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The Israel – UAE Peace Agreement and The Restructured Middle East

Both the "Abraham Accords" – the peace agreement between Israel and the UAE and the reactions from regional players to the agreement, reflect the current geostrategic condition of the Middle East. An environment which is a result of significant changes that have taken place in the region over the past decade.

Before I begin, I would like to briefly introduce a term in Arabic that is deeply rooted in the Arabic public discourse, and very relevant to this article and the current state of affairs in the Middle East. The term I am referring to is a word in Arabic - *tatbi'e*. Tatb'ie means "normalization." In the vernacular of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, the word *normalization* is a term that means recognizing Israel's existence in any manner or cooperating with Israel in any shape or form. Not surprisingly, Islamic organizations from [Political Islam](#) organizations (like the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, etc.) to the [Militant Islam](#) organizations (Al Qaeda, Hezbollah, ISIS, etc.) strongly reject any expression of Normalization. But other non-Islamist circles also oppose Normalization. For example, in Jordan and Egypt - two Arab countries that have peace agreements with Israel – trade unions, and other organized bodies of academics, engineers, lawyers, students, etc., also oppose Normalization with Israel. They repeatedly call on Egypt and Jordan to abolish the peace agreements they have with Israel.

In this short article, I will explain how the agreement itself, and the responses to the agreement, represent the new geostrategic construct of the region.

The Opposing Camp

The Palestinians, Turkey, Iran, and Iran's agents and proxies - such as the Lebanese Hezbollah, the pro-Iranian Al-Fatah Coalition in Iraq, the Houthis in Yemen, etc. virulently oppose the agreement. The statements repeatedly coming out of this camp are "*betrayal of the Palestinian cause*," "*abandoning al-Quds*" (the Arabic name of Jerusalem), "*severe strategic mistake*," etc.

The position of Turkey and Iran should come of no surprise to my readers. Both regimes use the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a card to advance their own hegemonic visions. Erdogan wants to restore the good old days of the Ottoman Empire. And he wants to be the leader of the [Sunni](#) Muslim world. And the [Shi'ite](#) regime in Teheran wants to get back the crown of leading the Muslim world that (in the Shi'ite narrative) the Sunnis stole from them in Kerbala in 680. Both regimes have skillfully and successfully appropriated the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to achieve their own goals. And therefore, it is in their interest for it to continue. And if they themselves can fan the flames - even better.

The language both Iran and Turkey are using in responding to the agreement should also come as no surprise to those familiar with my work. When looking at Teheran and Ankara's statements, we see that each evokes "*Al-Aqsa*." And they specifically accuse the United Arab Emirates of "*betraying Al-Aqsa*" because they made a peace treaty with Israel. (The literal translation of the word "*Al-Aqsa*" is "The Far Edge"; it is also a term mentioned in the Qur'an – the Muslim holy book; Islamist theologians identified Al-Aqsa as Jerusalem) (*For more articles on Al-Aqsa, please see my articles ["Al-Quds: Iranian Poster and](#)*

[Hidden Messages" \(June 2020\)](#); [Extended Intelligence Report – July 2017 Temple Mount Compound Crisis: Regional Perspectives \(August 2017\)](#); [Terror Attack at the Temple Mount Compound: Regional Reactions \(July 2017\)](#).

Of course, the Palestinian Authority and Hamas - the two central Palestinian powers have harshly criticized and completely rejected the agreement.

On a practical level, the Palestinian Authority announced that it would immediately return the Palestinian Ambassador from the UAE.

The agreement between Israel and the United Arab Emirates is yet another manifestation of the dismal situation the Palestinians find themselves in as a result of:

An irreconcilable internal Palestinian rift between Hamas and the Palestinian National Authority.

A US administration that is currently aligned with the Israeli government.

When it comes to the Arab countries, the Palestinians' interests and struggles have been severely downgraded due to a combination of several factors:

The threat Iran and Turkey pose to the region.

Arab countries like Lebanon and Iraq are on the verge of total collapse. Syria, Libya, and Yemen are ruined following years of continuous wars.

The Arab states are struggling with their own severe social and economic challenges – including COVID-19 and its ramifications.

Arab states are tired of the inner-Palestinian politics. Specifically, the continuing and escalating split between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority.

Arab states are losing patience with the Palestinians' unwillingness to adopt a pragmatic approach towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

When it comes to Hamas and Islamic Jihad, Sunni Arab powers – including Egypt and the Arab Gulf Monarchies (excluding Qatar) resent Hamas' alliance with their rivals - Iran, Turkey, and the Muslim Brotherhood.

Because the Palestinians recognize their weakened position, they are digging in their heels even more. They refuse to respond in any positive way to a move that does not wholly and resolutely meet their demands. *(On the decline of the Palestinian issue in the Arab world, please read my January 2020 article: [Trump's Plan - Regional Reactions and Initial Observations.](#))*

The Supporting Camp

Bahrain, Egypt, and Oman expressed immediate support for the agreement.

It is worth noting that Saudi Arabia has not made an official announcement regarding the agreement at the time of writing this article. However, there should be no misunderstanding. The deal would not have happened without the blessing of Saudi Arabia.

In response to the expected criticism – primarily the Iranian and Turkish rhetoric - supporters of the agreement present two main arguments.

One argument directly attacks Iran and Turkey. This line emphasizes that Iran and Turkey have caused more destruction and damage in the Arab world than any other entity.

On August 14, 2020, for example, Saudi Journalist, Mashari Althaydi ([@MAlthaydy](#)) wrote an article entitled: "[The UAE-Israel Agreement... Breakthrough to the barrier of Illusion.](#)" Here is a quote: "*Let us remember that Turkey and Iran caused the Arab world damage and destruction- Turkey in Libya, Iran in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen.*" (Please note the article is in Arabic, but you can 'right-click' to translate to English.)

Another argument is that the peace agreement between Israel and the UAE secured a core Palestinian interest because it halted the West Bank's Israeli annexation.

On August 13, 2020, UAE crown-prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Ruler of the United Arab Emirates [@MohamedBinZayed](#) tweeted the following: "*During a call with President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu, an agreement was reached to stop further Israeli annexation of Palestinian territories. The UAE and Israel also agreed to cooperation and setting a roadmap towards establishing a bilateral relationship.*"

This refrain has been echoed by the Crown Prince in subsequent interviews, messages, etc.

And Many in the Arab world who support the agreement, highlight this exact fact. See, for example, An August 16, 2020 article by Emirati Political Analyst, [Dr. Salem Al Ketbi @salemalketbiar Emirati Breakthrough in the Regional Reality Crisis](#)" and an opinion piece published in the Bahrain-based, Newspaper, Al-Watan, entitled "[An Emirati Historic Agreement.](#)" (Please note both articles are in Arabic, but you can 'right-click' to translate to English.)

An interesting note is that on August 15, 2020, Palestinian writer, Suha Al-Jundi published an article, "[Emirates and Peace with Israel,](#)" in which she reluctantly supports the agreement with the following: "*This agreement could expose the Arab world to a (young and Left-leaning) Israeli public, who are interested in living in peace with the Palestinians. And this could promote peace between Israelis and Palestinians.*" (Please note the article is in Arabic, but you can 'right-click' to translate to English.)

Some Interesting Responses

Jordan

The Jordanian response is reserved. The official Jordanian [statement](#) (please note the article is in Arabic, but you can 'right-click' to translate to English) regarding the agreement emphasizes that the ultimate test for the advancement of peace is an Israeli commitment to a two-state solution in which an independent Palestinian state - with Jerusalem as its capital - will be established alongside Israel.

Jordan's response is puzzling for two reasons:

The United Arab Emirates provides economic support to Jordan.

The peace agreement between Israel and the United Arab Emirates could cool the voices in Jordan, pressuring King Abdullah II to cancel the peace agreement between Israel and Jordan.

So why the tepid response?

Jordan's response does not reflect a lack of support. Instead, it reflects the fact that Jordan - of all the Arab states - is very complicated when it comes to the Palestinian issue. Why?

It is important to remember that Jordan ruled the West Bank for nearly twenty years (1948 - 1967). Most of Jordan's population is Palestinian. King Abdullah II's biggest fear is that the Palestinian's demand for an independent state will morph into a demand to include Jordan as part of the Palestinian State. Therefore, Jordan emphasizes that resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict requires establishing an independent Palestinian state alongside the State of Israel and Jordan. Not in Jordan.

Qatar

For now, Qatar has refrained from an official response. Qatar's silence is not accidental.

Regionally, Qatar aligns itself with Iran, Turkey, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Militant Islam.

Like Iran and Turkey, Qatar aspires to be a regional power and is always looking for opportunities to position itself. This is one of the reasons Qatar has become the primary source of income for the Hamas government in the Gaza Strip.

Qatar's policies – especially supporting the Muslim Brotherhood and aligning themselves with Turkey, and having a friendly policy towards Iran – have put it on a collision course with Egypt and the Gulf states (except Oman).

Given the above, you would have expected Qatar to be a part of the "opposing camp." However, that is not the picture. For now.

Qatar's silence is due to the current tensions in the Qatar-US relationship as a result of reports claiming Qatar is providing financial assistance to Hezbollah. Therefore, Qatar, to line up with the opposing camp, led by Iran and Turkey, could exacerbate tensions in Qatar's relationship with the United States. A development both the US and Qatar would like to avoid.

Tunisia

Tunisia has also remained silent.

The President of Tunisia is Kais Said. He is a vocal opponent of Israel and supporter of the Palestinian Islamist movement, Hamas. Though not a member of an Islamist movement, a large part of Said's base is Islamist, his policies favor Islamists, and he has a good relationship with President Erdogan. Given that profile, we could expect that Said would line up with Turkey and oppose the agreement. But that is not the case.

To understand why we need to zoom-out.

In its pursuit of hegemony and to spread its influence and control over territory and natural resources, Turkey acts very aggressively – like a bully - in the eastern basin of the Mediterranean Sea. Erdogan's policy and actions have resulted in a counter regional alliance, which includes Cyprus, Greece, Egypt,

Israel, Italy, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. In that evolving power struggle, Turkey views Tunisia as a natural ally because Kais is friendly towards Islamists and the Muslim Brotherhood. Moreover, other political Islam movements – who support Said - are powerful in Tunisia.

And indeed, when it comes to the Israel – UAE agreement, Islamist groups in Tunisia have voiced resounding opposition. But the President is silent. Kais wants to clarify that he is not necessarily in "Turkey's pocket," He wants Turkey and the UAE to know that he is interested in maintaining good relations with Abu Dhabi.

Erdogan is likely not happy with Kais' position. And it leaves Ankara wondering to what extent it can rely on Tunisia as an ally in the service of its hegemonic aspirations.

Yemen

In response to the Israel-UAE agreement, the ousted Yemenite government led by Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi officially announced that it *"adheres to its support for the Palestinian cause and Palestinian demands."* A Senior Advisor of Hadi, Al-Malek al-Khalafi, tweeted the following: *"Normalization with the enemy (Israel) is not acceptable to the Arab people and is contrary to the Arabness and values of the Arab mother and its interests. It harms the Palestinian cause and serves the Zionist project as well as other projects that harm the Arab nation."*

This is an interesting response. Let's look more at Yemen to understand their official response.

In September 2014, Iranian-backed Houthi Shi'ite tribes in Yemen conducted a military coup, ousting the (Sunni-led) Yemenite government led by President Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi. The ousted government moved to 'Aden in south Yemen. Threatened by an Iranian takeover of Yemen, and following the failure to reach a diplomatic solution, a Sunni military coalition led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE initiated a military operation in March 2015. The goal was to restore Hadi and his government and to prevent Iran from taking control of Yemen.

Because the UAE is one of the main supporters – financially and militarily - of the ousted Yemeni government, Hadi's response is interesting.

Hadi's cold (some would say thankless) position is because, at the same time that the UAE supports Hadi's government in fighting the Houthis, there is also a conflict between Hadi and the UAE that began in mid-2019. In 2017, a UAE-backed militia in south Yemen, known as the Southern Transitional Council (STC), broke off from Hadi's government. The STC is a secessionist movement comprising some of the dominant tribes deeply rooted in the District of Aden. The UAE supports the STC and wants to deepen its relationship with the local tribes because of where Aden is [located](#).

Whenever it comes to Yemen, it is vital always to remember that Yemen is located on one of the most strategic and sensitive points in the world. And Aden is the southernmost point of Yemen, located on the Gulf of Aden, less than one hundred miles from the Bab el Mandeb Strait, one of the most strategic places on the planet. The Bab el-Mandeb Strait - eighteen miles wide at its narrowest point - is located at the southern entrance of the Red Sea, between Yemen and the Djibouti and Eritrea. It is the chokepoint between the Horn of Africa and the Middle East, linking the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean, and a vital link between Asia, the Mediterranean, Europe, and North America. Whoever controls this area wields enormous power.

About 250 miles East of Aden is another point of strategic interest for the UAE. An archipelago of a couple of islands - the largest of which is called [Socotra](#). These islands are in the Arabian Sea and sit right at the Gulf of Aden's entrance - one of the world's busiest shipping lanes.

In July 2020, the UAE-backed Southern Transitional Council militias took control of Socotra Island, taking over all Yemenite government and military institutions and hoisting the flag of South Yemen – the entity they want to create.

When Al-Malek mentions, " ***the other projects that harm the Arab nation,***" he refers to the UAE's takeover of Socotra.

Current Geopolitical Construct of the Middle East

As I said in the opening of this article, the agreement and its responses express the current geostrategic construct of the Middle East. As I close this piece, with your permission, I would like to explore what geostrategic conditions led to the Abraham Accords.

The face of the Middle East is currently shaped by two factors that are intertwined.

One factor is the struggle over the path, identity, and direction. Who will win the hearts and minds of the Muslim world? In broad strokes, there are three competing entities.

[Political Islam](#) Best represented by the most massive Sunni Muslim movement – the Muslim Brotherhood whose ideology is the concept of a global Islamic cultural, political, and religious entity known as the Caliphate, in which no other independent or sovereign state exists. That Caliphate should be governed and ruled by Islamic religious codex - the *sharī'ah*.

[Militant Islam](#) The most well-known Militant Islam entities are Al-Qaeda, ISIS, Global Jihad, Islamic Jihad, the Taliban, African-based Boko Haram, etc. Militant Islam ideology aspires to create a global Caliphate in which the *sharī'ah* will be strictly implemented. ISIS and other Militant Islam groups argue that the current political structure of the Muslim states is corrupt because the governments and rulers do not implement *sharī'ah* law in its most strict and dogmatic form. Therefore, it is their duty to "prepare the stage" for creating the global Caliphate. And the way they prepare the stage is first and foremost by toppling all the "fake Muslim" governments and rulers.

[Civil Society](#) Institutions, non-profits, etc. that promote for lack of a better term, more "Western" inspired values such as pluralism, civil marriage, gender equality, protecting the rights of women, children, LGBTQ, etc.

The power struggle over path identity and direction feeds constant political turbulence and instability in many Arab states. Furthermore, as you can see from some of the examples above, the struggle is not only domestic; it impacts foreign policy and can strain or solidify regional relationships and partnerships.

The second factor that shapes the Middle East today is the hegemonic vision of two key players in the Middle East. Iran and Turkey, who are not only taking advantage of the instability in Arab states. But also fuel it. The relationship between Iran and Turkey is complex, competitive, and even hostile. But their goals have two main common denominators.

One common denominator is that their ambitions to rule the Middle East come at the expense of the Arab world.

Iran has taken advantage of the Arab States' weakness to deepen its influence and advance its own interests. The primary tool of Iran's foreign policy is a network of armed militias it has established and / or nurtures throughout the Arab world – in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, the Gaza Strip, and more. From Hezbollah in Lebanon to Iranian-backed Shi'ite militias in Syria and Iraq, to the Houthis in Yemen, and Hamas and Islamic Jihad in the Gaza Strip, the Iranian regime has successfully entrenched itself in critical locations throughout the region.

Turkey aspires to a position itself as the Sunni camp leader in the Middle East at the expense of traditional Arab leaders like Egypt and Saudi Arabia. This is one of the reasons Turkey supports Political and Militant Islam organizations like the Muslim Brotherhood, Al-Qaeda, ISIS, etc. all of whom pose a threat to Egypt and the Gulf States.

The second common denominator is that Iran and Turkey use the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a card to advance their interests.

Though there has been an on-again-off-again relationship between Hamas and Iran - primarily because of Iran's support for Assad's brutal atrocities in Syria - Iran has been a loyal patron of Hamas has ruled the Gaza Strip since 2007. Iran has also made its closer agent in Gaza, the Islamic Jihad in Palestine, the second most powerful entity in Gaza.

When it comes to Turkey, Erdogan supports Hamas (though his assistance is mostly diplomatic and political) and the Palestinian Authority.

As I said above, both Iran and Turkey have a vested interest in continuing and even exacerbating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This is why Iran and Turkey evoke Islamic narratives such as "Defending Al-Quds" or "Palestine is Islamic Land." Because these sentiments are at the heart of the Muslim and Arab consensus.

The Changing Middle East & The Abraham Accords

Iran and Turkey's hegemonic ambitions directly threaten Egypt, the Gulf states, and Jordan. Given these circumstances, the Gulf states are looking for a strong strategic partner. And Israel is the right address for three reasons: Israel is a regional power; Israel already has a stable peace treaty with Jordan and Egypt; Israel is also directly threatened by Iranian and Turkish hegemonic aspirations.

The changing Middle East has provided the platform for a long-term strategic alliance between Israel and the Arab Gulf states based on shared strategic goals. A dramatic milestone in this process is the signing of a peace agreement between Israel and the United Arab Emirates.

A common refrain in the West is that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict shapes the Middle East. Anyone familiar with my work knows that I argue the exact opposite. It is events and developments in the Middle East that shape the trajectory of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Israel-UAE peace agreement is a stellar example of that thesis.

The UAE signed the peace agreement with Israel because of its own strategic needs. Regardless of their solidarity with and support for the Palestinians. Turkey and Iran oppose the peace agreement because of their own strategic interests. Not because of their solidarity with or support for the Palestinians. Neither Iran nor Turkey cares about the Palestinians.

There are reports in the media about the possibility of another peace agreement between Israel and another Arab country. Among those mentioned are Bahrain, Sudan, and even Saudi Arabia. For reasons mainly related to each of those three countries' domestic politics, I estimate that this will not materialize in the foreseeable future.

Below Are Some Related Articles

[Possible Israeli Annexation / Sovereignty: Domestic & Regional Responses](#) (July 2020)

[The Civil War in Libya: A Flammable Struggle for Wealth & Hegemony](#) (June 2020)

[Zoom Zoom-In: The Red Sea](#) (January 2020)

[The Eastern Mediterranean: The Civil War in Libya & Turkish-Egyptian Tensions Deepen](#) (January 2020)

[The Palestinian March of Return: The Boxers Cautious Dance](#) (April 2018)

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[Because True Knowledge is a Real Asset](#)

Avi Melamed is a Strategic Intelligence Analyst and an Expert on the Current Affairs in the Arab and Muslim World and their impact on the Middle East and Israel.

He is the Founder and CEO of Inside the Middle East: Intelligence Perspectives (ITME). A program he designed during his tenure as the Fellow of Intelligence and Middle East Affairs at the Eisenhower Institute in Washington, DC, from 2013 - 2018. ITME is an empowering educational program teaching critical analysis in an innovative and engaging fashion. Avi's distinct curriculum provides an apolitical non-partisan education about the contemporary Middle East and uses Intelligence Methodology to teach Critical Thinking and Media Literacy. Through the ITME praxis, Avi transforms students and practitioners into knowledgeable, media literate, critical thinkers.

ITME began as an undergraduate initiative and now includes workshops and seminars from High Schools to Communities to Capitol Hill. Avi's goal is to ensure that the next generation of leaders will be equipped with the knowledge, skills, and tools to independently and accurately decipher the Middle East - and accurately predict the direction of future events. Through ITME, Avi has directly impacted the perspectives, educational path, and career trajectory of more than 200 current and future leaders. To quote Avi's students and alumni - *ITME doesn't tell you what to think ITME teaches you HOW to think.*

As an Author, Educator, Expert, and Strategic Intelligence Analyst, Avi provides Intelligence Analysis, Briefings, and Geopolitical Tours to diplomats, Israeli and foreign policymakers, global media outlets, and a wide variety of international businesses, organizations, and private clients on a range of Israel and Middle East Affairs.

Avi is a former Israeli Intelligence Official and Senior Official on Arab Affairs. In his public service, he held high-risk Government, Senior Advisory, Intelligence, and Counter-Terrorist intelligence positions in Arab cities and communities throughout the region – often in very sensitive times - on behalf of Israeli Government agencies.

He has co-authored [Separate and Unequal: Israel's Rule in East Jerusalem](#) and wrote *Ubrusi: The Novel*. His newest book, [Inside the Middle East: Making Sense of the Most Dangerous and Complicated Region on Earth](#) is a GPS to help you navigate the dramatically changing Middle East. The book offers a unique insight into the Arab world, challenges widely-accepted perceptions, provides a guide to make sense of the unfolding events in the region and provides an out of the box idea that could lead to a positive breakthrough in the Israeli- Palestinian conflict. At the request of the publisher, he is currently writing an updated edition.

An Israeli Jew, fluent in Arabic, English, and Hebrew, with a unique understanding of Arab society and culture, Avi has his finger on the pulse on the Arab world. He has a proven record of foreseeing the evolution of events in the Middle East and their impact on a local and regional level.

Through all of his efforts, as an analyst, educator, entrepreneur, and writer, he is a bridge-builder. He dedicates himself to enhancing the Arabic, English, and Hebrew speaking audience's comprehensive understanding of the Middle East and each other.

The Middle East is a Chain of Links. What Happens in one-part impacts what happens in another - And what happens in the Middle East does not stay in the Middle East. Author, Educator, Lecturer, Entrepreneur, Intelligence Analyst, Middle East Expert, Avi Melamed Takes You Inside the Middle East. His decades of experience in Government, Senior Advisory, Intelligence, and Counterterrorism in Arab cities and communities throughout the region Help You Connect The Dots and Build A Three Dimensional Picture of Reality.

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