

MIDDLE EASTERN ANTI-NORMALIZATION GROUPS

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For more than two decades, the State of Israel has been subjected to a global delegitimization campaign aimed at undermining its right to exist as the nation-state of the Jewish people. This campaign operates across both the political and civil arenas, with one particularly prominent aspect being the coordinated activity of non-governmental organizations in liberal-democratic countries. These efforts are carried out within the framework of the “Red-Green Alliance,” which entails extensive collaboration between activists and organizations from streams of political Islam (Islamists) and their counterparts on the left (primarily radical socialists with Marxist-Leninist backgrounds). At least some of these activists have ties to the Middle East, and are at times directly affiliated with organizations officially designated as terrorist groups in the West, such as Hamas and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. The broad cooperation between such actors and radical Western elements—who aim to transform the current order and undermine the liberal-democratic system—has, over time, produced a romanticized image of violent action. This violence is portrayed as grassroots, nonviolent activism rather than as a deliberate and coordinated strategy by these ideological circles.

In recent years, entities active within the Red-Green Alliance have added another branch to their struggle: opposition to the initiatives that led to the signing of the Abraham Accords and the broader normalization process between Israel and several countries in the region. They have established frameworks for both Middle Eastern and international mobilization around anti-normalization activity. This article focuses on several prominent groups involved in these activities in countries that signed the Abraham Accords,

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and reviews the coordination among them as well as their operations both in the Middle East and beyond.

Background

For many decades, Islamism has been considered the most organized opposition force in Middle Eastern countries, led primarily by movements affiliated with the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood. These movements, recognized over the years as representatives of this ideology in their respective countries, operate civilian *da'wa* (proselytization and outreach) mechanisms through which they have built their support bases. Where possible, they also participate in the political sphere—formally or informally. While they act within their own countries according to local circumstances and opportunities, they also coordinate among themselves—and with similar ideological frameworks around the world—on strategies, directions for action, and grassroots activity. In some cases, they even share common sources of funding, both state and non-state. Over time, this has resulted in the formation of an international network of organizations and activists from the Middle East and beyond. At least during the first generation, this network consisted largely of Middle Eastern exiles who had been persecuted for years by the regimes in their home countries. These individuals were able to operate freely in Western countries under the protections and liberties granted to them. Moreover, following the rapid rise and fall of Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated regimes in the Middle East during the Arab Spring revolutions, the need to shift the center of gravity of Islamist activity to the West has become even more pressing. In early 2016, the [first conference](#) of its kind for Muslim councils in the West was held in Washington, under the sponsorship of the US Council of Muslim Organizations (USCMO)—an Islamist-American umbrella group established two years earlier [as part of a reorganization](#) and rebranding process.

Today, the Muslim Brotherhood and its brand of Islamism can be accurately described as a transnational religious-political movement. The second- and

third-generation activists in Western countries have adapted their methods to Western realities and sensibilities. The civilian arms of these Brotherhood-affiliated networks operate within Western political systems and target centers of social and governmental power. Until recent years, they have largely succeeded in portraying themselves as “community leaders” and as a moderating force vis-à-vis the younger generations drawn to more radical elements.

The Palestinian issue—particularly the Islamist line and support for Hamas and its armed struggle against Israel—has long served as a key unifying anchor in the Islamist effort to reunite the Islamic nation. Additionally, support for Hamas, the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood and a prominent actor in the “Resistance Axis” (*muqawama*), has opened the door for fruitful cooperation between the two main camps within the Brotherhood movement: the “mainstream” camp, which sees itself as following the path of Hassan al-Banna, and the more radical one from which global jihadist circles have emerged. Many of the groups in the latter camp are rooted in the teachings of Sayyid Qutb, the revolutionary thinker active in the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in the 1950s, and of Abul A’la Maududi, the Indo-Pakistani ideologue who had a significant influence on Qutb and the Brotherhood more broadly. Despite other ideological disagreements, cooperation between the two camps remains possible.

One of the most common methods of coordination within and among the various camps is the convening of international conferences, where strategies of action are discussed and new initiatives and “civilian bodies” are presented. Another method is message coordination and direct action on the ground, such as demonstrations in various countries. In the West, these are often organized in collaboration with radical left-wing organizations. During the Swords of Iron war, such demonstrations became more widespread and influential than ever before.

Over the years, key Islamist figures associated with the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas have increasingly emphasized the importance of nonviolent

resistance on the civilian front, alongside military resistance. In 2005, Khaled Mashal [described](#) resistance as a comprehensive state of being and a complete way of life, highlighting the significance of such a front. He spoke at the relaunch conference in Doha of the [Global Anti-Aggression Campaign](#) (GAAC)—a highly important umbrella framework established by hundreds of activist Sunni clerics. The organization was active primarily until 2016 and included senior figures from Muslim Brotherhood circles in both the Middle East and Western countries, senior Hamas leaders, and Salafi and Salafi-jihadist leaders—among them at least seven individuals designated as terrorists by Western countries and the United Nations due to their ties to al-Qaeda. Over the years, GAAC took part in various “civilian” initiatives in partnership with both radical leftist and Islamist actors. Notably, in early 2009—following the conclusion of Operation Cast Lead in Gaza—it held a [conference](#) that included a series of workshops focused on civilian methods of struggle. These included cooperation with international actors on human rights issues, recourse to international legal tribunals, the organization of nonviolent demonstrations, and more.

The Struggle Against Normalization with Israel in the Context of the Abraham Accords

[The discourse](#) around normalization was central during the peace negotiations with Egypt—and even earlier. Shortly after Donald Trump entered the White House at the end of 2016, public discussions began regarding the possible relocation of the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. The Islamist axis began preparing for a new wave of resistance around the issue, and several conferences were convened to coordinate opposition strategies to such initiatives. In November 2017, for example, a Gulf [conference](#) was held in Kuwait under the sponsorship of then-Speaker of the National Assembly, Marzouq Al-Ghanim. In early December 2017, Trump delivered a speech in which he declared that the United States recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and that the American administration would begin preparations to

move the embassy to the city. Later that month, what was likely the most significant [Islamist conference](#) to date was held: the “Conference of the Nation’s Religious Scholars Against Political Normalization with the Zionist Entity.” The event took place in Istanbul and was attended by around 300 clerics from 25 organizations, whose names suggested representation of religious scholars from many Middle Eastern countries. A [press conference](#) launching a [declaration](#) on the issue was even held at the offices of the Islamist organization İnsani Yardım Vakfı (IHH)—a group with known ties to terrorist organizations, which gained international attention as a partner in organizing the 2010 “Gaza Freedom Flotilla” with Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated circles and Western radical left activists.

The declaration is published on the website of the Association of Palestinian Religious Scholars, which is explicitly aligned with a pro-Hamas stance. It portrays normalization as a threat to fundamental Islamic humanitarian values such as freedom, justice, dignity, international security, and peace, and as an attempt to dismantle the doctrine of liberating al-Aqsa while forcibly “Judaizing” generations of Muslims. Israel is described in the document as a racist Zionist entity hostile to humanity, which steals Palestinian land, desecrates holy sites, and violates the rights and freedoms of those living under its control—an illegitimate entity founded by force and terror, against which resistance, including armed resistance, is sanctioned by international norms and laws. The declaration asserts that opposition to normalization is a religious duty and a human responsibility for all members of Arab and Muslim societies. The identities of the participating organizations and the signatories of the declaration come as no surprise and follow established patterns of anti-Israel activity. One of the leading bodies was the International Union of Muslim Scholars (IUMS), then still led by Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi (d. 2022), who served as the spiritual authority for Muslim Brotherhood circles worldwide. Most of the other organizations are also identifiable with Islamist groups; some, though they claim to represent scholars from various

Middle Eastern countries, actually operate out of Turkey. They were joined by several Salafi and Salafi-jihadist organizations. GAAC, though less active by that point, was also listed among the participating entities. During the conference, participants [called](#), among other things, for Muslim countries to impose a boycott on US-made goods.

Following the Abraham Accords, several Middle Eastern groups were established with a focus on resisting normalization. Below are details on some of the prominent groups:

Emirati Campaign Against Normalization and the “Emirati Association for Resisting Normalization”

After the signing of the peace agreements between Israel and the United Arab Emirates in August 2020, a campaign opposing the accords was launched. The campaign’s [founding statement](#) was signed by 20 academics and businesspeople, some of whom are affiliated with the Emirati branch of the Muslim Brotherhood—Al-Islah. By late August, a related [campaign](#) had begun circulating on social media. It is worth noting that in early 2013, UAE authorities charged 94 individuals associated with Al-Islah with plotting terrorist activities and a coup, most of whom have since remained in detention. The UAE designated the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization in 2014. In January 2024, Al-Islah members were again [brought](#) to trial in the UAE, and in August the authorities claimed to have [uncovered](#) an attempt to reestablish the movement using exiled members and with cooperation from figures in other countries also linked to Brotherhood circles. The UAE’s handling of the issue over the years has been widely criticized by international human rights organizations. In response, a network of Islamist-aligned human rights groups was established, focusing on the matter and cooperating with similar organizations. The campaign was led by Alaa al-Siddiq, an Emirati activist based in London and the daughter of an Al-Islah member who [died](#) in a car crash in 2021. Al-Siddiq [headed](#) a human rights organization named ALQST,

founded by Saudi opposition figures in exile in the UK, which focuses its activity on criticizing Gulf regimes.

Six of the signatories of the campaign's founding statement also [established](#) a group called The Emirati Association for Resisting Normalization. According to [its own description](#), the association is dedicated to “resisting all forms of normalization with the Zionist entity occupying the land of Palestine.” Based on its [Facebook account](#), it operates out of Istanbul. On social media, it publishes materials related to Gulf-Israel rapprochement, calls for boycotts against companies linked to Israel, and support for the broader BDS campaign. Since the beginning of the Swords of Iron war, the association has also posted messages in support of Gaza’s “victory.” The association is led by Ahmad al-Sheiba al-Naamani, one of eight Al-Islah members tried in absentia and sentenced to prison in the UAE, and whose name has been on the country’s terrorism lists since 2021. Al-Naamani resides in the [UK](#) and is active in various Muslim Brotherhood–affiliated frameworks. He contributes to the movement’s weekly publication *Risalat al-Ikhwan*, published in London. In a [webinar](#) hosted by the association in October 2020, several proposals were raised on how to oppose normalization, including actions in the fields of art and social media—capitalizing on “popular rejection” of normalization—expanding the base of opposition beyond Islamist circles, and uniting forces with other relevant movements.

The Bahraini Society Against Normalization with the Zionist Enemy

It appears that the most active group in Bahrain on this issue is the *Bahraini Society Against Normalization*, which was officially registered in the country back in 2002. Sixteen individuals are listed as the society’s [founders](#), headed by Sheikh Issa bin Mohammed Al-Khalifa, a former politician who was among the founders of the local branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. In August 2024, the Muslim Brotherhood branch [organized](#) a memorial rally for Ismail Haniyeh

following his assassination by Israel, in collaboration with another organization. The rally was held in a hall commemorating Issa bin Mohammed Al-Khalifa.

Other activists within the society come from a Marxist background, and the society played an active role in the recent campaign for the release of former opposition figure [Ibrahim Sharif](#), who had been imprisoned several times in Bahrain. Sharif heads the *Wa'ad Party*, which grew out of the underground movement *Popular Front for the Liberation of Bahrain*, which he joined in the 1980s. He was released from detention in November 2023. According to a U.S. report, in 2008, Sharif [led a delegation](#) to Lebanon, where he praised the activities of terrorist Samir Kuntar, who had been released from Israeli prison at that time as part of a deal and joined Hezbollah.

On October 7, 2023, the society's X (formerly Twitter) account posted [a video](#) of Ibrahim Sharif praising the day's events. The society's social media accounts regularly post videos of protests it organizes and calls for boycotts of international companies with ties to Israel.

The Moroccan Front in Support of Palestine and Against Normalization

Marxist-Leninist groups and their mobilization for anti-Zionist activism are particularly visible in Morocco. These groups have gradually replaced the traditional socialist movements that had taken part in the Maghreb's anti-colonial struggle in the 1950s and 1960s. In March 2023, 100 legal and academic professionals [signed a petition](#) calling to halt normalization with Israel. Among the signatories were several figures who had held senior positions in parties from similar ideological backgrounds, including one who began his career in anti-colonial militias. In May, the *Moroccan Front for Supporting Palestine and Against Normalization* [convened](#) at the offices of the *Moroccan Association for Human Rights*—a veteran organization whose leadership also [hails](#) from a Marxist-Leninist background. This meeting was the front's third national assembly, attended by its member organizations under the slogan: "Together for the Palestinian resistance and against normalization."

Reports stated that the assembly included civil activists, politicians, party leaders, and cultural figures. Alongside the [many participants](#) with socialist backgrounds, representatives of the Islamist opposition party *Justice and Charity* also took part. Normalization was repeatedly described as an act of betrayal, and there was consensus that action must be taken to stop it.

In April 2023, the Front sent a public [letter of support](#) for Palestinian prisoners and those on hunger strike, in honor of Palestinian Prisoners Day. In May 2023, a demonstration was held marking 75 years since the Nakba. Among the demonstrators was long-time Marxist-leftist and anti-Zionist Jew, [Sion Assidon](#), a member of the Front's leadership. Assidon was one of the [founders](#) of the *March 23* Marxist-Leninist organization in the 1970s, and is among a group of Jewish activists on the fringes of the left who have been involved in Moroccan politics. He also [participated](#) in a protest in front of the Moroccan parliament in July 2022 during the visit of then-IDF Chief of Staff Aviv Kochavi. During the Swords of Iron war, the Front [organized](#) anti-Israel demonstrations and [called to fight](#) the “cancer of normalization” and to support the “heroic Palestinian resistance.” The Front is also actively campaigning for the release of Ismail Al-Gazaoui, who was arrested and imprisoned for one year toward the end of 2024 and is [identified](#) as a member of the Moroccan branch of the BDS movement.

The Moroccan Observatory Against Normalization

An older organization in the country is the *Moroccan Observatory Against Normalization*, [led by](#) left-wing activist Ahmed Wihmane, who was arrested and prosecuted in Morocco in 2019 due to his anti-Israel activities. Wihmane has been praised by circles close to the Muslim Brotherhood. Ahmed Raissouni, a Moroccan Islamist who succeeded Qaradawi as head of the International Union of Muslim Scholars, dedicated [an article](#) on his personal website to Wihmane, describing him as a national and international symbol of the struggle against normalization and against the “Zionist occupier.”

The Observatory collaborates with other organizations such as the *National Action Group for Supporting Palestine/Morocco*. For example, in September 2021, the Action Group [submitted](#) a letter to the UN protesting “Israel’s crimes” against Palestinian prisoners, the al-Aqsa Mosque, and Jerusalem, and the organization’s silence on the matter. The delegation delivering the letter included, in addition to Wihmane, the head of the largest Islamist movement in Parliament—*Unity and Reform*. In February 2023, the two bodies also collaborated with the aforementioned Moroccan Front in [organizing](#) an anti-Israel demonstration.

In July 2023, the Observatory [warned](#) that the Israeli government’s recognition of Morocco’s sovereignty over Western Sahara and the announcement that a consulate may be established in the region, stem from a desire to take control over the Sahara and over Morocco as a whole. In January 2024, the Observatory [initiated](#) a petition calling for the closure of Israel’s diplomatic mission in the country and the cessation of the normalization process.

Establishment and Activity of a Coordinating Body Against Normalization

As in other areas where the campaign to delegitimize Israel is active, a coordinating body was also established in early 2021 for the struggle against normalization. [Operating out](#) of Istanbul, it is called the High Coordination Committee for Anti-Zionism and Resistance to Normalization, more commonly known as the Anti-Zionism Coordination (AZC). The committee is chaired by Moroccan left-wing activist Ahmed Wihmane, and his deputy is Ahmed Al-Sheiba Al-Naamani, an Al-Islah (Muslim Brotherhood) activist exiled from the United Arab Emirates.

In February 2022, the AZC made headlines in the United Kingdom when Jeremy Corbyn—the former leader of the British Labour Party, who was expelled from the party and now serves as an independent MP affiliated with the pro-Palestinian bloc—was forced to cancel his participation in a webinar organized by the AZC. The event was titled: “*The Year of Struggle Against Normalization:*

We Will Resist the [Zionist] Entity and Defend Our Homelands.” Corbyn canceled after it was revealed that among the event’s sponsors were: a body designated as a terrorist organization in the United States due to its ties to Hamas; another headed by senior Hamas official Bassem Naim, responsible among other things for BDS within the movement (and who, in late 2024, was [sanctioned](#) by the U.S. Treasury Department along with other senior Hamas members); and a [third organization](#) headed by a senior figure in Palestinian Islamic Jihad in Gaza.

The committee’s website [publishes](#) various materials related to the boycott campaign against Israel, public statements, and religious rulings opposing normalization—some of which are issued by bodies affiliated with Hamas. It should be noted that its social media accounts are currently less active than in the past.

Conclusion

With the launch of initiatives to promote normalization between Israel and Arab states, the efforts to resist it have escalated. As in other areas of the campaign to delegitimize Israel’s right to exist as the nation-state of the Jewish people, this sphere has also seen mobilization by local “civil” or “non-governmental” organizations that present themselves as grassroots, non-violent actors. In reality, many of these organizations are linked to broader Islamist networks that often include exiled activists. At times, they are directly connected to Hamas and other designated terrorist organizations on one hand, and to Marxist-Leninist backgrounds on the other. Most often, these networks also represent opposition movements to the ruling governments.

The Swords of Iron war significantly escalated such activities against Israel at the international level—including protests in the streets and on campuses across Western countries, as well as efforts targeting international political and legal systems. In order to continue advancing the Abraham Accords, there is an urgent need to understand this activity, its background, and the critical importance of developing effective counter-strategies.