

## The Abraham Accords

The Abraham Accords are a series of treaties normalizing diplomatic relations between Israel, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco, facilitated by the U.S. Administration<sup>i</sup> between August and December, 2020. In the span of five short months, these four Arab states joined Egypt and Jordan in making peace with Israel. The agreements were called “The Abraham Accords” in honor of Abraham - the patriarch of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam<sup>ii</sup>.

### **The Abraham Accords began with the groundbreaking Israel-UAE agreement in August, 2020.**

- The UAE and Israel have never fought militarily, but the UAE did participate in the Arab League boycott against Israel, which had been in place since Israel’s establishment in 1948<sup>iii</sup>.
- The agreement was the result of shared interests regarding threats posed by Iran’s regime and years of quiet/secret cooperation.
- Israel opened an international diplomatic office in UAE in 2015<sup>iv</sup>, Mossad chief Yossi Cohen made several secret trips there, and the two governments cooperated to fight the coronavirus pandemic<sup>v</sup>.
- Both countries are interested in diversifying their economies and engaging with each other to achieve that goal.<sup>vi</sup>
- Israel agreed to freeze its plans for annexation/application of sovereignty in the West Bank as part of the deal<sup>vii</sup>.
- The agreement has led not only to diplomatic ties, but also cultural exchanges and grassroots cooperation between people in both countries. Since the accords were signed in September, 130,000 Israelis have visited Dubai<sup>viii</sup> and trade between Israel and the UAE has reached 1 billion AED<sup>ix</sup>.
- In a move widely seen as tied to the Abraham Accords, the U.S. agreed to sell advanced F35 warplanes to the UAE<sup>1</sup>. This raised concerns among Israeli security officials that these planes could be used to threaten Israel in the future. U.S. and Israeli officials have discussed the issue and seem to have reached an understanding about ensuring Israel can effectively defend itself.

### **Israel and Bahrain announced a similar agreement in September, 2020<sup>2</sup>.**

- They initially signed a declaration of peace, agreeing to normalize diplomatic relations, negotiate a formal peace treaty, and not antagonize each other. Officials from the two countries then began working together on the details of how they would cooperate in various areas.
- Similar to the UAE, there was longtime quiet cooperation between Israel and Bahrain. The King of Bahrain denounced the Arab League boycott of Israel in 2017<sup>3</sup>. In 2020, Bahrain hosted the “peace

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<sup>1</sup> Aaron Mehta and Joe Gould, “Just hours before Biden’s inauguration, the UAE and US come to a deal on F-35 sales”, Defense News, January 20, 2021, at <https://www.defensenews.com/global/mideast-africa/2021/01/20/just-hours-before-bidens-inauguration-the-uae-and-us-come-to-a-deal-on-f-35-sales/>

<sup>2</sup> Ilan ben Zion, “Israel, Bahrain sign deal establishing formal ties”, AP News, October 18, 2020, at <https://apnews.com/article/bahrain-israel-saudi-arabia-benjamin-netanyahu-manama-c096793c544ab25568286bbcb2e9c3af>

<sup>3</sup> Dov Lieber, “Bahrain’s king opposes Arab boycott of Israel, Jewish leader says”, Times of Israel, September 17, 2020, at <https://www.timesofisrael.com/bahrain-king-opposes-arab-boycott-of-israel-jewish-leader-says/>

to prosperity” conference<sup>x</sup>, which was led by the U.S. Administration and boycotted by Palestinian leaders.

- The UAE and Bahrain have since announced they would cooperate with Israel to present a unified front to the U.S. regarding the Iran nuclear deal and the Iranian regime’s ballistic missile program<sup>xi</sup>.

#### **Israel and Sudan signed a normalization agreement in October, 2020.**

- This agreement is more complicated than the others because Sudan's government is going through a transition with the stated goal of becoming more democratic<sup>xii</sup>.
- There are some difficulties in implementing a normalization agreement, namely that Sudan must first repeal a domestic law that prohibits relations with Israel. Progress has also been slowed by opposition from some groups in Sudan and a precarious transition in the government<sup>xiii</sup>.

#### **Israel and Morocco announced a normalization agreement in December, 2020<sup>xiv</sup>.**

- Morocco had quiet diplomatic relations with Israel prior to open normalization<sup>xv</sup>. This was partly based on the long history of Jews in Morocco, many of whom fled the country to Israel<sup>xvi</sup>. The Moroccan government has made efforts to preserve Jewish history and welcome Moroccan Jews who visit the country.
- The U.S. recognized Morocco’s claims to the disputed territory of Western Sahara, as an incentive for the Moroccan government to normalize relations with Israel<sup>xvii</sup>. This was a controversial decision and it is unclear if the Biden Administration will adopt the same stance.

#### **Palestinian leaders strongly condemned the Abraham Accords.**

- The Palestinian Authority called the UAE-Israel agreement a total betrayal and attacked the UAE<sup>4</sup>.
- Hamas reacted as expected, saying the agreement “served the Zionist narrative” and that Arab states should continue to engage in anti-normalization<sup>5</sup>.
- These statements led to backlash in the Arab world, including a lengthy interview by former Saudi Ambassador to the U.S., Prince Bandar bin Sultan, levelling unprecedented and harsh public criticism of against the Palestinian leadership<sup>6</sup>.
- According to a poll by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, 80 percent of Palestinians “describe their feelings towards [the Abraham Accords] as: **treason, abandonment, and insult.**” <sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Oliver Holmes, Hazem Balousha, Michael Safi, and Bethan McKernan, “‘We feel betrayed’: Palestinians fear cost of Arab states’ deals with Israel”, The Guardian, September 22, 2020 at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/22/we-feel-betrayed-palestinians-fear-cost-of-arab-states-deals-with-israel>

<sup>5</sup> Al Jazeera English Staff, “How the world reacted to UAE, Israel normalising diplomatic ties”, Al Jazeera English, August 15, 2020 at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/8/15/how-the-world-reacted-to-uae-israel-normalising-diplomatic-ties>

<sup>6</sup> Reuters Staff, “Saudi former intelligence chief slams Palestinian leadership's criticism of UAE-Israel deal”, Reuters, October 5, 2020 at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-gulf-saudi/saudi-former-intelligence-chief-slams-palestinian-leaderships-criticism-of-uae-israel-deal-idUSKBN26Q33U>

<sup>7</sup> Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, “Public Opinion Poll No (77)”, September 15, 2020 at <https://www.pcpsr.org/sites/default/files/Poll%2077%20English%20full%20text%20September2020.pdf>

- Dennis Ross, a former Middle East peace envoy for the U.S., wrote that the UAE’s move “should also signal to Palestinians that others are not going to wait for them” to make peace with Israel<sup>xviii</sup>.

**Other Arab and Muslim states such as Oman, Indonesia, and Saudi Arabia are rumored to be considering normalization with Israel as well.**

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<sup>i</sup> US State Department, The Abraham Accords, at <https://www.state.gov/the-abraham-accords/>

<sup>ii</sup> Steve Mnuchin speech, US Department of the Treasury, October 20, 2020, at <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm1195>

<sup>iii</sup> Martin A. Weiss, Arab League Boycott of Israel, Federation of American Scientists, August 25, 2017, at <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33961.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> John Reed and Simeon Kerr, “Israel to open diplomatic mission in UAE”, Financial Times, November 27, 2015, at <https://www.ft.com/content/7b1193b8-94f1-11e5-b190-291e94b77c8f>

<sup>v</sup> TOI Staff, “Mossad chief meets with UAE security head in Abu Dhabi, Times of Israel”, Times of Israel, August 18, 2020, at <https://www.timesofisrael.com/mossad-chief-meets-with-uae-security-in-abu-dhabi/>

<sup>vi</sup> Bryan Cave Leighton Paisner Law Firm, “Welcoming opportunities: The benefits of UAE-Israel cross-border investment” Arabian Business Global, October 19, 2020, at <https://www.arabianbusiness.com/business/453049-welcoming-opportunities-the-benefits-of-uae-israel-cross-border-investment>

<sup>vii</sup> Jacob Magid, UAE ambassador: ‘Abraham Accords were about preventing annexation’, Times of Israel, 2 February 2021, at <https://www.timesofisrael.com/uae-ambassador-abraham-accords-were-about-preventing-annexation/>

<sup>viii</sup> Middle East Eye Staff, 130,000 Israelis visited UAE since normalisation, Middle East Eye, February 2, 2021 at <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20210202-130000-israelis-visited-uae-since-normalisation/>

<sup>ix</sup> Reuters, Dubai, Israel trade reaches 1 billion dirham since normalisation -Dubai media office, Reuters, 30 January 2021, at <https://news.trust.org/item/20210130080117-yhx3g>

<sup>x</sup> Staff writer, “US-led ‘Peace to Prosperity’ workshop kicks off in Bahrain”, Al Arabiya English, June 25, 2019, at <https://english.alarabiya.net/business/economy/2019/06/25/US-led-workshop-kicks-off-in-Bahrain-with-top-business-people-government-officials>

<sup>xi</sup> Lazar Berman, “UAE, Bahrain: We need ‘unified voice’ with Israel on Iran’s missiles, nukes”, Times of Israel, January 26, 2021 at <https://www.timesofisrael.com/uae-bahrain-we-need-unified-voice-with-israel-on-irans-missiles-nukes/>

<sup>xii</sup> Areig Elhag, “Sudan-Israel Relations: Ensuring Civilian Buy-In During a Democratic Transition”, Fikra Forum at the Washington Institute, August 26, 2020, at <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/sudan-israel-relations-ensuring-civilian-buy-during-democratic-transition>

<sup>xiii</sup> I24 Staff, “Intel minister: It will take ‘several months’ before Israel-Sudan deal cemented”, i24 News, January 29, 2021, at <https://www.i24news.tv/en/news/israel/diplomacy-defense/1611865400-intel-minister-says-it-will-take-several-months-before-israel-sudan-deal-finalized>

<sup>xiv</sup> Avie Schneider, “Morocco Becomes Latest Arab Country To Normalize Ties With Israel”, NPR, December 10, 2020, at <https://www.npr.org/2020/12/10/945033413/morocco-becomes-latest-arab-country-to-normalize-ties-with-israel>

<sup>xv</sup> Elie Podeh and Einat Levi, “Israel and Morocco: Major Potential for Warm Peace”, Morocco World News, December 17, 2020 at <https://www.morocroworldnews.com/2020/12/328978/israel-and-morocco-major-potential-for-warm-peace/>

<sup>xvi</sup> Mohamed Chtatou, “Understanding Moroccan “Normalization” with Israel”, Fikra Forum at the Washington Institute, January 5, 2021 at <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/understanding-moroccan-normalization-israel>

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<sup>xvii</sup> Toms Dumpis, FM: US Western Sahara Recognition a Step Towards 'Lasting Stability', Morocco World News, February 4, 2021 at <https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2021/02/334086/fm-us-western-sahara-recognition-a-step-towards-lasting-stability/>

<sup>xviii</sup> Joyce Karam and Willy Lowry, "UAE ties with Israel show how region is changing, former US envoy says", National News, September 14, 2020 at <https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/mena/uae-ties-with-israel-show-how-region-is-changing-former-us-envoy-says-1.1077731>