

SECURITY INSIGHTS



The Abraham Accords: Paradigm Shift or Realpolitik?

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Executive Summary

This paper analyzes the motives and calculations of Israel, the United States, and the United Arab Emirates—the signatories of the Abraham Accords—which were signed on the White House Lawn on September 15, 2020. The Accords normalize relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Israel and Bahrain. The agreements signed by Israel with two Gulf States symbolizes a major shift in Middle Eastern geopolitics, which have long been characterized by the refusal of Arab Gulf states to engage in talks with Israel. However, the possible larger consequences of the agreement cannot be fully understood without considering the complex set of domestic and foreign policy causes that prompted the parties to come to the negotiating table.

By signing the agreement, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was able to avoid the controversial West Bank annexation plan, which, if executed, could prove disastrous for him both at home and abroad. On the other hand, the UAE, while officially claiming credit for preventing the annexation, is now able to establish full diplomatic relations with Israel, with great advantages both to its economy and military security. For the Trump administration, the Abraham Accord represents the President's first real foreign policy achievement, a victory especially welcome so close to the U.S. elections. This will be popular with the president's conservative, pro-Israel base, and an achievement that Democrats, Biden in particular, will have difficulties critiquing. Geopolitically, the deal strengthens the informal anti-Iran alliance in the region, increasing pressure on Tehran and strengthening U.S. ties with its key Middle East allies.

In conclusion, three alternative trajectories are presented. The agreement can motivate additional Arab nations to negotiate bilaterally to normalize relations with Israel. However, realists would point out that even if it succeeds, the agreement would again ignore the most controversial regional issues, such as the Palestinian question or the tense relationship with Tehran. In the worst-case scenario, this would lead to isolation of Iran and the Palestinians, provoking their (most likely violent) reaction.

Introduction

Hailed by some as a historic breakthrough that heralds a new era of peace in the Middle East, the Abraham Accords between Israel and the United Arab Emirates announced on August 15, 2020 have been met by relatively little fanfare beyond the first news cycles and the predictable White House signing ceremony on September 15. Some experts argue that the

agreement is not as groundbreaking as claimed and that its impact is vastly overblown.¹ However, the agreement is by no means inconsequential, and while expectations of all twenty-two Arab states making peace with Israel in a domino effect is very likely exaggerated, the addition of Bahrain to the Accords on September 11th showed that their effect on security and prosperity in the region could be far-reaching, with a potential impact for years to come and in more ways than its architects could foresee. However, who wins and who loses from the Abraham Accord is still being debated.

The deal symbolizes a geopolitical shift in Middle Eastern security, and a significant step in the gradual but deliberate long-term efforts of Israel to normalize relations with its Arab neighbors without having to compromise on the Palestinian issue. It marks the end of Arab ideological rejection of the famous “No’s” laid down in the Khartoum Declaration of 1967 (“No” to recognition of and negotiation and peace with Israel). It also displays the demise of the Palestinian veto power on Israel’s role and relationships in the neighborhood and sunsets any remnants of Israel’s “Periphery Doctrine,”² in which it was allied to non-Arab states on the periphery of the region, such as Turkey, Iran, and Ethiopia against the “resistance front”³ made up of the Arab states opposing the Jewish state. It reinforces U.S. influence on key Gulf States in reversal of the overall trend of the current administration’s policies to lessen U.S. military engagement in the region. On the surface, it looks like realpolitik has gained the upper hand. But has it?

As always, because the full extent of the agreement, with its possible secret clauses, is not yet known; the truth is more complex. One poignant question concerning Israel’s long-term veto on the sale of sophisticated military equipment to Arab states, to include F-35 planes and advanced drones, was immediately raised, with top officials in Israel and the UAE quickly contradicting one another.⁴

What is clear is the fact that the publicity around the announcement of the accord has a welcome distraction effect for its main signatories, most notably, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, who is facing a tough legal challenge in a corruption probe against him, but also the UAE crown prince as well as the U.S. President and his closest advisor, his son-in-law, Jared Kushner. Hence, the agreement in all its facets increasingly looks like a Middle Eastern Mezze/smorgasbord with international, regional, and personal issues at stake. These range from petty issues such as Netanyahu’s legal troubles, to larger geostrategic issues, such as the regional defense posture against a continued Iranian missile threat.

From the outside it looks like a high-level political horse trade, where only those closest to the bargaining know the real merits of the deal and the likely long-term effects. The issue of suspending the Israeli annexation of the West Bank is a case in point. It provided both countries with a token bargaining chip; the appearance (for Israel) of having made “tough concessions” on an issue that was clearly not conducive to its own security, while the UAE, for whom it was at most a side note, could present it as a major achievement for the good of

¹ Dalia Dassa Kaye, “Why Israel-UAE deal doesn't merit the hype,” *Al-Monitor*, August 17, 2020, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/08/israel-uae-agreement-earthquake-egypt-bahrain-oman.html>.

² Leon Hadar, “The Collapse of Israel’s ‘Periphery Doctrine,’” *Foreign Policy*, June 16, 2010, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2010/06/26/the-collapse-of-israels-periphery-doctrine/>.

³ Ben Hubbard, Isabel Kershner, Anne Bernard, “Iran, Deeply Embedded in Syria, Expands ‘Axis of Resistance,’” *New York Times*, February 19, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/19/world/middleeast/iran-syria-israel.html>.

⁴ See “UAE Nixes Meeting with US, Israel over F-35 Arms Deal Row: Report,” *Al Jazeera*, August 25, 2020,

the Palestinian people, and the region as a whole.⁵ As Itamar Rabinovich, former Israeli ambassador to Washington, now famously said, Netanyahu managed to “turn lemons into lemonade.” “Instead of Israeli annexation for a Palestinian state, they made it Israeli non-annexation in return for peace with the UAE.” Kushner, he said, was basically “generating an asset out of nothing.”⁶

Domestic and international stakes are commonly intertwined in politics in the Middle East and even more visibly so during an American presidential election season. While Kissinger famously observed that Israel had no foreign policy, only domestic policy, the same could also be said for the other stakeholders. However, the Abraham Accords add another layer to that observation as they are a prime example of how foreign policy can serve not only domestic priorities, but also personal ones. The individual actors involved in this deal all score much-needed personal victories that seem almost completely unrelated to the long-term effects on peace and security. Thus, the statement that the Abraham Accords represent a major shift in security priorities from ideological rejection to pragmatic realpolitik is arguably overshadowed by the more cynical view that the main purpose and timing of these agreements are directly tied to the political fortunes of their main proponents in Israel, the UAE, and the United States.⁷ Any positive impact on regional stability would thus be a fortunate side effect that can by no means be guaranteed. Still, there is no doubt that these accords are a major diplomatic accomplishment and, the cynical interpretation notwithstanding, that they warrants a thorough analysis of winners and losers both in the short- and long-term. Below we will look at the actors who are in the spotlight as well as those who have been sidelined. We will try to assess the interests and calculations of the actors and discuss possible future trajectories.

Israel's Interests & Calculations

As Netanyahu gleefully notes, his doctrine of “Peace for Peace, and Peace through Strength”⁸ has finally paid off. If Israel can negotiate bilaterally to normalize relations with other states, it will be under no pressure to negotiate under the threat of violence or to commit to preconditioned negotiations with the Palestinians. The agreement thus represents both an important foreign policy achievement and a much-needed public distraction for his domestic audience while he continues to face corruption charges and an imminent court case. As a political move, excluding his two main rivals and governing coalition partners, Defense Minister Benny Gantz and Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi, effectively elevates his status in the run-up to possibly yet another national election.⁹ He can claim the deal as his personal achievement, something his two more moderate partners will find hard to swallow both in principle and at the ballot box.

⁵ See “UAE’s Gargash Says Israeli Pact Is ‘Sovereign’ Decision,” Interview with Anwar Gargash, Minister of State of Foreign Affairs of the UAE, *Bloomberg Media*, August 14, 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/videos/2020-08-14/uae-s-gargash-says-israeli-pact-is-sovereign-decision-video>.

⁶ Itamar Rabinovich in an interview with Thomas Friedman, “A Geopolitical Earthquake Just Hit the Mideast,” *New York Times*, Aug 13, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/13/opinion/israel-uae.html>.

⁷ Michael H. Fuchs, “Trump’s Foreign Policy is Cynical and Self-Interested,” *The Guardian*, January 31, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jan/31/trump-israel-palestinians-foreign-policy-peace-plan>.

⁸ Amnon Lord, “Netanyahu: My efforts to counter Iran brought us closer to Arab countries,” *Israel Hayom*, August 17, 2020, <https://www.israelhayom.com/2020/08/17/netanyahu-my-efforts-to-counter-iran-brought-us-closer-to-arab-countries/>.

⁹ Toi Staff, “Netanyahu says he kept Gantz and Ashkenazi in the dark to avoid leak of the UAE deal,” *The Times of Israel*, August 17, 2020, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-says-he-kept-gantz-in-the-dark-to-avoid-leak-of-uae-deal/#gs.gzjxtz>.

The agreement furthermore allowed Netanyahu to side-step the now thrice-promised annexation of parts of the West Bank, a move spurred by ambiguous language in the Trump Peace Plan, and which Netanyahu understood well was potentially disastrous for the country. Despite the support of his very vocal right-wing settler base, annexation is not unanimously supported among the Israeli electorate.¹⁰ To be sure, the Israeli security establishment has continuously cautioned against it, the Arab world (notably also the UAE) has warned of the potential fall-out, and the Trump administration has refrained from publicly declaring its support.

In an Op-ed in *Israel Hayom* in June, the UAE Ambassador to the U.S., Yousef Al-Otaiba, cautioned against it, warning that “annexation will certainly and immediately upend Israeli aspirations for improved security, economic and cultural ties with the Arab world and with UAE.”¹¹

In addition, the question of annexation divided Netanyahu’s base. While some pro-settler groups are disappointed, the question of annexation is quite controversial even in settler communities, as many hardline settlements lie outside of the proposed zone for annexation (Area C).¹² These settlers are adamantly opposed and have shown that they are not afraid of resorting to violence both against Palestinians and their own government.¹³ Hence, Netanyahu needed a way out and the UAE was happy to provide it.

By preserving the territorial status quo in Israel, Netanyahu was also able to continue to ignore the Palestinians, reinforcing his perspective that the Palestinian leadership is an untrustworthy partner in peace. By doing so, he gained a valuable distraction from the peace process whilst at the same time scoring profitable bilateral economic relations with key Gulf states, first the UAE and then Bahrain. Some argue that it was a clear message to presidential hopeful Joe Biden signaling that he, Netanyahu is ready to “do business” with him.¹⁴ Such a message would be understandable, given that Biden has reiterated his disagreement with many policy decisions by the Trump administration in the region, including the withdrawal of support for the Palestinian Authority. It would be in Netanyahu’s interest to restore this relationship, given his public humiliation of Biden in 2010, when in a “brutally contemptuous rebuff” to American peacemaking,¹⁵ Israel announced a plan to build 1600 homes in a disputed area of East Jerusalem, as the Vice President was visiting Jerusalem.

The second part of Netanyahu’s foreign policy doctrine concerns the threat posed by Iran and the U.S. role in helping him confront that threat. Trump’s confrontational policies towards Iran and the withdrawal of the U.S. from the “Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action,” also known as the Iran Nuclear Deal (JCPOA), had been closely coordinated with Israel, much to Netanyahu’s liking. If the Democrats take the White House, it leaves Netanyahu with Biden,

¹⁰ Dina Kraft, “Haaretz Poll: 42% of Israelis Back West Bank Annexation, Including Two-state Supporters,” *Haaretz*, March 25, 2019, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/israeli-palestinian-conflict-solutions/.premium-42-of-israelis-back-west-bank-annexation-including-two-state-supporters-1.7047313>.

¹¹ Yousef Al-Otaiba, “Annexation will be a Serious Setback for Better Relations with the Arab World,” *Ynet News*, June 12, 2020, <https://www.ynetnews.com/article/H1Gu1ceTL>.

¹² Ruth Eglash, “Netanyahu’s Plan for West Bank Annexation Faces Unexpected Opposition from Settlers,” *The Washington Post*, June 10, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/netanyahus-plan-for-west-bank-annexation-faces-unexpected-opposition-from-settlers/2020/06/10/9db6c694-a744-11ea-898e-b21b9a83f792_story.html.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ David Patrikarakos, “The Israel-UAE peace deal was made in Iran,” *The Spectator*, August 13, 2020, <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/the-israel-uae-breakthrough-was-a-deal-made-in-tehran>.

¹⁵ Simon Tisdall, “Bibi’s snub to Biden may backfire,” *The Guardian*, March 10, 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/mar/10/israel-joe-biden-east-jerusalem-settlements>.

who played a central role in the Obama administration's negotiations over the JCPOA and convinced congress to support it.¹⁶ If elected, Biden has pledged to salvage what he can of the agreement.¹⁷

Netanyahu vehemently disagreed with the Obama administration's Iran's policies to the extent that during a visit to Washington, he made a point to avoid a visit to the White House and instead plead his case against the nuclear agreement before the House of Representatives. How he will actually "do business" with Biden with a history of such contention, remains to be seen.

Now, with the stroke of a pen, Netanyahu successfully moves Israel's military capabilities onto the doorstep of its arch foe and into the heart of the Persian Gulf, shifting and solidifying the balance of power in his favor. The ramifications in terms of intelligence gathering and early warning are significant for Israel.¹⁸ In addition, the normalization with the UAE and Bahrain moves Israel closer to Saudi Arabia. Even as senior Saudi royal Turki al-Faisal ruled out normalization with Israel before the establishment of a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital, the long-standing defense collaboration between Israel and Saudi Arabia in the face of Iran is not a well-kept secret.¹⁹ Israelis remain hopeful that additional Arab states will come around and reports claim that Saudi Arabia has expressed interest in 'military and intelligence cooperation,' while Oman already has indicated an interest in security and trade relations.²⁰ Indeed, Oman's government already released a statement expressing hopes that "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."²¹

In addition, the further opening up of the UAE and other Gulf states to Israeli high-tech defense and security products will provide a new wealthy market for Israeli products and services, and could help offset the decline in the rate of un-earmarked U.S. defense aid dollars available for Israeli domestic procurement, which, if not compensated for, may hit the industry hard.²² There are even speculations that Israel's Aviation Industries might be producing the wings of F-35 fighters to be sold to the UAE.²³

¹⁶ Sarah Mimms, "Joe Biden's New Mission: Selling the Iran Deal," *The Atlantic*, July 15, 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/07/joe-bidens-new-mission-selling-the-iran-deal/449295/>.

¹⁷ Danielle Pletka, "Would Biden's Foreign Policy Really be that Different Than Trump's?," *The Dispatch, American Enterprise Institute*, July 25, 2020, <https://www.aei.org/op-eds/would-bidens-foreign-policy-really-be-much-different-from-trumps/>; Joseph Rank & Richard Baffa, "What a Biden Iran strategy might look like," *Middle East Institute*, July 29, 2020, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/what-biden-iran-strategy-might-look>.

¹⁸ James Stavridis, "Military reasons to celebrate the Israel-UAE deal," *The Japan Times*, August 19, 2020, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2020/08/19/commentary/world-commentary/military-israel-uae/>.

¹⁹ MEE Staff, "No normalisation with Israel without Palestinian state, Saudi royal says," *Middle East Eye*, August 21, 2020, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/saudi-israel-normalisation-palestinian-state-turki-alfaisal>.

²⁰ Raphael Ahren, "Security and Business: Israel Charts Potential of Ties with 3 More Gulf States," *Times of Israel*, September 3, 2020, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/security-and-business-israel-charts-potential-of-future-ties-with-gulf-states/>.

²¹ "Oman welcomes Bahrain's initiative to normalize ties with Israel: Oman TV," *Al-Arabiyye*, September 13, 2020, <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/gulf/2020/09/13/Oman-welcomes-Bahrain-s-initiative-to-normalize-ties-with-Israel-Oman-TV>.

²² Hagai Amit, "Changing U.S. Aid Terms Hit Israeli Defense Industry Harder Than Expected, Report Says," *Haaretz*, August 4, 2020, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/business/.premium-report-changing-u-s-aid-terms-hit-israeli-defense-industry-harder-than-expected-1.9043457>.

²³ Udi Etzion, "IAI will manufacture the F-35 wings for the Emirates," *Calcalist*, September 17, 2020, <https://www.calcalist.co.il/local/articles/0,7340,L-3850154,00.html>.

So, while defense cooperation between Israel and the UAE already thrived in the shadows – and some in that industry might actually prefer dealing away from the limelight of official relations – business is likely to pick up even more and in many areas from arms, cyber security, and command-and-control systems, to agricultural products, desalination and drip irrigation technology.²⁴ Yariv Yanay, Director of Business Development and Innovation at an Israeli Insurtech company stated:

The potential isn't just in the possible sale of products to the UAE, but that this can also lay the infrastructure for entering the rest of the Arab world and places like Jordan and Egypt. I take part in many international conferences and until now it was very obvious we were outcasts.²⁵

If the Israeli agreements with Jordan and Egypt are any indication, Israel will most likely not be swarmed by Arab visitors to their beaches and holy sites. However, Israelis are eager travelers and itching for new locations to visit, so the possibility of a weekend in Dubai will be a welcome morale boost. In addition, direct flights to Abu-Dhabi and overflight rights granted by Saudi Arabia will give access to the most important hub to the East and Far-East for both Israeli tourists and businessmen and reduce their flight costs.²⁶

United Arab Emirates' Interests & Calculations

In an interview with CNBC, Anwar Gargash, UAE's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, said that there will never be a "perfect moment" for the UAE to normalize relations with Israel: "If we really wait for that perfect moment, it really is a call for ... standing still and letting developments sort of bypass you, and unfortunately, this has been the case with the Palestinian issue historically."²⁷

While personal motivation played some role on the part of Netanyahu, this also holds true for other key players. UAE Crown prince Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan also has a lot to gain from this move. Since his brother's ill health in 2014, the de-facto ruler is overseeing the country's fast-paced transformation into one of the most formidable economic and military powers in the Middle East, a process that has intensified since the 1990's. Together with securing his own and his family's consolidation of power in a country where more than 80% of the workforce is foreign, MBZ's most pressing concern is to preserve UAE's political and military stability, while continuing to diversify the economy away from oil dependence. UAE thus shares the same threats to its instability as Israel, including terrorism, regional insurgencies, and the Iranian threat.

²⁴ Hagai Amit, "The Real Deal for Israel and the UAE is Weapons," *Haaretz*, August 17, 2020, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/business/.premium-the-real-deal-for-israel-and-the-uae-is-weapons-1.9077725>.

²⁵ Sophie Shulma, "Deals under the radar: These are the Israeli tech companies already operating in the UAE," *CTECH*, August 18, 2020, <https://www.calcalistech.com/ctech/articles/0.7340.L-3845539.00.html>.

²⁶ Jerusalem Post Staff, "UAE businessman in talks with Israil to begin flights with tourists," *The Jerusalem Post*, August 19, 2020, <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/uae-businessman-in-talks-with-israil-to-begin-flights-for-tourists-638917>; Raphael Ahren, "In boon for Israel, Saudi Arabia gives permanent overfly rights to and from UAE," *The Times of Israel*, September 2, 2020, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/in-boon-for-israel-saudi-arabia-gives-permanent-overfly-rights-to-and-from-uae/?fbclid=IwAR3hRLAU-yvedTRiQFUTnB0dxVPFeX-AsFQNJmTqpKsRkKEAmJJk7qhE>.

²⁷ Abigail Ng, "The UAE's peace deal with Israel is a win-win solution, says UAE minister," *CNBC*, August 14, 2020, <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/08/14/the-uaes-peace-deal-with-israel-is-a-win-win-solution-says-uae-minister.html>.

Spurred by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1991, UAE has built up one of the best equipped militaries in the world and “has done the most to escape from the long-standing mediocrity of Gulf (and Arab) armies.” It has an air force that is exceptionally well trained.²⁸ The UAE is the second highest military spender in the Middle East after Saudi Arabia, with a defense budget of over \$16 billion in 2019.²⁹ Like Israel, the country has invested in smart and high-tech military capabilities while also gaining operational experience in real combat, including in Afghanistan, North Africa, and Yemen. Unquestionably, the United States’ most reliable ally in the Arab world, the UAE is a significant contributor to both U.S. and NATO security operations and in the fight against ISIS.³⁰ Former U.S. Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis dubbed the UAE “Little Sparta” in reflection of the country’s years of dedicated investment and single-minded military ambition and its outsize role in regional security stability.³¹ Building a strong security partnership with Israel will further strengthen the country, cement its relationship with the U.S., and help balance against a future Iranian threat. In simple terms, politically, economically, and strategically, the UAE has a lot to lose from regional insecurity.

Although a staunch ally of Saudi Arabia in Yemen and a vocal critic of the 2015 Iran Nuclear Deal, the UAE has always pursued a hedged policy towards Iran, in the form of a dual diplomatic and strategic track.³² Still however, the Obama Administration’s “Pivot to Asia” policy and the conclusion of the Iranian Nuclear deal in 2015 was a let-down. The UAE initially placed high hopes that the Trump administration would be a more reliable ally, but in 2017 they again found their relations with the U.S. souring, when they, increasingly concerned about keeping the peace in the Persian Gulf, communicated their unhappiness about the Trump administration’s bellicose rhetoric.³³

In support of this perspective, the UAE Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Anwar Gargash, indicated in an interview that the agreement with Israel was a calculated step that facilitates much desired improvements in the UAE’s defense posture during a time of regional strategic change, while also strengthening the U.S.-UAE relationship ahead of the 2020 elections

²⁸ Zoltan Barany, “Military Officers in the Gulf: Career Trajectories and Determinants,” CSIS Report, November 5, 2019, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/military-officers-gulf-career-trajectories-and-determinants>.

²⁹ Christian H. Heller, “Little Sparta’s Big Ambitions: The Emirati Military Comes of Age,” *Real Clear Defense*, September 17, 2019, https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2019/09/17/little_spartas_big_ambitions_the_emirati_military_comes_of_age_114748.html.

³⁰ During the early fight against ISIS, UAE pilots flew more sorties in the campaign than any other U.S. ally. See Deborah Amos, “United Arab Emirates Shows Off Its Military Might,” *NPR, Morning Edition*, December 29, 2014, <https://www.npr.org/2014/12/29/373729978/united-arab-emirates-shows-off-its-military-might?t=1600944894740>;

Anthony Nelson, “Night Ops at the 380th AEW,” *US Air Forces Center*, February 22, 2018, <https://www.afcent.af.mil/Units/380th-Air-Expeditionary-Wing/News/Display/Article/1448597/night-ops-at-the-380th-aew/>.

³¹ The Al Dhafra Air Base in the UAE, which was finally made public in 2017, became the most important U.S. base for operations against ISIS, with the garrison now numbering thousands of troops as well as F-22 Raptors. See Oriana Pawlyk, “Air Force Acknowledges Clandestine Base in UAE,” *Oriana K. Pawlyk*, May 11, 2020, <https://orianapawlyk.com/2020/05/11/air-force-acknowledges-clandestine-base-in-uae/>; see also Heller, “Little Sparta’s Big Ambitions,” 2019.

³² Ayman El-Dessouki & Ola Mansour, “Small states and strategic hedging: the United Arab Emirates’ policy towards Iran,” *Review of Economics and Political Science* (forthcoming), 2020.

³³ Hussain Ibish, “The UAE’s Evolving National Security Strategy,” *The Arab Gulf State Institute in Washington*, Issue paper number 4, April 6, 2017; Liz Sly, “The UAE’s Ambitions Backfire as it Finds Itself on the Front Line of US-Iran Tensions,” *The Washington Post*, August 12, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the-uaes-ambitions-backfire-as-it-finds-itself-on-the-front-line-of-us-iran-tensions/2019/08/11/d3ee41a0-509d-11e9-bdb7-44f948cc0605_story.html.

(regardless of the outcome).³⁴ If rumors are true, the biggest win for the UAE from the deal may be a U.S./Israeli concession to overcome restrictions imposed by the Congressional Israel Qualitative Military Edge Act of 2017, which bans the sale of advanced U.S. weapons to Israel's Arab foes in order to ensure Israel's ability to defend itself. Indeed, the initial categorical rejection by Netanyahu about impending UAE military purchases from the U.S. has fallen silent as various aspects of such an agreement has been discussed quite openly in the press.³⁵ Further Israeli-UAE defense collaboration and the technology-sharing can now be brought into the open, an important win for both countries.

Economically, the UAE and its royals will benefit from the economic dividend of normalization with Israel. Israelis are avid investors, consumers, and travelers and a number of hi-tech companies already cooperate with partners in the UAE. Deals span from CCTV-, phone-, and critical infrastructure surveillance to upgrades of the UAE air force fighter aircrafts. This area of cooperation will no doubt flourish further, offering the Emirates access to cutting-edge technology. Expanding its highly developed service and technology sector through Israeli collaboration will benefit the country's economy and the continued incentives that high-skilled foreign workers have to flock to its job markets.

So, while UAE officials point out the regional concern over the looming Israeli annexation of occupied territories as a major victory in this deal, other considerations seem to have offered strong motivation. Again, the Palestinian issue is a fictitious bargaining chip that made the deal possible at this time in history.

United States' Interests & Calculations

Very few U.S. presidents have been brokers of peace in the Middle East, although many have tried. That President Trump would be successful during his term was therefore against the odds, especially given the bellicose track record of his foreign policy. However, once the transactional nature of this accord is appreciated, it becomes much less surprising. The accord, which does not demand major concessions from either side, toots "non-annexation" as its major accomplishment while sidelining Palestinian aspirations altogether. What is clear, though, is that it is primarily about political and economic normalization and not about "peace" as in the cessation of hostilities.³⁶ Having said that, Israel's other two peace-agreements with Egypt and Jordan have never penetrated the respective societies in the sense of real normalization between the peoples.

³⁴ *Bloomberg Media*, "UAE's Gargash Says Israeli Pact Is 'Sovereign' Decision," 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the-uaes-ambitions-backfire-as-it-finds-itself-on-the-front-line-of-us-iran-tensions/2019/08/11/d3ee41a0-509d-11e9-bdb7-44f948cc0605_story.html.

³⁵ Former White House Mideast peace envoy Jason Greenblatt appeared to hint at the possibility that there had been backroom deals. See Toi Staff, "UAE Official Reportedly Rebuffs Netanyahu Denial he Okayed F-35 Sale," *Times of Israel*, 18 August, 2020, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/report-uae-official-says-netanyahu-approved-us-sale-of-advanced-jets/>; Lahav Harkov, "The UAE and F-35s story isn't over just because Israel doesn't like it," *Jerusalem Post*, August 19, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/08/uae-nixes-meeting-israel-35-arms-deal-row-report-200824235236086.html>; Mike Stone, "Exclusive: U.S. eyes December agreement on F-35 jets with UAE - sources," *Reuters*, September 22, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-emirates-f35-exclusive-idUSKCN26D19T>.

³⁶ See David Kirkpatrick, "The Most Powerful Arab Ruler isn't M.B.S, it's M.B.Z," *New York Times*, June 2, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/02/world/middleeast/crown-prince-mohammed-bin-zayed.html>.

The normalization of relations between Israel and two additional Arab States is a major foreign policy accomplishment for the Trump administration. Amid criticism over the administration's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and with the elections nearing, the president will be well served by a foreign policy victory.³⁷ John Hannah, a conservative political analyst, argues that this is President Trump's first unambiguous diplomatic success, especially considering that some of his policies—including the rapprochement with North Korea—have been quite controversial.³⁸ The deal also somewhat reverses the problematic geostrategic position in which the U.S. finds itself, as it gradually reduces its troops overseas and in the region. For some time now, the U.S. has left others—most notably Iran, Turkey, and Russia—to fill the power vacuum. The Israel-UAE-Bahrain alliance now drives a wedge into Iran's "arch of resistance," divides Turkey's "Muslim Brotherhood alliance," and strengthens key U.S. allies while also ensuring that they remain steadfast in their support of U.S. policies in the future. Thus, one could argue that the deal provides a lifeline for sustained U.S. influence in the region, strengthening engagement both strategically and economically.

In addition, this accomplishment is quite personal for President Trump and his closest family. Both he and Netanyahu have argued that the UAE deal was the result of a long-term strategy, as well as many years of work, led by Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, who has frequently been ridiculed for his naïve understanding of Middle East politics. On September 1, 2020, when a jubilant Kushner predicted that "all other Arab countries will gradually follow the United Arab Emirates in normalizing ties with Israel," he was met with skepticism. Certain vindication came as only a few weeks later Bahrain followed on the heels of the UAE. Other countries, including Oman (as mentioned above) and possibly Morocco and Sudan, may be next.³⁹

While the "script" may indeed have changed for the better in the Middle East – as Mr. Kushner has suggested – there is evidence that the calculations for the U.S. administration are rather short-term.⁴⁰ With the domino effect unfolding (beginning with Bahrain), the administration can show that the U.S. still retains the ability to serve as a mediator and facilitator in one of the world's most intractable conflict regions. This will be applauded by Republicans and Democrats alike and helps strengthen the president's foreign policy credentials vis-a-vis Biden, as it is a success that the former vice president will have difficulties brushing aside.⁴¹

Trump's success also speaks directly to significant parts of the American electorate who care deeply about Israel. His most conservative base, Christian Evangelicals, are staunch supporters of Netanyahu, whose message of Israeli ownership/birthright over the West Bank and East Jerusalem aligns with their religious doctrine. They were delighted with the Trump

³⁷ Barbara Stiles, "The Gulf's Calculus on the AUE-Israel Deal," *The Washington Institute*, August 19, 2020, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-gulfs-calculus-on-uae-israel-deal>.

³⁸ John Hannah, "The Israel-UAE Deal is Trump's First Unambiguous Diplomatic Success," *Foreign Policy*, August 14, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/08/14/israel-uae-peace-trump-success/>.

³⁹ "Oman welcomes Bahrain's initiative to normalize ties with Israel: Oman TV," *Al-Arabiyye*, 2020; Raphael Ahren, "Security and business: Israel charts potential of ties with 3 more Gulf states," *Times of Israel*, September 3, 2020, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/security-and-business-israel-charts-potential-of-future-ties-with-gulf-states/>.

⁴⁰ See "Kushner: 'A New Script for the Middle East,'" August 31, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-middle-east-53973034>

⁴¹ Jacob Magid, "In back-handed compliment, Biden praises Trump for Israel-UAE deal," *The Times of Israel*, September 11, 2020, www.timesofisrael.com/in-back-handed-compliment-biden-praises-trump-for-israel-uae-deal/#gs.g63wog

relocation of the U.S. embassy and have been unequivocal supporters of annexation of parts of the West Bank.⁴² However, a poll conducted by an evangelical website shortly after the announcement of the Abraham Accords, shows that 68% supported the UAE-Israel agreement and only 7% said they would have preferred annexation.⁴³ While such a shift may seem dramatic, it could perhaps be explained by a relatively binary view of a very complex political situation: whatever puts Israel in a good light is eagerly applauded.⁴⁴ It made it possible for the administration and Netanyahu to skillfully play up the Israel-UAE agreement as firmly in their interest, explaining how and why it is significant for Israel.⁴⁵

However, Evangelicals are not the only ones with a fervent interest in Israel. While many American Jews have traditionally voted for the Democratic Party, the more conservative segments, who support the Netanyahu government's policies or the settler movement, have been very happy with Trump's staunch pro-Israel stance. While they may not have supported postponing the annexation, Jewish Trump voters are thrilled because the UAE-Israel deal rejects not just the land-for-peace formula, but the entire philosophy of the Obama administration's "daylight" between the U.S. and Israel.⁴⁶ Thus, the deal allows the administration to steer Netanyahu away from annexation—at least temporarily—something that the Trump administration knew was not in long-term U.S. interest.⁴⁷

Two additional aspects are worth discussing with regard to U.S. calculations. The first has to do with the question of the Iranian nuclear agreement and the U.S. effort to further alter the balance of power in the Middle East. The Trump administration has been working hard to disrupt the Iranian nuclear deal and is facing a probable show-down at the UN about imposing "snap-back" sanctions, a step that is mandated in case of Iranian non-compliance.⁴⁸ While such sanctions could be activated in October should the agreement terminate without renewal, other countries (especially the Europeans) don't believe that the U.S. has the right to impose such a process after it formally left the agreement in 2017.⁴⁹ Having the UAE and Israel work together in support of the U.S. political and strategic efforts is therefore important, especially as the UAE most recently has become a bit of an unreliable ally. While the UAE contributions to NATO operations in Afghanistan and to the ISIS campaign have been significant, its policies on Iran have frequently diverged with Washington, favoring a diplomatic, rather than security-focused approach.⁵⁰ In terms of military balance, the

⁴² Ariel Kahana, "Netanyahu to Evangelicals: We have no greater friends," *Israel Hayom*, June 29, 2020, www.israelhayom.com/2020/06/29/netanyahu-to-evangelicals-we-have-no-greater-friends/

⁴³ Amir Tibon, "Poll Shows U.S. Evangelicals Overwhelmingly Back Israel-UAE Deal Despite Nixed Annexation," *Haaretz*, September 9, 2020, www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-poll-shows-u-s-evangelicals-back-israel-uae-deal-despite-nixed-annexation-1.9133775

⁴⁴ Owen Amos, "Why Do US Evangelicals Support Trump's Jerusalem Policy?," *BBC News*, January 5, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-42402350>

⁴⁵ "President Trump Announces Historic Peace Deal Between Israel, United Arab Emirates," *OAN*, August 13, 2020

⁴⁶ Jonathan S. Tobin, "For Trump's Jewish Supporters, 'Four More Years' Tops Annexation," *Haaretz*, August 17, 2020, <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-for-trump-s-jewish-supporters-four-more-years-tops-annexation-1.9080616>.

⁴⁷ Ben Sales, "5 winners and 4 losers from the historic treaty between Israel and the UAE," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, August 13, 2020, <https://www.jta.org/2020/08/13/israel/5-winners-and-4-losers-from-the-historic-treaty-between-israel-and-the-uae>.

⁴⁸ Ellie Geranmayeh, Elisa Cataland Ewers, "Europe Can Preserve the Iran Nuclear Deal Until November," *Foreign Policy*, August 18, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/08/18/snapback-sanctions-trump-rouhani-europe-eu-can-preserve-the-iran-nuclear-deal-until-november/>.

⁴⁹ Ishaan Tharoor, "A Win for Trump's Middle East Agenda is Followed by Defeat," *The Washington Post*, August 17, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2020/08/17/trump-uae-israel-iran/>.

⁵⁰ Sly, "The UAE's ambitions backfire as it finds itself on the front line of US-Iran tensions," 2019.

strengthening ties between Israel and the two Arab states should significantly strengthen the anti-Iran coalition. Getting the UAE firmly under the U.S. security umbrella will obligate the country to support American policies.

Furthermore, the U.S. stands to gain economically. By circumventing the congressional ban on high-technology military sales to the two Gulf States (the QME Act of 2017), the U.S. defense industry now has a new wealthy market for American military equipment, including a green light for the controversial sale of F-35 fighter jets.⁵¹ This comes at a time when Chinese-owned companies have stepped in to “fill orders” for military equipment that the U.S. could not fill due to the ban, including armed drones.⁵² China is heavily dependent on the Gulf countries both for its oil and as a hub for its commerce,⁵³ making the region a potential new flashpoint for renewed great power competition. Although Chinese interests in the region are still largely economic, geostrategic issues may begin to be more significant as their economic influence grows.⁵⁴

In Lieu of Conclusions - Three Scenarios

When David Ben Gurion, Israel’s first prime minister, and Eliyahu Sassoon, his first ambassador to Ankara, invented Israel’s “Periphery Doctrine” against the “Resistance Front” of Arab states, it was only considered to be a temporary policy.⁵⁵ Over decades, the ultimate guarantor for survival in the eyes of mainstream Israel was peace with its Arab neighbors. Subsequent peace treaties with Egypt, Jordan, and the Oslo Accords were pursued with that goal. However, the strategy was never “stand-alone” but went hand in hand with a “hedging” policy that was heavily relying on Jabotinsky’s “Iron Wall” concept,⁵⁶ which prescribed maintaining a qualitative military edge over its regional adversaries.

What we are witnessing now is not only the creation of a reverse doctrine by Israel but also a dramatic shift in alliances: Israel joining forces with the Sunni center (UAE and by extension, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) against the periphery (Turkey and Iran) at some (possibly considerable) cost to its qualitative military edge. The superpower competition during the Cold War—and the early support from the Soviet Union—allowed the Arab states to stay principled on the Palestinian issue, and act out on their collective humiliation dealt them by Israel’s military victories. Since the 1990’s, the U.S. has mostly taken a geostrategic position in the Middle East, allowing Arab states to ideologically oppose them while serving as the main guarantor of regional stability and continued economic prosperity. Now, with the U.S.

⁵¹ Stone, “Exclusive: U.S. eyes December agreement on F-35 jets with UAE - sources,” 2020.

⁵² Camille Lons, Jonathan Fulton, Degang Sun, Naser Al-Tamimi, “China’s Great Game in the Middle East,” *European Council on Foreign Relations*, October 21, 2019, https://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/china_great_game_middle_east; “Chinese military drone sales hover over Middle East,” *Associated Press*, February 26, 2018, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2134680/chinese-military-drone-display-united-arab-emirates>. See also Tom Kington, “UAE allegedly using Chinese drones for deadly airstrikes in Libya,” *DefenseNews*, May 2, 2019, <https://www.defensenews.com/unmanned/2019/05/02/uae-allegedly-using-chinese-drones-for-deadly-airstrikes-in-libya/>.

⁵³ In 2018, almost 30 percent of China’s oil imports—or 2.9m barrels per day—came from Gulf countries (UAE and KSA accounting for the biggest part of that) and an estimated 60 percent of China’s European and African trade passes through the UAE. See Lons, et al.

⁵⁴ Marcus Salles, “US alliance with Gulf Decays as UAE Strengthens Ties with Russia and China,” *Modern Diplomacy*, August 1, 2019, <https://modern diplomacy.eu/2019/08/01/us-alliance-with-gulf-decays-as-uae-strengthens-ties-with-china-and-russia/>.

⁵⁵ Hadar, “The Collapse of Israel’s ‘Periphery Doctrine,’” 2010; Hubbard et al., “Iran, Deeply Embedded in Syria, Expands ‘Axis of Resistance,’” 2018.

⁵⁶ “Texts Concerning Zionism: ‘The Iron Wall,’” *Jewish Virtual Library*, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/quot-the-iron-wall-quot>.

sending clear isolationist signals, together with inroads of Russia into the Syrian battle space, a continued worry about Iran's intentions, and a threat to prosperity from possible internal popular dissent, many Arab authoritarian leaders have concluded that sustained American engagement is a priority at the cost of any remaining ideological disagreement. While realpolitik is part of this picture, the complex web of personal interests that were fulfilled by this deal shows how political, geostrategic, economic, and even personal issues are often difficult to separate in Middle East politics.

The agreement is the logical conclusion of this reassessment. It should be noted that the continued Sunni passion by which they detest the Iranian regime can hardly be exaggerated.⁵⁷ Iran's continued support for regional proxies, radical groups, and terrorism, and its return to nuclear activities after the U.S. withdrew from the treaty, may be the most powerful factor that unites the new-found friends. How this geostrategic shift will affect the region remains to be seen. In lieu of a conclusion, we have outlined three possible trajectories below: the good, the bad, and the ugly.

The Good

As Thomas Friedman has argued, some of the best outcomes in Middle East politics take place as a result of big players doing the right things for the wrong reasons.⁵⁸ The analysis above shows that this seems to be the case here. If so, a domino effect from the Abraham Accords could encourage additional Arab regimes to sign bilateral cooperation and normalization agreements with Israel,⁵⁹ in a way creating a semblance of the "New Middle East" that Shimon Peres envisioned decades ago. Such a development could cause an atmospheric change throughout the region and possibly encourage the Palestinians to elect a more pragmatic leadership who could enter the long awaited "historical compromise" with Israel. In addition, a closer relationship with Israel might also allow Israel's new Arab allies more leverage to pressure the Israeli leadership to continue working towards a just and legitimate solution to the Palestinian problem. This could finally lead to a two state solution, somewhere between the Camp David Plan and the Saudi Initiative. Yossi Beilin, the co-architect of the Oslo Agreements, calls on the four Arab countries at peace with Israel to do just that by forming "an intensive peace pressure group, empowered by good relations with both the Israeli and Palestinian sides" in order to "help each of them to walk the extra mile towards peace."⁶⁰ The supporting push and pull dynamic of regional prosperity and peer pressure would drive that effort. The Israeli and Palestinian leadership would then be able to

⁵⁷ Hans Blix, the chairman of the 2003 UN weapons commission in charge of verifying Iraq's compliance to destroy its WMD, argued that even if Iraq had no WMD at the time (which is indeed what the UN inspection found), they were reluctant to admit it in order to deter Iran (personal conversation with Hans Blix in 2005).

⁵⁸ Thomas Friedman, "The Love Triangle That Spawned Trump's Mideast Peace Deal," *The New York Times*, September 15, 2020, <https://www.timesfreepress.com/news/opinion/times-commentary/story/2020/sep/16/love-triangle-spawned-trumps-mideast-peace-deal/532350/>

⁵⁹ Seth J. Frantzman, "Five Countries That Could Be Next to Make Peace With Israel," *The Jerusalem Post*, August 16, 2020, https://www.jpost.com/arab-israeli-conflict/five-countries-that-could-be-next-to-make-peace-with-israel-638821?utm_source=jpost&utm_medium=facebook&utm_campaign=boost&utm_content=08-15-20&fbclid=IwAR16g0-AV5nXTZAm8iHI3TW67kGRCjkxu02oaY1Er4tvMNBnx2laYHHyleI

⁶⁰ Yossi Beilin, "It's Time for Arab States to Drop Another Bombshell on Israel," *Haaretz*, September 22, 2020, <https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/.premium-it-s-time-for-arab-states-to-drop-another-bombshell-on-israel-1.9173482>

use the tangible promise of a peace “dividend” to unite their populations to embrace the inevitable compromise. Turkish and Iranian influence and ability to spoil the process would be met on a wide front, decreasing the power of radicals opposed to any rapprochement with Israel.

However, this is unlikely to happen unless there is also a parallel reduction in regional tensions, effective deterrence of Iran, and an end to support of proxy forces in regional conflicts by both Iran and Saudi Arabia. The United States would have to take a decisive but balanced role in such efforts, with a focus on diplomacy while also supporting and communicating credible deterrence. Effective dialogue with Iran and continued collaboration with Turkey would help them overcome their perceived security dilemma, allowing them to de-escalate. If the “distraction” of the threat from Iran is removed from Israel’s playbook, it will be harder to avoid resolving its conflict with the Palestinians.

The Bad

In the Middle East, the more things change the more they remain the same, especially for those who end up on the losing side. Normalization in this scenario would mean just that: the solidification of the status-quo into a situation in which Israel and the Gulf Arabs “let the future bury the past” by pushing the Palestinian issue to the sidelines.⁶¹

Business would continue as usual, Israel would become a powerful and well-connected regional player with an ever-growing circle of friends and great benefits to its economy and its external security. The downside is felt by those who have been left out—the Palestinians—banished into some sort of parallel universe in Israel’s backyard.

This version of the future can hardly be sustained forever. The resulting frustration and violence will be a constant irritant, with demographics increasingly trending to Israel’s disadvantage. The Israeli journalist Eli Podeh warns of the dangers that this scenario brings: “Israel is wrong to seek agreement with Arab states while circumventing the Palestinians. Its attempt to isolate and weaken the Palestinians could end in the Palestinians being pushed towards violent struggle as a last resort. Israel will then claim that the Palestinians have reverted to violence once again, ignoring its own role in this deterioration.”⁶²

Continued ambiguity in U.S. intentions and involvement, and (possibly) a more confrontational foreign policy towards Iran, would further destabilize the region while keeping Israel focused on its external enemy rather than resolving the problem “at home.” Turkey and Iran would not remain idle when faced with such a strategic challenge and might intensify their efforts to regain the initiative by increasing their support for proxies (including Hamas and Hezbollah) and further incursions into Iraq and Kurdistan. A continuous, if only just bearable, war of attrition would be the old and new normal, the unfortunate side effect of normalization. This situation would most likely lead to heightened tensions, increased friction, and even renewed (surrogate) clashes between the sides. However, should the U.S. revert to dealing with problems at home, and again prove to be an unreliable guarantor for

⁶¹ Thomas L. Friedman, “A Geopolitical Earthquake Just Hit the Mideast,” *The New York Times*, August 13, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/13/opinion/israel-uae.html>.

⁶² Elie Podeh, “How the UAE and Saudi Arabia now hold Israel Hostage,” *Haaretz*, August 26, 2020, <https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/.premium-how-the-uae-and-saudi-arabia-now-hold-israel-hostage-1.9101401>.

Middle East stability, it would provide inroads for both Russia and China to exert more influence, if not direct intervention. This would create a “jittery” alliance and bilateral tensions between Israel and its new allies.

The Ugly

Israeli and Gulf security and defense cooperation leads to a significant shift in the regional balance of power. The UAE, protected by Israeli anti-missile defense systems, informed by high-end U.S./Israeli drones and displaying aerial dominance through stealth technology, severely curtails Iranian freedom of operation in the region. From the viewpoint of Teheran, its policy of confronting Israel (via proxies) on a multitude of fronts (Sinai/Gaza in the South; Lebanon/Syria in the North) is now met by Israeli encirclement from the North (Kurdistan, Azerbaijan) and the South (UAE, Bahrain, Oman and, for all intents and purposes, Saudi Arabia). Iran could redouble its efforts to wage a multifront surrogate war on Israel—from Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria – and on the Gulf States from Yemen—drawing them into a regional exchange of fire. Israeli analyst Zvi Yehezkeili says that this dangerous dynamic could lead to disaster: Iran, recognizing the degradation of its relative power, would have no choice but go nuclear.⁶³ An emboldened and now nuclear Iran would have the ability to directly confront its adversaries and break out of the noose that is tightening around the country. Ignoring the Palestinians would certainly lead to frustration and possibly violence. Because the Arab street was never consulted on the Abraham Accords, increasing discontent may arise and threaten the authoritarian regimes. If monarchies are toppled and replaced by revolutionary or Salafi-Jihadi groups, the military investment that has been made in the UAE and Bahrain may be turned against the U.S.-Israel alliance. Should these regimes fall, we may have created a “little Frankenstein” by arming the UAE.⁶⁴

These scenarios, or variations thereof, contain clear dangers but also offer hope. Separate bilateral peace deals with Arab states are not the end-all for an Israel searching for peaceful coexistence in the Middle East. Not addressing the core issues postpones tragedy but cannot avoid it as the future can never fully bury the past. But there are also clear opportunities. The Palestinians could seize the chance, re-enter negotiations and strike a deal, possibly even achieve concessions from Israel that go beyond the Olmert proposal. Now would be the time, and the historic opportunity to make a peace agreement with Israel which is supported by the major forces of the Arab world (unlike Camp David twenty years ago) may be more likely than it has been for a very long time. With a solid military alliance carrying part of the defensive burden for keeping regional stability, the U.S. could re-engage in diplomacy with Iran to stave off a needless arms race while also increasing the chances of de-escalating the conflicts in Syria and Yemen, bringing an end to the enormous human suffering in those countries. This might lead to wider benefits, as it could lessen the pressure from refugees fleeing war zones while also giving civilians in the Middle East more generally a chance to lead productive lives without an endless threat of new violence.

⁶³ Zvi Yehiskeli interview “לא היה אבא למזרח התיכון עד שהגיע טראמפ” (The Middle East was an orphan before Trump), *Maariv online*, August 19, 2020,

<https://103fm.maariv.co.il/programs/media.aspx?ZrqvnVq=IDHHFI&c41t4nzVQ=FJF>

⁶⁴ Tamara Cofman Wittes, quoted in Kirkpatrick, “The Most Powerful Arab Ruler isn’t M.B.S, it’s M.B.Z,” 2019.

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