

# Abraham Accords: A Journey From Arab-Israeli to Palestinian-Israeli Conflict

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## ABSTRACT:

*The western hype over Abraham Accords is evident from their exploitation of the overused phrase “historical moment” in international relations. A shift in Arab-Israeli relations has been stamped with the signing of Abraham Accords, whereby the Arab veto over the recognition of the Palestinian state, in return for Israeli recognition, is practically over. The unexpected shift of alliances in Middle East have defined new battle lines. Israel has joined forces with UAE, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia – against perhaps Iran and Turkey. Despite the commitment to halt further settlements, Palestine is the ultimate victim. The two-state solution, in spirit, is all but buried. Comprehensive peace processes are multi-level and multi-layered and involve pragmatic efforts to build the widest consensus possible around a shared future. However, Abraham Accords lacks just that; it is both elitist and imposed. The paper is an attempt to explore the changing ground realities by exploring both history and the contemporary scenario. It examines both long-term and short-term impact of the accords on the stakeholders and the regional players.*

**JEL Classification:** D74, F51

**KEYWORDS:** *Abraham Accords, Arab-Israeli Conflict, Palestine, Two-State Solution, Peace in Middle East*

## INTRODUCTION:

The Arab-Israeli conflict post-2011 is not centre stage. It has been overshadowed by the Syrian civil war, the Yemen war, and conflict with Iran. The changing role of Turkey vis-à-vis Israel and Iran, and its role in Syria have altered the conflict matrix in the Middle East. Abraham Accords, designed to advance the Trump Peace Plan of January 2020, became possible because of these brewing conflicts. It promises Palestinians yet again a potential “state”, however with severe restrictions. In fact, the text of the agreement signed by the UAE is built upon what is called the ‘deal of the century’ by the Trump proponents, and the ‘slap of the century’ by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. Netanyahu, the former Prime Minister of Israel claims that ‘peace for peace’ has replaced ‘land for peace’ is not credible, though, has a powerful spin to it. Trump’s predictions of comprehensive peace and a new Middle East are an eyewash. President Joe Biden has pledged to pursue a slightly different trajectory.

Zionist expansionism is a strict undertone of Abraham Accords. This unequivocally shows that Israel is effectively affecting the Arab world to extend its frontier plan (Massad, 2020). The accords aim to make ways for similar agreements with Arab and non-Arab Muslim states. It was

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in the making throughout the last decade, as support for the Palestinian cause and resistance to Israel had been declining in UAE. The UAE government was already utilizing media to portray the “good” Israel through history shared with the Jews (Zweiri, 2020). In that perspective, the accords are a public acknowledgment of the secret diplomacy that has been happening in the region (Micallef, 2020).

Security ties existed between Israel and the UAE long before this; the agreement not only brings them into the open, but also broadens them. In return, Israel has given its tacit consent to suspend its further proposed annexations of the West Bank. Recognition by Bahrain and Sudan followed UAE’s. The new fondness for Israel is the coming together of Arab nations and Israel around their common enemy, Iran, as well as the changed political complexion of Turkey.

The backdrop is the post-cold war disintegration of Soviet Union and a unilateral world order leading to rising unopposed US influence in the Middle East.

The five major issues that cause frustration amongst the Palestinians and are impediments to sustainable peace in the region, are:

1. Constant humiliation of Palestinians and denial of their basic rights
2. Betrayal on promised security and development
3. Palestinians’ right to freely access Jerusalem
4. The refugees’ right to return, and
5. Exclusion from security arrangements.

Ironically, the Abraham Accords, like previous peace initiatives, address none of the above.

### **Historical Background**

The roots of Jewish migration, mainly from Russian Empire and Eastern Europe to the Middle East, date back to 1880s, which can also be considered as seeding period of Zionism. The very first agricultural settlements of Israel were in the making. Later on, Jews were restricted by the Ottoman government to enter the country and buy land in 1890s (Mandel, 1975). In 1897, World Zionist Organization came into being during the first Zionist Congress, seeking a Jewish state in Palestine. A decade later, its local office was opened in Jaffa, the then Palestinian city (Ro’i, 1968). The organisation initiated a systematic and vigorous Jewish settlement policy in 1908, where it sought protection of Jews under public law, leading to the Balfour Declaration in 1917 (Khalidi. 2014), which is seen by many as the beginning of the conflict.

Jewish settlements on Palestinian land and the European colonialist settlements in various parts of the world share similar philosophical background. The Zionist settlement, deprived and exploited Arabs of their land, as occurred in similar instances throughout the world. It can be argued that ideology and colonialism both were at play in the creation of Israel (Tahhan, 2017).

Peace has eluded the Middle East for decades. The history of peace initiatives carried out by the Israelis, Palestinians and other stake holders can be traced back to the six-day-war. The UN Security Council Resolution 242 called for the “withdrawal” of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the war and for all states in the region to respect redlines drawn by international law (“UNSC Resolution 242,” 1967).

Resolution 242 is the basis of various other peace initiatives. However, the ambiguous phrasing created operational difficulties, and rendered implementation next to impossible. Camp David agreement happened after eleven years, whereby Egypt and Israel agreed to a regional framework that called for an Israeli withdrawal from Sinai and the formation of a provisional Palestinian government in the West Bank and Gaza (Miller, 2010).

Israel's first accord with an Arab country was in 1979, whereby it signed a peace treaty with Egypt. It set out a plan for a complete withdrawal from Sinai within three years in 1981, as a quid pro of Israel's recognition by an Arab country (Glass, 2019). It is also seen as the first fracturing of Arab solidarity against Israel. As part of the treaty, a phased return of the peninsula was initiated in 1979. The first Intifada broke out in 1987, when Palestinians retaliated over Israeli occupation of Gaza and the West Bank; hundreds were massacred. This resulted in initiation of Oslo Peace Accords in the early 1990s (Makdisi, 2018).

The Oslo Accords had two components; one was about mutual recognition between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and the other was the Declaration of Principles, as per which, negotiations took place on Palestinian self-government through Palestinian Legislative Council for a permanent settlement of the occupied territories and unresolved issues (Shlaim, 1994).

Jordan became the second Arab country to enter into a peace agreement with Israel in 1994, as its inclination towards Iraq during the Iraq-Kuwait crisis had damaged American-Jordanian relations. King Hussein wanted Israeli help to restore relations with Washington, including the resumption of military aid (Little, 1995). However, the sentiment on the street in Jordan has been very anti-Israel and pro-Palestinian.

Five years down the lane, in 2000, history was made; Palestinian cause was given legitimacy and recognition. Yasser Arafat, on the invitation of Bill Clinton, met Ehud Barak in Camp David. However, no agreement could be reached, and the second Intifada – Intifadat al-Aqsa – ensued. The then Israel opposition leader Ariel Sharon walked into al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem (Smith, 2004). It was a blatant provocation with no consideration for Palestinian and Muslim sensibilities and sensitivities; Masjid al-Aqsa being the third holiest site for Muslims. The protest, an obvious outcome, resulted in the use of excessive force by Israeli police to quench the violence. Live ammunition and rubber-coated metal bullets were used to push back the protesting Palestinians\*, which killed fifty and wounded more than one thousand (Pressman, 2003). Palestinians became increasingly frustrated over their lack of socio-economic development, as promised in the Oslo accords (Shlaim, 2016). The assumption was that the superpowers never intended to walk their talk.

In 2002-2003, George W. Bush took the lead in openly calling for two-state solution. However, he accused the Palestinians of committing terrorism and called on them to elect new leaders, abandoning Yasser Arafat (Bush, 2002). The Arab world was also receptive of the two-state solution. In 2002, Saudi Arabia presented the same peace plan supported by Arab League, for a complete withdrawal by Israel and its acceptance of two-state option in return for recognition

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\* The Israel Defense forces fired approximately one million rounds in the Gaza and West Bank in the first three weeks of the intifada. An Israeli defense officer called the project as "a bullet for every child." Cited in Ben Caspit, "Israel is not a country with Army, but an Army with an Attached Country". *Ma'ariv*, 6 Sept. 2002, 8-11, 32

by the Arab states (Kostiner, 2009). The United States, the United Nations, the European Union, and Russia presented their own respective blueprints for Israeli and Palestinian states.

After almost four decades of clashes and negotiations, Israeli withdrawal from Gaza happened in 2005. In 2006, Hamas won the Palestinian legislative elections, sponsored but later dismissed by Bush Administration. Israel, Russia, EU and the UN also refused to legitimise Hamas's victory, largely because Hamas outrightly rejects the Oslo Accords. For Hamas, it has both religious and nationalistic overtones (Efron, 2018). However, the Hamas movement remains the most popular among the Palestinians. It also has a potent militia of volunteers on the Palestinian territories (Efron, 2018). Fighting between Hamas and Fatah ensued the same year. In the subsequent year, Fatah was defeated by Hamas.

Two other peace initiatives, Annapolis Conference and Israeli-Palestinian Peace Talks were brokered in 2007 and 2013-2014, respectively. However, there were no peace dividends from the same (Malley, 2017). Consequently, Hamas and Israel were at loggerheads several times, including Operation Cast Lead in December 2008, Operation Pillar of Defence in November 2012, and Operation Protective Edge in July 2014 (Barakat, Milton & Elkahlout, 2020).

Jerusalem was recognised as Israel's capital by Trump in 2017. Subsequently, US embassy was shifted to Jerusalem from Tel Aviv in 2018. In 2019, Trump launched an economic plan in Bahrain. It took the "economy first approach" (Barakat et al., 2020) and called for a US \$50 billion investment to enhance the economies of Arab countries in general and Palestine in particular (Yahaya, 2020). However, Palestinian leaders immediately rejected it. However, Trump continued with his peace plan; the Abraham Accords are largely its extension.

### **Peace in the Middle East**

Abraham accords are not geared towards achieving peace in the region or resolving the Palestinian issue. UAE does not share borders with Israel, there are no direct political disputes between them. The elephant in the room is Iran. The objective is to restrict Iranian activities in the region. In fact, the UAE has timed it nicely. Its engagement with Iran is in a cold temporary peace settlement rather than a true rapprochement. It allows UAE to avoid any future criticism by President Biden towards the UAE in case of the latter's rapprochement with Iran. The relations between UAE and Palestine are at its lowest. UAE has already abandoned Palestine, it is not sending any monetary assistance to the Ramallah-based government since 2014 (Zafar, 2020). However, during the COVID-19 emergency, it did offer medical supplies to Palestine, which were rejected because they had to come through Tel Aviv ("Palestinian Authority Rejects UAE Aid Sent via Israeli Airport," 2020).

The low-key reaction of the Emirates on making Jerusalem the capital of Israel was an obvious indicator to Saudi Arabia, that recognising Israel will not antagonise the street in UAE. The ground reality is that parts of 'what is to be Palestine' stands annexed with 600,000-750,000 Israelis living there (Hadded, 2020). Thus, the eyewash that halting illegal occupation is an objective of recognition and restoration of ties does not hold ground.

The accords will formalise economic and security cooperation among Israel and the Gulf states. Such collaborations, particularly on security matters and sharing of intelligence knowledge on Iranian activities, have been continuing for over ten years. However, the accords would

not translate into a collective security paradigm, like a Middle Eastern NATO. Israel will not protect the Gulf from Iranian proxy war infrastructure on the ground, even though it is helping the Gulf states in protecting themselves against Iranian cyberwarfare (Micallef, 2020).

### **Implications for Israel**

Post tightening of grip on the West Bank, Israel is not inclined towards talks with the Palestinians, as it maintains surveillance around the Gaza Strip with the help of Egypt. Both 1979 Camp David Accords and 1994 Oslo Accords had the backdrop of a conflict. Tel Aviv is using this to change the status quo in the region, thus leading to a domino effect on the states opting for normalisation of ties. The agreement is also tactical, focusing only on halting *de-jure* annexation while Israel's tangible administrative control over the West Bank continues; it only asks of Israel to not declare sovereignty over the areas outlined in the plan.

Israel has desired better relations with the Arab states for several years now, mainly from the forum of the Gulf Cooperation Council. A number of initiatives have been taken over the years, both bilaterally and otherwise. In 2019, Netanyahu visited Oman. Trump's Deal of the Century saw meetings for economic opportunities initiated in Bahrain. Both the Israelis and the Palestinians were not represented. The acknowledgement of the Israeli right to exist by Saudi Crown Prince Salman is a huge shift. Israeli Haj pilgrims from Israel and members of the business can now travel to Saudi Arabia. The Kingdom has already allowed the use of its airspace by India to fly to Tel Aviv ("Saudi Arabia Grants Approval for UAE-Israeli Flights to Use Its Airspace," 2020). Qatar resorted to sports diplomacy with Israel by inviting it to FIFA in 2022 (Scharfenort, 2012). The accord is a culmination of Israeli aspirations of cultivating the Arab world, gaining legitimacy, isolating Palestinians, and circumventing the Palestinian cause.

The emergence of Iran and Turkey in the conflict matrix of the Middle East has allowed Israel and the United States to exploit the fault lines to their advantage. Abraham Accords benefits Israel tremendously, garnering support against Iran and finding a new watchtower to replace Turkey. UAE and Israeli convergence will further polarise the Middle East. Both are engaged in supporting separatist groups in the region to boost their sphere of influence.

### **From Trumpism to Biden**

The Abraham Accords may or may not have impacted American elections 2020. However, it continues to be viewed as a major diplomatic win of Trump's Administration, which had bipartisan support. Senator Christopher Coons, a Democrat close to the Biden Administration, declared the deal to be "a big step forward" (Rod, 2020).

However, there is ambiguity on the suspension of the annexation of Palestinian land because there is no clarity on the US take on the annexation plans. The revisit of US-Saudi relations and US-Iranian relations by Biden may reset the US foreign policy. For now, the Biden Administration seems less enthusiastic about allocating money to the 'Abraham Fund' from its budget, as it has suspended the Abraham Fund indefinitely the rhetoric from Iran is strong, they term it as "a huge mistake" and a "treacherous act" (Iran's President Says UAE Made 'huge Mistake' with Israel Deal," 2020). The bipartisan support that it enjoys dims the possibility of course-correction, which may favour the Palestinians. The bias for Israeli interests will remain.

Palestinian official stance is that no strategic change is expected vis-à-vis Palestine in the US policy under Biden. However, the Trump era, which it described as “the worst”, may be over. Hanan Ashrawi also does not see Biden as a saviour of Palestinians (Alsaafin, 2020). Hamas Political Bureau Head, Ismail Haniyeh, met Biden requesting “a historic correction of the course of the unjust US policies against the Palestinians, which has made the United States a partner in injustice and aggression, and damaged the stability in the region and the world” (Alsaafin, 2020).

Trump’s anti-Iran policy has all but failed. Major powers have dismissed US sanctions on Iran. A defiant Iran sees this dismissal as isolation of the United States. One of the few firsts, announced by President Biden, is the reversal of Trump’s abandonment of the Iran nuclear deal, subject to Iran’s willingness. Biden’s victory was cautiously welcomed in Iran, the then President Rouhani calling it as “an opportunity for the next US government to make up for past mistakes and return to the path of adhering to international commitments” (Motamedi, 2020). The convergence of views may result in a sea-change in US-Iran relations, a revival of multilateralism, thus impacting Middle Eastern politics far more positively than an accord that has polarized it.

### **The Iranian Factor**

One of the main slogans of the 1979 revolution in Iran was the “liberation of al-Quds” from Israel. Iran greatly assisted the Palestinians with arms and moral support. However, following each peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians, Iran’s opposition against moderate Palestinians grew, and it tilted more towards hardliners and radical groups. As a result, Iran became the perfect enemy for all Arab states, Israel, and the United States. Iran’s use of armed Palestinian groups as its proxies, brought closer some Arab rivals afraid of Iran’s growing influence and pushed them toward the United States and Israel. Iran’s opposition to the Abraham Accords may also evolve into more support for radical groups (Aman, 2021).

The response from Iran is mixed. The parliament is overwhelmingly in the hands of conservatives. With the win of Ebrahim Raisi, Iran is now more conservative. He presented a Cabinet dominated by hardliners. Moreover, the designated Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian was critical of the accords last year. The new hardliner leadership may target the Arab street with their extremist rhetoric, resulting in more regional isolation for Iran. Hence, the prospect for improved relations between Iran and its Arab neighbours are thin. If a more moderate Rouhani government, with a charismatic Foreign Minister, could not improve Iran-Saudi relations, no hardliner government can (Aman, 2021).

The fact that Iran’s Persian Gulf neighbours are in a proactive convergence with Israel could trigger a debate inside Iran as to why Iran, a non-Arab nation, should be louder in its opposition to the accord than the Arabs themselves. The youth also deliberate on the pros and cons of the animosity with the Arab countries (Aman, 2021).

Israel, UAE, and other Gulf states have helped each other against Iran for more than a decade. The normalisation of relations reinforces this alliance. The 2015 Iran nuclear agreement strengthened its position as a territorial player in the region. The Abraham Accords put Iran and its intermediaries on the back foot and resulted in Iran being cultivated both by China and Russia (Razoux, 2020). However, Iranian stance is clear. Any threat to its interests could be

countered by stopping the unhindered navigation of oil tankers in the Persian Gulf as an act of retaliation. Former Iranian President Rouhani said, “if the agreement leads to expanded Israeli influence in the region, things will change, and they will be dealt with in a different manner” (Azodi, 2020). Major General Mohammad Baqeri, Iranian military chief, also pointed out that Iran will not tolerate if military adventurism takes place in the Persian Gulf and the Iran’s territorial security comes under risk.

### **Saudi Arabia – Is Silence a Strategy?**

Saudi Arabia and Israeli relations are thawing up for a while. The backchannel track is extremely active. Both Israel and Saudi Arabia are genuinely worried with the winding down of the US impact on constraining Iran. Biden’s win has only enhanced their insecurities.

Saudi Arabia has not yet voiced its opposition to the accords, which is raising doubts; its silence is being interpreted as tacit consent. Analysts suspect that this lack of reaction is an indication that Mohammed bin Salman supports the agreement but is constrained because of his father, King Salman Bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud. The Crown Prince’s close connections with Jared Kushner are also seen as an endorsement (Widakuswara, 2020).

There are several reasons for Saudi Arabia to support Abraham Accords. While other Gulf countries normalise relations, Saudi Arabia has also made a few concessions. It consented to open its airspace to flights going around Israel and the UAE. The normalization of relations with Israel immediately bore fruits with direct flights from Israel to UAE, Bahrain, and Sudan (“Saudi Arabia Allows Israeli Commercial Planes to Use its Airspace,” 2020). The convergence of interest among Tel Aviv, Washington and New Delhi, Turkey’s change of heart, fear of Iranian mounted proxy wars, especially in Yemen and Syria, and the Kingdom’s economic compulsions are motivating factors for Saudi Arabia to be more accommodating of the accords.

The leader of Washington-based Saudi-American Public Relations Affairs Committee, Salman al-Ansari, has been surging on Twitter for the “White House’s deal-making”, crediting Trump and King Salman for preparing for a “torrent of harmony” in the region (Hincks, 2020). Abdulrahman al-Sudais, the Imam of the Grand Mosque in Makkah, in a message broadcasted on a Saudi state television on September 2020, asked Muslims to dodge “energetic feelings and red-hot eagerness” towards Jews (Hincks, 2020).

Mohammed Bin Salman’s Vision 2030 – an arrangement intended to free the Kingdom from its close complete reliance on oil – depends intensely on an internal venture into Saudi Arabia (Moshashai, Leber, & Savage, 2020). The advancement of the travel industry around the Kingdom’s Red Sea Coastline and building ‘brilliant city’ called Neom, in Tabuk province of north-western Saudi Arabia are both part of vision 2030 (Moshashai et al., 2020). Israel, which is also a Red Sea coastline player and an innovator in tech-advancement, is an ideal partner for Saudi Arabia (Moshashai et al., 2020).

### **Turkey – The Change of Heart**

The first Muslim country to recognise Israel was Turkey. It also established military cooperation with Israel in 1948. However, a major paradigm shift took place in the last twenty plus years, where the relationship between the two became increasingly confrontational. Erdogan’s comments against Israel in the Davos conference in 2009, and the Mavi Marmara flotilla incident, resulted in an almost breakdown of relations. Turkey is accused by Israel of giving shelter to Israeli enemies, such as members of Hamas.

Agreement between Abu Dhabi and Tel Aviv has triggered a volley of negative responses from Turkey. The Israeli-Turkish cooperation especially in the arena of defence triggered Iranian anxieties, also their support for the Azeri minority. In return, Turkey also holds Iran responsible for aiding the secessionist Kurdistan movements and was in hot pursuit of militants and even dispatched military aircraft to bomb their hideouts (Larrabee & Nader, 2013).

In the last many years, especially since 2017, under Erdogan, Turkish-Iranian economic interdependence has inched-up and is not just confined to oil and gas. It may go up to US \$30 billion (Ayoob, 2018). Turkey and Iran have a history of rivalry. Their interests do not converge on many issues across the Middle East, although there is some convergence of economic and security objectives. The two states are at loggerheads in terms of political ideologies and identities. The Arab Spring has given this rivalry a greater thrust. The disruption of political order in the Middle East, because of the collapse of authoritarian regimes in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia, and the wars in Syria, and Yemen, have allowed both Iran and Turkey to exploit the emerging 'new order' to their advantage.

Turkey's recent convergence with Iran may seem to be of tactical nature. Erdogan's government knows that the current situation of political crisis and extremism in the region is not viable in the long run. The chances of an all-out Iran-triggered proxy conflict will increase the likelihood of a compromise between Turkey, Iran, and Russia in Syria, against Saudi Arabia and the United States. Burgeoning geopolitical competition between Turkey and UAE plays out in Syria. It has resulted in rising of anxieties in the Arab world where Turkey cannot be utilised, nor trusted, against Iran; thus, pushing the Arab world towards convergence with Israel.

The Abraham Accords were severely criticised in Ankara. President Erdogan conveyed his support for the Palestinians and denounced the initial statement of the agreement on August 14, 2020 (Butler & Gumrukcu, 2020). Following this, Turkish Airlines suspended its Istanbul-Dubai flights. Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs condemned the UAE for betraying the Palestinian cause. The Head of Communications at the President's Office, Fahrettin Altun, said that Turkey would never abandon Palestinian cause (Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, Directorate of Communications, 2020).

Despite putting up a diplomatic offensive, Turkey could not prevent the relocation of the US embassy to Jerusalem in May 2018. However, Turkey reacted strongly to the killings of protestors, post clashes in Gaza by recalling its ambassador from Israel and the US. The Israeli ambassador was asked to leave and mourning was observed in the country. Erdogan, as the Chairman of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation then, convened a meeting, condemning the Trump 2019 recognition of the Golan Heights as Israeli territory. The diplomatic spat between the two countries intensified further when the exchange of diplomats did not take place.

The Israeli-UAE agreement gives the perception of reduced Turkish role in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. Moreover, Turkish interests may get sabotaged by American military expertise and Israeli support for Abu Dhabi's rising role in the region. The EU states, like for instance France, are providing Greece military support to counter Turkey. On the other hand, Ankara's actions in the past have always been prompting cooperation between the coastal states, both politically and militarily. The internationally-recognized Government of National



Accord, which controls the western part of Libya, has strong Turkish support. The Fatah-Hamas compromise supported and sponsored by Turkey may raise its influence with the Palestinian Authority, pushing it squarely into an anti-Israeli camp.

### **China and Russia – Both Sides of the Fence**

China and Russia have both supported the accord, by responding in a cautious and balanced manner, they see the normalisation as an opportunity. Nonetheless, they are worried by the agreement's suggestions for the military parity against Iran. Zhao Lijian, Chinese spokesperson of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said that China is "pleased" to see the measures adopted by Israel and UAE to reduce tensions in the region. However, he was of the opinion that the relevant parties should take concrete actions so that the Palestinian issue can return to equal-footed dialogue and negotiations. China is also shown commitment to "play a constructive role" for a peaceful solution to the Palestinian issue (Cafiero & Wagner, 2020). Russia also expects that restoration of diplomatic relations between Israel and the Arab countries will "reinforce stability and security" in the region, including the resolution of the Palestinian issue (Gofman, 2020). Russia sees the Israel-UAE normalisation deal as the opening of international doors for it. Andrei Baklanov, Former Russian Ambassador to the Kingdom, sees economic dividends coming out of the Accords for Russia for its exports to both countries may go up. He was also of the view that the Abraham Accord was in fact a feather in the Russian diplomatic cap, because the first Israel-Gulf dialogue summit in January 1992, was hosted in Moscow (Ramani, 2020). However, Russia is concerned about potential elimination of UAE's role as a bridge between Saudi Arabia and Iran, as a consequence of the accords. The situation has pushed Moscow to cultivate Tehran more proactively. This incapsulates Moscow and Beijing's scepticism about the outcome of the accords.

China has praised the Abraham Accords because it compliments its expanding economic ties throughout the Middle East and Africa. It is also of the view that Turkey under Erdogan, and not Iran, destabilises the region with aggressive adventurisms, aimed at recapturing some of the bygone glories of the Ottoman Empire (Kofas, 2020). Moreover, it views the Accords as a restraining mechanism towards Iran and Turkey, more so than Russia. However, the real objective as per China's understanding, is its commercial containment in the region, as the US is supporting wars in the Gulf States (Kofas, 2020).

### **Pakistan – The Recognition Dilemma**

Pakistan being the only ideological state other than Israel, sees itself as the global flag bearer of the Muslim cause. Its constraining hybrid-political culture impedes the recognition of Israel. Pakistan continues to hold its non-acknowledgment of Israel, as a long-standing position that was established in line with sentiments of Islamic solidarity with Arab nations. A large number of people in Pakistan organise peaceful rallies in the last week of Ramzan annually, in solidarity with Palestinians.

The official stance is also cautious. Prime Minister Imran Khan has reasserted Pakistan's customary position, stating, "Whatever any nation does, our position is clear. Our position was clarified by Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah in 1948: that we would not actually acknowledge Israel as long as Palestinians are not given their privileges, and there is no fair settlement" (Pakistan Will Not Recognise Israel: PM Khan, 2020). Ministry of Foreign Affairs opines that the Israel-UAE deal might have "far-reaching implications, and Pakistan's

approach would be guided by our evaluation of how Palestinians' rights and aspirations are upheld and how regional peace, security, and stability are preserved" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pakistan, 2020).

The factions in Pakistan that advocate recognition of Israel are usually perceived as liberal and westernised, seeking improved relations with the US and European countries. Pakistan is a very emotively religious country. The street-sentiment in Pakistan is very anti-Israel. However, the fact remains that it is also a country that is not completely trusted by the United States, despite the seventy-years' relations and long periods of convergence. By recognizing Israel, Islamabad could demonstrate to the US that it is prepared to let pragmatism, instead of extremism, drive its policymaking. Another popular question is that why should Pakistan decline formal binds with Israel based on the Arab-Israeli clash when Arab nations themselves are straightforwardly encouraging a relationship with Israel? The rationale for not recognizing is basic and direct: Pakistan's stance on Israel is a principled one, like it is on Armenia. Pakistan stands with Palestine, Turkey, and Azerbaijan against violations of human rights. The security-related, anti-Iran segment of the agreement has implications for Pakistan, a direct neighbour of Iran, with a sizeable Shia population.

### **The Ultimate Victim**

Palestine is presently a dead pony for the Arab World. Hence, its Arab neighbours would prefer not to surrender their vital interests because of a futile issue. The accord is a three-way jeopardy for Palestinians. Firstly, by supporting Sunni-Kingdoms against Iran, US and Israeli military industrial complex will be strengthened, fanning and capitalizing on the insecurities of the Sunni Arab world at the expense of the Palestinians. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, Israel has succeeded in defeating a collective stance against itself and fragmenting the Arab world. Thus, allowing Israeli bilateral agreements, in some cases mutually advantageous, at the expense of the Palestinians. Thirdly, the Israeli narrative is gaining ground, and the Arab recognition will give it the moral legitimacy it has always sought.

No prior negotiations about the Abraham Accords took place between Israel and the Palestinians, or between the United States and the Palestinians. President Mahmoud Abbas has rejected the accords and said it was a "betrayal of Jerusalem, Al-Aqsa and the Palestinian cause". The negotiations were the outcome of consultations between right-wing Zionist officials in Washington and the right-wing government in Israel.

The fact that UAE and other Arab states, including Bahrain, did not consult with the Palestinians before going into the accord, is reflective of indifference to the plight of the Palestinian people. As expected, the Palestinian Authority rejected the deal and termed it as "aggression against the Palestinian people." In retaliation, they withdrew their ambassador from UAE, and demanded an Arab League Summit.

### **CONCLUSION**

The security matrix of the Middle East with religious and ethnic conflicts is intertwined, where competition for resources and the complex geopolitical, geostrategic, and geo-economic interests' interplay with each other. The confrontational nature of the conflict makes it a strategic hotspot for major countries of the Middle East and a cauldron of relentless disputes. The signing of Abraham Accords has turned the *Arab-Israeli conflict* into a *Palestinian-Israeli conflict* only. It is a huge disservice to the Palestinian cause.

During the Cold War, the Arab states stayed united for their collective security against Israel due to the Soviet support. The collapse of the Soviet Union changed the power dynamics and gave the US a geostrategic edge in the Middle East. It resulted in Arab states serving as the patrons of regional stability and continued economic prosperity. Now, decades later, many Arab authoritarian states seem to be more receptive of American engagement in Middle Eastern politics giving up on the ideological disagreement. A continuous apprehension against Iran's growing power in the region and its joint involvement in the Syrian conflict along with Russia and Turkey have catalysed the situation, culminating into actions like Abraham Accords.

It cannot be emphasised enough that the accords are not inclusive; Palestinians are excluded from the so-called recipe for peace. One lesson from history of successful transitions is: *go slow to go fast*. Comprehensive peace processes are multi-level and multi-layered, involving pragmatic efforts to build the broad-based consensus, around a shared future. Transition of long-drawn conflicts to sustainable peace on the ground is a complicated process. The construct of the accords is both elitist and imposed. Half of all peace agreements fail; every failure makes conflicts more interact able. No example can manifest the process better than the Arab-Israeli conflict.

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