

Gaza, Qatar, and the UAE: The Abraham Accords After Operation Guardian of the Walls

by [Yoel Guzansky \(/experts/yoel-guzansky/\)](/experts/yoel-guzansky/), [Yohanan Tzoreff \(/experts/yohanan-tzoreff/\)](/experts/yohanan-tzoreff/)

Jun 16, 2021

Also available in

[العربية \(/ar/policy-analysis/ghzt-wqtr-walamarat-atfaqat-abraham-bd-mlyt-hras-alaswar/\)](/ar/policy-analysis/ghzt-wqtr-walamarat-atfaqat-abraham-bd-mlyt-hras-alaswar/)

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

[Yoel Guzansky \(/experts/yoel-guzansky/\)](/experts/yoel-guzansky/)

Dr. Yoel Guzansky is a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), Tel Aviv University. Guzansky is a contributor to Fikra Forum.

[Yohanan Tzoreff \(/experts/yohanan-tzoreff/\)](/experts/yohanan-tzoreff/)

Yohanan Tzoreff is a Senior Researcher at the Institute for National Security Studies and a contributor to Fikra Forum.



Brief Analysis

The Abraham Accords seem to have neither obfuscated not strengthened the Palestinian cause.

The potential results of recent Arab-Israeli normalization agreements for the Palestinian cause have been a subject of great debate. Many saw the normalization agreements that Israel signed with the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan under the aegis of the Trump administration as having potential for advancing an agreement between Israel and the Palestinians. For others, the agreements were evidence that there was no need to engage Ramallah to advance regional peace.

At this point, neither point can be proven entirely true. The agreements are still too young for satisfactory conclusive analysis, and they all differ in scope and content. However, the recent violence between Israel and Hamas, which can be seen as the first real trial for the agreements, indicates that the reality is somewhere in between the two arguments. While the agreements do not appear to have obfuscated the Palestinian cause for normalizing Arab states, the agreements also do not appear to have advanced any new, meaningful opportunities for an Israeli-Palestinian agreement.

Operation Guardian of the Walls: A Test for Normalization

The protests and violence in Jerusalem starting on May 7, 2021 and Operation Guardian of the Walls, the IDF operation pertaining to the resulting violence between Hamas and Israel, were, in practice, the first test of the normalization agreements. During the Jerusalem protests, during which IDF forces entered the al-Aqsa mosque, the

[UAE \(https://www.wam.ae/en/details/1395302933505\)](https://www.wam.ae/en/details/1395302933505), [Bahrain \(https://saudigazette.com.sa/article/606029\)](https://saudigazette.com.sa/article/606029), [Sudan \(https://www.voanews.com/middle-east/arab-nations-hit-out-israel-over-jerusalem-violence\)](https://www.voanews.com/middle-east/arab-nations-hit-out-israel-over-jerusalem-violence), and [Morocco \(https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2021/05/341764/jerusalem-is-my-cause-social-media-in-morocco-world-condemns-israels-violent-attacks/\)](https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2021/05/341764/jerusalem-is-my-cause-social-media-in-morocco-world-condemns-israels-violent-attacks/) harshly criticized Israel for what they described as infringing on Palestinian rights and the sanctity of al-Aqsa.

This criticism, focused specifically on the events in Jerusalem, placed responsibility for the violence on Israel and expressed the Arab signatories' sensitivity to incidents in the city (reflected similarly by Saudi Arabia, which seemed to have supported the agreements). Largely, the Arab signatories' reactions demonstrated their interest in showing the Palestinians that the signatories stand with them despite the signatories' new relations with Israel.

Nonetheless, these countries' reactions to the ensuing violence between Israel and Hamas was almost entirely different. For example, while the UAE condemned Israel's actions in East Jerusalem, it did not condemn Israel's bombing of the Gaza Strip. Rather than criticizing Israel over its actions, the Emirati newspaper *Al-Ittihad* claimed generally that violence begets violence and that problems cannot be solved through bloodshed. The paper indicated Emirati support for any move that would stop escalation and promote restraint.

The Difficulty in Combatting Qatari Influence in Gaza

The normalizing Arab states' lack of criticism over Israeli strikes in Gaza, as well as their lack of vocal support for Hamas, indicates that while these countries want to appear supportive of the Palestinian cause writ large, they are also interested in weakening Hamas. For Bahrain and the UAE, as well non-signatory Saudi Arabia, this interest likely stems from a desire to keep Qatar from controlling the discourse on the issue.

Qatar enjoys extensive trust from Palestinians: it is remembered as the first nation that opened a Palestinian embassy in its capital in 1988 after the Palestinian declaration of independence, and its heads of state visited the Gaza Strip twice in Yasser Arafat's lifetime and again in 2012 during Hamas' rule. Furthermore, though it has caused a rift between Qatar and the Palestinian Authority (PA), Qatar is a core source of funding for the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip. And because Israel prefers Qatar to the PA, Israel and Qatar cooperate over the delivery of this financial support, meaning that Qatar maintains a working relationship with both Hamas and Israel. Now, with Hamas likely to demand a more central role in Palestinian decision-making at Cairo-hosted Palestinian reconciliations talks, Qatar could grow its influence in Palestinian politics.

Because of Qatar's strong ties to Hamas and its support for the Muslim Brotherhood, which the UAE views as a threat to its national security, Emirati leadership is struggling to combat strong Qatari influence in Israeli-Palestinian relations. As part of that effort, the UAE has promised to help finance the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip after Operation Guardian of the Walls, but it is struggling to transfer funds to Gaza without the involvement of Hamas or Qatar. To date, it would seem that the \$500 million that Egypt has promised to donate to the reconstruction in Gaza will actually be UAE money arriving in the form of Egyptian goods and services in the Gaza Strip.

As mentioned, however, it is likely that Qatar will maintain its influence in Gaza regardless of Emirati efforts. Qatar enjoys a relative advantage as the Palestinians' most generous, long-lasting, and consistent donor nation, and Hamas will not allow it to be sidelined, particularly considering the favorable media coverage Hamas enjoys in Qatari news sources like *Al Jazeera*. Moreover, Israel views the flow of money into Gaza as a requirement to prevent agitation and preserve stability, and Israel sees Qatar as a helpful entity that can be trusted over the long term. One must remember that, after the Oslo Accords, Qatar was the first nation to establish diplomatic relations with Israel and the first to sign a natural gas supply agreement with it.

As such, Emirati efforts to infringe on Qatari influence are unlikely to succeed. The UAE's problematic relationship

with the Palestinian Authority, the inability of Emirati-hosted Palestinian politician-in-exile Mohammed Dahlan to administer aid funds, and the UAE's antipathy towards Hamas make the UAE unable to deliver aid to Gaza through any Palestinian organizations. The UAE's resulting delivery of aid through Egypt will greatly downplay the Emirati part in Gaza's reconstruction and lessen the UAE's significance for the average Palestinian.

Changing Dynamics in Washington

Beyond the UAE's concerns about Qatari influence in Palestinian affairs, all four Arab signatories have demonstrated that their most important concern related to the normalization agreements is their relationship with the United States and the plaudits they received from the Trump administration.

Nonetheless, with a new administration in office, the potential benefits offered by the United States in exchange for normalization have been drawn into question. While the Biden administration has **announced** (<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/biden-stresses-importance-normalization-with-israel-call-with-abu-dhabi-crown-2021-05-04/>) its support for the recent Arab-Israeli normalization agreements, it remains to be seen what the administration will be willing to provide in exchange for promoting arrangements between Israel and its neighbors.

As of yet, Morocco and Sudan have not fully implemented their agreements, as they have yet to receive the benefits offered by the United States in exchange. The rhetoric they have been using since signing the agreements makes it clear that their motive was the dividend the United States promised rather than any real desire to advance their relations with Israel. And pertaining to the UAE, the Biden administration has lifted its temporary freeze on the arms deal with the Abu Dhabi, but it is still not certain whether the United States will realize the rest of its commitments.

This hesitation in the provision of U.S. benefits in exchange for normalization may be connected to a larger reduction of the favor Israel garners in Washington. Some Americans' angry reactions to Operation Guardian of the Walls, along with the pro-Palestinian voices of the progressive Democrats in the House of Representatives, represent pressure on President Biden to reduce the United States' previously unshakable commitment to Israeli security. As such, Israel may no longer enjoy the same influence in Washington that it did before the arrival of the Biden administration.

Therefore, in addition to the UAE's difficulties in using the agreements to combat Qatari influence in Gaza, Arab signatories to the agreements are likely to struggle in using them as a bargaining chip with the United States.

The Future of Normalization and the Palestinian Cause

Given all the jockeying over reconstruction efforts in Gaza, anyone who thought normalization agreements would eliminate the need to address the Palestinian issue appears to have missed the mark. At the same time, while remaining relevant, the Palestinian cause is likely to become increasingly fractured and ineffective due to the continuation of Qatar's and Hamas's control over Gaza, a trend which Israel may support.

For the UAE, the Palestinian issue continues to be relevant as leverage against Israel and a potential avenue for bonus points from Washington. Operation Guardian of the Walls and the reconstruction efforts needed afterwards in Gaza represent an opportunity for the UAE to increase its influence in the Gaza Strip and sideline Qatar, which has become the main source of financing for Gaza civilians.

Nonetheless, the UAE is unlikely to succeed in that mission, and the result could be a continued division between the West Bank and Gaza. At least from the perspective of the UAE, Qatar's cooperation with Israel on the monthly transfer of donor money to Gaza constitutes an effort to cement the long-standing separation between the Gaza Strip

and the West Bank. This reality amplifies the question about Qatar's motives for its involvement in Gaza and strengthens the theory that the Israeli government's intentions are to perpetuate the internal Palestinian split.

As such, the accords have not significantly changed Israel's geopolitical standing and have not created opportunities or a new formula for advancing a political process with the Palestinians. With Morocco, Sudan, and Bahrain all more interested in Washington than the Palestinian cause, the accords appear to have had no significant impact on the region, as Israel already enjoyed relatively good relations with the the UAE, which even included a security relationship. The potential economic, commercial, and technological relations between the UAE and Israel may therefore be the only meaningful result of the agreements relating to Israel or Palestinians. ❖

RECOMMENDED



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Iran Takes Next Steps on Rocket Technology](#)

Feb 11, 2022

◆
Farzin Nadimi

(/policy-analysis/iran-takes-next-steps-rocket-technology)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Saudi Arabia Adjusts Its History, Diminishing the Role of Wahhabism](#)

Feb 11, 2022

◆
Simon Henderson

(/policy-analysis/saudi-arabia-adjusts-its-history-diminishing-role-wahhabism)



ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

[Podcast: Breaking Hezbollah's Golden Rule](#)

Feb 9, 2022



Matthew Levitt

[\(/policy-analysis/podcast-breaking-hezbollahs-golden-rule\)](#)