will be, the wider and deeper will be their full integration into the fabric of life within Israel.



26.0%	The trade with the Gulf states will improve the economic situation in Israel.	The normalization agreements are at the expense of a solution to the Palestinian problem.	**22.1%**
11.7%	Israel will open up to the Arab world and will no longer be a foreign element in the region.	These Arab countries are dictatorships that do not respect their people.	**5.1%**
8.3%	More Arab citizens will find employment in commercial companies or in government ministries that will establish connections with the Arab countries.	The government will concentrate on foreign policy and will neglect the problems of the Arab community in Israel.	**4.9%**
7.4%	The Jewish majority will exhibit greater openness and understanding toward Arab culture and civilization.	Israel will gain official recognition from Arab countries even though it continues to define itself as a "Jewish state".	**1.7%**
7.2%	These agreements will contribute to achieving a peace agreement with the Palestinians.		

Figure 1: Do you support or oppose the normalization agreements between Israel and Arab countries?

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4 Ahmad Tibi, "Do you want to sign on a peace treaty with Israel's Arab citizens? [Hebrew]," Maariv, October 1, 2020.

5 Jamal Zahalka, "We, the Palestinians, need new political power that speaks on justice and equality [Hebrew]," Local Call Magazine, September 9, 2000.

6 Jeremy Sharon, "Joint List condemns normalization with Sudan." Jerusalem Post, October 24, 2020

7 Ahmad Hazem, "The normalization between the regimes' acceptance and the peoples' refusal [Arabic]," Kull al-Arab, January 10, 2021 .

8 Sheikh Ibrahim Abdullah Sarsur, "No justification for normalization with the occupation [Arabic]," Kull al-Arab, September 3, 2020.

9 Kull al-Arab [Arabic], December 13, 2020.

10 Sammy Smooha, Still Playing by the Rules: Index of Arab-Jewish Relations in Israel, 2015 (Haifa: Pardes Publishers, 2017).

11 Salman Masalha, "What upset the Joint List's members? [Hebrew]," Haaretz, August 23, 2020.

12 Jalal Bana, "The Joint List's opposition to the agreement – an unforgiven mistake [Hebrew]," Israel Hayom, October 17, 2020.

13 Riyad Ali, "Never wasted a chance to waste a chance: Why has the Joint List voted against the agreement with the UAE? [Hebrew]," Israeli Public Broadcasting Corporation (KAN) web site, October 17, 2020: https://www.kan.org.il/item/?itemId=78635

14 The poll was carried out in November 2020 among a representative sample of the adult Arab community, with 500 respondents: https://dayan.org/content/public-opinion-poll-among-arab-citizens-israel

Sunni Jihadists and the Abraham Accords: Predictable Responses to a Changing Regional Reality

Adam Hoffman

Responses by Sunni jihadi groups to the Abraham Accords were few and predictable. While the two major global jihadi groups, al-Qaeda and Islamic State (IS), did issue statements on the Accords, the signing of the normalization agreements between the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Israel received far less attention from jihadists than other regional and global developments. They predictably called for attacks following the signing of the agreements and condemned the Arab Gulf States which signed them, but the Accords did not occupy a central place in jihadists' discourse since their announcement.

In response to the Accords, al-Qaeda's "General Command" issued a statement in Arabic and English which stated that "the al-Qaeda Organization ... strongly condemn[s] this step taken by the Bedouin rulers of the House of Khalifa, the House of Zaid and those who follow in their footsteps among the Zionists in the House of Saud" – derogatory terms for the ruling regimes of Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, respectively. The statement also condemned "the complete sell out of the Palestinian cause by the rulers of the Gulf statelets," and their normalization of relations with Israel. Al-Qaeda ended the statement with a call to Muslims to attack "Zionists Jews and non-Jews" (a reference to Arab rulers normalizing relations with Israel) "in the Arabian Peninsula or in other parts of the Muslim World."[1]

Like other statements by jihadi groups and leaders, al-Qaeda's statement on the Abraham Accords was meant to show that it was staying abreast of current developments in the Middle East and remains relevant to shaping political trends in the region. Despite this, both the timing and the content of the statement had the opposite effect: al-Qaeda's commentary on the normalization agreements was published almost a month after their signing, and thus indicated an organization which had serious difficulties in releasing media statements in a timely manner. This may reflect broader leadership problems in al-Qaeda: on November 13, analyst Hassan Hassan claimed that al-Qaeda's leader Ayman Zawahiri died a month before of natural causes.[2] To date, Zawahiri's death has not been officially confirmed by al-Qaeda, but the organization is already considered in recent years by many analysts to be an outdated and less inspiring organization than IS. Al-Qaeda's very late response to the Accords (relatively speaking, given the extensive coverage of the normalization agreements in regional and international media) may therefore be another indication of an organization in decline.

The content of al-Qaeda's message also presented outdated motifs: the organization has long condemned Arab rulers as agents of the West, and has attacked and de-legitimized the ruling family of Saudi Arabia since the 1990s.[3] In June 2018, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) has also specifically condemned the cultural and economic reforms initiated by Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman, describing them as "the sale of the sharia."[4] Finally, the call to attack "Zionists Jews and non-Jews in the Arabian Peninsula or in other parts of the Muslim World" strongly echoes Osama bin Laden's famous fatwa from 1998, in which he stated that "the ruling to kill the Americans and their allies – civilians and military – is an individual duty for every Muslim" in response to what he described as the American occupation of the Arabian Peninsula.[5] Al-Qaeda's response to the normalization agreements with Israel therefore didn't present any new ideas from the founding organization of global jihad; calling on Muslims to attack Jews and Arab rulers who normalize relations with Israel should hardly come as a surprise, given al-Qaeda's long track record of terrorist attacks against West-

ern targets, including in Saudi Arabia, as well as its calls for terrorist attacks against the Saudi regime.

Much like al-Qaeda's slow response to the Accords, IS also released a late statement after the signing of the normalization agreements. On October 18, the organization released an audio statement by its official spokesman, Abu Hamza al-Muhajir al-Qurashi, in which he attacked the "*tawaghit*" ([idols] – IS' derogatory term for Arab rulers), "the donkeys of knowledge" (IS' derogatory term for Muslim religious scholars) and their "supporters" for the normalization agreements signed with Israel, which he described as a betrayal of Islam. The statement also called for physical attacks on Saudi Arabia because of the Kingdom's indirect support to the UAE and Bahrain in their moves towards Israel. Al-Qurashi called on IS supporters in the Kingdom to "start by hitting and destroying oil pipelines, factories and facilities which are the source [of income] of the tyrant government," in order to sabotage Saudi Arabia's economic infrastructure.[6]

It is unclear what effect IS' call for attacks in Saudi Arabia will have; IS similarly called for attacks against Americans following then-US President Donald Trump's decision in December 2017 to move the US Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, to little effect. Furthermore, IS' efforts in the past few years have been focused on rebuilding its capabilities since the destruction of its physical caliphate, and on carrying out low-level attacks in Iraq and Syria, as well as on expanding its operations in Sub-Saharan Africa.[7] Condemning the Abraham Accords as a betrayal of Islam and calling for attacks in Saudi Arabia therefore seem like yet another attempt to re-attract international attention, rather than a shift in its regional strategy.

Despite the two organizations' statements regarding the Abraham Accords, the signing of the normalization agreements with Israel attracted far less attention from Sunni jihadi groups compared to other global and regional developments. The coronavirus pandemic, for example, has led to dozens of statements by different jihadi groups,[8] and French President Emmanuel Macron's comments on Islam in France have similarly led to much commentary and calls for attacks.[9] The relatively subdued response of Sunni jihadists to the Abraham Accords shows the declining importance of the Palestinian issue to global jihadists, but more importantly, the marginal role jihadists themselves have in shaping geopolitical developments in today's Middle East. Unable to actually impact Muslim states' foreign policies and the emerging geopolitical power balance in the Middle East, jihadists are – in the words of former IS spokesman Abu Muhammad al-Adnani – left to "die in their rage."[10]

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