



THE ABRAHAM ACCORDS: A SOLID STEP TOWARDS REGIONAL INTEGRATION?

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During President Trump's 2016 – 2018 administration, the United States of America changed its regional policy. The previously-agreed Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action was repealed, the Iranian general Qassem Soleimani was assassinated in January 2020, and the Abraham Accords were signed in September 2020. Two important aspects changed in 2020: the cooperation between the US-led West and Iran was downgraded and the Arab countries were supposed to enter a new age of regional integration and peace.

As of September 2024, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) appears unwilling to recognize Israel as a state unless the Palestinian State is recognized by Israel (and potentially by its allies) and the overall American-led plan for the region's future is challenged by the perspectives of a wider regional conflict, highly biased opinions about the future Middle East security architecture, as well as by systematically competing visions that might reshape global aspirations and decision-making.

This article analyses various perspectives of Middle East and North Africa (MENA) regional integration, which through the Abraham Accords may be potentially understood as an American-driven regional integration proposal, the solidity of this endeavour in the broader regional landscape, and potential challenges in expanding and implementing such a regional plan.

Keywords: Abraham Accords; reprioritization; MENA; USA; Israel;



ABRAHAM ACCORDS: REGIONAL INTEGRATION OR REPRIORITIZATION?

The term *American Abraham Accords* does not exist, but the Declaration (Bahrain, Israel, UAE, USA, 15 September 2020) was signed also by the USA and in the USA, at the initiative of US administration. The signatories were all United Nations (UN) members, but the USA was the only signatory also member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), with a population and economy significantly larger than the combined populations and economies of the signatories.

The signatories “...recognize the importance of maintaining and strengthening peace in the Middle East and around the world based on mutual understanding and coexistence, as well as respect for human dignity and freedom, including religious freedom”. The document also mentions that the signatories seek, among others, “...to end radicalization and conflict to provide all children a better future”. Most of the 8 paragraphs utilize wording like “encourage”, “believe”, “seek”, “welcome”, i.e. less binding, if at all, formulations.

The term “region” is mentioned only once in the joint declaration, i.e. in the context of Israel's progress with establishment of diplomatic relations. But the 7th paragraph reads: “We pursue a vision of peace, security, and prosperity in the Middle East and around the world”. Although not a guarantee that this endeavour shall be achieved, the term “pursue” is significantly more deterministic than the one previously mentioned. As a clarification, the signatories were not mandated by the entire Middle East region to enter such a declaration, hence the term “in” (the Middle East) is sufficiently representative for the purpose of the agreement. However, taking into consideration recent escalations, the commitment towards pursuit of peace, security and prosperity by all signatories can be assessed differently by observers.

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The "Treaty of Peace, Diplomatic Relations and Full Normalization" between the United Arab Emirates and the State of Israel utilizes in the 9th paragraph the term "Arab and Jewish peoples". The paragraph does not state but, at a minimum, could imply a relatively high representativeness of the accord for Arab and Jewish peoples, since this particular formulation does not limit the geographical territories to the State of Israel and the United Arab Emirates.

The utilization of the term *"Middle East and around the world"*, and not West Asia or MENA sets the focus on a region without Iran. Of course, the meaning of Middle East as it is defined in English literature does not include Iran, but given the interactions between Iran and Middle East countries throughout millennia, the declaration confirms, from this perspective as well, the relative delimitation.

The *"Treaty of Peace, Diplomatic Relations and Full Normalization"*¹ (Israel, UAE, US, 2020) between the United Arab Emirates and the State of Israel utilizes in the 9th paragraph the term *"Arab and Jewish peoples"*. The paragraph does not state but, at a minimum, could imply a relatively high representativeness of the accord for Arab and Jewish peoples, since this particular formulation does not limit the geographical territories to the State of Israel and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The degree of representativeness cannot be underestimated, and the historical character, should the treaty be fully implemented, is highly significant, but, at the same time, it must be acknowledged that Saudi Arabia, the country with the population significantly larger than all Middle East signatories combined, was not and is not at present a signatory to the Abraham Accords. Neither is Iraq, an Arab country from the Middle East with relatively large population, nor the Syrian Arab Republic. The 9th paragraph mentions also the aspiration *"...to foster in the Middle East a reality in which Muslims, Jews, Christians and peoples of all faiths..."*, hence the space is not limited to only the descendants of Abraham, but as previously mentioned, it is only two small regional countries that signed this agreement, the USA being just witness.

Consequently, the Abraham Accords, even after being signed by Morocco and Sudan, do not represent a regional peace agreement agreed or signed by the entire Middle East, MENA, or West Asia regions. It is an important step towards a broader regional peace, whatever the region is equated to, it is a relatively significant initiative, but so were the Oslo Accords. Furthermore, it is not the only regional peace initiative, KSA and Iran announcing an agreement in March 2023 as well.

¹ *Treaty of Peace, Diplomatic Relations and Full Normalization between the United Arab Emirates and the State of Israel.*



Nevertheless, the Israeli – Emirati treaty introduces at point 7 the notion of a (joint) *"Strategic Agenda for the Middle East"*. Together with the USA, the two countries are supposed to launch and work together on the agenda, in order to advance peace, stability and prosperity, among others (Ib.). The intent of such an agenda is very clear and constructive, but, given recent history of this region and the political orientation of certain population segments throughout the Middle East, the implementation of this agenda, and the definition of indicators that assess progress in preestablished directions, as well as the actual improvement of these indicators at regional level are still pending.

Hence, Abraham Accords do not, at present, represent a regional framework for all or most of the regional countries. Moreover, they are not the only regional political trend, but rather an American-led initiative meant to normalize relations between Israel and its neighbours. They do not replace the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), since they appear to have refocused mostly on Arab-majority countries, but could be assessed at least theoretically as a measure meant to fill a part of the JCPOA void. The signatories, particularly Israel and the UAE, presented a broader cooperation framework, which includes finance and investment, energy, tourism, education, among others, prioritizing peace as well as economy. These domains were important in the past as well, but under certain conditions, the parties agreed to refocus on longer term and less resource-intensive development. Considering the previous peace deals between Israel and Egypt, and subsequently Jordan, the progress appears as a solid one. But is it indeed?

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ALMOST FIVE YEARS AFTER: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ABRAHAM ACCORDS IN THE REGIONAL GEOPOLITICAL LANDSCAPE

From the perspective of Israel's recognition and normalization of relations with its Arab-Muslim neighbours, the Abraham Accords represent a breakthrough: *the first two Persian Gulf countries normalized relations with Israel.* They also represent a continuation of the normalization process that started with Egypt and Jordan. Two important positive aspects emerge for Israel: the expansion



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of recognition in the region and a growing perspective of recognition by KSA. However, the normalization process is not a regional development, since probably the largest involved actor is the USA, and there are potentially significant economic and political strings attached to the implementation of this initiative.

The China-led macroeconomic revolution has created ripples in all parts of the planet. In the Middle East particularly, the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEEC) has been presented as a potential competitor to "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI). Besides cultural exchanges, Israel and a part of its Arab neighbours were supposed to offer an alternative route from Asia to Europe. The transit of goods from the Persian Gulf to a port on the Eastern Mediterranean, or an alternative route to the Suez Canal, are not new ideas. They just resurfaced after BRI took off, and they are associated to both economic goals and geopolitical rivalry.

❖ **The first assumption behind a presumed success of such a project would be that Indian economy would rise and compete the Chinese one.** While the Indian economy is growing fast, the level of competition between the two BRICS² members – India and China – is a complex topic. To which extent these two countries will cooperate or compete may be a variable that requires further analysis.

❖ **Secondly, the investment required to compete the existing Suez Canal with a multimodal alternative route might be significant.** At the same time, the volume of goods from Asia to Europe can be further split in the future between more routes, hence competing with relatively high investments for less per route trade volumes may bring the economic viability of all routes at unpredictable levels. Alternative routes like the Iraq Development Road with Türkiye, the Middle Corridor, new technologies like electric trains and planes will rather regionalize IMEC than render it a global pathway comparable to what the Suez Canal was for the past century.

❖ **Thirdly, the reaction of Egypt to a potential competitor for the Suez Canal is not comprehensively addressed in mainstream**

² Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

geopolitical analyses, but it is difficult to envision an implosion of its role in trade between Asia and Europe. Europe, China, India, and South-East Asia would probably not replace the Egyptian trade route with another one, unless it offers significant advantages. While Egypt took over the Canal, it can hardly be argued that Europe or Asian partners would doubt Egyptian commitment to allow and secure free navigation of commercial ships on this vital route. At best, the two routes would compete in terms of price and quality, ideally without political or security tensions, but since the volume of goods would be split and reduced by other routes, the region might not rely on the same level of revenues and leverage as the ones of the Suez Canal.

Other major development initiatives in the region may relate to water desalination, energy production from renewable sources, including atomic energy, and security. While the USA assumed the central role of coordinating regional peace through Abraham Accords, it has the presumed privilege and duty to contribute to regional development more than other powers. However, Abraham Accords do not directly provide the USA with exclusivity in regional affairs. Neither in the Middle East, nor MENA and West Asia. Therefore, the fundamental economic transformations at global level will likely impact the Abraham Accords.

The question whether regional projects amount to integration is relatively significant. The competitive nature of IMEEC vis-à-vis the Suez Canal and a potential shift in geopolitical balance due to such a project are factors that have to be taken into account. And the first aspect of this question is: *integration into what?* The Abraham Accords do not represent a comprehensive regional framework, it is another layer added to normalization between previous Israel and Egypt, Jordan normalizations. Whether this layer will be suitable to add more countries, or a new one will be developed for this purpose by the USA, Israel or other alliances has to be observed in the future. Furthermore, the continued implementation of Abraham Accords appears already impeded by the Gaza Strip, West Bank and Lebanon developments: in February 2024, the USA had to transfer assets in Qatar because the UAE restricted American access to Al Dhafra airbase in Abu Dhabi (Youssef et al., 2024), and the Emirati Foreign Minister, Abdullah bin Zayed,



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reportedly stated that the UAE will not play any role in the post-war Gaza Strip arrangements unless the Palestinian State “*is established*” (AGENCIES, TOI STAFF, 2024).

Should the Abraham Accords be considered an American-led initiative for the Middle East region, then the regional integration would require the implementation of this vision. Besides diplomatic efforts and political concessions, this project would require resources in order to align Egyptian and Jordanian normalization frameworks with Abraham Accords, the expansion of this agreement to other regional countries, the delivery of economic advantages, in a relatively peaceful manner.

The evolution towards regional peace is a key component of Abraham Accords and a prerequisite for maintaining the Arab signatories of Abraham Accords in the deal. Should Abraham Accords genuinely consider the entire region, peace is required for trade routes to deliver value, for projects like *Neom* to achieve feasibility, for Iraq, Syria, Yemen to recover from devastating conflicts and consider transition towards a clean economy and for Lebanon to stabilize and start to build an economy. All these fundamental constraints, as well as realistic relationships with Iran, a solution to the conflict from the Occupied Palestinian Territories that can be built upon, a fair competition within the region will have to be added to the scope of Abraham Accords in order to transform it into a regional framework.

At present, the data suggests that the USA is the superpower that proposed and promoted Abraham Accords. Until recently, the concept of a potential, gradual, Israeli takeover of certain Middle East affairs from the USA would have been difficult to assess. However, at least in September 2024, Israel appears to need US and allied support more than ever. The USA dispatched additional navy resources in order to protect Israel from potential Iranian retaliation, supplied weapons and ammunitions and has a major contribution to Israel’s economy. Besides the financial military aid, investment and loans, a significant support in know-how domain, especially from the USA, appears to strengthen its economy. The American 2023 Investment Climate Statements: Israel mentions that two-thirds of the approx. 300 research & development

centres from Israel are accounted for by US companies and 135 Israeli companies were listed on NASDAQ (US DoS, 2024). Consequently, it is difficult to envision a fully independent Israel in the next years, that would have the leverage and resources to realistically overtake the grand strategy and influence in the region from the USA.

Do the Abraham Accords represent a solid step in regional affairs? As an US initiative, it is a significant expansion of Israel’s recognition, but whether this represents a foundation for unanimous and long-term recognition in all scenarios remains to be established. US officials also maintain a high level of support for Israel. American Democratic Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, for example, reportedly stated in January 2023 that the expansion of Abraham Accords should not be conditioned by “*any local political issue*”, Middle East pointing out that these include the “*illegal settlements*” (MEE Staff, 2023). The existing accords may face hurdles and competition, and the expansion appears to be doubtful: there is no recent update on Oman’s Parliament law criminalizing relations with Israel (Asianews.it., 2023) announced in early 2023, and the poles presented by Wilson Center hint that, as of 2022, acceptance of Israel in “*the Arab world*” is at 20.4 %, whereas rejection stands at 79.6 % (Benstead, 2022).

The concept of Israel taking a solid step towards regional integration on its own does not appear to stand valid unless agreements outside of US-designed and supported frameworks are being signed and implemented. This was not the case so far, and no such scenario appears to be on the radar. However, this does not mean that Israel will not receive the support it does or continue its plans, it is just the acknowledgement that it is not alone in pursuing regional geopolitical goals.

POTENTIAL CHALLENGES FOR THE ABRAHAM ACCORDS

As certain texts mention, the possibility of interpreting Abraham Accords was not overlooked. Therefore, the perspective of geopolitical calculations and potential roles such agreements can play on a larger chessboard cannot be overlooked.



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Should Israel carry out its increasingly visible territorial expansion policy, the Abraham Accords can be interpreted also as time-winning against potential Arab opponents. The Greater Israel, "From the Euphrates to the Nile", or other projections of territorial expansion aspirations are becoming increasingly popular, the expansion of settlements in the West Bank and the enormous pressure on the Gaza Strip population amount to arguments that support the territorial expansion of Israel thesis.

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In the competition with Iran and other regional players, Saudi Arabia may prioritize the acquisition of F-35 or other advanced fighters, purchase peaceful atomic energy facilities from the USA, but the kingdom does not appear willing to accept Israel's expansion for such concessions. On the one hand, the politics of certain actors based on acquisition of material and strategic assets at any cost, including by force, and bargaining for them subsequently may be valid only in a purely confrontational logic, hence not acceptable in the framework of a potential peaceful regional future. Secondly, the era when the USA could provide superior defence and energy technologies is still ongoing, but challengers arise. This discussion does not relate to the relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia anymore, but to major superpower blocks, or positions in an envisioned multipolar world. The concept of selling sensitive assets outside traditional alliances is relatively difficult to deploy, and the fundamental basis of the American – Saudi relation may be gradually weakening: Asia is nowadays Saudi Arabia's most important oil customer and ultimately the biggest contributor to its finances. Similarly, the idea of NATO – Saudi cooperation (NATO 2023) can also be perceived as an outstretch and reaction to the war from Ukraine, with possible repercussions on the OPEC+ decision-making, dominated by Saudi Arabia and the Russian Federation.

The narrative of concessions appears to shift along with Israel's expansion, and the Saudi position appears to remain consistently

opposed to such an approach. Should the final game be Greater Israel, and the maps vehiculated in the media be considered, then Israel might want to annex in the future parts of Saudi Arabia. Therefore, the concept of "security guarantees" from the USA appears to be central in the expansion of Abraham Accords for the Kingdom.

Once this issue is solved, which might imply a potential recalibration of Israel's regional stance, the issue of expanding Abraham Accords throughout the region may still face further challenges. Should this however be implemented, the cooperation framework and fundamentals must deliver on long term, since global competition is apparently just warming up.

The Abraham Accords: Who's next?

The recent interest expressed by Syria and Azerbaijan to join the Abraham Accords represents a significant development in the geopolitics of the Middle East and South Caucasus. After the fall of the Assad regime in Syria, the leader of the Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) rebels, known as Abu Mohammad al-Jawlani and since taking power in Syria under his (real) name Ahmad al-Sharaa, recently expressed his conditional desire to normalize relations with Israel under the Abraham Accords, mainly to escape US sanctions (Freiberg, 2025) and to cope with the economic devastation of several years of civil war.

This move aligns with realist theories of international relations, in which states' behaviour is determined by survival and self-interest. The conditions imposed by al-Sharaa – *the cessation of Israeli attacks, the preservation of Syria's territorial integrity and guarantees against foreign interference* – reflect a pragmatic approach to balancing internal legitimacy with external pressures (Stein, 2025; Jerusalem Post Staff, 2025).

However, Syria's historical animosity towards Israel, particularly over the Golan Heights, complicates this shift. Al-Sharaa's background as a former leader of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, an extremist group that fought against Bashar al-Assad's regime, further raises scepticism among Israeli officials, with Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar labelling Syrian leaders as "jihadists" despite their diplomatic overtures (Freiberg, 2025). The Syrian strategy appears driven by the need



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to stabilize the post-Assad regime and integrate into a US-backed regional order, but public opinion and unresolved territorial disputes are significant obstacles.

Azerbaijan's possible inclusion in the Abraham Accords builds on its already strong strategic partnership with Israel, characterized by an "energy for weapons" relationship since the 1990s. Azerbaijan supplies over 60% of Israel's oil, while Israel supplies advanced weaponry essential to Azerbaijan's victories in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflicts (Mammadli, 2025). The request for formal inclusion, backed by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and US envoy Steve Witkoff, reflects a mutual interest in countering common regional threats. Azerbaijan's integration into the Accords would formalize its role in an anti-Iranian axis led by the USA and Israel, which could lead to escalating tensions with Tehran, especially given Iran's concerns about Azerbaijan's Zangazur corridor project (Ib.). However, Azerbaijan's non-Arab identity and pre-existing diplomatic ties with Israel raise questions about the added value of formal inclusion, suggesting that the move may serve symbolic and trilateral (USA-Israel-Azerbaijan) strategic purposes (Mamedov, 2025).

CONCLUSIONS

This article analysed various aspects of Abraham Accords and the potential for implementing this agreement at a significant scale in the future. The idea of a potential regional integration can only be considered in conjunction with a US plan and contribution to significant change in the region, whereby Israel itself was identified as a still relatively small player in regional geopolitics, but strongly supported by allies.

There was no significant geostrategic realignment as a consequence of the Abraham Accords so far, as KSA appears to wait for certain steps from Israel and the USA in a potentially already agreed direction. The region has been complicated for centuries, and appears to remain so even strong attempts to coordinate. As for Syria and Azerbaijan's expressed desires to join the Abraham Accords, they reflect strategic calculations rooted in economic survival and regional security. While Azerbaijan's integration seems more feasible due to its pre-existing ties

with Israel, Syria's aspirations face significant obstacles. The success of these initiatives will depend on resolving territorial disputes, managing domestic sensitivities and supporting US mediation, with wider implications for stability in the Middle East and South Caucasus.

The newer approaches to international relations, notably multipolarism, are challenging the concept of regional integration in the sense of a single superpower exercising overwhelming influence. It does not oppose such a scenario, but it makes it more expensive for any single superpower to convince all regional players to align on a certain axis. For example, the deployment of Israeli force in the Gaza Strip led to, among others, increased American support and reinsurance for Israel, but it also opened the door for significant new paradigms, like for example the re-emergence of Spain as an increasingly significant actor in regional geopolitics. Furthermore, once a construct of this size is being built, its maintenance will require significant resources.

Long-term feasibility of regional integration is not insured, but requires constant and increasing reinforcement in the face of global competition. Therefore, its basis must remain genuine, solid, and noble. Otherwise, any single new agreement may represent just a drop in the ocean. History records increasingly more facts, but to inspire future generations, contemporary achievements have to at least match the classical ones, or surpass them.

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