

Five Years On: Are the Abraham Accords Here to Stay?

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The Abraham Accords are a significant milestone in Israel's diplomatic history and in its integration into the region. The accords have proven unexpectedly resilient in the face of the war in the Gaza Strip, particularly given the negative public opinion toward Israel in Arab states. In fact, cooperation in the security and economic spheres has even accelerated. While the war has caused considerable damage to the accords, this damage is not irreversible. A gradual restoration of ties—and even an expansion of the accords, potentially to include Saudi Arabia—remains possible. However, such progress will depend on the timing and outcome of the war in Gaza, particularly in relation to meaningful steps toward resolving the Palestinian issue.

In September 2020, the Abraham Accords were signed between Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain, with Morocco and Sudan joining shortly thereafter. The accords marked a milestone in Israel's diplomatic history and a major achievement in its regional integration. The Palestinian issue—previously considered a prerequisite for any agreement with Arab states—was pushed aside, while strategic-security, economic, and geopolitical interests, and especially concerns about the Iranian threat, economic modernization, and strengthening ties with the United States, served as central catalysts for signing the Abraham Accords.

The accords had important consequences for Israel's place in the Middle East in political, military, and economic terms. One prominent diplomatic achievement was the establishment in March 2022 of the Negev Forum, with the participation of the foreign ministers of Israel, the United States, Egypt, Morocco, the UAE, and Bahrain. The forum was intended to convene annually to discuss regional issues of mutual concern, and six working groups were formed on security, energy, tourism, health, education, water, and food security. However, its activity was suspended as a result of the war in Gaza.

Militarily, the Abraham Accords facilitated the institutionalization of security cooperation under a US umbrella and the strengthening of military and intelligence ties. In 2021, as a complementary step to the accords, [the Trump administration decided](#) to transfer Israel to the framework of United States Central Command (CENTCOM), responsible for Middle Eastern states. This was a dramatic strategic and military development, demonstrating the willingness of Arab states under CENTCOM to cooperate with Israel. Even before that, Israel had [participated](#) in joint exercises with its Arab neighbors with whom it did not maintain formal relations. Still, integration into the US regional system played an [important role](#) in

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repelling Iran's missile attacks on Israel in April and October 2024, and during the 12-days war in June 2025.

The Abraham Accords also strengthened bilateral security cooperation between Israel and the partner states. [Reports](#) indicate that Israel supplied the UAE with missile defense batteries in early 2022 against the backdrop of Houthi rebel attacks from Yemen. The UAE [allowed](#) Israeli companies to participate in its international arms exhibition in February 2025. Military ties with Morocco also intensified: In November 2021, the two states signed a military cooperation agreement—[the first of its kind](#) between Israel and an Arab state. Since then, including during the Gaza war, Morocco's arms and military equipment purchases from Israel have totaled about [\\$2 billion](#). According to data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), [about 11% of Morocco's defense imports come from Israel](#). In addition, arms deals with the UAE and Bahrain [surged](#). Despite political pressures, Israel's defense exports in 2024 reached a record \$14.8 billion, with the Abraham Accords countries accounting for [12% of exports—up from just 3%](#) in 2023.

The accords were especially reflected in strengthened economic cooperation with Israel. On April 1, 2023, [a free trade agreement](#) (FTA) between Israel and the UAE entered into force. This was the first such agreement between Israel and any Arab state. Following its implementation, reciprocal tariff reductions were introduced on imports and exports, alongside improved and facilitated trade in a range of other areas, including services, standards, intellectual property, and government procurement. This was the practical realization of normalization between the two states, demonstrating the vast potential inherent in the relationship. In addition, trade volumes have increased significantly since 2021. According to Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics, trade between Israel and the UAE grew from about \$200 million in 2020 [to over \\$3 billion](#) in 2024 (including diamonds). Morocco and Israel also signed an economic cooperation agreement in February 2022. While trade figures between them are not as impressive as those with the UAE, they are still higher than in the period before signing the Abraham Accords.

Meanwhile, a number of cooperation agreements were signed in the fields of water and [climate](#) between Israel, the UAE, Bahrain, and Morocco. One impressive project signed in 2021 was the "Water for Electricity" agreement, under which Israel was to supply Jordan with up to 200 million cubic meters of water annually in exchange for solar electricity generated in Jordan with Emirati funding. In November 2022, at the Sharm el-Sheikh Climate Conference, Israel, Jordan, and the UAE [signed](#) a memorandum of understanding to accelerate implementation of this [project](#), but the Gaza war prompted Jordan to suspend it.

Indeed, the Gaza war of October 2023 put the Abraham Accords to the test. Scenes of destruction in Gaza and the protracted fighting reignited deep feelings of solidarity with the Palestinian people across the Arab world. These developments raised questions about the durability of the Abraham Accords and cast doubt on the long-term viability of normalization between Israel and Arab states when decoupled from the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

Despite the severity of the crisis, none of the signatory states cut off or formally suspended relations with Israel. However, Bahrain decided to freeze economic agreements and, like Jordan, recalled its ambassador from Israel as [a symbolic gesture](#) of solidarity with the Palestinians. Still, the continued existence of diplomatic ties, trade channels, and security

cooperation amid the ongoing war—even if below the surface—indicated the depth of the strategic choice made. The UAE, in particular, demonstrated consistent commitment to its agreement with Israel, presenting the relationship as a national asset. Senior Abu Dhabi officials, including the UAE president, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed, [openly declared that these relations serve](#) the federation’s stability and its economic and regional resilience.

The signatory states of the Abraham Accords have an additional incentive to preserve them, stemming from the value they place on their relationship with the United States. Since the United States—and President Trump in particular—was the main sponsor of the accords, there is an understandable concern that undermining them could strain ties with Washington.

The resilience of the accords—even under conditions of ongoing conflict in Gaza, whose humanitarian consequences stir Arab public opinion—may reflect a new regional trend of [“functional normalization,”](#) whereby sovereign interests are maintained even in times of political or moral clashes. This trend points to a deep change in self-identity perceptions, privileging pragmatic action over loyalty to historic and ideological struggles. However, the widening gap between the policies of the elite and Arab public sentiment remains profound. While governments continue to maintain relations with Israel, public sentiment—especially in light of the war—has grown increasingly hostile, with calls for boycotts and widespread expressions of solidarity with Palestinians through protests and media activism. In response to public criticism, policy-makers contend that these ties afford them leverage over Israel, which can be used to promote the Palestinian cause.

As with earlier peace treaties between Israel, Egypt, and Jordan, the Abraham Accords are built on a relatively narrow foundation of institutionalized cooperation, primarily in the realms of security and economics, without fostering substantial grassroots engagement. Israel’s integration into the culture, education, media, and social spheres has remained limited. Morocco is a notable exception, where historic and religious ties have enabled more robust people-to-people connections. The UAE has also legitimized a visible Israeli presence in the public sphere. Nevertheless, this gap between official cooperation and societal engagement creates a strong dependency on regime stability and the personal commitment of decision-makers. A major political shift, the emergence of domestic opposition forces, or a regional security crisis could swiftly destabilize the current framework.

The normalization with the UAE had been made possible at the time due to an [Israeli promise](#)—according to the UAE—to refrain from applying Israeli law in Judea and Samaria for four years. Yet, recent Israeli government declarations about annexing parts of the West Bank led the UAE in early September 2025 to issue a public warning that such a move would be a “red line” gravely harming the Abraham Accords and [“the vision of regional integration.”](#) Abu Dhabi did not explicitly threaten to walk away from the agreement with Israel, but for the first time since the accords were signed, the Emiratis took such a step, aimed also at American ears. Another sign of potential backsliding in the accords came immediately after Israel’s attempted assassination of Hamas leaders in Qatar on September 9, 2025: The UAE [informed Israel](#) it could not participate in the upcoming Dubai Airshow—an event of importance to Israel’s defense industries.

Alongside domestic factors, regional actors consistently work to thwart normalization between Israel and Arab states. Iran, which sees the accords as a threat to its ability to shape

the regional agenda, pressures them to act against this process, directly or via proxies. Terrorist attacks inside Israel, strikes on Gulf states, and intensive activity on social media all reflect a combined effort to undermine the new partnerships. Hamas's October 2023 attack on Israel was partly intended to block the impending normalization between Saudi Arabia and Israel.

In this context, Saudi Arabia plays a unique role. Much has been written about it as the "ultimate prize" of normalization, but reality is more complex than the prevailing image. The kingdom differs fundamentally from the small Gulf states—in size, in its responsibility as "custodian of the holy places" for the Muslim world, and in its position on the Palestinian issue. It proceeds cautiously, maintaining strategic ambiguity, and remains reluctant to pursue normalization with Israel without meaningful progress on the Palestinian issue or sufficient guarantees from the United States regarding security and access to nuclear technology.

Moreover, the war in Gaza prompted Saudi Arabia to temper its enthusiasm for normalization, while insisting on a more substantial Palestinian component in any future agreement with Israel than it had previously demanded. In September 2024, in a speech before the Shura Council, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman declared: "The kingdom will not stop its tireless work toward the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital, and we affirm that the Kingdom [will not establish diplomatic relations with Israel without that.](#)"

Riyadh also [frequently criticizes](#) settlement activity and Israeli government decisions to expand settlements in Judea and Samaria, regarding them as contrary to international law and to [the peace process and the Palestinians' legitimate aspirations for self-determination](#). The kingdom keeps the door open to normalization with Israel after the war, but conditions it on the establishment of a Palestinian state or at least concrete steps toward a two-state reality. Annexation of West Bank areas could therefore significantly jeopardize any future chance of an agreement between Israel and Saudi Arabia.

The survival of the Abraham Accords is not guaranteed under all circumstances. Continuation of the war in Gaza, the humanitarian situation and scenes of hunger in the Strip, the expulsion of Palestinians from it, annexation of areas in Judea and Samaria as well as Gaza, and events infringing on Arab sovereignty, such as the Qatar strike, could gravely damage Israel's relations with the Abraham Accords states. Clearly, as long as the war continues and there is no progress on the Palestinian issue, at least some of the achievements of the accords—such as the Negev Forum and the "Water for Electricity" agreement—will erode and may even be suspended permanently. Generally, Arab-Israeli normalization processes do not necessarily proceed in linear fashion but rather move in constant flux of rapprochement and estrangement in response to diverse circumstances. For example, the diplomatic ties established with Morocco, Tunisia, Oman, Qatar, and Mauritania in the 1990s following the Oslo Accords were severed after the outbreak of the Second Palestinian Intifada in 2000.

In the five years since the signing of the Abraham Accords, Israel has constructed a new—albeit fragile—infrastructure of regional ties that has thus far withstood the pressures of the Gaza war. In the realm of public consciousness, even though many in the Arab world continue to oppose the notion of "normalization" (*tatbi'* in Arabic), relations with Israel are no longer a taboo. Indeed, they have even been invoked in the context of Lebanon and Syria following the

war between Israel and Hezbollah war and the collapse of the Assad regime. This points to a significant shift in the outlook of some regional decision-makers—and possibly segments of the broader public—toward Israel.

However, as long as these ties remain grounded solely in elite-driven strategic interests, without fostering genuine people-to-people engagement, they will remain vulnerable to future upheavals—especially those rooted in the unresolved Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The Abraham Accords thus reflect a form of diplomatic pragmatism, but one whose permanence is far from guaranteed. Their long-term viability will depend not only on high-level diplomacy or mutual security and economic interests, but also on the cultivation of grassroots connections and a broader sense of authentic regional partnership.

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