

## BEYOND THE MIDDLE EAST: ABRAHAM ACCORD, MUSLIM WORLD ALIGNMENTS AND PAKISTAN'S POLICY DILEMMA

Brig. Dr. Rifat Ullah Rifat<sup>\*1</sup>, Dr. Samiya Shahzad<sup>2</sup>, Mrs. Maria Shamim<sup>3</sup>

<sup>\*1</sup>Independent Defense Analyst and PhD Scholar, Pakistan

<sup>2</sup>Lecturer, COMSATS University Lahore; PhD Scholar, Minhaj University Lahore (MUL), Pakistan

<sup>3</sup>Lecturer, COMSATS University Lahore; PhD Scholar, University of Education, Lahore, Pakistan

<sup>1</sup>rifatrafi2303@gmail.com

Corresponding Author: \*

Brig. Dr. Rifat Ullah Rifat

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20540204>

Received	Accepted	Published
03 April 2026	15 May 2026	30 May 2026

### ABSTRACT

The Abraham Accords (2020), signed during Trump's first term in office, decreed the normalization of relations between Israel and Arab states in the Middle East under US stewardship, projecting a significant transformation of regional geopolitics. Nonetheless, the recent expansion drive, often labeled as Abraham Accords 2.0, is a modified and more resolute version of the past effort. This realignment, driven by a narrative of common security threats and opportunities alongside more coercive diplomacy, has the potential to enlarge its scope and focus, baiting Muslim countries inside and beyond the Middle Eastern region. The success of this initiative primarily hinges on the US's ability to demonstrate how pragmatic states' national interests exceedingly outweigh historical religious grievances and ideological resistance. In contrast, the Abraham Accords experience divergent trajectories across the Muslim world, particularly in non-Arab countries like Pakistan and Turkey, where participation is far more complicated due to domestic constraints, past diplomatic stances, and other geopolitical realities –the China factor. This study examines two critical dimensions related to the Accord's future: the expansion of partnerships in general across various Muslim-majority countries and Pakistan's unique policy dilemma in navigating this emerging landscape, balancing relationships with the West without antagonizing China. Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Oman, Qatar, Syria and other Muslim countries weigh normalization of relations with Israel against US security and economic guarantees and incentives. In contrast, the case for Pakistan is different, where, besides domestic barriers, evolving stronger ties with China and divorcing the Kashmir cause would hold center stage. To answer these questions, this research integrates a neoclassical realist lens with constructivist critiques as a theoretical framework in order to explain the stark divergence in Muslim-world responses. Methodologically, the research combines qualitative analysis with integrated SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) and PESSTEL (Political, Economic, Social, Security, Technological, Ecological and Legal) frameworks. Findings suggest that while embracing the normalization drive by Gulf and other Muslim states may not be that difficult due to economic and strategic gains, Pakistan will resist overt acceptance due to obvious reasons, most importantly, the Kashmir-Palestine linkage. This arrangement, however, signals a potential fracture within the Muslim world, manifesting a clear bifurcation between pragmatist and ideological blocs. Ultimately, the Accords highlight the conflicting perspectives of material incentives and identity-driven or ideology-driven sovereign foreign policy, where Pakistan's strategic choices serve as a bellwether for the broader region's geopolitics.

**Keywords:** Abraham Accord, Kashmir-Palestine linkage, I2U2, Pakistan's Dilemma, US-China strategic competition, Iran factor, Neoclassical Realism, Constructivist Critique, Muslim World geopolitics

### Introduction:

While the world was busy witnessing the recent Hamas-Israel conflict and Iran-Israel standoff, the Abraham Accords were out skirting the complete geostrategic mosaic of the Middle East and beyond. This initiative marks a watershed moment with rippling effects, signaling an unprecedented shift in regional alliances, especially dividing the Muslim world into pragmatic and ideological blocs. As momentum builds for an expanded Abraham Accord across other countries, the pressure will mount on non-aligned states to choose sides. In this case, Pakistan emerges as a pivotal case study, caught in a catch-22 situation, where overt acceptance of the normalization initiative would have strategic implications. Certain realities further complicate the complexities of the evolving geopolitical landscape in Asia, including the China factor and Iran's resistance to submitting to Western pressure in recent confrontations. In addition, the enhanced stature of BRICS in the global economic order also emerges as a crucial building block in deciphering the emerging complex scenario.

This study addresses two central questions: First, what factors drive Muslim countries to join the Abraham Accords, and how do their rationales differ? Second, why does Pakistan, despite visible strategic incentives for engagement, remain an implacable outlier? The research is anchored in neoclassical realism, in contrast to the constructivist theoretical framework, illuminating systemic pressures – US vs. China, the influence of BRICS, and domestic barriers. With a prime focus on Pakistan as a case study, the study underscores the complexities in accepting the deal; US-China competition, domestic sentiments as barriers, Iran's neighborhood and inextricable Kashmir-Palestine causes' linkages. This narrows Pakistan's diplomatic choices for navigating the scenario without crossing the red lines.

The research employs a qualitative research approach, utilizing content analysis within an integrated SWOT-PESSTEL analytical framework that provides a comprehensive view of the issue, encompassing political, social, economic, security, technological, ecological, and legal dimensions. The study also contrasts Trump's Abraham Accords with Biden's I2U2

initiative, although with a similar tone of isolating Iran in the region and marginalizing China's influence, but with different engagement strategies and spread. The study highlights the potential of this accord to divide the Muslim world into two distinct blocs: pragmatists and ideologists. With enhanced US pressure, the costs of non-alignment are rising, as more Muslim states in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and beyond are recalibrating their options to join the partnership conditionally or unconventionally. This paper argues that the Pakistan government's space for maneuver is shrinking, constrained by increased economic and security dependence on China, particularly ideological sentiment towards Iran, the Kashmir factor and the existential character of anti-Israel rhetoric in the country's nationalist discourse. In this limited room for diplomatic engagement, the research ultimately proffers specific policy recommendations for Pakistan.

### Systematic Literature Review (SLR): The Abraham Accord and Divergent Muslim-World Alignments

The second wave of the Abraham Accords has sparked an extensive academic debate, primarily coalescing around two dominant theoretical lenses: realism and constructivism. To capture a comprehensive view, divorcing any biases, the SLR synthesized 50 relevant studies (2015-25), identified through Google Scholar. The detailed process of conducting SLR is appended at the end of the study. The literature review underscores three dominant thematic clusters in Abraham Accord scholarship, reinforced by empirical data. The principal themes include: theoretical distribution, regional participation drivers and emerging research gaps.

Out of the 50 studies analyzed, 41 (82%) applied a realist theoretical framework, while 9 (18%) employed a constructivist approach. Realists' work predominantly revolved around the Gulf States, with the UAE leading, followed by Pakistan, Southeast Asia (including Indonesia and Malaysia), North Africa (Morocco and Sudan), and Turkey and Iran. The results of the SLR reflecting regional/states' participation in the Abraham Accords are appended below:

Region	Studies Citing	% of Total	Realist	Constructivist
GCC (UAE, Bahrain, KSA)	32	64%	29 (91%)	3 (9%)
Pakistan	9	18%	1 (11%)	8 (89%)
Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia)	5	10%	3 (60%)	2 (40%)
North Africa (Morocco, Sudan)	3	6%	3 (100%)	0
Turkey/ Iran	1	2%	0	1 (100%)

The Gulf States' motivational drivers for participation in the accord showed consistency, with the following factors being most prevalent: US security guarantees (56%, 18/32 studies), Iran containment (47%, 15/32 studies), economic diversification (38%, 12/32 studies), and regime legitimacy (9%, 3/32 studies). In the case of Pakistan (9 studies), the Kashmir-Palestine linkage was identified as the primary motivational driver in 89% (8/9 studies), followed by China's strategic cover in 11% (1/9 studies). For Southeast Asia (Indonesia and Malaysia), out of the five studies, the main drivers include economic pragmatism (60%, 3/5 studies) and domestic opposition (40%, 2/5 studies). In the case of North Africa (Morocco and Sudan), all three studies (100%) identified US political concessions as the major driver of policy decision-making. Finally, in the case of Iran (one study), anti-Western solidarity emerged as a primary driver in shaping foreign policy options towards the Abraham Accords.

The SLR helped in identifying the understudied areas, notifying the research gap, where only 18% (9/50) of studies focused on Pakistan's response to the accord, 7.2% (6/83 studies) investigated China's role in motivating non-aligned states, and only 2.4% (2/83 studies) conducted a comparative analysis of the accord with I2U2.

In a nutshell, this research bridges the research gap by introducing neoclassical realism to examine Pakistan's non-aligned status, which is overlooked in 71.1% of Gulf-centered scholarship. In addition, the study also analyzes China-aligned systemic pressure in the face of US pressures on Pakistan (only 7.2% covered in the literature). The two other understudied areas of research, comparison with I2U2 and Pakistan's Kashmir-Palestine ideational lock, are also thoroughly examined in the study to contribute to the existing literature.

### Theoretical Framework

The study employs a dual theoretical lens, integrating neoclassical realism and constructivist critique, to investigate the divergent responses of the Muslim world to the Abraham Accords. In this combined theoretical framework, neoclassical realism serves as the foundational lens to establish the structural context of states' decision-making paradigms. This helps in examining how systemic power dynamics, with a special focus on US-China competition in the region, influence the strategic policy formulation of aligned and non-aligned states. This justifies why Gulf States like Bahrain and the UAE opted for material incentives, such as arms deals, security guarantees, or technology transfers, silencing ideological bonds. Nonetheless, the same structural explanation fails to explain Pakistan's reluctance to join the accord, despite facing the excessive dependence on material benefits like other states and experiencing similar systemic pressures. To address this aspect, the constructivist insights become an essential framework for understanding how intensely internalized issues, like the Kashmir-Palestine linkage and omnipresent anti-Israel rhetoric based on popular public sentiments, often override structural benefits.

The marrying up of these two theoretical lenses thus offers more comprehensive insights; neoclassical realism affords a broader understanding of geopolitical threats and opportunities, while constructivism illuminates how domestic dynamics and normative frameworks impact the states' responses to external pressures.

### Methodology

The study employs a qualitative approach using content analysis by using Neuendorf's coding protocols (Neuendorf, 2017) and distributing the content into relevant thematic clusters,

reviewing 50 research works (2015-25) which were identified and analyzed through SLR. A case study strategy has been employed, following Yin's case study approach (Yin, 2018), to compare the UAE's participation with Pakistan's resistance to joining the accord, while employing an integrated dual theoretical lens: neoclassical realism and constructivism. In addition, the integrated SWOT-PESSTEL (with one additional 'S' for security in the standard PESTEL configuration) analytical tool has been used to capture a wholesome view of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats under each domain.

### Historical Background of the Abraham Accords and I2U2

During Trump's first term in office, the Abraham Accords were formally established in September 2020, marking a fundamental shift in Middle Eastern geopolitics through the normalization of bilateral relations between Israel and four Arab states from the MENA region: the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan. However, the process to formalize this initiative started with Trump's first that started in January 2017, where Jerald Kushner, Trump's son in law was the senior administration participant to author Trump's Vision of Peace in the Middle East (Ravid, 2020), presented by the President himself in the White House on January 28, 2020. Prior to the finalization of this plan, Kushner co-hosted the 'Peace to Prosperity workshop' with Bahrain from June 25-26, 2019 (Fishman & Kuperwasser, 2019) to outline the US's initiative for formalizing relations between Israel and Muslim countries. Kushner distributed a 136-page document to participants from all Arab states –their foreign ministers –outlining a US pledge to raise \$50 billion to be spent in Palestine over the next ten years (Hodali & Hassan, 2019). The vision was widely applauded, ensuring maximum support for the initiative. This document became the basis of Trump's 'Vision for Peace, Prosperity, and a Brighter Future for Israel and the Palestinian People'. The key clauses of this plan included (Trump, 2020): 1) Palestinian state will consists of West Bank and Gaza, 2) the territory will as of prior to 1967 War, where Israel will have to forgo certain areas for State

of Palestine, 3) State of Palestine will not maintain any military force or weapons which can threaten Israel's security, 4) Palestine would not commit to any agreement unilaterally with any other country and Israel will be responsible for defense of Palestine, 5) Palestine will be allowed to maintain armed organization like police for internal order after approval from Israel, 6) Jerusalem will remain under Israel's control and people from all religions will be allowed to visit, 7) the capital of Palestine will be in east of Jerusalem, which can be named as Al-Quds or any other name of their choosing and the US will establish its embassy for Palestine in the same city, 8) a 30 kilometers underground tunnel will be constructed to connect two halves of State of Palestine; West and Gaza, 9) the State of Palestine will work for counter-terrorism and will denounce all Palestinians who got killed in the past fighting against Israel, 10) both states will nominate a panel for negotiations but Palestine will not nominate any person which is objected by Israel, 11) after the normalization of relations, the US along with the world will undertake rehabilitation and developmental works in a phased plan.

Based on the broad contours of this plan for a two-state solution of Palestine with minimum autonomy, the Muslim world was engaged to accept Israel and normalize its relations as part of the Abraham Accords, officially unveiled in June 2020. The UAE was the first state to formally join the accord in August 2020, followed by Bahrain in September 2020, Morocco in December 2020, and Sudan in January 2021 (Reuters, 2021), while Egypt already had a peace treaty with Israel since 1979 though Camp David Accord of 1978 (Wahba, 2025) and Jordan since 1994 commonly referred as 'Treaty of Peace between State of Israel and Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan' (Gov.il, 1994). By signing this accord, these Muslim states secured multiple material incentives. The UAE, for instance, gained access to sophisticated US military technology, including a \$23 billion deal to acquire F-35 fighter aircraft. However, the US later suspended the sale to the UAE under Biden's administration (Magid, 2021). Owing to this normalization drive, UAE-Israel bilateral trade, facilitated by the establishment of the UAE-

Israel Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) in 2023, reached \$3.2 billion in 2024, excluding direct governmental deals and software (TOI Reporter, 2025). Morocco, in exchange, gained crucial recognition of its rights and sovereignty over Western Sahara (Ravid, 2020), while Sudan was removed from the list of state sponsors of terrorism in addition to a loan of \$1.2 billion to pay off its debts to the World Bank (Reuters, 2021). The negotiations with other Muslim countries, including Oman, were underway when Trump's first term as President ended on January 20, 2021.

President Trump, assuming office for a second term on January 20, 2025, has revitalized the Abraham Accord, with renewed enthusiasm and momentum, to expand the framework to include Saudi Arabia, Oman and Indonesia by 2025. In the same context, recent discussions have centered on Sudan's potential return to the accord after a momentary withdrawal following the 2021 coup.

In contrast to the diplomatically driven Abraham Accords, the I2U2 ordained by President Biden in July 2022 (The White House, 2022), represents a distinct complementary approach towards regional cooperation. This quadrilateral framework among the US and the three Asian states (India, Israel and the UAE) is also referred to as the Indo-Abraham alliance, the Indo-Abrahamic bloc, the Middle East Quad, or the West Asia accord. Egyptian foreign policy thinker Mohammad Soliman first coined the term in 2022 (Soliman, 2021). The framework revolves around the concept that peace and stability in West Asia are not guaranteed by a US military presence, but rather through a

balance of power among other like-minded nations to moderate the ambitions of rising states, such as Iran and Turkey. Soliman's concept altered the Middle Eastern geography, shifting the Arab world from being a synonym for the Middle East to encompassing West Asian geography, which stretches from Egypt to India, and proposing an Indo-Abrahamic order as a trans-regional framework (Soliman, 2021). The concept was replicated to orchestrate the I2U2 framework, with the first summit of counterparts aimed at deepening their strategic relations. The first leaders' summit was held in July 2022 (Markey & Youssef, 2022). Unlike NATO in Europe and the Quad in the Indo-Pacific, a need was felt to articulate a security architecture in the Middle East to ensure security, where the US remains the primary guarantor. It also aimed to transform regional geopolitics and geo-economics, linking the Indo-Abrahamic bloc with the US Indo-Pacific strategy, thereby establishing an Asian geopolitical order.

### Comparative Analysis of Abraham Accords and I2U2

The primary distinction between these two frameworks resides in their political necessities and core objectives. The Abraham Accords explicitly demand diplomatic acceptance and recognition of Israel, causing intractable hurdles for states like Pakistan, where domestic politics is profoundly tied to Palestine solidarity and its semblance with the Kashmir cause. In contrast, I2U2's economic focus affords its members greater flexibility in terms of multilateral engagement and cooperation. The detailed comparative analysis of the two is given below:

Aspect	Abraham Accords	I2U2
Primary objective	Diplomatic normalization with Israel	Economic and technological cooperation
Member states	Israel, Bahrain, Morocco, Sudan	India, Israel, UAE, USA
Key incentives	Security guarantees, political recognition, arms deals	Technology transfer, infrastructural investment, food security
Security dimension	Explicit anti-Iran alignment	Implicit through technological collaboration
Economic impact	Bilateral trade growth	Multilateral projects (e.g. \$500 million renewable energy fund)
Pakistan's position	Politically untenable due to Kashmir	Negligible potential to

	Palestine stance	participate
China's stance	Opposition, supports Iran/Pakistan axis	BRI competing Indo-Middle East Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)
Expansion plans	KSA, Indonesia, Oman by 2025	Frozen
Diplomatic sensitivity	High (requires formal recognition)	Low (avoids political recognition)
Technology transfer	Limited to bilateral agreements	Multilateral cooperation

### Potential New Entrants in Accord: Triggers and Barriers

Under renewed US diplomatic drive, the Abraham Accords are extensively engaging Muslim countries in the Middle East and beyond to cede to the US's plan for normalization of relations with Israel to expand the club of original signatories: UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan. The ensuing paragraphs outline the potential few significant and potential entrants, as well as the various triggers and barriers in their way to change their policy stance towards Israel fundamentally.

#### Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA):

Saudi Arabia, due to its religious and economic significance in the Muslim world and the international arena, stands out as the most important ally the US and Israel would like to club in. Following the KSA's stance, many other Muslim countries would likely align themselves without much resistance. Riyadh's participation hinges on visible triggers, such as the economic realization of ambitious Vision 2030, US security guarantees comparable to NATO Article 5 protection, access to advanced US military hardware and nuclear technology, and economic tradeoff. On the other hand, credible barriers to accepting Israel are not easy to ignore. These include popular domestic support for Palestine and the KSA's stature as the center of the Muslim world in the OIC. In addition, the recent rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia, brokered by China, adds another layer of complexity to the autonomous decision-making process. The US's sincere initiative to pursue a two-state solution for Palestine and Israel, assuring complete autonomy and sovereignty, can act as a deal-breaker step. The unconditional support for an authoritarian, non-democratic regime may be used as a bargaining chip by the US to cede desired concessions.

**Oman:** The negotiations with Oman were already underway in 2021 when the Abraham Accord was temporarily shelved with Trump's completion of his term in office. The discreet Oman-Israel relations date back to the 1970s (Ghariani, 1998), during which Muscat consistently played an intermediary role in regional diplomacy. The potential triggers for Oman joining the accord include Oman's mediation role in the region, economic incentives post-oil diversification (desert farming solutions via Israeli agritech), and détente between Iran and the US. In contrast, the barriers to normalization include Muscat's reliance on Iran for the security of the Strait of Hormuz and Sultan Qaboos' legacy, which suggests a cautious approach towards normalization of relations with Israel (Ghariani, 1998). KSA's joining the accord would be a significant deal-breaker for Oman to follow suit.

**Indonesia:** Being the largest Muslim-majority democracy, Jakarta's potential participation carries significant symbolic weight across the Muslim world. The potential triggers include Indonesia's serious interest in Israeli technology transfer, especially in the fields of agricultural innovations, the digital economy, and cybersecurity, which will help materializing its ambitious economic growth targets. Strong public sentiments rooted in unity with Palestine and Aceh province's Islamic leadership are significant barriers for the government to accept Israel overtly. Any normalization movement would likely follow the consensus approval by majority Muslim countries, initiation of the two-state formula for Palestine and a gradual economics-centered path rather than instant diplomatic recognition.

### **Pakistan's Strategic Position: Opportunities and Threats**

An integrated SWOT-PESSTEL model (with an additional 'S' for security in the standard PESTEL analytical framework) has been used to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats under each component of PESSTEL: political, economic, social, security, technological, ecological and legal. Where strengths and weaknesses reflect the internal dynamics of Pakistan's geopolitical settings, the opportunities and threats signify the external favorable trends and potential risks respectively. Similarly, when the strengths are maximized, they are converted into opportunities, while weaknesses, when ignored or exploited by external forces, can develop into potential threats. The detailed SWOT-PESSTEL analyses of Pakistan's internal and external dynamics, which underscore its strategic dilemma, are covered in the ensuing paragraphs, highlighting the most significant factors.

#### **Political**

**Strengths:** Strong constitutional and parliamentary consensus against recognition of Israel (2021 unanimous resolution), and diplomatic cover available in the form of the OIC stance over Palestine.

**Weaknesses:** Increased pressure due to other Gulf States' drive to recognize Israel, and the absence of a fully functional and autonomous political system in Pakistan in the present scenario.

**Opportunities:** Leveraging available China/Russia support to counter western pressure, and the potential of Saudi mediation for a limited non-diplomatic cooperation.

**Threats:** US linking the IMF package with conditionality to recognize Israel, and overt normalization of relations with Israel, distancing Pakistan from China and Iran.

#### **Economic**

**Strengths:** CPEC and other Chinese economic and defense-related initiatives as alternatives to Western material incentives, and a gradual increase in tax net and remittances- \$38.3 billion in the fiscal year 2024-25, marking a 26.6% increase, compared to the previous year (Huaxia, 2025).

**Weaknesses:** Debt crisis with \$130 billion external debt and liabilities (State Bank of Pakistan (SBP, 2025), vulnerability to sanctions, and declining exports in 2024: \$32.4 billion and increasing trade deficit: \$24.05 billion (Trading Economics, 2025).

**Opportunities:** Increased economic opportunities from non-aligned countries, including China, Russia, Iran, and Turkey.

**Threats:** Pakistan's traditional trade with the Gulf States is shifting away; UAE-India bilateral trade is increasing from \$20.9 billion in 2021-22 to \$28.2 billion in 2023-24 (GJEPC, 2025); and the US poses potential secondary sanctions risks against CPEC-related projects and initiatives.

#### **Social**

**Strengths:** Strong public support for Palestine: 91%, and consensus on Kashmir-Palestine linkage, while 31% did not approve the government's policies towards Palestine-Israel crisis (Gallup, 2023), and Islamic identity and the Founder of Pakistan's clear vision on non-acceptance of Israel.

**Weaknesses:** Youth disconnection, primarily due to unemployment (6.3%) (Mian, 2025), causing potential discontent and unrest, and rising sectarian tensions that complicate foreign policy options.

**Opportunities:** Pakistan's diaspora in the West and Gulf continues to advocate for a balanced approach, avoiding Pakistan's isolation, and a viable Pakistani diaspora in the US/West to mediate the country's policy stance on Israel's acceptance or refusal.

**Threats:** Religious factions exploiting internal dynamics, creating fissures, and external forces manipulating national cohesion on the country's diplomatic stance over the acceptance of Israel.

#### **Security**

**Strengths:** Nuclear deterrence averts the likelihood of direct diplomatic coercion, and improved Pak-Sino defense cooperation is evident in the recent Indo-Pakistani standoff.

**Weaknesses:** With enhanced Indo-Israel defense cooperation widening Pakistan's conventional military gap with India, and in the event of normalization of relations with

Israel, increasing tensions with Iran, as well as border tensions with Afghanistan.

**Opportunities:**

A gradual shift in military hardware dependence away from China and Russia, with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) platform becoming more active in coordinating security concerns among its member states.

**Threats:** Potential US arms embargo for not aligning with the US agenda, internal security disturbances, if Pakistan decides to normalize its relations with Israel.

**Technological**

**Strengths:** Alternative technological partnerships with China, especially in military hardware (JF-17 and beyond) and the space program, as an alternative to the West, and an internal indigenization drive.

**Weaknesses:** Critical gaps in precision technology lead to increased dependence on Western technological solutions and cyber susceptibilities to Israeli-US technologies.

**Opportunities:** Chinese and Russian technological alternatives can bridge the gaps, such as BeiDou serving as a substitute for GPS for both commercial and military use, and joint ventures with China, especially under the CPEC framework. The collaborations span various areas, including the JF-17, space cooperation, glass manufacturing and potentially in Artificial Intelligence (AI) fields.

**Threats:** Expanding Indo-Israeli technological collaborations, especially in military hardware, create a competitive disadvantage, and US restrictions on sensitive technology transfer to Pakistan, including semiconductor/ dual-use technologies.

**Ecological**

**Strengths:** Global moral leverage due to climate vulnerability as a diplomatic shield, ranking 5th in the Global Climate Risk Index and 23rd out of 194 in disaster risk (Shah, 2025), justifies climate aid over geopolitical demands, averting pressures to join the accord.

**Weaknesses:** Alarming water stress levels in Pakistan have been increasing in recent years, reaching less than 800m<sup>3</sup> (Ishaque, Mukhtar, & Tanvir, 2023). This heightened sensitivity to water wars waged by India, in consultation with

Israel/ US, and the CPEC energy projects face criticism from international climate agencies.

**Opportunities:** Green alliances partnering with other Muslim non-aligned countries, such as Turkey and Malaysia, to access green funds without relying on Western-led climate initiatives.

**Threats:** Climate aid conditionality, where the US may link climate financing to desired geopolitical concessions.

**Legal**

**Strengths:** Constitutional redlines in the form of provisions- Article 40 (Bibi, 2024) to support Muslim causes, including Palestine, making overt recognition of Israel constitutionally untenable. In addition, OIC commitments in support of Palestine also offer legal cover to Pakistan.

**Weaknesses:** A weak legal framework and a compromised judicial system render the constitution irrelevant and toothless.

**Opportunities:** UN stance over Palestine, UNGA Resolution and 2023 UN vote (120-15), and recent International Court of Justice (ICJ) verdict on war crimes of Israel in Palestine offering a legal diplomatic cover.

**Threats:** The FATF grey listing may be invoked again in the event of non-compliance with policy and the implementation of a more severe sanctioning regime against Pakistan. In addition, US legislation like CAATSA could potentially sanction CPEC for the refusal to normalization of relations with Israel.

**Pakistan's Geopolitical Dilemma**

Unlike other states in the Gulf or the Muslim world, Pakistan's geopolitical position in the Abraham Accord era is starkly different, shaped by ideological and diplomatic red lines, as well as a strategic bind with China, in addition to the economic costs of non-alignment. The following paragraphs discuss the dimensions that reflect Pakistan's geopolitical dilemma.

**Domestic Barriers: The Ideological Red Lines.**

The policy of non-engagement with the Abraham Accords, despite immense pressure from the West, stems from unequivocal domestic constraints. The Founder of Pakistan's statement about Israel, constitutional binding in the shape of Article 40, reflecting

Pakistan's commitment to support Muslim countries, and the state's long tethered legitimacy to the Kashmir-Palestine linkage, are significant barriers to the recognition of Israel as an independent sovereign country. Public sentiment, with the majority viewing Israel unfavorably, signifies that any normalization effort by the government would trigger a fierce domestic backlash. The same sentiment was codified in a unanimous resolution of the Parliament in 2021, barring any ties with Israel, thus making any overt effort politically untenable.

**Strategic Bind: The Increased China-Iran Counterweight** - Pakistan, geopolitically, is caught between intersecting geostrategic interests and competing alliances: the US/West versus China. China leads as the most significant contributor of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Pakistan, constituting 40% of the total FDI (CPEC News Desk, 2025), primarily through and an unprecedented support in recent Indo-Pak military showdown of April-May 2025, discourages any alignment with the US led initiative such as the Abraham Accord, which are perceived to isolate Iran and minimize Beijing's influence in the region. In the same context, geographical contiguity with Iran and a sizeable Shia community forewarn Pakistan to adopt a cautious approach, balancing Tehran's interests. The recent Saudi-Iranian rapprochement, brokered by China in 2023, further complicates Pakistan's decision on which side to choose.

**The Kashmir Wildcard:** Diplomatically, Pakistan's foreign policy towards Israel remains anchored to traditional Indo-Pak rivalry. Recognizing Israel would greatly undermine its Kashmir diplomacy at the OIC and UN levels, which equates Indian occupation of Kashmir with Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands. Where most of the Gulf States decoupled Palestine from their ties with India and Israel, Pakistan consistently repeated this rhetoric to link Palestine with Kashmir in its UN speeches.

**Pakistan Establishment's Existential Dilemma:** Being part of the Abraham Accord or normalization of diplomatic relations with Israel overtly, which is India's closest ally to

India, would undermine the establishment's traditional stance of anti-India nationalism. It would also weaken the establishment's domestic appeal by compromising on the Kashmir-Palestine equivalence.

**Economic Costs of Non-alignment:** Pakistan's non-engagement stance towards the Abraham Accords can also expose it to austere economic coercion from the West. The IMF standby agreements and future bailout packages may become contingent on geopolitical compliance. Similarly, the Washington can leverage financial and military aid as a tool to influence Pakistan's foreign policy options. In a debt crisis scenario, where Pakistan's external debt exceeds \$ 130 billion (State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), 2025), making IMF and financial aid from the West and the Gulf indispensable. Other policy exploitation tools include the resuscitation of FATF Grey Listing, military hardware sanctions similar to the past, withdrawal of GSP+ status, and increased trade and tariff barriers. In addition, KSA and the UAE are pivotal to Pakistan's economy, owing to oil-credit lines and contributing \$34 billion in remittances in 2025, with a significant share from KSA and the UAE (SBP, 2025). Where the UAE is already part of the Abraham Accords, if the KSA agrees to join, these countries may also align their financial sustenance with geopolitical compliance. In addition, the economic isolation, coupled with higher youth unemployment rates (31%), has the potential to increase social unrest.

**Pakistan's Strategic Scenarios:** This section discusses specific possible strategic scenarios for Pakistan, ranging from an absolute refusal (status quo) to forced acceptance, along with potential triggers, implications, and a scenario assessment matrix.

**Absolute Refusal (Status Quo):** Pakistan, using diplomatic cover offered by UN resolutions, citing its domestic opposition, and Kashmir-Palestine linkage as the main barriers, maintains the status quo by adopting a rigid stance towards acceptance of the Abraham Accord or normalization of relations with Israel. Likely triggers of this scenario include strong public and military opposition, as well as

financial assurances from China and Gulf states, especially the KSA. The implications for Pakistan in this regard include the potential for economic strangulation through the IMF or US allies in the Gulf, a revival of the FATF listing, withdrawal of GSP+ status, conditional sanctions, and the imposition of additional tariffs. Within a regional strategic context, it will deepen Pakistan's dependence on China and its allies, cause regional isolation, a military resource crunch, and Pakistan becoming irrelevant in the OIC, if Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States opt to align with the accord.

**Conditional Acceptance:** Pakistan cedes to start limited ties in exchange for US-led mediation on Kashmir, in addition to the initiation of a two-state solution for Palestine, an assured IMF bailout and US/Saudi investments. Implications of this scenario include: clear split in OIC (pragmatic vs. ideational states), temporary conditional economic breather, revival of US military assistance, visible internal security threats from hardliners, strained relations with Iran and border tensions on the western border, and annoyance of China (if not taken onboard before embarking on this adjustment).

**Covert Engagement:** Pakistan, conceding to extreme external pressures, especially in the face of an economic bailout, yields silent approval of the accord and plays its role covertly in geopolitical compliance. The likely triggers for this scenario include extreme external pressure, Pakistan's feeling diplomatic

isolation, a severe economic meltdown, and the Indo-Israel defense nexus seriously altering the Indo-Pak conventional balance of power. Where keeping it discrete may not be an easy option, if this scenario materializes, Pakistan will benefit from selective material incentives promised by the US/West. The backchannel covert acceptance, if exposed, however, besides triggering a massive domestic upheaval, tarnishing the establishment's image and denting Pakistan's stature in the OIC, it can sever Pak-Sino and Pak-Iran relations.

**Forced Alignment:** It is the worst-case scenario, where Pakistan is forced to accept the accord by exploiting its economic conditions. The different triggers for this scenario may include: economic blackmail, including excessive sanctions, declaring Pakistan a pariah state, increasing international pressures on Pakistan's nuclear program, asking it for international scrutiny, altering the Indo-Pak conventional strategic equilibrium through a quantifiable Indo-Israel nexus, and threatening Pakistan with a regime change. The implications of this scenario include extreme internal upheaval, economic meltdown, loss of international prestige as a sovereign nuclear power, and loss of the establishment's relevance in domestic affairs.

**Scenario Assessment Matrix:** In light of the above discussion, underscoring different contours of Pakistan's strategic dilemma and implications of different probable scenarios, the likely scenario matrix is given below.

Scenario	Probability	Economic Impact	Internal Cost	Strategic Outcomes
Status Quo	1	Severe	Favorable	Growing isolation
Conditional Acceptance	2	Moderate	Manageable	High-risk reward
Covert Engagement	3	Positive	Revolutionary unrest	Optimal balance
Forced Acceptance	4	Moderate	Dangerous	Long-term dependence

### Policy Recommendations

**For Pakistan: Survival in Evolving Geopolitical Dynamics.** Pakistan faces a catch-22 situation, where accepting Israel unconditionally is not a viable option, and rejecting it altogether would have profound economic and strategic implications for

Pakistan. The most constructive diplomatic engagement in this regard emerges as conditional acceptance, safeguarding its principal stance on Kashmir and Palestine, while averting the possibility of becoming irrelevant or isolated in regional and global geopolitics. It needs to tread its path cautiously

while navigating this intricate issue, which has domestic, diplomatic, economic, and strategic repercussions. Pakistan, using UN diplomatic cover and the OIC as a main mouthpiece for the Muslim Ummah, should pursue a policy of reconciliation, demanding rights for Palestinians as a primary prerequisite for any further engagement. In the same context, Pakistan needs to keep China onboard before any diplomatic maneuvering, while ensuring that Pakistan's stance does not hurt its relations with the Muslim world, especially neighboring Iran. To assert its demands through backchannel dialogue, Pakistan also needs to keep outcomes transparent, thereby managing its domestic narrative effectively and averting the risk of domestic distrust and unrest.

**For the Muslim World: Preventing Divisions & Consolidating Collective Strength.** The OIC needs to perform its role more effectively in bridging the fissures between pragmatic and ideological blocs. At the same time, both work in unison for a solution to the Palestinian issue as a non-negotiable condition. The influential Muslim countries, like KSA, Turkey, Iran and Malaysia, need to come forward in negotiating an enduring peace solution for the Palestinians. The Muslim world will also need to ensure that international and OIC guarantees adequately address Iran's concerns about the Abraham Accords.

**For Global Powers: Incentivizing Collaboration over Coercion:** The US, Russia, and China need to understand the consequences of global disorder, which has plagued the world in the recent past. The Russo-Ukraine war, Hamas-Israel conflict, Indo-Pak showdown, and Iran-Israel/US standoff have divided the world into two clear halves like the Cold War era. Pursuing this trajectory of escalating tensions will not favor either bloc; rather, it would enflame further tensions and conflicts. The US backing off from unconditional support for Israel, and China showing strategic restraint and flexibility, can restore global peace and order.

### Conclusion

This research is an academic endeavor to underscore the evolving geopolitical landscape of the region, under the US initiative to expand

the Abraham Accords, which is bringing more Muslim states in the Middle East and beyond. Where its implications for the Gulf States and the Muslim world have been discussed, the principal focus remained on Pakistan's strategic choices to navigate its diplomatic path. The study also accounts for probable scenarios of Pakistan's acceptance or refusal to join the accord, along with the different triggers and implications of each scenario. Towards the end, specific policy recommendations have been proffered for Pakistan, the Muslim world and global powers.

**Additional Notes: Method of Conducting SLR.** Due to non-availability of institutional or paid access to data sources like "Web of Science, Scopus, JSTOR", "Google Scholar" was used as a search engine to conduct SLR. The details of the process are appended below:

### Exclusion Criteria:

- Duplicates.
- Studies without theoretical framework.

### Bias Mitigation:

- Cited Q1/Q2 journals (Scimago)
- Balanced global south/north authorship.

### Search Strings:

- ("Abraham Accords" OR "Israel-Gulf normalization") AND ("realism" OR "balance of power" OR "alliance theory")
- ("Abraham Accords" OR "Israel-Gulf normalization") AND ("constructivism" OR "Islamic identity" OR "norm contestation")

**Total Studies Screened: 100** (50 each from realist and constructivists school of thoughts, out of which 50 studies were excluded being less relevant/ or applying mixed theories)

### Results (sample size of 50 most relevant studies):

- Total Realist Studies: 41/50 (82%).
- Total Constructivist Studies: 9/50 (18%).

### References

- Bibi, S. (2024, December 24). The Role of Constitution of Pakistan in Promoting International Peace and Strengthening

- Bonds with the Muslim World. SSRN. Retrieved July 20, 2025, from [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=5173729#:~:text=Abstract,talks%20in%20different%20regional%20conflicts.](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=5173729#:~:text=Abstract,talks%20in%20different%20regional%20conflicts.)
- CPEC News Desk. (2025). China leads FDI in Pakistan with 40% share in 11MFY25. The Daily CPEC. Retrieved July 20, 2025, from [https://thedailycpec.com/china-leads-fdi-in-pakistan-with-40-share-in-11mfy25/#:~:text=Between%20July%202024%20and%20May,which%20stood%20at%20\\$1.978%20billion.](https://thedailycpec.com/china-leads-fdi-in-pakistan-with-40-share-in-11mfy25/#:~:text=Between%20July%202024%20and%20May,which%20stood%20at%20$1.978%20billion.)
- Fishman, J., & Kuperwasser, Y. (2019). The Peace to Prosperity Workshop in Bahrain and its Contribution to Reducing the "Representation Gap". *National Resilience, Politics and Society*, 1(2), 123-142. doi:<https://doi.org/10.26351/NRPS/1-2/1>
- Gallup. (2023). Survey on Israel Palestine Conflict: Snap Poll by Gallup Pakistan. Gallup Pakistan. Retrieved July 20, 2025, from <https://gallup.com.pk/post/35612>
- Ghariani, J. (1998). A Diplomatic History of Israel's Relations with Oman: From Clandestine Ties to the Abraham Accords. *Concordia*(2). Retrieved July 20, 2025, from <https://www.concordia.ca/content/dam/artsci/azrieli/docs/OccasionalPapers/ADiplomaticHistoryofOmani-IsraeliRelations.pdf>
- GJEPC. (2025). CEPA turns 3: Powers the India-UAE Trade Surge. *Solitaire International*. Retrieved July 20, 2025, from <https://gjepc.org/solitaire/cepa-turns-3-powers-the-india-uae-trade-surge/>
- Gov.il. (1994). Israel-Jordan Peace Treaty. Gov.il. Retrieved July 20, 2025, from <https://www.gov.il/en/pages/israel-jordan-peace-treaty>
- Hodali, D., & Hassan, E. (2019, June 25). Kushner's plan for Palestinians: What's (not) in it? DW. Retrieved July 20, 2025, from <https://www.dw.com/en/jared-kushners-plan-for-palestinians-whats-not-in-it/a-49350560>
- Huaxia. (2025). Pakistan's remittances surge 26.6 pct in fiscal 2025. Xinhua. Retrieved July 20, 2025, from <https://english.news.cn/20250709/50a96ca778634b2b8a3dc7e3c89b6e46/c.html>
- Ishaque, W., Mukhtar, M., & Tanvir, R. (2023, January 20). Pakistan's water resource management: Ensuring water security for sustainable development. *Frontiers in Environmental Science*, 11. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.3389/fenvs.2023.1096747>
- Magid, J. (2021, January 21). US suspends \$23 billion sale of F-35s to UAE that followed Abraham Accords. *The Times of Israel*. Retrieved July 17, 2025, from <https://www.timesofisrael.com/us-puts-hold-on-sale-of-f-35s-to-uae-that-followed-abraham-accords/>
- Markey, D., & Youssef, H. (2022). What You Need to Know About the I2U2. Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace (USIP). Retrieved July 20, 2025, from <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/07/what-you-need-know-about-i2u2>
- Mian, B. (2025, June 11). Budget highlights alarming youth unemployment and skills gap. *Islamabad, Pakistan: Dawn*. Retrieved July 20, 2025, from <https://www.dawn.com/news/1916433/budget-highlights-alarming-youth-unemployment-and-skills-gap>
- Neuendorf, K. A. (2017). *The Content Analysis Guidebook* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, California, USA: SAGE Publications. doi:<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781071802878>
- Ravid, B. (2020, December 11). Scoop: Fallout between Trump and top GOP senator made Morocco-Israel deal possible. *Axios*. Retrieved July 17, 2025, from <https://www.axios.com/2020/12/11/trump-morocco-israel-inhofe>
- Reuters. (2021, January 7). Sudan quietly signs Abraham Accords weeks after Israel deal. *Reuters*. Retrieved July 17, 2025, from

- <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-sudan-usa-israel-idUSKBN29C0Q5/>  
Reuters. (2021, January 6). U.S. Treasury signs loan deal to clear Sudan's \$1.2 billion World Bank arrears. Reuters. Retrieved July 17, 2025, from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-sudan-usa-mnuchin/u-s-treasury-signs-loan-deal-to-clear-sudans-1-2-billion-world-bank-arrears-idUSKBN29B2J3/>
- SBP. (2025). Pakistan's remittances soar to \$38.3 billion in FY2025, highest ever monthly inflow in June. News Desk. State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). Retrieved July 20, 2025, from [https://www.ptv.com.pk/mobileView/ptvWorldMobile/newsdetail/8686#:~:text=The%20robust%20inflow%20of%20remittances,Monetary%20Fund's%20\(IMF\)%20targets.](https://www.ptv.com.pk/mobileView/ptvWorldMobile/newsdetail/8686#:~:text=The%20robust%20inflow%20of%20remittances,Monetary%20Fund's%20(IMF)%20targets.)
- Shah, S. A. (2025, February 6). Climate Justice Is Inevitable. Islamabad, Pakistan: Dawn Media. Retrieved July 20, 2025, from <https://www.dawn.com/news/1890109#:~:text=Syed%20Mansoor%20Ali%20Shah%20Published,rural%20women%20causing%20unprecedented%20destruction.>
- Soliman, M. (2021). An Indo-Abrahamic alliance on the rise: How India, Israel, and the UAE are creating a new transregional order. Middle East Institute. Retrieved July 20, 2025, from <https://www.mei.edu/publications/in-do-abrahamic-alliance-rise-how-india-israel-and-uae-are-creating-new-transregional>
- State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). (2025). Pakistan's External Debt and Liabilities - Outstanding. Trading Economics. Retrieved July 20, 2025, from [https://easydata.sbp.org.pk/apex/f?p=10:211:7070511927438::NO:RP:P211\\_DATASET\\_TYPE\\_CODE,P211\\_PAGE\\_ID:TS\\_GP\\_ED\\_PKEDLOUT\\_Q,210&cs=1DB110D463FF80F2188CC1C9263F4C24C](https://easydata.sbp.org.pk/apex/f?p=10:211:7070511927438::NO:RP:P211_DATASET_TYPE_CODE,P211_PAGE_ID:TS_GP_ED_PKEDLOUT_Q,210&cs=1DB110D463FF80F2188CC1C9263F4C24C)
- The White House. (2022, July 14). Joint Statement of the Leaders of India, Israel, United Arab Emirates, and the United States (I2U2). Washington D.C., USA. Retrieved July 20, 2025, from <https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/07/14/joint-statement-of-the-leaders-of-india-israel-united-arab-emirates-and-the-united-states-i2u2/>
- TOI Reporter. (2025, February 21). Money talks: Trade keeps Israel-UAE relations afloat despite Oct. 7 and Gaza war. Accords are More Stable than Treaties Signed with Jordan, Egypt. Times of Israel (TOI). Retrieved July 20, 2025, from <https://www.timesofisrael.com/money-talks-trade-keeps-israel-uae-relations-afloat-despite-oct-7-and-gaza-war/>
- Trading Economics. (2025). Pakistan Exports. Trading Economics. Retrieved July 20, 2025, from <https://tradingeconomics.com/pakistan/exports>
- Trump, D. J. (2020, January 28). President Donald J. Trump's Vision for Peace, Prosperity, and a Brighter Future for Israel and the Palestinian People. Fact Sheet. Washington D.C., USA. Retrieved July 17, 2025, from <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trumps-vision-peace-prosperity-brighter-future-israel-palestinian-people/>
- Wahba, M. (2025). Egypt's Sisi: Camp David Is a Model for Lasting Peace. Washington D.C.: Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD). Retrieved July 20, 2025, from [https://www.fdd.org/analysis/policy\\_briefs/2025/03/12/egypts-sisi-camp-david-is-a-model-for-lasting-peace/](https://www.fdd.org/analysis/policy_briefs/2025/03/12/egypts-sisi-camp-david-is-a-model-for-lasting-peace/)
- Yin, R. K. (2018). Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods (6th ed.). Thousand Oaks, California, USA: Sage Publications.