



A Case Study Of The United Arab Emirates And Bahrain Within The Framework Of The Abraham Accords

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Abstract

This study investigates the normalization between Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Israel through the structure of a detailed sequence of international politics and diplomatic law in the period 2020–23 known as Abraham Accords. Employing a qualitative method of comparative case studies, the study concludes that the Abraham Accords are a paramount revolution in Middle East politics. Scrutiny of diplomatic cables, official statements and trends in economic-security cooperation reveals that the UAE-Bahrain normalization has set major precedents in Middle Eastern diplomacy, particularly surrounding the question of Israeli-Arab normalcy (or lack thereof), Israel's legitimacy without a peace agreement with Palestinians, and the formation of an informal strategic alliance oriented around containing Iran. The results indicate that the decisions of both the UAE and Bahrain are not motivated by any dream for peace with Israel; rather, they reveal realpolitik calculations based on security and economic gains. The new partnership presents for co-operation in technology, trade, security and energy, and poses great challenges to be addressed on questions concerning the Palestinians, domestic opposition or doubts about long run security. The research finds the Abrahams Accords represents a regional turning point in Gulf-Middle East diplomacy's architecture and its sustainability is contingent on the willingness of principal actors to ward off old conflict dynamics and establish extensive trust.

Keywords: Diplomatic, Abraham Accords, Middle East, United Arab Emirates, Israel, Bahrain

Introduction

The Abraham Accord Peace Agreement: Treaty Peace, Diplomatic Relations, and Full Normalization between their Respective Countries was signed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Emirates Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bahrain Abdullatif bin Rasyid al-Zayani, and the Prime Minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu, witnessed by the President of the United States Donald Trump (Lazin 2023). In his speech, Trump called the achievement a historic one that would shape a new and better Middle East after decades of endless conflict.

The Abraham Accord signed at the White House on 15 September 2020, and marked a historical turning point in Israeli-Arab relations. For the first time since the Israel-Egypt (1979) and Israel-Jordan (1994) peace agreements, Arab states starting with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, formally normalized diplomatic relations with Israel without the precondition of resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This broke the peace for land paradigm that had for decades been the cornerstone of peace initiatives in the region, including the Arab Peace Initiative (2002) which required Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories as a precondition for normalization.

In the context of international relations, the Abraham Accords reflect a paradigm shift from Pan-Arab solidarity-based diplomacy to a more pragmatic and national interest-oriented approach. Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates see a strategic opportunity to strengthen their economic and security alliances, especially when faced with common threats such as Iran or militant groups affiliated with it, as well as to expand access to global investment and technology. However, this normalization also raises ethical and political dilemmas related to the Palestinian issue, which has been a mainstay of Arab foreign policy.

These dynamics include the strengthening of previously secret relations between the Gulf and Israel (particularly in the fields of intelligence and security), as well as a shift in the priorities of US foreign policy in the Middle East. In addition, pragmatic interests in technology, security, and economics have created momentum for diplomatic breakthroughs that were previously difficult to imagine.

This article seeks to explore the mechanisms of the UAE and Bahrain's normalisation with Israel under the framework of the Abraham Accords, by considering three key dimensions: (1) Drivers of normalization decisions that supersede established preconditions tied to Arab-Israeli relations; (2) The implications for regional security architecture and regional strategic dynamics; (3) implications for the prospects of resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and expanding normalization to other Arab states.

Through a comparative analysis of UAE and Bahrain, two states that do not share the same political characteristics but have relatively similar strategic orientations, this study tries to identify which patterns and variations in the interest calculations of Gulf states are involved. This comparative model allows the identification of factors that allow us to predict the behaviour of other regional actors, and thus provides an analytical grid to assess the long-term effect of the Abraham Accords on regional stability. Against the backdrop of evolving Israeli Arab relations since 2020, this research provides a systematic scrutiny of the internal dimensions of normalization process and its inherent contradictions between official discourse and actual implementation, as well as feasibility for continued sustainability amidst regional instability. Through a combination of international relations theory and recent empirical evidence, this paper makes a contribution to constructing an expanded concept concerning volatile alliances in Middle East area. The significance of this research lies in that it contributes to a deeper comprehension of the transformation of foreign policy directions in the Gulf, and to grasp how normalization with Israel has been instrumental for Arab states to adapt to changes in global and regional geopolitical constellations.

Literature Review

The academic literature on the normalization of the UAE and Bahrain's relations with Israel within the framework of the Abraham Accords encompasses a variety of theoretical and thematic perspectives. A systematic review of recent studies identifies four main bodies of literature that reflect the complexity of this phenomenon:

1. Realism and Strategic Interest Perspectives

The scholarship on the normalization of the relations of the UAE and Bahrain with Israel illustrated by the Abraham Accords consists of multiple theories and themes. A systematic review of the current literature demonstrates the existence of a few primary literature streams that showcase the multi-faceted nature of the phenomenon: Aviation Accords and Abraham Accords, The Emirates and the (Guzansky and Marshall, 2022) analyses of the normalisation of relations of the UAE and Israel through strategic hedging where the UAE is trying to reposition its security partnerships on a perceived dilution of US Gulf security. The research revealed that the UAE relicensing of the US F-35 and access to Israeli defence technology provisioned critical motivator for engagement of normalisation. *Small State, Big Ambition: Bahrain's Strategic Calculus* (Wechsler and Henderson, 2021) also posits that Manama's security dependence on the US and the fear of Iranian influence are notable motivators for its entry to the Accords. Threat perceive arch was a midwife of potential coalition between Israel and the Gulf states towards Iran (2023). *International relations magazine* describes the cascading threat dynamics between Israel and the Gulf states. Iran became a precedent for an informal coalition that transcended the traditional Arab-Israeli conflict paradigm.

2. Political Economy and Diversification Perspectives

The second group of studies examines economic aspects of normalization. Al-Mashat (2022) considers the Abraham Accords as part of the UAE's strategy to diversify its economy and focuses on the Israeli technology and renewable energy sectors. The author indicates the move from dependence on hydrocarbons to the use of economic diplomacy as one of the most defining features of the UAE's foreign policy today. Mitchell (2023) examines the link between Bahrain's economic crisis and the normalization decision in the framework of Bahrain's Economic Vision 2030 and the diplomatic re-alignment, concluding that the hopes for Israeli capital and US economic aid were considerable. In the meantime, an article in *Middle Eastern Policy* (2022) discusses some transactional aspects of the normalization and focuses on the expectations of US economic and military aid as incentives for the UAE and Bahrain.

3. Identity, Legitimacy and Domestic Politics

The third set of literature looks at the dynamics of domestic and regional legitimacy of the normalization decisions. Zogby Research (2022) *Normalizing the Abnormal: The Abraham Accords and Arab Public Opinion* identifies the void between elite decisions and public opinion in the Gulf and the 'discursive legitimization' strategies' employed by the government to rationalize normalization through re-framing of the Palestinian problem and focusing on the instrumental advantages. Bahrain's Sectarian Dynamics and Normalization Politics (Gengler, 2021) critically analyses how sectarian dynamics between the majority Shia and Sunni governments influenced Bahrain's decisions, including the regime's efforts to strengthen its international legitimacy amid human rights criticism. An article in the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (2023) *Bahrain's Sectarian Dynamics and Normalisation Politics* examines how signatory states employed narratives of religious tolerance and coexistence to construct, and defend, normative legitimacy of the controversial decisions while ignoring the political aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

4. Regional Dimensions and Geopolitical Implications

The fourth column of studies examines the wider systematic consequences of the Abraham Accords on the region's polity. *The New Middle East: Realignment and Ruptures* (Lynch, 2023) discusses the fragmentation of Arab consensus on the Palestinian cause, and the new offensive, anti-Iran, and Arab-superseding strategic position of the coalition of the UAE-Bahrain-Israel normalization. A study by the Carnegie Middle East Centre (2022) identifies the shift from pan-Arab solidarity to issue-specific alignments as a key characteristic of post-Abraham Accords Middle East politics. A *Journal of Palestine Studies* publication (2024) critiques the implications of normalization for the Palestinian position, arguing that the Abraham Accords have marginalized the Palestinian issue on the regional agenda and reduced its diplomatic leverage.

5. Gaps in the Literature and Research Contributions

While the above literature provides comprehensive analyses of various aspects of the Abraham Accords, there are some important gaps: First, there are limited systematic comparative studies that analyse the differences and similarities in the motivations of the

UAE and Bahrain, two countries with different political capacities and characteristics. Second, there is a lack of in-depth analyses of the practical implementation of the agreement beyond diplomatic rhetoric, especially in the economic, security and socio-cultural sectors. Third, there is a lack of exploration of the impact of regional volatility (such as the 2023 Gaza war) on the sustainability of normalization.

The aim of this study is to develop a comparative analytical framework to address the normative, institutional and empirical gaps of the UAE and Bahrain normalizations. The study enhances understanding of the transformation of the Middle East by using recent empirical studies along with the theories of international relations.

Research Methods

This study has been designed to analyze the normalization processes of the UAE and Bahrain concerning the Abraham Accords using a qualitative approach with a comparative case study framework. This strategy provides a lens to capture the intricacies of the UAE and Bahrain diplomatic relations with Israel and allow for a systematic comparison and analysis to be developed, taking into consideration factors such as strategic, economic and identity dimensions.

1. Research Type and Approach

Given the focus of this study, the purpose of this research as it is in the realm of international relations, is to analyze the phenomenon of foreign policy using qualitative research methodologies. As part of this study, due consideration will be given to the qualitative aspects of the variables, such as economic interests, threat perceptions and diplomacy, as well as their qualitative study, to be undertaken.

2. Data Collection

Research data sourced from:

Main Sources: Texts forming the Abraham Accords, the Joint Statements, the Bilateral MOUs, transcripts from the Press Conferences and Speeches from the Heads of State, the Foreign

Ministry Press Releases, and Economic Planning Documents from the UAE and Bahrain (Vision 2030 and Economic Vision 2030 respectively).

Media Sources: Balanced reports on the Abraham Accords from the region and world (Al-Jazeera, Al-Arabiya, Haaretz, Times of Israel, Gulf News).

Academic Sources: International Relations journals (International Affairs, Middle East Policy, Journal of Palestine Studies), publications from prominent think tanks (Carnegie, Brookings, Middle East Institute), and analyses on Middle East Policy from experts.

3. Data Analysis Technique

The data was analyzed using content analysis and comparative analysis methods, which examined the content of official documents and statements to find patterns, themes and main arguments. The collected data was analyzed through the following steps:

- Content Analysis:

- a) Conducted on the content of official documents and statements to identify patterns, themes, and main arguments.
- b) The aim was to reveal the official rhetoric and strategies used by the UAE and Bahrain to justify the normalization decision.

- Comparative Analysis:

- a) This approach was used to conduct a systematic analysis of the similarities and differences between the UAE and Bahrain cases.
- b) The objective was to identify patterns and variations in the calculations of Gulf states with different political characteristics, thereby providing an analytical framework for evaluating the long-term impact of the Accords.

- Theoretical framework

- a) Realism theory, to interpret the UAE and Bahrain's actions as an effort to maintain security and strategic interests.
- b) Liberalism theory, to understand economic and diplomatic cooperation as part of regional integration and peace-building through interdependence.

Results

An analysis of the normalization of the UAE and Bahrain's relations with Israel through the Abraham Accords reveals complex dynamics that reflect fundamental transformations in Middle Eastern regional politics. The research findings are applying theoretical frameworks more explicitly, especially realism and liberalism. In addition, the result is organized into five dimensions of analysis that illustrate different aspects of this phenomenon.

■ Applying Theoretical Frameworks

The theoretical framework of Realism and Liberalism for analyzing the decision of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain to normalize relations with Israel within the framework of the Abraham Accords.

1. Realism and Strategic Interests

Applying Realism theory to relations between the UAE and Bahrain can be rationalized in terms of safeguarding national interest and security in the global arena.

- 1) Realpolitik: threats Convergence This is based on the theory of Realpolitik, whereby relations are normalized, not to achieve peace, but for calculative security and economic gain.
 - a) Iran Encirclement: Iran and its allied proxy forces, such as Hezbollah, Hamas, and the Houthis, constitute a shared security risk. This drives the UAE and Bahrain rapprochement to Israel. This lays the groundwork for the informal anti Iran coalition beyond the classical Arab-Israeli conflict.

- b) Bahrain interests: for Bahrain, with its Sunni dynasty ruling a Shia majority country and facing a direct security threat from Iran, normalization is seen as a way to enhance its strategic position and maintain internal order.
 - c) UAE interests: the UAE, as an ambitious regional power, seeks technological superiority and the strengthening of the regional security architecture.
- 2) Major Powers Incentives: theory of Realism incorporates the influence of great powers. The USA's involvement, coupled with a substantial military and economic aid package, was a significant factor affecting the strategic choices of both countries.

2. Liberalism and Institutional Cooperation

This facet of liberalism aims to gain understanding on how cooperation, interdependence, and institutions facilitate peace and stability, especially through economic relations.

- 1) Economic Pragmatism and Diversification: Normalizing relations was largely influenced by economic pragmatism and diversification of the two countries.
- a) Access to Technology and Investment: the post-oil economic diversification strategy articulated in Vision 2030 will be supported by the UAE acquisition of Israeli technologies in agritech, water, and renewable energy.
 - b) Bahrain's Economic Recovery: pressured by fiscal constraints and budget deficit, Bahrain hopes to gain Israeli investments and economic aid from the US through the normalization of relations.
- 2) Interdependence and Regional Integration: liberalism international relations views the prosperity of trade and investment relations as a means of creating interdependence and hence lowering the probability of conflict.
- a) UAE Trade Growth: there are strong signs of growing economic relations between the two countries as the UAE-Israel bilateral trade has grown

significantly. The UAE welcomes cooperation and investment in high technologies, especially artificial intelligence, renewable energy, and desalination.

b) Israel's Integration: the agreement has transformed the region by incorporating Israel as a full and active member of the Arab trade zone and a legitimate trade partner, which marks a significant departure from the Pan-Arab ideological and solidarity alliance towards a more pragmatic trading partnership.

3) The formation of institutions (Bilateral Agreements). The execution of the Abraham Accords through 80+ UAE-Israel bilateral agreements is a testament to the liberalism theory's expected cooperative institutionalism. This is a positive signal to the theory that institutionalism will advance the relations and peace prospects.

■ Five Dimensions Of Analysis

1. Strategic Convergence: Threat Perception and Regional Realignment

The Abraham Accords are the result of a strategic shift that has been brewing under the surface for a decade. Diplomatic correspondence and public statements from various officials show that a common security threat perception vis-a-vis Iran, as well as its proxy allies (Hezbollah, Hamas, the Houthis), contributed most to the UAE's and Bahrain's move closer to Israel. There's no clause in the deal that will allow the U.S. to deploy troops on Emirati or Israeli soil, a fear voiced after the UAE-Israel agreement was made public in August 2020. "This agreement has nothing to do with stopping any countries," as UAE Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed said back in September of last year. As bin Zayed put it: "This is not directed at anyone, but to strengthen the regional security architecture." However an analysis of post-normalization patterns of security cooperation including joint military exercises, surveillance technology transfers and intelligence cooperation, indicates an explicit anti-Iran orientation.

This strategic aspect is far more significant when it comes to Bahrain, as the looming security threat against Iran hangs directly on it. With a Sunni dynasty ruling a Shiite-

majority state, Bahrain is a small country that may simply consider the benefits of normalizing relations will outweigh the costs in terms of raising its strategic position to Iran's advantage. So you will find policy papers and think-tank documents that highlight how Bahrain has been clinging to the threat of 'Iranian-backed sabotage and infiltration as a primary justification for normalization, or how the UAE has sought to create a narrativisation about economic pragmatism plus long-term regional vision.

There is evidence of different approaches in relation to the implementation of these post-normalization security agreements: the UAE formulated multi-faceted strategic cooperation encompassing cyber defence, drones, and the integration of border surveillance systems, while Bahrain concentrated on the provision of counter-terrorism training and the exchange of intelligence. These differences relate to the varying capabilities and security priorities: the UAE is an ambitious regional power seeking a technological edge, while Bahrain is a small state focused on maintaining internal order.

2. Economic Pragmatism: Diversification and Regional Integration

The post-normalization economic agreements and Bahrain and the UAE's investment patterns indicate the strong pragmatic element of their calculation. With the UAE being able to access Israeli technology, particularly in the agritech, water-tech, and renewable energy sectors, it is able to align with its 'post-oil' economic diversification strategy as set out in the Vision 2030. Bilateral trade is growing spectacularly, from almost \$0 in 2019 to \$2.5bn in 2023, and UAE investment in Israel reached \$1.2bn, chiefly in technology and renewable energy, within the first 3 years. With Bahrain's severe fiscal pressure and chronic budget deficit, normalization is likely to provide access to Israeli investment, as well as increased US economic assistance.

Bahrain's economy is seeing slower growth than the rest of the Gulf and Israel, as is evident from the predicted \$300 million US-Bahrain trade for 2023 and the limited scope of Israeli investments to fintech and tourism. This disparity in economic outcomes is evident in the economic commonalities documents. The UAE with its large consumer market and substantial investment capacity offers a more attractive value proposition to Israeli partners

than Bahrain's smaller economy. There is a clear prioritization of economic collaboration. In the case of the UAE, this is anchored within the scope of emphasis on high tech and AI, desalination and renewable. In the case of Bahrain, this is primarily on tourism, financial services and the overall business infrastructure. This primarily revolves not only on economic capacity, but on the visions of the future. The UAE is looking to the future in a transformational sense. Bahrain is investing in economic normalization in a much more transnational sense.

3. The Politics of Legitimacy: Re-framing, Public Opinion Management and Narrative Control

The two countries faced legitimacy issues on the home front, as well as on the regional stage, with the normalization process. Correspondence on normalization shows that the two countries attempted and still attempt to legitimize, using sophisticated vocabulary, the making of the new normalization documents. The UAE fostered a new Middle East backstory, reconfigured as pragmatic and peaceful, with the Palestinian issue taken out as the central cause and brought in as one of many regional challenges that needs a new solution. With other Bahrain discursive stride deficient, she seems to adopt the UAE and US backstory, with a focus on the so-claimed security and other geopolitical dividends. In all countries, as a response to the issue, the authorities sophisticated information control to stife all and any public dissent, which was consolidated by on-cyber crime laws, and by roughing the press.

Research on the UAE showed the strategically coordinated work of social media influencers as positively framing Israel, while in Bahrain, elite co-optation, and enforcement of political expressive stiflement were used to manage the public dissent which largely was from the subcontinent Shia. The use of religious narratives, Christian, and more so with a focus on Abrahamic faiths as a sense of shared religious culture, plays positively in the legitimization strategy. The UAE accompanied the publicized religious diplomacy with the building of the Abraham Family House in Abu Dhabi that combine mosque, church, synagogue in one complex. This strategy creates a normative framing that obscures the

political dimension of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and highlights aspects of interfaith dialogue.

4. Coordination with the US and Incentive Dynamics

The role of the United States in assisting with and encouraging diplomatic relationship restorations has been described in many diplomatic documents and reports detailing the chronology of negotiation events. In both cases, the US had the "package deal" strategy which involved major US government concessions: the F-35 fighter jets, which had previously been denied to the UAE, and the recognition of the UAE's control over certain disputed areas of the territory, and with regards to Bahrain, was US military and economic assistance to Bahrain. This model of negotiation and diplomacy, particularly Trump's, has been described as deal-making instead of diplomacy which is what we expect. However, the research exposed some differences in the negotiation positions. For instance, the UAE was in a better position because they were able to negotiate a more moderate agreement in which Israel committed to postponing its plan to annex the West Bank. In contrast, the US had a much larger military presence in Bahrain than it did in the UAE and light diplomatic control, weakening Bahrain's position in the negotiations, particularly with the US, as the agreement was almost a carbon copy of the UAE but with fewer concessions.

The chronology demonstrates that the UAE was the 'first mover' in leading, and that Bahrain joined a week afterward which demonstrated bandwagoning as well as diplomatic pressure. Bahraini officials have confirmed that consultation with Saudi Arabia was the basis of their decision, which indicates that some form of regional coordination and a possible unofficial green light from Riyadh.

5. Asymmetric Implementation and Regional Impact

The signed Abraham Accord from 2020 is a peace agreement made between the UAE, Bahrain, and Israel which is now being assess from the UAE's and Bahrain's individual prospective, with a focus on differentiated implementation on to how they signed the peace accord with Israel tied to integrated priorities. With the UAE being the most active member, the operational heading components of the peace agreement and 80 bilateral signed

agreement triggered a multi-factored strategy, comprehensive with Israel through cooperation on trade and security partnerships. However, in the case of Bahrain, the scope in operational implementation was of little to no extent. Its primary focus was the tourism and financial service industry development.

Following the exchange of tokens was as expected in the peace agreement, the major military conflict in Gaza in 2023 and its aftermath where Bahrain is to a higher degree passive, detaining a military umbrella, and halting some trade and military cooperation with Israel, while the UAE extended humanitarian efforts to Gazan warfare. This engaged and active partnership Elints formed confirms that the peace accords became that which shifted the structure of the regions' conjunction for the now on with Israel as an active integrated trade member of the Arab trade Zone moving Israel from a rogue state, to a legit Arab trading partner state, a trading democracies, and a putative integrated with a now legit member stabilizing and fortifying the trade with the anti Iran bloc with further military and trade cooperation from the UAE. This crossroad phenomenon marks the end of total ideological Arab political solidarity on Palestine and the beginning of a more pragmatic Arab trade partnership to encourage Arab, political and economic cooperation inter Africa and the Middle East.

Conclusion

In September 2020, the Abraham Accords altered the relations of the Arab states with each other and with Israel. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain became the first Arab states to achieve formal diplomatic ties with Israel with no prior condition to settle the Palestinian issue. The research determined that the Arab states' decision to establish diplomatic ties with Israel was due to three main factors: the apprehension of an Iranian threat, economic benefits of cooperating, and the superpower support of the United States with a variety of security and political benefits. Israel-Bahrain and Israel-UAE relations are normalized differently.

Due to being the more wealthy and powerful state, the UAE has a more diversified approach focusing on technology and long term economic relations to help with the

economy diversification away from oil dependence. Meanwhile, Bahrain, which is smaller and more dependent on outside security support, has mainly followed the UAE lead with the main motivation being security protection against Iran's influence at home and short-term economic benefits. Both countries will have to work hard to convince their people that normalization with Israel is the right decision. The UAE actively promotes the idea of a more pragmatic new Middle East and emphasizes that the Palestinian issue is just one of many regional problems that need a new approach.

Bahrain follows a similar narrative by emphasizing the security aspect. Both countries also use media control and religious narratives to manage public response, for example by emphasizing the relationship between the Abrahamic religions (Islam, Christianity and Judaism) to make relations with Israel appear more natural. Three years on, the implementation of the agreement shows real differences between the two countries. The UAE has developed extensive relations with Israel through more than 80 agreements in various fields, while Bahrain has only focused on limited cooperation in the tourism and financial sectors.

When the 2023 Gaza conflict occurred, both countries faced the first major test of their relationship with Israel. The UAE maintained active relations while increasing aid to Gaza, while Bahrain suspended some co-operation but maintained formal diplomatic relations. This indicates that both nations favored their respective national interests rather than the customary allegiance with Palestine. In general, the Abraham Accords have transformed the political landscape of the Middle East by forming a new set of alliances that no longer adhere to the conventional Arab Muslim identity.

This agreement has slowly dismantled the Arab states' decades-old consensus regarding the Palestinian issue, bolstered the unofficial alliance countering Iran, and rendered Israel a recognized actor in the politics of the region. This constitutes, a departure on politics driven by identity to politics driven by interests, which will influence the stability and power relations in the region in the long run.

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