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Normalisation of Relations Between Saudi Arabia & Israel: Assessment of Critical Aspects

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Abstract

The West Asian region has experienced several unexpected fluctuations in the interactions between the regional players since the outbreak of the Arab Spring in 2010-2011. Since then, some very new camaraderie emerged while some strong and old affinities broke down. However, the unprecedented overture between Saudi Arabia and Israel is the most noticeable feature of the unfolding situation within the region. Although the two countries do not have formal diplomatic ties, there have been several stories in recent years of covert exchanges between them in the fields of intelligence sharing, security, and counterterrorism during the previous few decades. The latest developments in the region indicate that Saudi Arabia's perspective on the Palestinian problems is shifting, despite a claim that the Kingdom adheres to a principled approach towards the normalisation of relations with Israel—which is about a just solution to the Palestinian question.

This paper is set to assess how the region's changing geopolitical landscape is driving Saudi Arabia to revisit its foreign policies in all its parameters and, in particular, its perspective on opening diplomatic relations with the Jewish State of Israel. The study will also discuss the essential elements in the evolution of the normalisation narrative between the Kingdom and Israel. It further argues that the absence of a fair resolution to the Palestine conflict in the near future, Iran's pursuit of regional dominance, and Saudi Arabia's increasing demand for technical investment are some of the contributing causes to this normalisation. This article places these elements in the context of the pragmatism-ideology schism and the way Saudi foreign policy is currently being framed under the direction of Mohammad bin Salman.

Keywords: Peace Plan, Peace Process, Arab Peace Initiative, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Palestine, Iran, Normalization, USA, Arabs, Jews, Islam, Judaism

Introductions

Since the Arab spring, there have been many unheard-of ups and downs in the relationships among the regional players in West Asia. Wherein some enduring, long-standing relationships broke down and some brand-new friendships emerged. Nevertheless, the most startling feature of the region's current predicament is the amount of rumours that point to an unusual overture between Saudi Arabia and Israel. Despite not having any sort of formal diplomatic ties with Israel since its foundation in 1948, there have been numerous conflicting media claims of covert cooperation between the two countries in the past two decades in the fields of intelligence sharing, security, and counterterrorism. Despite claims that the Kingdom adheres to ethical principles regarding the normalisation of relations with Israel, recent events indicate that Saudi Arabia's perspective on Israel has taken a new turn and its concern vis a vis Palestinian issue has dwindled. In a correct historical context, this essay seeks to investigate the core of Saudi Israeli ties.

Before investigating the evolving ties between Israel and Saudi Arabia, it is imperative to understand the circumstances in which Israel emerged as a homeland for Jews and what Saudi reactions were to it.

Emergence of Israel as a Homeland for Jews

As per the beliefs and claims of the Jewish people, Israel is the only country on the earth that still exists on the same land, same location, has the same name, speaks the same language, and practises the same religion as it did three and half thousand years ago. Israel is the precise definition of Jewish continuity. Israel is a tiny, slender, semiarid nation on the Mediterranean Sea's southern coast. It first appeared in history some 35 centuries ago when the Jewish people gave up their nomadic lifestyle, moved to the Land, and established themselves as a nation ^[1].

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The history of the Jewish claim to the Land of Israel (*Eretz Yisrael*) spans thousands of years and it is an extremely broad topic which cannot be covered in this study. However, the arguments made in the claim had overly been grounded in the imagination of the Jewish people as religious and cultural claims originating from Jewish traditions and gospels. But, when Jews came across modern political and cultural thoughts, they started absorbing the reality of modernity in human life, became more secularised in the 19th century, began to rely more and more on secular ideas, especially nationalism and called for a territorially confined homeland with a self-government system by the Jews, for the Jews and of the Jews. This was a good move by the Jewish community because statements of a claim based on religion and cultural traditions are likely to be seen as outdated in today's world. Most of the political pundits and critics believe that when people make a claim in the ambit of present political and secular thoughts, it appeals universally, making it suitable for public discussion. In other words, religion-based assertions may be persuasive when they are made to other believers, whereas secular claims are more acceptable in extra-communal speeches. Therefore, claims to *Eretz Yisrael* or Palestine that are based only on the Covenant between God and the Jews or on Palestine's position as a Waqf may persuade Jews and Muslims, respectively, but have less of an impact when made in front of academic and public opinion tribunals.

However, it is crucial to present both sets of claims: internal and external. Both appeal to a sizable number of Jews both inside and outside of Israel and are many, diversified, and sometimes even incongruous. Despite the fact that there are many widely held ideas, no one claim is accepted by all. As a result, there is a constant cacophony of Israeli and Zionist discourse within the context of shared ties to one another and a shared ancestral home. Jewish opinions on the right to the land are outlined here, taking into account both common values and dividing characteristics.

Both religious and secular Jews have agreed that the assertion made at the outset of Israel's Declaration of Independence—"The Land of Israel was the birthplace of the Jewish people"—is true. Jews have believed they are part of a people whose history has been recorded in the Bible for millennia. The chapters of Genesis that are devoted to the forefathers—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—tell the tale of their creation and prophesy the survival of a people throughout history. These foundational tales are the roots of the Jewish nationhood that they recognise as historical reality.

When the Zionist movement first started in 1897, around eighty percent of the world's Jews were living in Christian Europe, which has a rich cultural past. European Christians felt that the New Testament had replaced the Old Testament even though they recognised the authority of the Bible. The "Testament" (in both senses of the word) bears "witness" to the ancientness of the Jews as a nation and of their relationship to the Land of Israel. Although biblical research has questioned some aspects of the biblical story since the middle of the 19th century, the text's basic historicity is almost unanimously acknowledged. The validity and vitality of the Jewish historical ties to Palestine were supported by this "Judeo-Christian" legacy.

As it is referred to in sacred books, "*Eretz Yisrael*" [Land of Israel] is what Zionists referred to the land they returned to. In an effort to break the link between disobedient Jews and

their homeland, the Romans gave the region the name "Palestine" in the second century C.E. The ancients, just like the moderns, understood the importance of historical ties while naming a region. They purposefully evoked the Philistines, a people who once predominated throughout parts of the coast and in certain inland regions, by referring to the nation as Palestine. In response, the Romans punished the Jews for defying them and made an effort to wipe out the country's remaining Jewish population. Perhaps, the country's identity would be severed from its long-standing Jewish residents, who had lived there with only a few interruptions as an independent polity for well over a thousand years and had roots going back two millennia, from the time Abraham was thought to have made his Covenant with his Lord. This would happen if the country had Greek origins rather than native Semitic ones. Therefore, whether or not they backed Zionist objectives, Zionists were regaining the name that was recognisable to all Jews by presenting "*Eretz Yisrael*" before the international community. Even when the more popular term "Palestine" started to be used frequently in everyday speech, it was still common use in Jewish religious and secular works. Zionists used "Palestine" and "*Eretz Yisrael*" interchangeably in the names of their organisations and on the letterheads of official stationery before competing nationalities became a problem. But after 1948, when the Declaration of Independence referred to "the State of Israel," "Palestine" and "Eretz Israel" were replaced. According to standard political usage of the 20th century, the Jewish kingdom needed a name. "Israel" was accepted as a recognisable and fitting name for the fledgling Jewish state almost universally outside of the Arab world and among predominately Muslim countries.

Saudi Reaction to Establishment of Israel

The recent news of deepening ties between the two countries would have come as a tragic shock to the founder of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Abdelaziz ibn Abdul Rahman popularly known as Ibn Saud and his successors. In order to understand Saudi reactions towards the developments leading to the establishment of Israel in the 1930s and 1940s, we need to look into the memories created in that period, especially Ibn Saud's famous meeting and correspondences with U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt around 85 years ago, then we can easily comprehend today the Saudi popular imagination of Israel and the Jews during its formation days.

In November 1938, at the peak of the Arab Revolt in Mandate Palestine, Ibn Saud wrote to Roosevelt: "The Jews have no right to Palestine and that their claim is an act of injustice unprecedented in the history of the human race ^[2]." Reminding the President he also said that "Palestine has from the earliest history belonged to the Arabs and is situated in the midst of Arab countries. The Jews only occupied it for a short period and the greater part of that period was full of massacres and tragedies." Writing against the backdrop of WWII, Ibn Saud had also warned that the Allies ^[3] should not allow in Palestine "vagrant Jews who have no ties with this country except an imaginary claim which, from the point of view of right and justice, has no grounds except what they invent through fraud and deceit ^[4]." The king concluded his letter with more assertions: "For if - God forbid! - the Jews were to be granted their desire, Palestine would forever remain a hotbed of troubles and

disturbances as in the past, and they (the Jews) have been the cause of many troubles in the past^[5]." And when due to the plight of European Jews Roosevelt finally conveyed to the king his support for the founding of a Jewish national home in Palestine following the imminent end of the British Mandate, the King shrugged him off remarking that "Palestine would be drenched in blood, as in the past."

The same view and imagination of Jews and Israel have been held by all his descendants in modern Saudi Arabia which was established in 1932. There was no formal rapprochement or courtship between them in this span of time. If there had been any dealing and contact reported of the Kingdom with Israel, it had been only limited to Saudi attempts to bring forth a plan for peace in the region. Two known peace plans to bring normalcy between Arabs and Jews have been initiated by the two then Saudi Crown Princes; the Fahd Plan of 1981 and the Abdullah Plan of 2002 which is known as Arab Peace Initiatives (API). These initiatives - accepted by Arab states - have always been at the forefront of thinking in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy towards Israel.

Saudi Involvement in Israel's Major Wars with Arabs

The wars fought in the wake of the establishment of Israel in West Asia are popularly known as the Arab-Israeli Wars, in which a string of armed engagements occurred between the armies of Israel and various Arab countries. Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq were the main Arab forces fighting against the State of Israel. The most notable wars were the three occasions when Arab and Israeli forces came face to face.

1948-49: Israel's War of Independence = Palestinian Nakbah

On 29th November 1947, the British Mandate of Palestine was proposed through a UN resolution to terminate the mandatory status of Palestine, and divide it into two states: one meant for the Jewish people and another for Arabs and internationalise the City of Jerusalem with an arrangement of the special international regime^[6]. Immediately after that, the Jews and Arabs of Palestine started fighting. Conflict among them got even worsen as the British troops prepared to leave Palestine. The hostility between them turned quite severe and a very notorious incident took place on 9th April 1948, when a terrible massacre of Palestinians was carried out by Zionist paramilitary forces of Irgun and Lehi in a village of roughly 1600 population near Jerusalem, namely Deir Yassin, resulting a brutal killing of 107 villagers^[7]. This incident caused widespread panic and terror among the Palestinians and even incited them to resolve to take revenge and retribution. Subsequently, on the 4th day of the Massacre, Palestinian Arabs attacked Hadassah medical convoy in Jerusalem and killed 79 Jews most of them were the medical staff^[8]. These incidents marked the beginning of a larger Arab-Israeli conflict.

with Israel's proclamation of its independence on May 14, 1948, a day before the British forces were to leave Mandatory Palestine, which was due on 15th May 1948, the war began between forces from Arab countries and Israel. The following day, troops from Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Transjordan (Jordan) attacked the recently established state of Israel, captured East Jerusalem, including the tiny Jewish Quarter of the Old City, and seized control of the southern and eastern parts of Palestine that the UN partition

of Palestine had not designated for the Jews^[9]. The invasion's claimed goal was to reestablish law and order in Palestine in the wake of the British withdrawal from Palestine. This was justified in reference to incidents that occurred after the UN declaration of the Partition Plan, for instance, the one that happened in Deir Yassin village and a worsening refugee situation in neighbouring Arab nations. While this was happening, the Israelis successfully repelled numerous Arab attacks while controlling the major route to Jerusalem through the Yehuda Mountains (also known as the "Hills of Judaea"). Except for the Gaza Strip, the Israelis had succeeded in occupying the entire Negev by early 1949, all the way to the old Egypt-Palestine border.

Following separate armistice agreements between Israel and each of the Arab states, a temporary border between Israel and its neighbours was formed between February and July 1949. The struggle is known as the "War of Independence" in Israel. As a sad allusion to the fate of the enormous number of Palestinian Arabs who were displaced due to the war and were forced to seek sanctuary in neighbouring Arab nations as refugees, it came to be known as the Nakbah (or Nakba; "Catastrophe") by Palestinians^[10].

1967: Six-Day War

Arab and Israeli armies clashed from June 5 to 10, 1967 in a war popularly known as the Six-Day War (or June War). Initially, Syria bombarded Israeli communities from the Golan Heights. When Israel shot down six Syrian MiG fighter jets in retaliation, Nasser gathered his soldiers along the Sinai border and blocked Elat again. Egypt and Jordan signed a defence agreement in May 1967.

Israel responded to the seeming Arab rush to war by eliminating Egypt's air force. On the ground, Israel won decisively. Israeli forces expelled Syrian soldiers from the Golan Heights, captured Gaza and Sinai from Egypt, and drove Jordanian forces from the West Bank. Jerusalem is under Israeli authority completely.

1973: Yom Kippur War

The Six-Day War's occasional combat escalated in 1973. On Yom Kippur, October 6, Egyptian and Syrian soldiers crossed the Suez Canal and the Golan Heights, catching Israel by surprise. Arab troops were more aggressive and skilled than in earlier conflicts, and Israel suffered enormous fatalities. The Israeli army recovered early losses and proceeded into Syrian territory, encircling the Egyptian Third Army by crossing the Suez Canal and placing soldiers on its west bank. Still, it never reclaimed Egypt's once impenetrable defences around the Suez Canal.

The fighting ended on October 26 after lasting through Ramadan. Israel concluded official cease-fire agreements with Egypt and Syria in 1974. A 1974 disengagement agreement between Israel and Egypt called for Israeli departure west of the Mitla and Gidi passes and Egyptian troop reduction on the canal's east bank. Between the two armies, the UN sent peacekeepers. On September 4, 1975, another agreement was struck.

Saudi Role in Arab-Israeli Conflict

Saudi armies did not participate actively in any of the above-mentioned wars except for some moral and financial support to the fighting Arab forces. However, only in the Yom Kippur War of 1973, the Kingdom under the leadership of King Faisal took a bold step when an oil

embargo was imposed on the US and Europe, disrupting oil supply to the Western countries in order to pressurise them not to take the side of Israel in the Arab-Israel conflict^[11].

The State of Israel, on the other side, wanted to build connections with Saudi Arabia from the initial days in the same way as it pursued to develop diplomatic ties with any other Arab or Muslim country, but it could not manage to do so due to various reasons. Even when their strategic objectives matched, like in Yemen in the 1960s, they didn't cooperate, though they acted independently to achieve goals that were mutual between them. Saudi enmity against Israel emanates from two causes. First, the Saudi government has been supporting the Palestinian cause to varying degrees even before the declaration of the establishment of Israel in 1948. Second, for the sake of its legitimacy in the eyes of Arabs and Muslims and stability and peace in the country, the Kingdom needs to back the Palestinian cause. Saudi Arabia never prioritised the Arab-Israeli conflict. Most of the time, it focused on economic and diplomatic support, not military involvement.

Saudi Arabia's Peace Efforts & Mediation Role in Arab-Israel Conflict

Saudi strategy toward the peace process was influenced by the desire to maintain US backing for state security and to protect regime legitimacy and stability at home and in the region through coordinating an Arab consensus. In 1981, King Fahd's peace plan aimed to restore Riyadh's image in Washington as it felt threatened by a revolutionary administration in Tehran and the Iran-Iraq War. The plan implied Israel's recognition. It featured a 'right of return' for Palestinian refugees and their descendants to Israel, making it unworkable for any Israeli administration^[12]. This presumably didn't bother the Saudis since the Washington audience was more important. Saudi Arabia's focus on Arab consensus weakened even this step toward acknowledging Israel. After consulting with Syria, the Saudis agreed to a watered-down version of the idea in 1982.

Around the same time King Fahd unveiled his peace proposal, Secretary of State Alexander Haig also launched his idea to build a 'strategic consensus' in which America's Arab allies and Israel would work to limit the Soviets and their Middle Eastern allies before settling the Arab-Israeli issue^[13]. Ariel Sharon briefed the Reagan administration with proposals for Israel's Gulf participation. Saudi Arabia and other Arab friends were uninterested. The US had to manage tension when Saudi Arabia bought Chinese ICBMs with nuclear warheads.

Saudis discreetly supported King Hussein and Shimon Peres' 1987 peace efforts. However, due to a lack of Arab consensus, they were unprepared to endorse Peres' idea publicly. In 1991, in acknowledgement of the U.S. help in preserving the kingdom and defeating Saddam Hussein, the Saudis joined the Madrid Peace Conference and in 1994 they terminated their secondary and tertiary boycott of Israel. They declined to support Israel, unlike other Arab Gulf powers publicly. In 2000, they helped arrange the ill-fated Clinton-Assad peace summit in Geneva. Prince Bandar, the Saudi envoy to Washington, persuaded PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat to accept the Clinton Parameters. Bandar later called Arafat's refusal 'criminal'. The Saudis feared that attacking Arafat in public would be regarded as an attack on the Palestinian cause, undermining their

authority at home and in the region.

The Saudis worried that the 'al-Aqsa Intifada' would convert Arab rage against Arab states. They feared the destabilisation of Jordan, one of their more moderate neighbours, would be disastrous for them. Crown Prince Abdullah threatened to reevaluate the relationship with the US in August 2001 unless it supported the Palestinians. The letter helped Bush become the first US president to accept a Palestinian state, a move Israeli Prime Minister Sharon called Munich-style capitulation.

15 of the 19 9/11 hijackers were Saudi, which diverted attention from the Palestinians to Saudi support of religious extremism. Dr. Dore Gold, a Sharon advisor, wrote 'Hatred's Kingdom: How Saudi Arabia Supports the New Global Terrorism', which showed that the Saudis pay Hamas. Saudi assistance for Hamas declined substantially in 2005 under American pressure.

The Saudis wanted to repair their tattered position in America by re-engaging in the peace process. In 2002, Abdullah promised full normalisation with all Arab governments in exchange for Israel's departure from the 1967 Six Day War land. This transformation in Saudi policy provides more than official acknowledgement. Abdullah made a rare plea to the Israeli public during the Arab League Summit that year. As with the Fahd Plan, the Arab League's version was less appealing to Israelis in order to gain Arab acceptance. It demoted 'complete normalisation' to 'normal relations,' and its final declaration demanded a 'right of return,' shutting out other possibilities. Israel never rejected the idea. Some cabinet members answered unfavourably, some pleasantly, and Sharon tasked a senior advisor with determining if the Saudis were genuine. The Saudis focused on Iraq, and Israel on Gaza disengagement, thus the proposal languished for years.

By 2006, Iran's expanding influence in Iraq and Hezbollah's improved power and reputation after the Second Lebanon War signalled a larger strengthening that Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the UAE, and Jordan considered as a danger to their internal affairs along with a regional imbalance of power and Shia-Sunni equation^[14]. The Saudi government and media first concentrated on criticising Hezbollah's 'inappropriate and reckless behaviour in the second Lebanon War. This was marked as first occasion when the Kingdom indirectly endorsed Israel in public.

Olmert praised the Saudi response. He believed their shared fight against Iran would lead to collaboration. Olmert contacted Riyadh's National Security Adviser Bandar bin Sultan after the conflict, and Prince Turki bin Faisal held Track II negotiations with Israeli officials. Olmert later said he'd negotiate based on the Arab Peace Plan. He reportedly offered the Saudis a role in maintaining the Temple Mount as part of a peace arrangement with the Palestinians.

Riyadh held an Arab League meeting in March 2007 that invited Israelis to learn about the Arab peace proposal. The Saudis' plans to make the Arab League plan more palatable to Israel never materialised. In the March 2007 Mecca Accord, the Saudis aimed to unite Hamas and Fatah. Olmert was asked not to shake the Saudi Foreign Minister's hand at the 2007 Annapolis peace summit. Two years later, when President Obama asked the Saudis for a gesture towards Israel to persuade it to extend the ten-month settlement freeze, King Abdullah declined, saying Riyadh 'would be the last to make peace with Israel.'

This was an overview of Saudi Arabia's role in the pursuit of peace between Palestine and Israel and between Arabs and Israelis. The Kingdom always followed a path of dialogue, and negotiation through meddling and mediating between various disputants of the region. The Kingdom, even, has been appreciated for its efforts for reconciliation between warring groups within Palestine.

Previous Major Peace Treaties between Israel and Arabs

The discussion on the feasibility of a possible rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Israel is not outlandish and peculiar to the discourses of West Asian studies. In the past, a number of Arab countries made peace treaties with Israel as well. Despite the fact that most of Israelis, Palestinians, and Arabs outside the Palestinian territories think now that peace will never come. Many recent surveys also suggest the same. People in the region no longer take the "peace process" seriously. Let's have a look back at the Israeli-Palestinian and Arab-Israeli peace processes to understand how we got here.

Egypt - Israel Peace Treat (1979)

The Egyptian-Israeli Treaty was the first Arab-Israeli accord struck between 1978 and 1979. Egypt's President Anwar Sadat and Israel's Prime Minister Begin signed this bilateral pact, confusing the Carter administration's favoured comprehensive peace between Israel and all of her neighbours. Sadat's pursuit of the full restoration of Israeli-held Egyptian Sinai and gaining Israel's pledge to vacate all settlements there were huge diplomatic triumphs. However, this endeavour did not go well with the Arabs and Muslims around the world. As a repercussion of it, Sadat was killed in October 1981 for his pursuit of peace with the Jewish state. Most Muslim and Arab states resisted Egypt's recognition of Israel for a decade after the treaty was signed. With the deal, Israel gained a huge strategic victory by eliminating the biggest military and the existential danger it has faced since 1948. The Carter administration urged Israel to withdraw from the West Bank and Gaza Strip, establish an independent Palestinian state, and stop settlements in these territories. In accordance with the 1978 Camp David Accords, Egypt received the Sinai Peninsula back from Israel, and Egypt also recognised Israel's right to exist. The two countries established diplomatic ties ^[15].

Israel-Jordan Peace Treaty (1994)

Israel and Jordan signed a peace pact in 1994 to end 46 years of conflict, distrust, and dread between the two nations. More than 4,500 visitors and President Clinton saw Israel's second full peace with an Arab country, 15 years after its pact with Egypt. Israel is closer than ever to its long-held objective of making peace with all of its Arab neighbours after agreeing to Palestinian self-rule. Mr. Clinton said this in the Arava Valley, a sand and sagebrush-covered region. "Peace between Jordan and Israel is no longer a fantasy. True. It'll grow here. It will tower over decades."

King Hussein of Jordan told the president that the Arava had become a "valley of peace." Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin called the border's minefields "fields of wealth." With its pact, the two sides addressed long-standing land and water issues, agreed to wide tourism, economic activities, and other cooperation, and guaranteed that neither would

allow any third state of non-state actor to use their territory for military strikes against the other.

Even as leaders spoke of replacing old grief with new ambitions, they were reminded that true peace in West Asia remains distant. Southern Lebanon terrorists fired mortars into northern Israel as the signing ceremony began north of the Gulf of Aqaba. It wasn't clear who fired, but suspicion fell on the Iranian-backed Hezbollah (Party of God), a Lebanon-based militant organisation which opposes any peace deal between Arabs and Israel. Israeli soldiers and their Lebanese militia partners fired artillery against guerilla positions. No injuries were reported on either side of the border, but the episode highlighted Israel's long road to peace with Lebanon and Syria. It's also far from full peace with the Palestinians, as a mass strike in East Jerusalem and the West Bank organised by three PLO groups and Hamas shows. Thousands of Palestinians marched in Hebron and Nablus to condemn the Israeli-Jordanian deal.

Mr. Arafat was upset that the pact recognised Jordan's "historic position" as keeper of Islamic monuments in Jerusalem. Jordan and Israel are directly challenging the PLO leader's claims to precedence over the holy sites and his goal to make East Jerusalem the capital of his future state.

In the Arava, the ceremony's warmth and the desert's shimmering heat absorbed the rage. Jordan and Israel shut off the area, and no problems were reported. The ceremony began around 1 p.m. when temperatures were in the mid-90s-hardly the ideal time to be under the Arava sun, but excellent for East Coast morning news shows. Mr. Clinton's spectacle began when he stepped out of a black limousine onto a red carpet alongside a black Bedouin tent that provided the sole shade throughout the 90-minute event.

Hillary Rodham Clinton, the president's wife, made a stir by wearing the same turquoise outfit as Queen Noor, King Hussein's wife. Guests included politicians, diplomats, business executives, and priests, from black-hatted rabbis to Imams in flowing robes. 10 foreign ministers, including Warren Christopher and Andrei V. Kozyrev, attended the ceremony. Despite American supremacy, their nations co-sponsor peace negotiations in the region that began in October 1991 but produced nothing until Israel, the PLO, and Jordan took matters into their own hands.

Eight Arab or Muslim countries were represented in front rows of white plastic seats before the platform. Only Egypt had diplomatic ties with Israel. The ceremony was also attended by representatives from Tunisia, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Algeria, Malaysia, and Mauritania, which had recently forged lower-level connections with Israel. They all entered from Jordan.

President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, a strong proponent of Middle East peace, and Mr. Arafat were conspicuously missing, even though King Hussein would not have been so brave without their accords with Israel. Neither Mubarak nor Arafat were invited because neither side wanted them. After being spurned, the PLO commander ensured no one else went.

Graying visitors on both sides were injured in battles between the countries, from Israel's 1948 founding through its 1967 victory. This conflict signified King Hussein's acknowledgement of Israel's permanency, and he has maintained regular contact with Israeli officials despite poor, even hostile, ties. This year, he left more powerful Syria to highlight his friendship with Israel. Terrorism

victims and their families were in the audience, and two young girls, the granddaughters of 1967 soldiers, gave flowers to the leaders on stage. There was a persistent ghost, in the words of the Jordanian King and the Israeli Prime Minister, aged war horses who had come to adore each other.

"We will always cherish the memory and honour of all those who have fallen over the years from among all our peoples," the King said. "I believe they are with us on this occasion and at this time, as we come together to ensure, God willing, that there will be no more death, misery, suspicion, fear, or uncertainty of what each day might bring."

Mr. Rabin talked of the "many days of suffering" that led to today. "Our two peoples were desolate for two generations," he remarked. "It's time to stop dreaming and start building a better future."

Each man—the always-cheerful King and the often-glum Prime Minister—said they had made peace, too. Each benefited. The day brought King Hussein full rehabilitation with the U.S. after he seemed to side with Iraq in the Persian Gulf War four years ago. Rabin now has a peace treaty with his Labor Party's mark on Israeli internal politics. Likud's 1979 Egypt deal ^[16]. Now he's a mediator—and a 1994 Nobel Peace Prize winner with Arafat and Shimon Peres. Rabin and al-Majali signed the deal. Under their agreement, the nations will exchange ambassadors within a month. They agreed to cooperate in tourism, water, energy, transportation, environmental protection, agriculture, and economic growth. They granted themselves six more months to negotiate trade, banking, and other financial arrangements to show how rapidly they moved this autumn. Israel accepted Jordan's claims to Islamic shrines in Jerusalem and stated it would be given "high priority" in future negotiations with the Palestinians. Jordan promised not to join any anti-Israel alliance or allow its territory to be used to fight Israel. On the other hand, Israel recognised Jordanian sovereignty over 115 square kilometres in the Arava. To safeguard their farmers, they convinced Jordan to trade 11.5 square miles for seven hundred acres in the Arava and near the Sea of Galilee.

Israel promised to send fifty million cubic metres of Jordan River water per year to barren Jordan. Both parties agreed to build dams on the Jordan and Yarmuk rivers to increase the water supply by fifty million cubic metres a year. Both parties say this peace will be warm, unlike the "Cold Peace" Israel enjoys with Egypt, with minimal commercial or cultural exchanges. King Hussein stated Jordan endorses the pact "word for word." He highlighted that the two nations wouldn't have foreign monitors on their border, unlike the Sinai Peninsula or the Golan Heights if Israel and Syria make peace.

The King called it "dignified calm." "It's committed peace. Our gift to future generations."

Abraham Accords between Israel & UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan (2020)

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, United Arab Emirates (UAE) Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, and Kingdom of Bahrain (Bahrain) Foreign Minister Abdullatif bin Rashid Al Zayani signed the "Abraham Accords Declaration" in a ceremony on the South Lawn of the White House in Washington, DC, on September 15, 2020 ^[17]. It was named after Abraham, from whom Judaism, Christianity, and Islam stem. Trump

signed the Abraham Accords Declaration and two other bilateral accords in Washington on the same day.

On September 15, 2020, Israel and the UAE signed the Abraham Accords Peace Agreement: Treaty of Peace, Diplomatic Relations, and Full Normalization ^[18]. Israel and Bahrain signed a short declaration titled "Abraham Accords: Declaration of Peace, Cooperation, and Constructive Diplomatic and Friendly Relations" ^[19], in which they announced their intention to establish peaceful relations and enter a series of normalisation agreements in the spirit of the Abraham Accords Declaration. Israel and Bahrain signed a full-fledged peace treaty in Manama, Bahrain, three days after their Washington proclamation. Israel, the UAE, and Bahrain have signed normalisation agreements after signing peace treaties. Israel signed seven normalisation agreements with Bahrain on October 18, 2020, and four with the UAE on October 20, 2020. The Abraham Accords are all these statements and agreements. Israel and Sudan also normalised ties on October 23, 2020. In a joint proclamation, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Sudanese Sovereignty Council Chairman Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, Sudanese Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok, and U.S. President Donald Trump pledged to normalise relations between Sudan and Israel and halt their nations' belligerence. Israel and Sudan hadn't signed a formal agreement implementing the October 23 statement as of this writing. While the announcement did not mention the Abraham Accords, a White House fact sheet said they expanded to include Sudan.

In addition, on December 22, 2020, Israel, Morocco, and the U.S. signed a Joint Declaration announcing full diplomatic, peaceful, and friendly relations between Israel and Morocco and committing to normalise their relations in various areas, including immediately authorising direct commercial flights between the two nations. While this announcement didn't expressly name the Abraham Accords as the Israel–Morocco agreement's umbrella, the U.S. Department of State's website featured it on its Abraham Accords webpage. Israel's four agreements with the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco reinforce two peace accords it made with Egypt in 1979 and Jordan in 1994.

Other Peace Efforts between Israel and Other West Asian Countries

In 1949, Israel signed General Armistice Agreements with Syria and Lebanon, but they did not achieve peace. Since the 1991 Madrid Middle East Peace Conference, Israel and those two nations have begun peace discussions, although no treaties have been signed. In 1993, Israel entered into a series of agreements with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) on behalf of the Palestinians, including the Mutual Recognition Agreement, the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, and the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which established Palestinian autonomy in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (collectively, the Oslo Accords) ^[20].

Despite numerous attempts, the parties have not yet reached an Oslo-envisioned permanent status deal for the West Bank and Gaza. Following the Oslo Accords, Morocco, Tunisia, Mauritania, Oman, and Qatar decided to establish limited contacts with Israel. Each opened liaison, interest, or commercial offices in both countries. The underlying arrangements remain secret.

Before the Abraham Accords, the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco had informal contacts with Israel, but none formalised them. The 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, backed by Saudi Arabia and agreed to by the 22 Arab League members, demanded that normalisation by Arab countries with Israel, beyond Egypt and Jordan, be postponed until the Palestinians secured a peace accord with Israel. The most significant aspect of the normalisation agreements that these four Arab countries signed with Israel as part of the Abraham Accords is that the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco have agreed to bring those relations with Israel to light without waiting for an Israeli–Palestinian peace agreement to be concluded.

Another interesting aspect of the Abraham Accords, which relates to normalising relations between Sudan and Israel, is associated with the Arab League's "Three No's" resolutions adopted shortly after the 1967 Six-Day War in Khartoum: "no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, and no negotiations" with Israel [21]. Sudan accomplished a symbolic about-face by agreeing to negotiate, acknowledge, and make peace with Israel.

There has never been a conflict between Israel and the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, or Morocco [22]. Under Israeli law, none of these countries were enemies. As such, the agreements that established new relations between Israel and these four Arab countries differ from the peace treaties Israel signed with Egypt and Jordan, which ended the state of war between Israel and those two countries, which had fought with Israel and been considered enemy states before signing the respective peace treaties. The Israel–UAE and Israel–Bahrain accords were designed as peace treaties, while being normalisation agreements, to boost their political significance. The Israel–UAE agreement was titled "Treaty of Peace, Diplomatic Relations, and Full Normalization Between the United Arab Emirates and the State of Israel" and stated in its first clause, "Peace, diplomatic relations, and full normalisation of bilateral ties are hereby established between the United Arab Emirates and the State of Israel [23].

Countries that were not at war sometimes call a normalisation of ties pact a "peace treaty." See the Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Chile and Argentina, signed November 29, 1984, the Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Japan and the People's Republic of China, signed August 12, 1978, and the Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Co-operation between India and the Soviet Union signed August 9, 1971.

Palestinian Question and Saudi Pursuance to Resolve It Justly

Saudi-Israeli relations are linked to the Palestine problem. There is no question that the prolongation of the Palestinians' agony and the failure of Arabs and Israelis to resolve their differences prevented normalisation between the two countries. Furthermore, it is also thought that any positive development between Israel and Saudi Arabia, whether it occurs soon or in the distant future, can only be possible if steps are taken to advance the "two-state solution" for settling the Palestinian issue.

In regard to the Palestine question, one of the most contentious issues in the world, which also has exacerbated differences and antagonism between Jews and Muslims around the world, Saudi Arabia has maintained a consistent

stance on the Palestinian issue from the reign of the founder of the Kingdom, King Abdulaziz bin Abdul Rahman Al Saud (1875-1953). Saudi Arabia's enduring position on Palestine is that a legitimate and peaceful solution must be found and the Palestinian people must be granted the right to self-determination [24].

Even today, when the majority of West Asian studies experts predict a potential reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Israel in the near future, none of the Saudi officials, including the King, Crown Prince, and Foreign Minister, have ever made any statements that would contradict their long-standing position on Palestine. Adel al-Jubeir, the Saudi Arabian minister of state for foreign affairs, recently stated that unless the Palestinians are granted a two-state solution, his country will not fully normalise relations with Israel. He added that the procedure for arriving at this solution must follow the guidelines outlined in the "Arab Peace Initiatives" [25].

The Saudi leadership has made numerous attempts in the past to find a just resolution to the Palestine conflict, and these efforts are still regarded as the major cornerstone of negotiations between the conflicting sides over the Palestinian issue. To date, there have been only two peace proposals put up to explore the prospects for a resolution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, and the Saudi leadership is the only one who has made both propositions.

In addition to making these proposals, Saudi Arabia consistently supported the Palestinians during Israeli aggression and denounced any crimes committed against the helpless Palestinians. Additionally, Saudi Arabia occasionally provides financial aid to the Palestinians.

Motives & Factors behind Saudi-Israeli Relations

Islamism, Arab nationalism, and international relations shaped Saudi Arabia and Israel's long-term isolation and antagonism. Due to the fall of Arab unity and the severe changes in West Asia's political environment since the 'Arab Spring,' other factors than religion, have influenced Saudi Arabia and Israel's ties [26]. Saudi Arabia's long-standing refusal to recognise Israel's state was based on nationalism, not religion. This diminished the strain Saudi Arabia's 'Islamic leader' status had on Saudi-Israeli ties. It can also explain Egypt and Jordan's longstanding diplomatic relations with Israel. Saudi Arabia's consideration of current changes in relations with Israel includes two aspects: first, Saudi Arabia recognises the importance of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and Jerusalem's status in the hearts of Muslims; second, Saudi Arabia prioritises the 'threat' of Iran, which makes it attractive to improve the relationship with Israel. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed said that while the Temple Mount's status in East Jerusalem was the Saudis' only 'religious concern,' 'there is no conflict between our country and the Jews' [27].

Saudi Arabia and Israel are in a 'grey zone' between partnership and neutrality. The Iranian "threat" hampers both nations' security development goals. On the basis of military aid, intelligence collaboration, arms sales, and other security cooperation, they expand cooperation to non-security fields. Saudi Arabia and Israel's quasi-alliance has a realistic logic and is impacted by the surroundings.

Saudi Arabia and Israel's reasonable rationale includes the following. Saudi Arabia and Israel face a political and security crisis. West Asia's geopolitics are heating up.

Regional competition centres on the clash between Saudi Arabia and Israel's anti-Iran camp and Iran's Shiite camp. So Iran and Saudi Arabia compete strategically, not sectarian. Israel and Iran compete strategically. Iran utilised the 'Arab Spring' to meddle in Yemen, Syria, and other nations, which heightened Saudi Arabia's fear of Iraz^[28]. Saudi Arabia and Israel worried about their own and regional security, therefore they agreed to restrain Iran. Response to the 'Iranian menace' is the foundation of Saudi Arabia and Israel's partnership. Increased Iranian power and regional influence will be seen as a danger to their regimes or administrations. The 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran worried Gulf Sunni Arab monarchs and Israel since Iran's Shi'a theocratic republic rejects monarchy and does not recognise Israel's 'rights to exist.'

In 2003, the U.S. started the Iraq War to destroy Iran's longtime opponent, Saddam's regime, which increased Iran's regional dominance. Saudi Arabia and Israel have been more alert since the discovery of Iran's covert uranium enrichment facilities. Iran has intensified military and political engagement in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen to stabilise the Shia Crescent. Due to Iran's presence and backing for terrorists like Hezbollah in Lebanon and Palestinian militant organisations like Jihad in Syria, Israel must monitor the situation in Syria and Saudi Arabia must monitor the situation in Yemen^[29]. Iran-backed Houthis threaten Saudi Arabia's land and marine routes. As Iran's regional influence grows, stopping Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons and curbing its regional hegemony has become a security consensus between Saudi Arabia and Israel, and the anti-Iran bloc has progressively evolved.

The Shift In Us Policy Towards West Asia

The ups and downs of US policies pertaining to West Asia in recent years have accelerated Saudi Arabia and Israel's open relations. Obama and Trump's divergent West Asia's policies escalated and promoted Saudi Arabia and Israel's relationship. The Obama administration's strategic contraction in West Asia spurred Saudi Arabia and Israel to collaborate openly, especially when the Obama administration permitted the Iran nuclear accord, making Saudi Arabia and Israel unhappy with the deal^[30]. After Trump took office, the U.S. loosened its ties with Saudi Arabia, decided to restrict Iran, and started a new Palestinian-Israeli peace plan. The US sought to build an informal alliance between the Gulf monarchs and Israel to restrain Iran. Trump withdrew from the 2015 Iran nuclear deal in May 2018. The US was dissatisfied with Israel's choice of non-armed approaches to address the Iran issue through severe pressure, super deterrence, and all-around sanctions. Israel strengthened its collaboration with Saudi Arabia because of the "Iranian menace"^[31]. In May 2020, two years after withdrawing from the agreement, the US announced a partial withdrawal of its soldiers from Saudi Arabia and the evacuation of four 'Patriot' missile defence systems that protected Saudi oil fields and US military sites. This sparked widespread speculation regarding US-Saudi relations. Whether it's Obama or Trump, the US is in a position of strategic contraction in West Asia, thus Saudi Arabia and Israel see each other as Iran's defence partners. The Trump administration's strategy in West Asia focuses on Iran to create a U.S.-controlled geopolitical framework in the region. At the same time, the US and Israel tried to

launch a 'new cold war' between Saudi Arabia and Iran to expand conflicts between the two countries, divert attention from regional conflicts, and marginalise the Palestinian-Israeli issue, thereby advancing the development of the new version of the 'Peace Process in West Asia' and solving the Palestinian-Israeli issue as soon as possible.

Iran's Regional Expansion a 'Threat' to Both; KSA & Israel

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman once called Iran's Supreme Leader Khamenei the 'new Hitler,' in West Asia^[32]. Israel's former Prime Minister Netanyahu has also said that the supreme leader of Iran, Ayatollah Khamenei, is deeply engaged in spreading anti-Semitism in the region, the oldest form of hatred against the Jews and Israel and that he advocates for the complete annihilation of Israel^[33]. Moreover, Israel's ex-Prime Minister also stated that Israel was ready to join the international alliance against Tehran. The threats emanating from Iran are not the only cause of concern for both nations. There are many other issues in the region that push the two countries to come closer. Other than the 'Iranian menace', the two nations have multi-faceted geopolitical and geo-security interests in West Asia. 'Israel and Turkey's breakup, Saudi Arabia and Turkey's struggle for dominance in the area, and the battle between Sunni and Shia for dominance over the Muslim world, all gave Saudi Arabia and Israel a chance to work together^[34]. The interests of Saudi Arabia and Israel also converged in Syria where both resisted Bashar al-Assad's dictatorship that was being backed by the Iranian regime^[35]. In addition, the two nations also got disappointed when the US announced its pullout from Syria.

Mutual Economic & Commercial benefits for both the Nations

Saudi Arabia and Israel want to complement each other's economic progress. If political security is the reason for Saudi Arabia and Israel's tight connection, then their complementing economic development is a guarantee for further bilateral collaboration. Saudi Arabia's economic strength and oil production capability complement Israel's technological innovation, Internet software development, and modern financial stability. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed said Israel is a potential economic and scientific partner for Saudi Arabia^[36].

Israel is one of the world's 34 most developed economies and one of the world's most dynamic and technologically sophisticated markets^[37]. It leads in innovative areas such as high-tech, cleantech, and life sciences. Israel approved selling Saudi Arabia malware in 2018. In the 1970s and 1980s, Saudi Arabia's economy grew thanks to oil. The 'Vision 2030' national development plan is what makes Saudi Arabia's New Deal so eye-catching. It aims to diversify Saudi Arabia's oil-dependent economy, reduce its reliance on oil exports, and generate more jobs. Saudi Arabia hopes Israel might help with economic changes and 'Vision 2030' Saudi Arabia proposes to build a huge metropolis near the Gulf of Aqaba entry at the northeast corner of the Red Sea on the border with Egypt and Jordan. The project is near to Israel and compliments the Red Sea-Mediterranean Railway Plan. Two parties can cooperate on this endeavour to effect regional geopolitics. Saudi Arabia views Arab students graduating from Israeli colleges as

high-quality talents and offers them employment and incentives. As Saudi Arabia has not yet established diplomatic ties and a formal bilateral trading arrangement with Israel, there are no official trade volume figures. Saudi Arabia and Israel will debate economic openness. Saudi Arabia and Israel might cooperate on cyber security, irrigation, medical supplies, and diamonds.

Religion and Saudi Foreign Policy

The actual shift in diplomatic strategy between Saudi Arabia and Israel was evident in the 1970s and 1980s. It is believed that due to Israel's 1967 triumph and Jerusalem's occupation, religious nationalism rose throughout the Arab world and replaced secular nationalism. Saudi Arabia founded the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) in 1969 in order to uphold and defend the interests of the Muslim world and act as the collective voice of the Muslim world, primarily unifying Muslim countries against Israel [38]. With the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the Arab world's tacit recognition of Israel's existence since the 1980 [39]. (particularly following the Middle East peace process in the 1990s), the Arab world has been divided on the Palestinian-Israeli problem.

In terms of diplomacy, Saudi Arabia has steadily downplayed pan-Islamism and emphasised power and interests. Religious and sectorial beliefs no longer influence Saudi Arabia's diplomacy. Saudi Arabia's principal diplomatic aim is to control Iran, and it has revised its earlier 'low-key and moderate' foreign policy to boost major-power diplomacy and seek international collaboration. Saudi Arabia is building an anti-Iranian quasi-alliance across West Asia and nearby regions [40]. Saudi Arabia maintains balanced foreign diplomacy, minimises resistance in West Asia in the struggle for Gulf leadership, and tries to normalise ties with Israel based on this reasoning. Saudi Arabia's diplomatic ideals are based on open and close connections with Israel. Israel's leadership has been in constant pursuance to strengthen relations with Gulf Arab countries by exaggerating the "Iranian Threat Theory," promoting the increasingly marginalised Palestinian-Israeli issue, and using Saudi Arabia's power to help Israel achieve diplomatic breakthroughs and create a security environment beneficial to Israel in the Arab world. Israel has long expected open Saudi relations. Saudi Arabia and Israel's new diplomatic approach aims to safeguard internal stability. Iran and its 'threat' have helped reshape Saudi Arabia's foreign policy and Israel's diplomatic approach.

Conclusion

Saudi Arabia and Israel's growing closeness in recent times and openness on various levels need to be monitored as this development will have many implications for the regional as well as the global order. Despite their quasi-alliance to restrict Iran and radical Islamic forces, Saudi Arabia and Israel still face a huge security problem vis a vis these two factors.

Even though, if the two nations develop a formal diplomatic relation in the coming days without a just solution to the Palestine Question, the regional conflict between Arab people and Israeli nationalists will continue. So, it's not apparently possible for Saudis to go all the way for

normalisation without any breakthrough between Palestine and Israel.

Saudi Arabia's legitimacy and supremacy are attached to its guardianship of Islam's holiest places, placing it in a leadership role for Arabs and Muslims around the world in preserving Islamic and national values. There is a possibility that after the normalisation, the Kingdom may face backlashes. So, Saudi Arabia would not forsake its Islamic and nationalist values only to restrain Iran and will attempt to avoid harmful repercussions on its Islamic leadership role.

Despite Israel's long pursuit of developing relations with the Arab world and Saudi Arabia in particular, the Jewish State also has an apprehension regarding the balance of power in the region. Israel still worries about Saudi Arabia's military might. Israel is concerned that US weaponry shipments to Saudi Arabia may decrease the gap between them and the Kingdom. Israel's anxieties have surfaced in the UAE. Even while the UAE is forging diplomatic relations with Israel, Israel has encouraged the US to maintain its military advantage in West Asia. Israel is concerned about Saudi Arabia's request for U.S. help building nuclear reactors. The Saudi-Israeli quasi-alliance has limitations. Its collaboration focuses on Iran containment, counterterrorism, and other security domains, while its economic cooperation extends security cooperation. As Saudi Arabia and Israel have economic complementarities, this might be a fresh beginning point for bilateral relations. King Salman's low-key caution contrasts with Crown Prince Mohammed's sharpness. Mohammed is pragmatic and adaptable in foreign dealings; he breaks conventions. His diplomacy shows Saudi Arabia's confidence. This method supports progress and transparency in Saudi Arabia-Israel ties, indicating that Saudi Arabia's diplomatic policy will be more realistic in the future. Saudi Arabia and Israel will continue to deepen their tacit partnership under the umbrella of controlling Iran. Even if national interests determine Saudi Arabia and Israel's future relationship, Arab and Israeli mistrust will persist. Saudi Arabia will continue to balance pragmatic relations with Israel and retain its Arab strength. Israel will keep working with Saudi Arabia on national security issues.

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