

# Palestine: Expediency and Principle. Gulf-Israel Relations and the Palestine Question

Aftab ALAM, Riaz AHMAD, Dr. Zahir SHAH, Dr. Ijaz KHALID

**Abstract:** This paper examines the evolving diplomatic strategies of Gulf States in relation to the Palestinian question, with a focus on the normalization of relations with Israel. Once staunch supporters of Palestinian rights, several Gulf governments have recently shifted toward formal engagement with Israel, raising critical questions about the implications for Palestinian aspirations and regional stability. This policy realignment reflects a complex interplay of strategic, economic, and geopolitical considerations, including countering Iranian influence, leveraging Israeli technological expertise, and aligning with U.S. regional interests. While normalization may enhance cooperation across key sectors, it also risks undermining the Palestinian cause and entrenching existing conflict dynamics. The paper argues that Gulf governments must balance pragmatic diplomacy with enduring commitments to justice and self-determination, navigating both external pressures and internal public sentiment. This transformation signals a broader reconfiguration of power and priorities in the contemporary Middle East.

**Keywords:** Gulf Perspectives, Geopolitical relations, Palestine, Israel, Gulf dynamics, Self-determination.

## Aftab ALAM

Department of Politics and International Relations  
The Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan, Pakistan;  
Fellow LMU University Munich  
Email: aftab\_alam@awkum.edu.pk

## Riaz AHMAD

Associate Professor, School of Business,  
Qilu Institute of Technology, China  
International Medical Faculty,  
Osh State University, Kyrgyzstan  
E-mail: drriaz@zju.edu.cn

## Dr. Zahir SHAH

Assistant Professor, Department of Politics  
and International Relations  
The Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan, Pakistan  
E-mail: zahirshah@awkum.edu.pk

## Dr. Ijaz KHALID

Assistant Professor, Department of Politics  
and International Relations  
The Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan, Pakistan  
E-mail: ljazkhalid@awkum.edu.pk

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## 1. Introduction

The Middle East has always been a region characterized by complex and multilayered politics. With a myriad of nations, cultures, and religions, it hosts one of the world's longest-standing and most contested political disputes: the Arab-Israeli conflict (Smith, 2013). Since the establishment of Israel in 1948, the policies of Arab states toward the nascent state have been shaped by both the consensus of the Arab League and the diverse interests of individual countries. The League's position has been one of strict and unwavering non-recognition of Israel, with no formal communication until a fair and just resolution to the Palestinian question is achieved. This support for the Palestinian people has been a cornerstone of Arab foreign policy and remained consistent for many decades (Smith, 2017).

In recent years, a shift in Middle Eastern politics has begun to take shape. As evidenced by economic modernization efforts and the original Arab Spring protests, the traditional policies long adhered to by Gulf states have become increasingly untenable. Additionally, the rise and consolidation of the Iranian regime as a dominant regional power, coupled with deepening polarization in Middle Eastern politics, have further complicated the landscape of alliances and foreign partnerships. The urgent need to diversify their economies and modernize in terms of technology and infrastructure has created a unique set of pressures, prompting Gulf countries to reassess their overall security posture (Schulze, 2013).

One of the major outcomes of these circumstances was the signing of the Abraham Accords in 2020. These agreements marked the normalization of relations between Israel and several Arab states. The United Arab Emirates and Bahrain were the first to sign, followed by Sudan and Morocco, while Saudi Arabia is reportedly considering the possibility. This development represents a significant and unexpected shift in the region's traditional balance of power (Kostiner, 2013).

The traditional approach of Arab states toward Israel was characterized by decades of steadfast opposition, rooted in both political and ideological grounds. This stance began in 1948, with the establishment of the State of Israel and the displacement of approximately 700,000 Palestinians from their homes—a traumatic event known in Arabic as the *Nakba* (“catastrophe”) (Pappé, 2011). The creation of Israel, grounded in the ideology of secular Zionism, was widely perceived as a profound challenge and affront to the Arab world. Since then, the conflict has encompassed multiple wars and a persistent cycle of hostilities.

Founded in 1945, the Arab League became the primary platform for coordinating the Arab world's policies toward Israel. Major military confrontations—beginning with the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, followed by the 1967 Six-Day War and the 1973 Yom Kippur War—further intensified Arab opposition. In the 1967 war, Israel captured territories of immense economic, strategic, and symbolic importance: the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Golan Heights, and the Sinai Peninsula, including the Suez Canal crossing (Mara'i & Halabi, 1992). The occupation of East Jerusalem, home to the Al-Aqsa Mosque and deeply significant in Islamic tradition, became a central grievance that fueled the Arab world's sense of injustice.

In the aftermath of the 1967 war, the Arab League adopted the Khartoum Resolution, which expressed the “Three No’s”: no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, and no negotiations with Israel (Eisenberg & Caplan, 2003). This resolution laid the foundation for a unified Arab policy aimed at the international isolation of Israel. It was predicated on the belief that diplomatic and economic relations with Israel would only be possible if the Palestinian issue were resolved and all territories occupied in 1967 were returned (Sykes, 2022).

The traditional Arab approach to Israel encompassed a wide range of political and economic measures. As some of the world’s largest producers of oil and gas, Arab countries leveraged energy supplies as a strategic policy tool. In 1973, Arab states declared an oil embargo against countries supporting Israel, a move that had significant global economic consequences. Although often mentioned in proximity, the embargo was not directly connected to the terrorist attack on Israeli athletes during the 1972 Munich Olympics, which was carried out by a Palestinian militant group.

On the international stage, Arab states consistently sought to prevent Israel from advancing controversial decisions. For example, as Laila Juma Ibrahim, Legal Counsel at Al-Haq, notes, during the First Intifada, Arab states collectively opposed Israel in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea debates, voting in favor of referring the matter to the International Court of Justice (Singer, 2021). Their coordinated stance was pivotal; had any abstained, the number of votes in favor would have fallen to nine—barely meeting the threshold required for judicial consideration.

Simultaneously, various Arab countries provided financial and military support to Palestinian factions, including some armed groups, in pursuit of Palestinian independence. A landmark development in this policy trajectory was the Arab Peace Initiative, proposed by Saudi Arabia in 2002. The initiative called for the normalization of Arab-Israeli relations in exchange for a comprehensive peace settlement, including the establishment of a Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders and a just solution for Palestinian refugees. Nonetheless, the broader policy of non-recognition and diplomatic isolation of Israel remained a consistent condition in the Arab world. This historical backdrop has profoundly influenced contemporary Middle Eastern politics (Nasasra, 2021).

The Abraham Accords, signed in 2020, marked a significant turning point in the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East and reshaped how certain Arab countries engaged with Israel. The United Arab Emirates and Bahrain became the first Gulf states to break the longstanding Arab consensus by formally normalizing relations with Israel, followed later by Sudan and Morocco (Guzansky & Marshall, 2020).

The motivations behind these decisions were multifaceted, including regional security concerns, national economic and developmental aspirations, and evolving political dynamics. The Accords reflected a pragmatic shift in priorities, wherein strategic and economic interests began to outweigh historical animosities and ideological commitments.

This diplomatic breakthrough was largely facilitated by the active involvement of the United States, which played a central mediating role. Under the Trump administration, normalization between Gulf states and Israel was viewed as a key pillar of U.S. strategy in the region (Singer, 2021).

The Abraham Accords and the normalization of relations between Gulf Arab states and Israel were largely driven by shared concerns regarding Iran's nuclear ambitions, missile development, and support for proxy groups across the Middle East. One of the primary goals was to establish a united front against perceived Iranian aggression and to enhance regional stability. Additionally, normalization provided Gulf states with access to Israeli defense technologies and intelligence capabilities, thereby strengthening their national security.

The motivations behind the Arab states' actions were varied, yet they all reflected a shift toward a pragmatic, forward-looking foreign policy. This shift indicated a willingness to move beyond entrenched stereotypes in pursuit of strategic and economic benefits (AlMaashi, 2021). In particular, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain—key petroleum producers—have sought to diversify their economies. Israel was viewed as a valuable partner, especially in terms of scientific innovation and educational collaboration.

Overall, the signing of the Abraham Accords marked a significant reconfiguration of the Middle East's geopolitical landscape and laid the foundation for a new approach to regional alignments and foreign policy strategies (Singer, 2021).

This paper aims to analyze the evolving nature of Gulf-Israel relations within the broader context of the Palestinian question. First, it examines the historical foundations of Arab—and specifically Gulf—states' approaches to Israel. Second, it explores the motivations behind the recent normalization agreements and their implications for the Palestinian issue. Third, it assesses the broader regional consequences of these diplomatic shifts, particularly for Palestinian aspirations and regional dynamics. Ultimately, the paper seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the interplay between strategic pragmatism and ideological principles, and how this relationship is being reshaped within a changing global order.

## **2. Historical Context**

### **2.1 The Arab-Israeli Conflict and the Gulf States**

The Arab-Israeli conflict, which began in the early twentieth century and intensified with the creation of Israel in 1948, has been a defining and persistent feature of Middle Eastern politics. The mass displacement of Palestinians during this period—referred to as the Nakba or “catastrophe”—left a profound and lasting impact on the Arab collective consciousness, shaping regional dynamics for decades (Baqai & Mehreen, 2021). The wider Middle East's relationship with Israel has been marked by conflict, beginning with the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. Although the Gulf states were not directly involved in frontline

combat, they supported the broader Arab cause through political solidarity, financial aid, and, in some cases, military assistance. Israel's military victory and territorial consolidation significantly influenced the region, particularly among the Gulf monarchies, which aligned themselves with the pan-Arab consensus against Israel.

The 1967 Six-Day War served as a pivotal turning point. Israel's capture of key territories—including the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Sinai Peninsula, and Golan Heights—prompted a rare moment of pan-Arab unity, culminating in the Khartoum Resolution, which articulated the “Three No’s”: no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, and no negotiations with Israel (Rabi & Mueller, 2017). This resolution formalized the Arab world's collective stance and remained the cornerstone of regional policy for decades. Even before this point, some Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia, had already adopted positions of non-recognition and non-normalization, beginning in 1962.

Throughout the decades that followed, Gulf states continued to champion the Palestinian cause, offering financial support, political advocacy, and vocal condemnation of Israeli actions in international forums (Ramazani, 1978). A notable example of Gulf influence was the 1973 oil embargo led by the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC), in response to Western support for Israel during the Yom Kippur War. The only significant shift toward conditional engagement was the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, spearheaded by Saudi Arabia, which proposed normalization of relations with Israel in exchange for a comprehensive peace agreement that included a return to the 1967 borders and a just solution for Palestinian refugees.

Despite this proposal, Gulf states largely maintained their longstanding policy of non-recognition and disengagement from Israel, portraying it as a hostile state. This deeply entrenched position laid the foundation for understanding the significance of more recent developments—particularly the Abraham Accords—which represent a substantial departure from traditional Gulf foreign policy.

## **2.2 Role of Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia, in supporting the Palestinian cause**

The Gulf states have historically wielded considerable economic and geopolitical influence and, both individually and collectively, have actively sought to counter Israeli actions while supporting the Palestinian cause politically and financially. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which unites Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, has played a pivotal role in coordinating this support, leveraging the region's economic resources and geopolitical weight to advance Palestinian interests. This support has manifested in various forms, including direct financial aid, development projects in Palestine, diplomatic engagement, and political advocacy within international institutions such as the United Nations (Rabi, 2005). Among the Gulf states, Saudi Arabia has arguably been the most prominent critic of Israeli policies and the most significant

provider of financial and political assistance to the Palestinian people. This prominence is attributable to Saudi Arabia's vast oil reserves and its substantial political influence in the region, positioning it to lead and fund efforts opposing Israel. Saudi Arabia has consistently supported the Palestinian Authority and other groups by facilitating the survival and development of infrastructure in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, while also working to counter Israeli interests across the Arab world and beyond.

Beyond financial contributions, Saudi Arabia has been actively engaged in dialogue and negotiation efforts aimed at resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. A notable example is the Arab Peace Initiative, proposed by then-Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia and endorsed by the Arab League in 2002 (Gause, 2014). This initiative also aligns with the dynamics surrounding the emerging Saudi-Israeli alliance, which has been viewed by some as a form of strategic realignment affecting both parties involved in the conflict (Cooley, 1979). Additionally, Qatar's support is significant due to its cooperation with Hamas, the political and militant group controlling the Gaza Strip, which Bahrain, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia classify as a terrorist organization. Qatar's engagement with Hamas reflects a pragmatic approach to influence within Gaza. The UAE has funded numerous infrastructure projects in the West Bank and Gaza, including schools, hospitals, and housing. In contrast, Kuwait has publicly rejected cooperation with Saudi Arabia while continuing to provide financial aid to various Palestinian groups and offering diplomatic support for Palestinian issues in the United Nations and other international forums (Khader, 2020).

Despite this, the support of the Gulf states is neither straightforward nor without complications. Recent political developments in the Arab world have led to new partnerships between Israel and several Persian Gulf states, culminating in the Abraham Accords. While this agreement may provide a foundation for peace and regional cooperation, many scholars view it as a breach of the longstanding Arab consensus regarding Palestine (Rabi & Mueller, 2017). The changes brought about by the Abraham Accords have prompted many experts to question the future of Arab collective support for Palestine and its impact on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Alon & Sher, 2013).

### **2.3 Overview of the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002**

The Arab Peace Initiative was proposed by Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia in 2002 at the Arab League Summit in Beirut, Lebanon. This initiative "offered Israel diplomatic recognition from the Arab world in return for a full withdrawal from all occupied territories" and was subsequently adopted as a consensus by all Arab League member states (Ben-Meir, 2010). The initiative extended beyond the Middle East, envisioning the entire region—including not only Arab states but also Iran and Turkey—as a zone of peace, stability, and economic development. It promised full security for all states in the region, including Israel. This paper presents the key components of the Arab Peace Initiative, major criticisms associated with it, and its prospects for the future (Khatib, 2008).

The main principles of the initiative, which establish the framework for a stable peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors, are as follows. First, Israel must withdraw completely from all territories occupied after the Six-Day War in 1967, including the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Second, permanent borders must be determined with Syria in accordance with UN resolutions, including the return of the Golan Heights to Syria. Third, the initiative calls for “the achievement of a just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem,” to be agreed upon in accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution 194, affirming “the attainment by the Palestinian people of their rights”.

## **2.4 Diplomatic significance**

The initiative is unique for several reasons. For the first time in history, the entire Arab League, as a collective political body, offered to normalize relations with Israel. Until 2002, Arab countries had maintained a united front of non-recognition and even confrontation toward their Middle Eastern neighbor (Podeh, 2022). This collective offer of peaceful relations with Israel may be seen as a significant “political threshold.” Although not all Arab states were initially prepared to fully embrace these changes, they expressed a willingness to recognize Israel’s legitimacy as a state and partner once the Palestinian issues were resolved (Sher & Duckett, 2020).

The offer to Israel was particularly attractive due to its broad and comprehensive framework. Compared to previous agreements, such as those reached at the Madrid Conference and Oslo Accords, it addressed all core issues of the conflict, including borders, refugees, and the status of Jerusalem. The initiative aimed to tackle the root causes of the conflict holistically rather than addressing its symptoms in isolation. Its approach adhered strictly to international law and United Nations resolutions, providing the peace plan with a solid legal and moral foundation.

## **2.5 Reactions and impact**

The initiative received a variety of responses. The United States and the European Union welcomed it, viewing the peace plan as a constructive step and a promising starting point for negotiations. The Quartet for the Middle East, comprising the UN, the US, the EU, and Russia, also supported the initiative. Israelis responded cautiously to the Arab Peace Initiative. There were no immediate direct negotiations between the Arab states and Israel. The initiative, and its subsequent endorsements in 2010 and 2017, were interpreted in two ways (Baqai & Mehreen, 2021). Some Israeli leaders saw the Arab Peace Initiative as an “initial basis” for negotiations, while others regarded it as “cloaked in conditionalities”. Specifically, the initiative demanded that Israel withdraw completely to the pre-June 5, 1967 borders and accept the right of return for Palestinian refugees. This was perceived by many Israelis as an imposition that posed a potential existential threat to the country’s



security and demographic character. Meanwhile, the Palestinian people regarded the Arab Peace Initiative as a sign of continued Arab solidarity and support for their cause. It was also seen as establishing the “minimum requirements” for negotiating a two-state peace agreement (Podeh, 2022).

### **3. Factors Prompting Reevaluation of Gulf States’ Policies Towards Israel**

#### **3.1 Rise of Iran as a Regional Power**

One of the most critical reasons for the Gulf states’ reassessment of their approach toward Israel is the rise of Iran as a significant regional power. Over the past few decades, Iran has expanded its influence across the Middle East through military, political, and ideological means (Naqvi, 2024). Its involvement in the Syrian Civil War, substantial support for Hezbollah in Lebanon, alliances with Shia militias in Iraq, and backing of the Houthi rebels in Yemen have given Iran considerable leverage in several regional conflicts. Moreover, the ongoing development of Tehran’s nuclear program has alarmed the Gulf states, as a nuclear-armed Iran poses a direct threat to regional security and stability (Quamar, 2020). Particularly, Iran’s intervention in the Yemeni Civil War is seen as especially critical because it represents Iranian expansion right on Saudi Arabia’s doorstep. The strategic rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran has never been more intense, as demonstrated by their escalating hostility in multiple regional conflicts. Against this backdrop, Gulf states—most notably Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain—are increasingly viewing Israel as a potential strategic partner against Iran (Quamar, 2020). Israel’s advanced military capabilities, unmatched intelligence networks, and shared security concerns present a compelling case for these Gulf states to adopt a more pragmatic approach toward normalizing relations.

#### **3.2 Economic diversification needs**

One of the main drivers behind the changing behavior of Gulf states toward Israel is the urgent need for economic diversification. The economies of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries have traditionally been highly dependent on oil. However, fluctuations in global oil prices, shifting prospects in the global energy market, and growing environmental concerns—especially the transition to renewable energy sources—have exposed the vulnerabilities of oil-dependent economies. In response, Gulf states have launched ambitious economic reform programs aimed at reducing reliance on oil and promoting sustainable development. Initiatives such as Saudi Vision 2030, the UAE’s Centennial 2071, and Kuwait’s Vision 2035 focus on developing diversified, knowledge-based economies (Quamar, 2020). Engaging with Israel, a global leader in technology and innovation, offers Gulf states valuable opportunities to accelerate their economic diversification. Cooperation with Israel in areas such as technology, cybersecurity, agriculture, water management, and healthcare can foster economic growth and create new



jobs. Thus, the strategic importance of economic diversification makes normalization with Israel a wise choice for the Gulf states (Rahman, 2021).

Another key factor contributing to the shift in Gulf states' policies toward Israel is technological and security cooperation. Israel is recognized as a global technological hub with advanced capabilities in cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and renewable energy. The Gulf states see great potential in leveraging Israeli expertise and technology to advance their own projects and enhance their technological capabilities (Guzansky, 2021). Collaborative efforts including information exchange, strategic discussions, joint military exercises, and defense technology development are expected to counterbalance Iran's influence and help maintain regional stability. The recent peace agreements, particularly the Abraham Accords, have formalized this cooperation, enabling all parties to benefit from enhanced security and sustainable arrangements. Overall, the Gulf states' policies are pragmatic and reflect their readiness to prioritize national security and technological advancement over traditional political stances (Niu & Wu, 2021).

The changing political dynamics within the Gulf states themselves have also been crucial to this reassessment of their policies toward Israel. A notable recent development is the emergence of more pragmatic and future-oriented leadership in several Gulf countries. Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and the UAE's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed are prominent examples, having led ambitious economic and social reforms to modernize their countries and reduce oil dependency (Hitman & Zwilling, 2022). These younger leaders have demonstrated greater willingness to depart from traditional policies and adopt more flexible regional postures. Importantly, this generational leadership shift has allowed for a reconsideration of long-held positions, including those on Israel, as national interest, economic development, and regional stability have taken precedence (Rehman, 2020). Through normalization with Israel, these leaders aim to achieve broader strategic objectives.

#### **4. The Abraham Accords**

The year 2020 marked a fundamental shift in the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East. It was the year when the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain agreed to normalize relations with Israel, followed shortly by Sudan and Morocco taking similar steps. This transformation was driven by a complex mix of strategic, economic, and political factors, highlighting the practical and politically motivated nature of these decisions. A key influence behind the move was security concerns, particularly the desire to counterbalance Iran's potential regional expansion (Guzansky & Marshall, 2020). This pragmatic collaboration manifested in various forms, including joint military exercises and intelligence-sharing programs (Singer, 2021).

#### **4.1 Significance of the Abraham Accords**

In 2020, the normalization of relations between the UAE and Bahrain on one side, and Israel on the other, under the Abraham Accords marked an unprecedented moment in Middle Eastern diplomacy. The UAE's decision to establish diplomatic ties with Israel was driven by a complex mix of strategic, economic, and technological factors (Bayrak, 2021). Led by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed, the UAE's leadership recognized that cooperation with Israel could enhance the country's security, particularly in countering Iran. Moreover, the agreement presented an opportunity for the UAE to align itself with a more modern state on the global stage and to stimulate national economic growth through diversification, modernization, and integration into global economies via advanced technologies and investments (Çinkara & Coşkun, 2023).

Bahrain's move toward normalization was also motivated by security and economic considerations. Although Bahrain is oil-rich and enjoys a relatively high level of human development, it remains a small island state with limited natural resources (Feierstein & Guzansky, 2023). Thus, securing its survival through strategic alliances—including military partnerships—was crucial. Relations between Bahrain and Iran have been tense, with the predominantly Shiite Islamic Republic making recurrent claims against Bahrain's Sunni monarchy. Additionally, Bahrain sought to strengthen ties with its Gulf Cooperation Council partners, especially Saudi Arabia, whose perspectives heavily influence Bahrain's security and economic policies. Following the UAE and Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco also began normalizing relations with Israel, each motivated by unique factors. Sudan's decision, for instance, was primarily driven by its desire to be removed from the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism (Mazzucco & Alexander, 2022).

### **5. Balancing Expediency and Principle**

#### **5.1 Overview of Iran's Regional Influence and Military Capabilities**

Iran's regional influence has grown significantly over the past few decades, largely through the strategic use of proxy forces and the development of asymmetric warfare capabilities. Its external support for Hezbollah in Lebanon, various Shia militias in Iraq, the Assad regime in Syria, and the Houthi rebels in Yemen has extended Iran's reach across the Middle East, forming what is often called the "Shia crescent" stretching from Tehran to the Mediterranean. Among Iran's military capabilities, its expanding arsenal of ballistic missiles and drones, along with its nuclear program, are especially concerning. Overall, Iran possesses substantial strategic depth, enabling it to project power far beyond its borders (Jalal, 2023).

A key factor driving the improved relations between Israel and several Gulf states is their shared perception of Iran as a common enemy. Both see Iran's regional influence and military capabilities as direct threats to their security. For the Gulf states, the main concern

lies in Iran's support for proxy groups and the potential for exporting its revolutionary ideology to destabilize regimes. Israel's worries center on Iran's nuclear ambitions and its backing of organizations intent on the destruction of the Jewish state (Gul, Abbasi, & Haider, 2021). This convergence of security interests has led to closer cooperation between Israel and the Gulf states in recent years. Specific examples of this security cooperation include intelligence sharing, which has been a critical component of their partnership. Both sides have benefited from exchanging vital information regarding Iranian activities and capabilities (Khlebnikov & Smagin, 2021).

## **5.2 Defense and Military Alliances**

The establishment of both formal and informal military alliances has played a crucial role in strengthening security cooperation between Israel and the Gulf states. Formal alliances typically involve signed agreements and treaties that define the terms of military collaboration, defense aid, and strategic partnerships. In contrast, informal alliances encompass less publicized but equally vital cooperation, such as intelligence sharing, joint training exercises, and other collaborative efforts. Together, these alliances enhance the military capabilities of the parties involved and ensure they are well-prepared to confront shared threats, particularly from Iran (Horowitz, 2021).

## **5.3 Role of the U.S. in Facilitating Gulf-Israel Security Cooperation**

It is important to recognize that the United States has been central to the security cooperation between the Gulf states and Israel. Serving as a key ally to both parties, the U.S. provides military aid, advanced technologies, and supports their respective regional strategies (Barak, Sheniak, & Shapira, 2023). Heilbrunn highlights that Washington's push for the Abraham Accords was driven by the objective to unite key allies against Iran and other regional threats. Additionally, the U.S. has played a pivotal role in organizing joint military exercises and defense agreements, fostering an environment of increased cooperation and trust between the Gulf states and Israel. Overall, the U.S. seeks to strengthen regional security and deter aggression from Iran by backing this trilateral collaboration (Cristiano, 2021).

## **5.4 Analysis of Joint Military Exercises and Defense Agreements**

Regional security cooperation primarily centers on joint military exercises and defense agreements. Joint military exercises, organized and conducted by participating states, often include combat simulations, missile defense, naval operations, antisubmarine warfare, and counterterrorism efforts. Their main goal is to strengthen the operational readiness of the forces to effectively protect both the Gulf states and Israel. Defense agreements encompass mutual defense commitments, arms procurement, and intelligence sharing, all of which

serve to reinforce the region's collective defense capabilities and prepare for potential threats. Together, these joint exercises and defense agreements significantly enhance security cooperation between Israel and the Gulf states (Cristiano, 2021; Dana, 2023).

Recognizing the finite nature of their oil reserves and the vulnerabilities of the global oil market, many Gulf states—such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar—have launched ambitious economic diversification initiatives. These efforts are reflected in national development frameworks like Saudi Vision 2030, the UAE Centennial 2071, and Qatar National Vision 2030. Although these plans vary in scope and timeline, they share a common goal: building a diversified, post-oil economy (Yaman & Yiğittepe, 2023).

### **5.5 Technology and Innovation in Economic Plans**

Technology and innovation are central to the Gulf states' economic strategies. Many of these countries have committed substantial resources to developing advanced technological infrastructures and fostering innovation ecosystems. To attract foreign investment and support local startups and tech firms, the UAE has established multiple free zones, such as Dubai Internet City and Masdar City, Abu Dhabi's clean technology hub. Saudi Arabia's flagship initiative is NEOM, a cutting-edge, post-fossil fuel megacity powered entirely by renewable energy (Triantama, 2023). Consequently, the Gulf states' economic development plans, alongside the normalization of relations with Israel, encompass a broad range of initiatives including diversification, technological collaboration, trade and investment, tourism, and cultural exchange (Kéchichian, 2023).

### **5.6 Cultural and Religious Ties**

The Palestinian cause holds profound cultural and religious significance across the Arab world, particularly in the Gulf states. Jerusalem, with the Al-Aqsa Mosque as one of Islam's holiest sites, adds a deeply personal and spiritual dimension to the Palestinian struggle for Muslims globally. In the Gulf, this cause is woven into the cultural fabric and remains a passionate issue for both the public and regional governments. Beyond its political dimension, the Palestinian cause symbolizes Arab and Islamic unity, heritage, and shared identity.

Historically, the Gulf states have been key supporters of Palestinian rights. Since the establishment of Israel in 1948, these nations have strongly backed the Palestinian cause, providing substantial financial aid. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar have consistently contributed billions of dollars to support Palestinian refugees, fund salaries, and sustain essential public services (Saltzman, n.d.).

## **5.7 Israel attack on Palestine and the future of Gulf-Israel relations**

The future of Gulf-Israel relations will likely be shaped by a mix of regional and global developments. The ongoing conflict in Palestine, marked by escalating violence and humanitarian crises, exemplifies the challenges that could impact these relations. Public opinion in the Gulf and the broader international community, alongside Gulf countries' commitment to solidarity with Palestine, may pressure Gulf states to balance their ties with Israel against potential risks to their international reputation and internal stability. Additionally, global factors—such as U.S. foreign policy shifts under different administrations, the roles of China and Russia, and fluctuations in the energy market—will also influence the region's trajectory and Gulf-Israel relations (Oxford Analytica, 2024). These dynamics may strengthen pragmatic alliances while requiring Gulf states to adopt more cautious policies to preserve both regional and domestic stability (Abbas, 2024a).

## **5.8 Shifts in Alliances and Their Effects**

The regional changes discussed above suggest potential shifts in alliances. Iran's rising influence and the ongoing regional conflicts may prompt more Gulf states to strengthen their security ties with Israel. Conversely, the current war in Palestine could trigger a different realignment, with some divided Arab states renewing their commitment to the Palestinian cause as part of their collective identity and as a means to bolster regime legitimacy within the Arab world. These dynamics may lead to clearer positions among involved countries and a more polarized regional landscape. The consequences of these shifts are significant, affecting regional stability, the balance of power, and opportunities for cooperation on issues such as terrorism, economic development, and climate change (Oxford Analytica, 2024).

Gulf states occupy a unique position within the Israel-Palestine conflict and the wider Middle Eastern geopolitics, placing them in a pivotal role to facilitate peace negotiations and promote long-term regional stability. Should the Gulf states successfully contribute to resolving the conflict, a comprehensive peace agreement would markedly enhance regional stability. However, such an agreement is unlikely to produce major effects beyond the Middle East. Past negotiation attempts and the persistence of the status quo have demonstrated that the conflict's impact remains largely local, affecting primarily neighboring countries and the broader Middle East. In other words, none of the scenarios considered suggest broader geopolitical implications outside the region (Oxford Analytica, 2024).

## **5.9 The prospects for enduring peace and cooperation in the Middle East**

Several factors determine the prospects for enduring peace and cooperation in the Middle East. Firstly, the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian issue—through the implementation

of a two-state solution or another mutually agreed arrangement—remains a critical prerequisite for peace in the region. The Gulf states play a crucial role in this process due to their substantial economic resources and political influence, which can be used to encourage both sides to reach a peaceful solution. Secondly, equitable economic growth and social development across the region will help address some of the social and economic grievances that fuel the conflict. Thirdly, educational and cultural programs can be used to nurture mutual understanding and respect for other cultures. Fourthly, the regional security system should include all key stakeholders, such as Israel, Palestine, Iran, and the Gulf states (Abbas, 2024b).

## **6. Conclusion**

The relations between the Gulf states and Israel have undergone a substantial transformation, shifting from non-recognition and hostile approaches to normalization agreements within the Abraham Accords. This agreement marked the transition from several decades of informal and defensive relations to a policy characterized by pragmatism. This approach reflects a relatively similar set of security interests shared by the Gulf states and Israel, particularly regarding concerns about Iran. Moreover, the economic benefits of normalization have contributed to the implementation of various technological and economic projects, as well as the development of trade and investment networks that benefit both regions strategically and economically.

The pragmatic shift toward normalization is a testament to the realist outlook that the Gulf states adopt in response to the ever-evolving regional and international landscape. By partnering with Israel, the Gulf states seek to enhance their security architecture and refine their financial portfolios while promoting their status as pivotal players in the regional dynamic. The normalization of relations between the Gulf states and Israel may have significant impacts and shape future dynamics surrounding the issue in various ways. On the one hand, the fact that the Gulf states have normalized relations with Israel signifies a waning influence of the Arab world's two main countries—Egypt and Saudi Arabia—in the region's power architecture, resulting in a weakened position for the Palestinians. Moreover, the significant conflict in key regions, pitting the two sides against each other while causing a high death toll and humanitarian emergencies, intensifies this challenge. On the other hand, the Gulf states could leverage their new partnership to influence Israeli dynamics and promote an inclusive approach that incorporates the Palestinians into the regional integration project. The economic benefits of such a regional initiative could be advantageous for the entire region.

Looking to the future, the Gulf states are poised to use their new relationship with Israel to create a more stable regional geopolitical climate, at least by mediating potential conflicts. Additionally, these nations could feasibly pressure Israel through diplomatic means to adhere to the widespread demand for a two-state solution. Hopefully, in light of the

significant loss of life in the recent military conflict, the resolution this time underscores the necessity of addressing the root causes rather than the symptoms of this recurring malaise. Given the historical events that have perpetuated the conflict, either a two-state solution or some other compromise entailing full Palestinian recognition are the only pragmatic long-term solutions. The newly developing Israel-Gulf relationship is a realistic development amid the shifting alliances of the Middle Eastern world, combining the needs of the Gulf nations with the urgent interests of the parties involved, even if it is not entirely consistent with certain principles. Although it may present challenges for the Palestinian cause, the Gulf states are set to benefit from—and subsequently influence productively—the ongoing changes through balancing competing interests. In this way, the emerging political configuration could enable the region to address contemporary challenges while leaving historic grievances behind.

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