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## Between Peace and Conflict: The Middle East After the Abraham Accords

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**Abstract.** In 2020, four Arab states — Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Sudan and Morocco — took their first steps toward normalizing relations with Israel with the active US support. This research is an attempt to identify the main incentives which made the Arab states act the way they did, as well as to analyze the situation of the Palestinians amidst the strengthening of relations between Israel and the Arab world. The author also examines how the conflict between Israel and Hamas, which began on October 7, 2023, has affected the established diplomatic, economic, and military ties between the Jewish state and the Arab countries which signed the Abraham Accords. The study concludes that one of the main incentives for Arab states to normalize relations with Israel is the desire to deepen military and technical cooperation with the U.S. At the same time, it would be far-fetched to consider the normalization of relations between the four states and Israel as a step toward regional stabilization, given the reaction of the Palestinians and other Middle Eastern states to the agreements embraced. The reaction reflects the failure to find a common approach to the Middle East peace process as well as the fact that there is no region-widely shared view on shaping a new regional architecture. In this context, it is worth highlighting the situation of the Palestinians, for whom these agreements were a stab in the back and created unfavorable conditions for the establishment of a full-fledged state of Palestine. The study also emphasizes that the future of the “Abraham Accords” and the possibility of their expansion will depend on the development of the conflict between Israel and Hamas, as well as on the readiness of the parties to reach a long-term peaceful settlement. The continuation of the conflict in Gaza would seriously undermine Israel’s image in the Arab world and would certainly undermine the fundamental principles of the Abraham Accords, which would diminish the importance of these agreements. This study offers a valuable perspective on the complex and dynamic relationships in the Middle East region and contributes to understanding the motives and consequences of recent geopolitical changes.

**Key words:** Middle East, Abraham Accords, Arab-Israeli relations, US Middle East policy

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## Между миром и конфликтом: Ближний Восток после «Авраамовых соглашений»

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**Аннотация.** В 2020 г. четыре арабских государства — Бахрейн, Объединенные Арабские Эмираты, Марокко и Судан — при активном содействии США сделали первые шаги на пути к нормализации отношений с Израилем. Предпринята попытка выявить основные причины, подтолкнувшие арабские государства к таким действиям, а также проведен анализ положения палестинцев на фоне укрепления отношений Израиля с арабским миром. Автор анализирует, как конфликт между Израилем и ХАМАС, начавшийся 7 октября 2023 г., оказал влияние на сложившиеся дипломатические, экономические и военные связи между еврейским государством и странами — подписантами «Авраамовых соглашений». По результатам исследования установлено, что одной из главных причин нормализации отношений арабских стран с Израилем стал расчет на углубление сотрудничества с США в военно-технической области. В то же время нельзя расценивать нормализацию отношений четырех арабских стран с Израилем как шаг к стабилизации в регионе, так как реакция на достигнутые договоренности со стороны палестинцев и других государств региона демонстрирует отсутствие единого подхода к проблеме ближневосточного урегулирования и взгляда на выстраивание региональной архитектуры. В этом контексте следует особо отметить положение палестинцев, для которых эти соглашения стали ударом в спину и создали неблагоприятные условия для образования полноценного Государства Палестина. Также подчеркивается, что будущее «Авраамовых соглашений» и возможность их расширения будет зависеть от развития конфликта между Израилем и ХАМАС, а также от готовности сторон к долгосрочному мирному урегулированию. Продолжение конфликта в Газе серьезно подорвет имидж Израиля в арабском мире и основополагающие принципы «Авраамовых соглашений», что отразится на снижении значимости этих договоренностей. Это исследование предлагает ценный взгляд на сложные и динамичные отношения в Ближневосточном регионе и способствует пониманию мотивов и последствий недавних геополитических изменений.

**Ключевые слова:** Ближний Восток, Авраамовы соглашения, арабо-израильские отношения, ближневосточная политика США

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### Introduction

The year 2020 can be described as a period of hope for the normalization of relations between the Arab world and Israel, if not a turning point in the Arab-Israeli confrontation. It has been a very productive year for Israel in terms of building relations with Arab countries — at least in terms of establishing a legal framework: four of the six existing normalization treaties were signed during this year. Two others were concluded between Israel and Egypt in 1979 and Israel and Jordan in 1994 (Gasratyan, 2015, p. 156). The four new Arab countries that normalized relations with Israel

were the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco.

It is of interest to identify the main reasons that pushed both the U.S. and Israel, as well as the Arab countries, to take such decisive steps. Given the traditional Arab support for the Palestinians, the normalization of relations with Israel could significantly undermine the established pan-Arab consensus on this issue. In addition, the article examines the reaction of the Arab countries that joined the Abraham Accords to the escalation of the situation in the Gaza Strip in October 2023.

All this will make it possible to get closer to achieving the goal of the study: to examine

the motives behind the Arab states' rapprochement with Israel, to assess their interest in establishing relations with Israel through active US mediation, and to determine how durable the Abraham Accords will be against the backdrop of the escalation in the Gaza Strip.

Considering the fact that the key actors of the analyzed events are states, the author bases his study mainly on the realist theory of international relations. It should be emphasized that the conclusion of these agreements on the normalization of relations with Israel plays a key role in redefining the regional balance of power, as it not only changes the mutual relations between the signatory countries, but also influences the strategic dynamics in the Middle East region, creating new geopolitical realities and causing a rethinking of traditional alliances and animosities. In addition, the author uses historical and systematic research methods to analyze the developments that led to the signing of the Abrahamic Accords and to assess their impact on the Middle East region and international relations in general.

In analyzing sources of information, it was important for the author to pay close attention primarily to official documents and treaties, as well as public statements by official representatives of the parties. The author draws on the literature to understand the long-term trends and policy vectors of Middle Eastern states.

### **Reasons for Normalizing Israel's Relations with Arab Countries**

On September 15, 2020, a solemn ceremony was held in Washington, DC to sign agreements on the normalization of relations between Israel, on the one hand, and the UAE and Bahrain, on the other, with the active mediation of the United States.<sup>1</sup> The agreements

<sup>1</sup> Holland S., Spetalnick M. In Break with Past, UAE and Bahrain Forge Ties with Israel at White House // The Star. September 16, 2020. URL: <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/world/2020/09/15/at-historic-white-house->

were signed on the Israeli side by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and on the Arab side by the UAE Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, and Bahrain Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullatif bin Rashid Al-Zayani. The United States was represented by President Donald Trump (2017–2021). A set of documents were signed during the ceremony:

1. "Treaty of Peace, Diplomatic Relations and Full Normalization between the United Arab Emirates and the State of Israel"<sup>2</sup>;

2. "Declaration of Peace, Cooperation and Constructive Diplomatic and Friendly Relations" between Israel and Bahrain<sup>3</sup>;

3. The general "Abraham Accords Declaration", which was named after the patriarch of the three major monotheistic religions of the world: Judaism, Christianity and Islam.<sup>4</sup>

The Israeli-Emirati and Israeli-Bahraini documents have different titles: by customary practice, the "Treaty" suggests a deeper engagement than the "Declaration". The text of the treaty between Israel and the UAE appears more elaborate and detailed (Singer, 2021, p. 450). One reason for this differentiation may be the fact that Bahrain finally declared its intention to normalize relations with Israel less than a week before the signing ceremony in

event-uae-and-bahrain-to-move-toward-normal-ties-with-israel (accessed: 02.12.2023).

<sup>2</sup> Abraham Accords Peace Agreement: Treaty of Peace, Diplomatic Relations and Full Normalization between the United Arab Emirates and the State of Israel // U.S. Department of State. September 15, 2020. URL: [https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/UAE\\_Israel-treaty-signed-FINAL-15-Sept-2020-508.pdf](https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/UAE_Israel-treaty-signed-FINAL-15-Sept-2020-508.pdf) (accessed: 12.08.2023).

<sup>3</sup> Abraham Accords: Declaration of Peace, Cooperation and Constructive Diplomatic and Friendly Relations // U.S. Department of State. September 15, 2020. URL: [https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Bahrain\\_Israel-Agreement-signed-FINAL-15-Sept-2020-508.pdf](https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Bahrain_Israel-Agreement-signed-FINAL-15-Sept-2020-508.pdf) (accessed: 12.08.2023).

<sup>4</sup> The Abraham Accords Declaration // U.S. Department of State. September 15, 2020. URL: <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Abraham-Accords-signed-FINAL-15-Sept-2020-508-1.pdf> (accessed: 12.08.2023).

Washington. The US President signed all the documents, naming the event a “turning point” in the history of the development of the Middle East settlement, which the Israeli side also agreed with, expressing the hope that eventually these positive shifts — at least in the vision of the parties — would lead to the end of the Arab-Israeli conflict (Guzansky & Zachary, 2020, p. 379). The normalization of relations implies cooperation between Israel and the Arab states in a wide range of areas, from energy, economy, health and tourism to the military sphere.

A key condition of the agreement was freezing the construction of Jewish settlements in the occupied territory of the West Bank, which Benjamin Netanyahu had promised as early as the parliamentary elections in 2020 and which was reflected in the so-called “deal of the century” (Karasova, 2023, p. 85). Officially, the document is called “Peace for Prosperity. A Vision to Improve the Lives of the Palestinian and Israeli People.”<sup>5</sup> It is an essentially pro-Israeli initiative put forward by the U.S., which has provoked very mixed reactions, also because the Palestinian side was not involved in drafting the document (Melnikova, 2020, p. 31). Stopping settlement construction does not, however, imply Israel’s withdrawal from the previously occupied territories (Kshevitskaia, 2021, p. 164).

### ***The UAE***

The shift in Israeli-Emirati relations is seen as the most tangible. The UAE public welcomed the conclusion of the Abraham Accords (Hitman & Zwilling, 2022, p. 440). For the UAE, the agreement opens many new opportunities domestically and potentially beyond (Khan & Shahzad, 2021, p.182). The benefits to the UAE after signing the treaty with Israel demonstrate the US interest in normalizing relations between Arab countries and Israel (Melkumyan, 2021, p. 114).

<sup>5</sup> Peace to Prosperity: A Vision to Improve the Lives of the Palestinian and Israeli People // The White House. January 28, 2020. URL: <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/peacetoprosperity/> (accessed: 20.08.2023).

The normalization of relations between Israel and the UAE under the Abraham Accords has strengthened political, economic and regional interaction in the Middle East. This agreement, which followed decades of covert interaction, led to open diplomatic ties, commercial opportunities, and technology exchange (Maher, 2022, p. 1). Changing US security priorities played an important role in this process. Events such as the Baghdad Summits, the March 2022 Negev Summit, and the Israel — Lebanon Maritime Agreement have contributed to increased regional interaction and conflict de-escalation (Vakil & Quilliam, 2023, p. 2).

Since the normalization of relations, the UAE and Israel have developed close economic ties (Varnavskii, 2022, p. 77). The volume of bilateral trade between the two countries has exceeded 6 billion USD since 2020.<sup>6</sup> For example, in 2021, the volume of bilateral trade reached 1.154 billion USD, which is very significant for the first year of the agreement. In the context of these economic achievements, Israel and the UAE signed a free trade agreement in May 2022, which provides for the exemption of 96% of goods from customs duties and is expected to increase trade between the countries to 10 billion USD within five years.<sup>7</sup> In addition, Israeli tourists are actively visiting hotels, beaches and shopping centers in the UAE (Egel, Efron & Robinson, 2021, p. 3).

The UAE’s agreement with Israel also implied military cooperation, particularly with the U.S. The UAE expected that once relations normalized, it could purchase the US F-35 fighter jets and MQ-9 Reaper drones. Despite

<sup>6</sup> Cornwell A. Exclusive: UAE Plans to Maintain Ties with Israel Despite Gaza Outcry, Sources Say // Reuters. November 11, 2023. URL: <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/uae-plans-maintain-ties-with-israel-despite-gaza-outcry-sources-say-2023-11-11/> (accessed: 20.11.2023).

<sup>7</sup> Cornwell A. Israel, UAE Boost Ties with Free Trade Pact // Reuters. May 31, 2022. URL: <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israel-uae-sign-free-trade-deal-ambassador-2022-05-31/> (accessed: 20.08.2023).

the Trump administration's push for the sale of the F-35 and Reaper, complex negotiations over the transfer of key components and the US doubts about the safety of its technology amid the UAE's evolving relations with China have stalled the process. This led to the UAE's announcement that it would not purchase the aircraft (Feierstein & Guzansky, 2023, p. 3).

The ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas that started in October 2023 in the Gaza Strip has had a significant impact on the UAE — Israel relations. However, despite international outrage and the growing number of victims of the conflict, the UAE plans to maintain diplomatic relations with Israel. This decision was driven by the UAE's desire to exert a moderating influence on the Israeli campaign while protecting its own interests. As an important regional actor and security partner of the U.S., the UAE has expressed its position through official condemnations of Israeli actions and calls for an end to violence. The UAE maintains the presence of an Israeli ambassador on its soil, indicating a desire for a long-term strategic relationship with Israel. In addition, the motivation for continued cooperation was the shared concerns about the threat posed by Iran, as well as the economic reorientation of Abu Dhabi's foreign policy.

### ***Bahrain***

The pragmatic benefits of bilateral cooperation have played an important role in the development of Bahrain's relations with Israel. These benefits cover a wide range of areas, including defense and security, where partnership with the Jewish state offers new opportunities for enhancing regional stability. In this context, the "Abraham Accords" were the key mechanism that allowed both countries to formally establish diplomatic relations and expand cooperation. This cooperation proves to be particularly significant against the backdrop of general concerns about Iran's actions in the region, emphasizing the strategic importance of these new diplomatic ties for Bahrain.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Daze-Héni F. The Gulf States and Israel after the Abraham Accords // Arab Reform Initiative. November 6,

In March 2021, Bahrain appointed its first ambassador to Israel, marking a landmark in the two countries' relations.<sup>9</sup> In September 2021, Israel opened its embassy in Manama, and in September 2023, the Israeli foreign minister visited Manama to officially open the new embassy, which replaced the previous one.<sup>10</sup> Both Bahrain and Israel have sought to expand economic ties. In September 2023, the Israeli foreign minister and his Bahraini counterpart signed an agreement aimed at boosting tourism, increasing direct flights, and strengthening trade and investment ties. Accompanied by a delegation of businessmen, the minister noted the active participation of Israeli companies in high-tech and logistics projects in Bahrain.<sup>11</sup>

When analyzing the prospects and development of trade and economic relations between Israel and Bahrain, several key aspects need to be taken into account. First, the total volume of trade between the countries is relatively modest, and Manama's economic capabilities are inferior to those of the UAE. Second, the economies of Israel and Bahrain are less complementary, with the latter lagging far behind in technological development. Third, unlike the UAE, has been tacitly trading with the Jewish state since the 2000s, Bahrain has not yet had informal economic ties with Israel, forcing the countries to start the relationship from scratch (Krylov, Fedorchenko & Maryasis, 2022, p. 143). In addition, internal political

2020. URL: <https://www.arab-reform.net/publication/the-gulf-states-and-israel-after-the-abraham-accords/> (accessed 20.08.2023).

<sup>9</sup> Staff T. Bahrain Appoints Ambassador to Israel Following 2020 Abraham Accords // The Times of Israel. March 30, 2021. URL: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/bahrain-appoints-ambassador-to-israel-following-2020-abraham-accords/> (accessed: 02.12.2023).

<sup>10</sup> Hamad M. Israel Opens Bahrain Embassy, Three Years after Normalising Ties // Reuters. September 4, 2023. URL: <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israel-opens-bahrain-embassy-three-years-after-normalising-ties-2023-09-04/> (accessed: 02.12.2023).

<sup>11</sup> Israel Opens New Embassy in Bahrain, Agrees to Boost Trade Relations // Al-Jazeera. September 4, 2023. URL: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/9/4/israel-opens-new-embassy-in-bahrain-agrees-to-boost-trade-relations> (accessed: 20.09.2023).

tensions in Bahrain, especially among the Shi'a segment of the population, which often expresses dissatisfaction with the ruling government, limit the ability of political and economic elites to establish new relations.<sup>12</sup>

The analysis of the Bahraini-Israeli normalization leads us to conclude that despite the significant progress in the relations between the two states since the signing of the Abraham Accords, the escalation in the Gaza Strip in October 2023 had a negative impact on them. In November 2023, against the backdrop of the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas, the Bahraini parliament announced the return of its ambassador from Israel and the withdrawal of the Israeli ambassador from Bahrain.<sup>13</sup> It also announced the suspension of all economic relations with Israel, reflecting Bahrain's "firm and historic position" in support of the Palestinian cause and the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. The announcement was made by the Bahraini Parliament, while Israel stated that it had received no official notification of such decisions.<sup>14</sup>

### **Morocco**

Another Arab state that decided in 2020 to establish official contacts with Israel through the US mediation was Morocco. On December 22, 2020, Morocco, Israel and the U.S. signed a joint tripartite declaration on the normalization of relations.<sup>15</sup> The Israeli Prime Minister

welcomed the restoration of relations and announced the resumption of direct flights between Israel and Morocco. The first direct flight took place on December 22, 2020, when a joint Israeli-American delegation led by Jared Kushner and the head of the Jewish state's National Security Council, Meir Ben-Shabbat, arrived in Rabat from Tel Aviv (Pásztor, 2022, p. 8).

The parties signed four agreements: visa waiver for holders of official and diplomatic passports, memoranda of understanding on civil aviation, on innovation and water resources development, and on financial and investment cooperation.<sup>16</sup> Potential military cooperation and, in the case of Morocco, should be seen as an important incentive for normalizing relations with Israel. Omer Dostri from the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security pointed out in an interview that Israeli and Moroccan security cooperation encompasses intelligence cooperation, joint military exercises and arms trade.<sup>17</sup> The Israeli military has participated in the US *African Lion* exercise in Morocco, and the Moroccans have bought Israeli drones and air defense systems, with interest in armored vehicles and cyber security.<sup>18</sup> In February 2022, Morocco signed an agreement to promote bilateral trade and cooperation, including customs benefits and increased trade ties (Feierstein & Guzansky, 2023, p. 4).

For Morocco, the decision to sign the Abraham Accords was accompanied by specific

<sup>12</sup> Khurma M., Farley A., Sherman B. Harb F. A. News Roundup: UAE, Bahrain Normalize Relations with Israel // Wilson Center. September 16, 2020. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/news-roundup-uae-bahrain-normalize-relations-israel> (accessed: 15.10.2023).

<sup>13</sup> Bahrain Recalls Ambassador from Israel Amid Escalating Assault on Gaza // Al-Jazeera. November 2, 2023. URL: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/2/bahrain-recalls-ambassador-from-israel-amid-escalating-assault-on-gaza> (accessed: 02.12.2023).

<sup>14</sup> Hamad M. Bahrain Says Envoy to Israel Returned Home, Israel Says Ties Stable // Reuters. November 2, 2023. URL: <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/bahrain-parliament-says-envoy-israel-returned-home-israel-says-ties-stable-2023-11-02/> (accessed: 20.11.2023).

<sup>15</sup> Joint Declaration. The Kingdom of Morocco, the United States of America and the State of Israel // U.S.

Department of State. December 22, 2020. URL: <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Joint-Declaration-US-Morocco-Israel.pdf> (accessed: 25.08.2023).

<sup>16</sup> Belenkaya M. Israel's Gone Moroccan-ize // Kommersant. December 22, 2020. (In Russian). URL: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4626723> (accessed: 27.08.2023).

<sup>17</sup> Bassist R. Israel — Morocco Security Ties Set to Deepen after Western Sahara Recognition // Al-Monitor. July 18, 2023. URL: <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2023/07/israel-morocco-security-ties-set-deepen-after-western-sahara-recognition> (accessed: 25.08.2023).

<sup>18</sup> Fabian E. In First, IDF Sends Troops to Participate in Major US-led Drill in Morocco // The Times of Israel. June 5, 2023. URL: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/in-first-idf-sends-troops-to-participate-in-major-us-led-drill-in-morocco/> (accessed: 02.12.2023).

commitments from the United States. The Moroccans counted on Washington to recognize their sovereignty over the disputed Western Sahara, hoping that this would resolve the impasse in their claims. As a result, in December 2022 Donald Trump signed an executive order recognizing Moroccan sovereignty over the Western Sahara which contributed to the normalization of the relations between Israel and Morocco.<sup>19</sup> However, after this recognition, only Israel followed the US lead in July 2023.<sup>20</sup> The UN continues to regard the Western Sahara region as a “non-self-governing territory” while the International Court of Justice has recognized Morocco’s attempts to annex Western Sahara as illegal. Israeli recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over the territory opened the door to a significant expansion of bilateral military cooperation, including the appointment of Israel’s first military attaché in Rabat (Liokumovich & Akhmatshina, 2022, p. 65).

Morocco has taken a cautious stance on the conflict between Israel and Hamas, which began on October 7, 2023. The country has maintained a moderate tone in official statements, condemning attacks on civilians and calling for an immediate ceasefire and the protection of civilians and humanitarian access.<sup>21</sup> Despite the evolution of the situation and its complexity,

Morocco has avoided blaming any particular party to the conflict. This approach is evident in Morocco’s constant response to evolving events, where terminology and expressions are adapted to the changing context (Saddiki, 2023, p. 4).

### **Sudan**

Over the years, Sudan has been known for its position of refusing to recognize Israel. This was most evident in 1967 at the Khartoum Conference of the Arab League, where the “Three No’s” were declared: no peace with Israel, no negotiations with Israel, no recognition of Israel.<sup>22</sup> This declaration effectively meant non-recognition of Israel’s right to exist, implying that a war could be the only way to resolve the conflict.

However, there have been significant changes in recent years (Kosach, 2021, p. 66). In 2020, Sudan declared its desire to join the “Abraham Accords”, which aims to normalize relations with Israel (Mazzucco & Alexander, 2022, p. 2). This development was formalized in 2021.<sup>23</sup> For Sudan, it seems that the main incentive for signing the declaration was the desire to get off the White House’s list of “state sponsors of terrorism” and to escape the US sanctions, which would increase its international legitimacy (Makovsky et al., 2022, p. 7). In October 2020 D. Trump signed an executive order that Sudan was no longer considered a state sponsor of terrorism.<sup>24</sup> The U.S., for its part, demanded that Sudan compensate the losses of the US citizens who

<sup>19</sup> Proclamation on Recognizing the Sovereignty of the Kingdom of Morocco over the Western Sahara // U.S. Embassy & Consulates in Morocco. December 10, 2020. URL: <https://ma.usembassy.gov/proclamation-on-recognizing-the-sovereignty-of-the-kingdom-of-morocco-over-the-western-sahara/> (accessed: 26.08.2023).

<sup>20</sup> Berman L., Staff T. Israel Tells Morocco It Recognizes Its Sovereignty over Disputed Western Sahara // The Times of Israel. July 17, 2023. URL: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-tells-morocco-it-recognizes-its-sovereignty-over-disputed-western-sahara/> (accessed: 26.08.2023).

<sup>21</sup> Gaza: Morocco Expresses Deep Concern at Outbreak of Military Action and Condemns Attacks on Civilians Wherever They Are (Foreign Ministry) // Embassy of the Kingdom of Morocco in the United States of America. October 7, 2023. URL: <https://us.diplomatie.ma/en/gaza-morocco-expresses-deep-concern-outbreak-military-action-and-condemns-attacks-civilians-wherever-they-are-foreign-ministry> (accessed: 25.11.2023).

<sup>22</sup> Israel — Arab Peace Process: The Khartoum Resolutions (September 1, 1967) // Jewish Virtual Library. URL: <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-khartoum-resolutions> (accessed: 25.09.2023).

<sup>23</sup> The Abraham Accords Declaration // U.S. Department of State. January 6, 2021. URL: <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Sudan-AA.pdf> (accessed: 20.08.2023).

<sup>24</sup> Abdel-Rahim A. Sudan Says Trump Signs Order Removing State From Terrorism List // Anadolu Agency. October 23, 2020. URL: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/sudan-says-trump-signs-order-removing-state-from-terrorism-list/2016904> (accessed: 02.12.2023).

were victims of terrorist attacks organized by the terrorist group Al-Qaeda<sup>25</sup> and their families. This refers to the 1998 terrorist attacks in Kenya and Tanzania, which were organized by Usama bin Laden, the leader of Al-Qaeda, who was living in Sudan at that time. Sudan transferred the sum of 335 million USD in October 2020.<sup>26</sup>

Nevertheless, internal unrest and political instability between the civilian and military authorities in Sudan slowed down the normalization process and relations temporarily froze. Sudan lagged behind other countries that had joined the agreements, especially in the context of participation in the Negev Forum, which was established under the leadership of Joe Biden to deepen regional ties.

The situation in Sudan worsened after a military coup in 2021, which thwarted attempts at a democratic transition following the overthrow of Omar al-Bashir.<sup>27</sup> Despite internal difficulties, talks on normalizing relations with Israel continued. In February 2023, Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen visited Sudan, where he met with President Abdel Fattah al-Burhan. The visit initiated an agreement to normalize relations, underlining Israel's desire for peace with Arab and Muslim countries.<sup>28</sup> Cohen made a reference to the Khartoum Resolution of 1967 in his statement: "We are now building a new reality with Sudan, in which the Three No's will become Three Yes's: yes to negotiations

between Israel and Sudan, yes to recognition of Israel, yes to peace between states and peoples."<sup>29</sup>

Sudan has expressed support for the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people to establish their own independent state. However, the country's internal civil war is taking up too many resources and attention, preventing Sudan from actively engaging in international politics or making more detailed statements on the issue.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, in October 2023, Sudan and Iran agreed to restore diplomatic relations, which had been cut off in early 2016 due to Iranian interference in Sudan's internal affairs.<sup>31</sup> The move was not welcomed by Israel, which has traditionally viewed Iran as its main regional adversary. The restoration of relations between Sudan and Iran could be perceived as strengthening Iran's position in the Arab world, which raises concerns in Israel about Iran's increasing influence in the region and the potential deterioration of Israel's security.

### **The Palestinian Situation Against the Backdrop of the Abraham Accords**

In the Arab world, these events caused mixed reactions and, to a certain extent, discontent: first of all, among the Palestinians, who considered it a tragedy for the entire Arab world, since it was initially assumed that Israel would recognize the independence of the Palestinians, and only after that would it be possible to have a dialogue on the normalization of relations (Trigano, 2021, p. 12). However, in fact, Israel began to gain recognition in the

<sup>25</sup> Hereinafter, an organization included in the list of terrorist organizations in the Russian Federation is mentioned.

<sup>26</sup> Sudan's Listing as Sponsor of Terrorism Ended by US // BBC. December 14, 2020. URL: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-55300252> (accessed: 20.08.2023).

<sup>27</sup> Leiter M. Y. Sudan: Expanding the Tent of the Abraham Accords // Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs. February 22, 2023. URL: <https://jcpa.org/article/sudan-expanding-the-tent-of-the-abraham-accords/> (accessed: 25.11.2023).

<sup>28</sup> Lazaroff T. Israel and Sudan to Cement Peace Deal after Israeli FM's Secret Trip // The Jerusalem Post. February 2, 2023. URL: <https://www.jpost.com/international/article-730386> (accessed: 12.08.2023).

<sup>29</sup> Giwa K. Israel, Sudan Announce Deal to Normalise Relations // News Central. February 3, 2023. URL: <https://newscentral.africa/israel-sudan-announce-deal-to-normalise-relations/?noamp=available> (accessed: 20.10.2023).

<sup>30</sup> War in Gaza Forces Tough Choices on Israel's Arab Partners // Voa News. November 10, 2023. URL: <https://www.voanews.com/a/war-in-gaza-forces-tough-choices-on-israel-s-arab-partners/7350320.html> (accessed: 20.11.2023).

<sup>31</sup> Iran and Sudan Agreed to Resume Diplomatic Relations // TASS. October 9, 2023. (In Russian). URL: <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/18954563> (accessed: 23.11.2023).



region without making any concessions on its part.<sup>32</sup>

Such a forced normalization of relations between the Arab states and Israel seems highly undesirable for the Palestinians (Ian, 2019, p. 36). The signed documents delay the process of real conflict resolution between Israel and the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), making it less and less likely that Israel will recognize the existence of the state of Palestine (Gudkova, 2022, p. 75). The PNA considers September 15, 2020 as a “black day” in the history of the Palestinian people.<sup>33</sup> And the events in the Gaza Strip, which began in October 2023, have only strengthened the Palestinian belief in Israel’s hostile nature.

Moreover, the normalization of Arab-Israeli relations undermines the position of the PNA leadership within its territory. After the conclusion of the Abraham Accords, a sociological survey was conducted in the PNA, which showed that despite the obvious anti-Israeli sentiment (86% of Palestinians believe that the Abraham Accords are only beneficial to Israel), over 60% of respondents consider the very fact of concluding such agreements a “failure” of Palestinian foreign policy and diplomacy.<sup>34</sup>

## Conclusion

The normalization of relations between the Arab countries and Israel reflects a change in regional policy: the rejection of the settlement

<sup>32</sup> Palestinian President Abbas Says Accords with Israel, US Are Void // Al-Jazeera. May 20, 2020. URL: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/5/20/palestinian-president-abbas-says-accords-with-israel-us-are-void> (accessed: 20.08.2023).

<sup>33</sup> Firat E., Geldi M., Karaalp H. Arab Nations Oppose Normalization with Israel // Anadolu Agency. October 25, 2020. URL: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/arab-nations-oppose-normalization-with-israel/2018172> (accessed: 20.08.2023).

<sup>34</sup> Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research. Public Opinion Poll No (77) // Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research. September 15, 2020. URL: <http://pcpsr.org/sites/default/files/Poll%2077%20English%20full%20text%20September2020.pdf> (accessed: 20.08.2023).

of the Middle East conflict on the basis of traditional UN approaches in favor of economic interests and security cooperation. At the same time, the active role of the U.S. in this process, as an organizer rather than a mediator, indicates that it is the prospects of cooperation with the U.S., rather than directly with Israel, that has become the key incentive for the Arab countries. In turn, the U.S. seeks to strengthen its military and political ties in the region and maintain its influence and presence.

The outbreak of violence in the Gaza Strip in October 2023 has caused some tension in Israel’s relations with Arab countries. Nevertheless, in the case of the UAE, both sides continue to demonstrate a willingness to maintain and develop cooperation based on strategic and economic interests. In the case of Bahrain, the significant gains in bilateral relations with Israel now face new challenges due to developments in Gaza. This tension could complicate future cooperation given the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli conflict. At the same time, Morocco, which has entered into a number of agreements with Israel, often mediated by the U.S., faces a difficult choice. The termination of relations with Israel could seriously affect Morocco’s obligations and interests under these agreements, so the Kingdom of Morocco is taking a cautious stance in this conflict and seeking to balance its obligations and regional security. Finally, Sudan, which is experiencing internal political turmoil, is at the intersection of various international and regional influences.

After the events in Gaza the Abraham Accords have become a historical past and are unlikely to be revived in the near future. These agreements have lost their relevance. Certainly, a possible peace between Israel and Hamas and the subsequent achievement of stability and security in the region are key factors that could give a second breath to Israel’s existing diplomatic relations with Arab countries, as well as attract new participants to the Abraham Accords. In addition,

the international community, in particular the Arab signatory states to the aforementioned agreements, can have a significant impact on the course of the negotiations between Israel and Hamas, and on shaping the future

regional balance of power. This creates a complex mosaic of interactions and interdependencies in which any development could have long-term implications for the entire Middle East.

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