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Executive Summary Report

GEOIntelligence

As Bancroft Capital's GEO Intelligence Group hits its third anniversary, it is worthy to revisit one of our early reports – the strategic significance of the 2020 Abraham Accords – a topic that the media did not sufficiently cover, and the limited reporting missed key contexts.

Our initial report was published shortly before the horrific attacks by Hamas against Israel on Oct. 7, 2023. That attack resulted in the death of more than 1,200 Israelis, with hundreds more wounded, along with Hamas taking 250 hostages into Gaza. Hamas, one of Iran's many proxies, had several motives to conduct the attacks on Oct. 7. But the prime motivation of Iran to condone the atrocities committed by Hamas was to disrupt any diplomatic momentum between Israel, the United States, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to expand the Abraham Accords.

The Abraham Accords are arguably one of the most significant foreign policy achievements of the first Trump Administration. Early in the second Trump Administration, there was a clear intent to grow the Abraham Accords, starting with Israel and Saudi Arabia normalizing diplomatic relations, thus creating the strategic momentum for other Gulf states to follow.

The 2020 Abraham Accords, now six years running, continue to shape the strategic relationships between Israel, Saudi Arabia, the Arab signatories, the broader Middle East, and the Islamic world. However, the attacks of Oct. 7, 2023, along with Israel's regional wars against Lebanese Hezbollah, the Houthis, and the war with Iran, have sidelined diplomatic efforts to expand the Abraham Accords. But amid the increasing Middle East conflict, Arab majority states outside the region like Kazakhstan, which signed the Abraham Accords in 2025, are being courted by the U.S. and Israel to normalize relations.

Background:

In modern history, the Middle East weathered geopolitical storms, including Cold War rivalry, many revolutions, and the rise of a military-dominant Israel. Israeli Arab relations, while not the only source of strife in the Middle East, loomed over many conflicts and disagreements impacting everything from diplomacy to economics.

After several conflicts, including the First Arab Israeli War of 1948, the 1967 Arab Israeli War, and the 1973 Yom Kippur War, Egypt normalized relations with Israel in 1979. Next to do so was Jordan in 1994. Until the Abraham Accords, these were the only two states in the Middle East to recognize Israel with full diplomatic privileges, which includes the premise of Israel's right to exist.
As the most significant Middle East foreign policy success for the first Trump Administration, the Abraham Accords in 2020 were seen internationally as an extremely positive shift for Israel Arab relations within the Middle East and abroad. The Accords or Normalization Agreements between the State of Israel and the countries of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco

have dramatically improved Israeli Arab relationships. Formally recognizing Israel's right to exist, along with diplomatic, economic, and security relationships with Israel, are game changers for regional economic development and regional security.

There is a common assessment among foreign policy experts that none of the agreements could have become a reality without the consent of Saudi Arabia. The U.S. also provided most, if not all, of the parties, policy, security, and/or economic incentives to get the signatories to agree to the tenets of the Accords.

Abraham Accords Declaration:

- Mutual Understanding and Co-existence: The Parties will undertake to foster mutual understanding, respect, co-existence, and a culture of peace between their societies in the spirit of their common ancestors:
- A commitment to resolve ongoing and future conflicts through peaceful means and negotiations.
- Establishment of Diplomatic Missions or Embassies, exchange of Ambassadors, establishment of consular services, and the formation of diplomatic agendas.
- Cooperation and Agreements in other spheres: Advancing the cause of peace, stability, and prosperity throughout the Middle East through the development of a Strategic Agenda for the Middle East.
- Seek opportunities and develop concepts and optimally formal programs for Finance and Investment - Civil Aviation and Overflight - Visas and Consular Services - Innovation, Trade and Economic Relations - Healthcare - Science, Technology and Peaceful Uses of Outer-Space - Tourism, Culture and Sport - Energy - Environment - Education - Maritime Arrangements - Telecommunications and Post - Agriculture and Food Security - Water - Legal Cooperation."
- The Parties shall work together to counter extremism, which promotes hatred and division, and terrorism and its justifications, including by preventing radicalization and recruitment and by combating incitement and discrimination.
- Continued recognition of the Treaties of Peace between the State of Israel and the Arab Republic of Egypt and between the State of Israel and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and a commitment to working together to realize a negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict."

Implications and Enablement:

The Accords came to reality as an offramp to Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu's threats of West Bank annexation. The U.S. and UN opposed the application of Israeli sovereignty in the West Bank territories in the Spring of 2020.

While the immediate effect of the Accords did cease the threats of annexation, the Palestinian Authority (PA) continues to adamantly oppose the Accords and believes the signatories have betrayed the Palestinian people, concurrent with undermining the 2003 Arab Peace Initiative agreed to by the Arab League.

The PA under President Mahmoud Abbas continues to refuse to leverage the Accords despite the encouragement of the U.S., Saudi Arabia, and the Accords' signatories. There is no prospect for reinitiating the Peace Process dialogue between Israel and the PA under the current Israeli and PA leadership. Neither party has an interest in working with the other. The concessions are too great to even consider.

However, since the signing of the Accords, Israel and the participating Arab States are unquestionably benefiting in the areas of security, economics, and cultural understanding. Prior to the war with Iran following Oct. 7, Israel was rapidly expanding its security and economic relationships, in particular with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain.

Prospects for Abraham Accords Expansion Post Oct. 7 and the Ongoing War with Iran:

Following the attacks of Oct. 7, 2023, the Israeli response to Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad in Gaza has put at risk any progress toward Israel-Saudi Arabia normalization.

Israel's total war methodology in Gaza, the destruction of more than 75% of all infrastructure in Gaza, the assessed killing and injury of more than 100,000 non-combatant Palestinians in Gaza, and attacks by settlers against West Bank Palestinians have resulted in condemnation by many, including Arab states. The Arab World, led by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, will not extend an olive branch to Israel under these conditions.

The current Likud government in Israel, held together by the Otzma Yehudit (meaning "Jewish Power") party, led by Minister of National Security Itamar Ben-Gvir; the Religious Zionist Party, led by Minister of Finance Bezalel Smotrich; and the Noam Party, led by Avi Maoz, have no interest in the existence of Palestinians, let alone a pathway to a two-state solution.

Despite the cooperation between the United States, Israel, and the Gulf states in the war against Iran, the way that Israel has prosecuted the war in Gaza, and the inability of Israel to stop Settler violence in the West Bank, it is unlikely that the Abraham Accords will expand in the foreseeable future.

The Saudi Foreign Ministry has stated publicly on multiple occasions that there is an expectation of Israel to demonstrate its commitment to resolving the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Despite these setbacks, the foundation for strategic dialogue, commercial trade, security cooperation, technology exchange, and cultural people-to-people exchange among the Accords' signatories has a strong foothold.

It is unlikely that the PA will reconsider its strong opposition to the Accords or use the Accords as a vehicle to improve the lives of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza.

The cease-fire in Gaza and the release of the Trump 20-point plan, adopted into UN Security Council Resolution 2803, provides a roadmap toward peace and stability in Gaza but further alienates the Abbas-led Palestinian Authority in Ramallah. This was a deliberate decision by President Trump, approved by the UN, to ideally compel Abbas to reform all PA institutions before a resumption of dialogue toward a two-state solution roadmap.

For all the Arab nations in the Gulf, Israel, the United States, and the international community, resolving the Iran War remains priority one. Without establishing status quo ante in the Strait of Hormuz and reducing the likelihood of a resumption of war with Iran, Saudi Arabia and its Arab Allies will have little to no interest in resuming discussions about normalization. Of course, the future of the Palestinian people will continue to be a precondition for any forward momentum.