

THE ABRAHAM ACCORDS AND THEIR IMPACT ON IRAN'S FOREIGN POLICY

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the Abraham Accords and their impact on Iran's foreign policy, focusing on the significant shift in Middle Eastern alliances and the strategic challenges posed to Iran. Employing qualitative content analysis, the research analyzes diplomatic statements, regional policy changes, and official reactions to understand Iran's diplomatic, military, and proxy responses. Findings reveal that while Iran has intensified support for proxy groups and strengthened ties with non-Arab regional powers, it has been unable to prevent the normalization momentum among Arab states and Israel. The Accords have reshaped regional security dynamics and complicated nuclear negotiations. Policy recommendations urge Iran to pursue pragmatic engagement and restraint, encourage regional actors to expand cooperation while addressing Palestinian concerns, and call on global powers to support inclusive diplomacy and JCPOA revival. This study contributes to understanding the evolving geopolitical landscape and offers insights for fostering stability in the Middle East.

Keywords: Iran, Abraham, Foreign Policy, Global Power, Alliance.

INTRODUCTION

The Abraham Accords are a series of bilateral agreements that marked a historic normalization of relations between Israel and several Arab states, initially the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain, signed on September 15, 2020. These agreements were mediated and brokered by the United States under the Trump administration, with the signing ceremony held at the White House, symbolizing a major diplomatic breakthrough in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The accords enabled the UAE and Bahrain to officially recognize Israel's sovereignty and establish full diplomatic relations, marking the first such normalization between Israel and Arab countries since the 1994 Israel-Jordan peace treaty.

Following the initial agreements, Sudan and Morocco also entered into normalization agreements with Israel later in 2020. Sudan's agreement, though signed, remains unratified as of 2024; it was accompanied by the U.S. removing Sudan from its list of state sponsors of terrorism and offering financial aid. Morocco's agreement was linked to U.S. recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara, highlighting the geopolitical trade-offs involved. These accords collectively represent a significant shift in Middle Eastern diplomacy, breaking longstanding taboos and opening new avenues for cooperation in trade, security, and cultural exchange (Britannica, 2025).

The United States played a central role in brokering these deals, using its diplomatic influence and incentives, such as arms sales and economic aid—to bring parties to the negotiating table. The Trump administration framed the accords as a historic achievement for peace and stability in the Middle East, emphasizing shared strategic interests, particularly countering Iran’s regional influence (Britannica, 2025). The U.S. involvement was pivotal, orchestrating the timing and terms of the agreements and hosting the signing ceremony, which underscored Washington’s role as a key power broker in the region.

The Abraham Accords signify a profound realignment in Middle Eastern alliances, challenging the traditional Arab consensus that normalization with Israel must be contingent on progress toward Palestinian statehood. This shift has strategic implications for Iran, which has long positioned itself as the primary regional opponent of Israel and a defender of the Palestinian cause. The Accords undermine Iran’s influence by breaking its isolation and enabling Israel to cultivate alliances with Arab states that were previously hostile (Britannica, 2025).

Understanding how Iran’s foreign policy has adapted to this new regional order is critical for assessing the future trajectory of Middle Eastern geopolitics. The Accords alter the balance of power, security dynamics, and diplomatic engagements, making it essential to analyze Iran’s responses and the broader implications for regional stability and conflict (The Security Distillery, 2025)

This study aims to analyze how Iran’s foreign policy has responded to the Abraham Accords.

Specifically, it seeks to:

- Examine Iran’s diplomatic, military, and proxy strategies following the Accords.
 - Assess the impact of the Accords on Iran’s regional influence and alliances.
 - Explore the broader implications for Middle Eastern security and diplomatic relations.
- By focusing on these objectives, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the evolving regional order and the challenges posed by the Abraham Accords to Iran’s strategic ambitions.

Literature Review

The geopolitical landscape of the Middle East before the Abraham Accords was characterized by deep-rooted sectarian divides, shifting alliances, and persistent conflicts that shaped state behaviors and regional dynamics. The Arab world largely maintained a consensus of non-recognition and hostility toward Israel, rooted in the unresolved Palestinian issue and decades of conflict since Israel’s establishment in 1948. This consensus, however, was increasingly challenged by emerging geopolitical realities, including the rise of Iran’s regional influence and the decline of pan-Arab nationalism (Insight Turkey, 2021). The Syrian civil war and the rise of extremist groups such as ISIS exacerbated sectarian divisions, particularly between Sunni-majority Gulf states and Shia Iran, pushing Gulf monarchies to seek new security arrangements outside traditional Arab frameworks (Insight Turkey, 2021). These developments set the stage for the Abraham Accords, which represented a strategic recalibration by Gulf States like the UAE and Bahrain, motivated by elite preferences for political stability, nationalism, and countering Iranian influence (Insight Turkey, 2021).

Iran’s foreign policy since the 1979 Islamic Revolution has been deeply shaped by ideological commitments to Islamic resistance against Western and Israeli influence, combined with pragmatic efforts to secure strategic depth in the Middle East. Iran’s core foreign policy goals include maintaining an anti-Israel stance, expanding influence across Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen, and establishing itself as a regional hegemon capable of counterbalancing U.S. and Saudi dominance (Modern Diplomacy, 2025). Through its support for proxy groups such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, Shiite militias in Iraq, and the Houthis in Yemen, Iran has sought to create a contiguous sphere of influence extending from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean (Middle East Council, n.d.; Modern Diplomacy, 2025). This “Axis of Resistance” serves both ideological and strategic purposes, enabling Iran to project power asymmetrically and deter adversaries (Foundation for Defense of Democracies, 2024). Militarily, Iran has invested heavily in missile technology, naval capabilities, and asymmetric warfare tactics to reinforce its deterrence posture and regional influence (Modern Diplomacy, 2025).

Historically, Arab-Israeli relations were dominated by conflict and non-recognition, with key wars in 1948, 1967, and 1973 shaping the regional order. Despite intermittent peace efforts, such as the Camp David Accords and Oslo Process, most Arab states maintained a policy of non-normalization with Israel until the Abraham Accords. Iran's role in this context has been as a staunch opponent of Israel and any Arab normalization, positioning itself as a defender of the Palestinian cause and using proxy conflicts to undermine rapprochement efforts. Foundation for Defense of Democracies, 2024). The Abraham Accords thus represented a significant rupture in the traditional Arab consensus, challenging Iran's ideological and strategic position in the region (Insight Turkey, 2021).

Existing scholarship on the Abraham Accords emphasizes their genesis as a product of shifting elite preferences in the Gulf, rising nationalism, and a quest for political stability amid regional upheavals (Insight Turkey, 2021). Analysts highlight the U.S. role, particularly under the Trump administration, in facilitating these agreements as part of a broader strategy to isolate Iran and reshape Middle Eastern alliances (Burrows, 2014). The Accords are seen as a pragmatic move by Gulf states to secure economic and security benefits, including access to Israeli technology and intelligence, while countering Iran's growing influence (Insight Turkey, 2021; Burrows, 2014). However, the literature also notes the potential for increased regional tensions, as Iran perceives the Accords as a direct threat to its strategic depth and ideological narrative (Foundation for Defense of Democracies, 2024; Modern Diplomacy, 2025).

This study's theoretical framework draws primarily on realism and regional security complex theory. Realism explains the Accords as a rational response by states seeking to maximize security and power in an anarchic regional system, where threats from Iran and instability compel new alliances (Waltz, 1979). Regional security complex theory, as articulated by Buzan and Wæver (2003), provides a lens to understand how security interdependence and threat perceptions in the Middle East create patterns of alignment and conflict. The Abraham Accords can thus be interpreted as a reconfiguration of the regional security complex, with Gulf states and Israel forming a counterbalance to Iran's

influence, while Iran responds with asymmetric strategies and regional partnerships (Insight Turkey, 2021; Modern Diplomacy, 2025).

Gap Analysis

While substantial research exists on the geopolitical shifts leading to the Abraham Accords and Iran's ideological foreign policy orientation, there is a relative paucity of comprehensive analyses focusing specifically on the nuanced impacts of the Accords on Iran's foreign policy adaptations. Existing literature often treats Iran's response in broad strokes, emphasizing proxy warfare or rhetorical opposition without fully exploring Iran's diplomatic recalibrations, strategic partnerships (e.g., with China, Russia, Turkey), or internal policy debates post-Accords. Moreover, the evolving role of Iran in regional diplomacy, including recent détente efforts such as the 2023 Saudi-Iran agreement brokered by China, remains underexplored in the context of the Accords' long-term implications. This gap suggests a need for integrated studies that combine Iran's military, diplomatic, and ideological responses to the Abraham Accords within a coherent analytical framework, incorporating recent developments and diverse sources.

Research Methodology

The methodology employed in this study is qualitative content analysis, which systematically examines diplomatic statements, regional policy shifts, and official reactions to the Abraham Accords to uncover underlying meanings, themes, and patterns. This approach allows for an in-depth understanding of how Iran's foreign policy discourse and strategic behavior have evolved in response to the Accords by analyzing semantic relationships within textual data from speeches, official documents, and media communications. Qualitative content analysis is particularly suited for exploring complex international relations phenomena because it contextualizes communication within cultural and political frameworks, capturing nuances that quantitative methods might overlook. By coding and categorizing textual data, this method facilitates the identification of Iran's narrative framing, strategic priorities, and diplomatic adaptations, providing a rich, interpretive insight

into the dynamics of Middle Eastern geopolitics shaped by the Abraham Accords

Genesis and Strategic Significance of the Abraham Accords

The Abraham Accords, signed on September 15, 2020, marked a historic breakthrough in Middle Eastern diplomacy, establishing formal normalization of relations between Israel and several Arab states, initially the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain, followed by Morocco and Sudan. This diplomatic realignment was unprecedented in the post-1948 Arab-Israeli conflict framework and represented a significant shift in regional geopolitics. The genesis of the Accords can be traced to a confluence of strategic, economic, and political motivations among the signatory states, as well as the geopolitical aims of Israel and the United States. The Accords also had profound implications for the traditional Arab consensus on Palestine, challenging decades of pan-Arab solidarity and reshaping regional alliances.

Motivations of UAE, Bahrain, and Others

The UAE and Bahrain's decisions to normalize relations with Israel were driven by a combination of security concerns, economic interests, and political calculations. Both countries viewed Iran's growing regional influence as a direct threat to their national security and regional stability. The UAE, in particular, perceived the Abraham Accords as a strategic move to counterbalance Iran's expanding footprint in the Gulf and beyond, including its involvement in proxy conflicts in Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq (MEIJ, 2023). Bahrain, hosting the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet, also underscored its role as a critical U.S. ally and saw normalization as a way to reinforce the American military presence and security guarantees in the region (MEIJ, 2023). Economically, the Accords opened avenues for trade, investment, and technological cooperation with Israel, which had previously been inaccessible due to the absence of formal relations. Both Gulf states emphasized the potential benefits of economic diversification, innovation, and tourism that could arise from engagement with Israel's advanced economy (MEIJ, 2023). Politically, the UAE and Bahrain framed their normalization as a proactive step to reduce regional tensions and contribute to peace, arguing that engagement with Israel could create

new opportunities for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, although tangible progress on this front remained limited (MEIJ, 2023).

Morocco and Sudan's subsequent agreements to normalize ties with Israel were influenced by similar considerations, including the desire to gain U.S. favor and economic incentives, as well as to improve international standing. Morocco's deal was linked to U.S. recognition of its sovereignty over Western Sahara, while Sudan's agreement was tied to its removal from the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism (Modern Diplomacy, 2025). These cases illustrate the broader strategic realignment underway in the Middle East and North Africa, where pragmatic interests increasingly outweigh ideological opposition to Israel.

Israeli Interests and Normalization Goals

For Israel, the Abraham Accords represented a strategic breakthrough in breaking its regional isolation and expanding its diplomatic and economic horizons. Israel's leadership sought to transform its relationships with Arab states from covert or hostile interactions into open and cooperative partnerships. The Accords provided Israel with formal diplomatic recognition from key Gulf states, which had long been viewed as adversaries, and opened new channels for intelligence sharing, security cooperation, and economic exchange (GIS Reports, n.d.). The normalization agreements included commitments to mutual recognition, the establishment of embassies, and cooperation across diverse sectors such as finance, civil aviation, tourism, science, technology, agriculture, and energy (GIS Reports, n.d.). Importantly, the Accords contained clauses prioritizing the treaty obligations over other regional commitments, signaling a willingness among signatories to subordinate traditional Arab League positions to bilateral relations with Israel (GIS Reports, n.d.). This shift enabled Israel to build a coalition of moderate Arab states aligned against common threats, particularly Iran and Islamist extremism.

Israel also viewed the Accords as a means to bypass the stalled Israeli-Palestinian peace process, which had long hindered broader Arab-Israeli normalization. By establishing peace with countries that were not directly involved in the Palestinian conflict, Israel aimed to isolate

Palestinian leadership and pressure it into negotiations under new regional dynamics (Modern Diplomacy, 2025). The Accords thus served both diplomatic and strategic purposes, enhancing Israel's regional legitimacy and security posture.

US Geopolitical Aims (Trump Administration)

The United States, under the Trump administration, played a pivotal role in brokering the Abraham Accords, viewing them as a cornerstone of its Middle East policy. The U.S. sought to reshape the regional order by fostering alliances that could counterbalance Iran's influence without direct military confrontation. The Accords aligned with Washington's broader strategy of "maximum pressure" on Iran through sanctions and diplomatic isolation, while simultaneously securing American interests through strengthened partnerships with Gulf states and Israel (Modern Diplomacy, 2025).

President Trump framed the Accords as a historic achievement that would bring peace and prosperity to the Middle East by uniting two of America's closest regional allies against shared threats (Modern Diplomacy, 2025). The agreements also served to reinforce the U.S. security presence and influence in the region, countering the growing roles of China and Russia. By facilitating economic and technological cooperation between Israel and Arab states, the U.S. aimed to create a regional bloc supportive of American strategic goals (Carnegie Endowment, 2025). The Accords also reflected a shift in U.S. policy toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, effectively sidelining the Palestinians by decoupling normalization from the resolution of their dispute. This approach was controversial but represented a pragmatic recalibration to achieve incremental peace and stability through new regional alignments (Carnegie Endowment, 2025). The Biden administration has largely maintained support for the Accords, seeking to expand their scope, particularly with Saudi Arabia, although recent conflicts have complicated these efforts.

Impact on Traditional Arab Consensus on Palestine

The Abraham Accords fundamentally disrupted the longstanding Arab consensus that normalization with Israel must be contingent

upon a just resolution of the Palestinian issue. Historically, Arab states had maintained a unified front, refusing diplomatic recognition of Israel until Palestinian statehood was achieved. The Accords shattered this paradigm by demonstrating that some Arab states were willing to prioritize their national interests and security concerns over pan-Arab solidarity (FDD, 2020). This shift was motivated in part by frustration with Palestinian leadership, which Gulf states perceived as obstructionist and unwilling to engage constructively in peace negotiations. The UAE and Bahrain's agreements signaled a new willingness to engage Israel directly, marginalizing Palestinian rejectionism and opening channels for people-to-people ties, economic cooperation, and security collaboration (FDD, 2020). Unlike previous peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan, which resulted in "cold peace" limited to formal agreements, the Abraham Accords aimed to foster warmer, more substantive relations (FDD, 2020).

However, the Accords also deepened regional divides, with countries like Iran, Turkey, and Qatar vehemently opposing normalization and continuing to support Palestinian resistance groups. The Palestinian Authority and Hamas condemned the Accords as betrayals, leading to increased tensions and complicating prospects for a comprehensive peace settlement (Sevilla, 2024). The Accords thus represent both a strategic realignment and a challenge to the traditional framework of Arab-Israeli relations.

Iran's Immediate Reaction and Narrative Framing

The announcement and signing of the Abraham Accords in 2020 elicited swift and vehement reactions from Iran's political and religious leadership. The accords, which normalized relations between Israel and several Arab states including the UAE and Bahrain, were perceived by Tehran as a direct strategic and ideological threat to its regional influence and to the Palestinian cause, which Iran champions as a core element of its foreign policy. Iran's immediate response was characterized by sharp condemnation, framing the accords as a betrayal and a dangerous realignment that undermined Islamic solidarity and regional security. The Iranian leadership's narrative combined nationalist and religious rhetoric aimed at both

domestic and regional audiences, seeking to delegitimize the accords and rally opposition against the new Arab-Israeli rapprochement.

Official Statements by Iranian Leadership

Iran's top officials uniformly denounced the Abraham Accords as a grave threat to the Islamic world and a betrayal of the Palestinian cause. President Hassan Rouhani called the accords a "clear betrayal of the Palestinian people, the cause of al Quds (Jerusalem), and Muslims" (Iran Primer, 2020). The Iranian Foreign Ministry labeled the agreements as "strategic idiocy" and a "stab in the back" by the UAE to the Palestinians (Foreign Policy, 2020). Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei condemned the accords as an attempt to "subject the Palestinian question to oblivion" and to "allow Israel a foothold in the region," warning that such normalization would have dangerous consequences for the Gulf states involved (Foreign Policy, 2020).

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) issued a particularly fiery statement, describing the accords as "historic idiocy" that would bring a "dangerous future" for the UAE leadership (Iran Primer, 2020). The IRGC's Chief of Staff, Mohammad Bagheri, warned that Iran's policy towards the UAE would "fundamentally change" and that the Islamic Republic would hold the UAE responsible for any breaches of Iran's national security (Foreign Policy, 2020). These statements underscored Tehran's perception of the accords as not merely diplomatic shifts but existential security threats, prompting a recalibration of Iran's regional posture.

Framing the Accords as a "Betrayal"

Iran framed the Abraham Accords as a betrayal of the Palestinian people and the broader Islamic ummah. This framing was central to Iran's narrative, portraying the Gulf states' normalization with Israel as a violation of Islamic solidarity and a capitulation to Zionist and Western interests. President Rouhani's characterization of the accords as a "clear betrayal" encapsulated this stance, emphasizing the moral and political rupture with the Palestinian cause (Iran Primer, 2020). The Iranian leadership accused the UAE and Bahrain of abandoning their historical commitments to Palestine in exchange for political and economic gains orchestrated by the United States. Foreign

Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif dismissed the accords as politically motivated, suggesting that they were driven by opportunism rather than genuine peace efforts (Iran Primer, 2020). Supreme Leader Khamenei's rhetoric further framed the accords as a conspiracy to erase the Palestinian issue from the regional agenda and to legitimize Israel's presence in the Middle East (Foreign Policy, 2020). This narrative of betrayal served multiple purposes: it delegitimized the accords in the eyes of Iran's domestic and regional supporters, reinforced Iran's self-image as the defender of Palestine, and sought to isolate the Gulf states diplomatically by portraying them as collaborators with Israel and the West against Muslim interests.

Appeal to Domestic and Regional Audiences

Iran's narrative framing was carefully calibrated to resonate with both domestic and regional audiences. Domestically, the leadership used the accords to bolster nationalist and revolutionary legitimacy by positioning Iran as the steadfast opponent of Israel and the protector of Palestinian rights. This helped to unify various political factions around a common external threat and to distract from internal economic and political challenges exacerbated by sanctions and the COVID-19 pandemic (FDD, 2024). Regionally, Iran sought to rally opposition to the accords among other Muslim-majority countries and non-state actors. Tehran intensified its support for proxy groups such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, and militias in Iraq, portraying their resistance as part of a broader struggle against the normalization of relations with Israel (FDD, 2024). Iranian media and religious authorities amplified the message that the accords were a betrayal of Islamic values and a threat to Muslim unity, aiming to mobilize public opinion against the Gulf states involved (FDD, 2024).

Iran also attempted to exploit divisions within the Arab world by appealing to countries and groups that rejected normalization, such as Qatar and Turkey, to form a counter-coalition against the Abraham Accords (FDD, 2024). This regional outreach was part of a broader strategy to contain the diplomatic gains of the accords and to maintain Iran's influence in regional affairs despite increasing isolation.

Use of Religious and Nationalist Rhetoric

Religious and nationalist rhetoric was central to Iran's framing of the Abraham Accords. The accords were depicted as an affront to Islamic principles and a betrayal of the sacred duty to defend al-Quds (Jerusalem) and the Palestinian people. Supreme Leader Khamenei's speeches frequently invoked religious symbolism, portraying the accords as a "conspiracy" against Islam and an attempt to undermine the Muslim ummah's unity (Foreign Policy, 2020). Nationalist themes were also prominent, with Iranian leaders emphasizing Iran's role as the regional power resisting Western and Israeli hegemony. The accords were depicted as a foreign-imposed scheme aimed at weakening Iran's strategic depth and isolating it politically and militarily (FDD, 2024). The IRGC's warnings to the UAE underscored the nationalist defense of Iran's territorial and security interests, framing any breach of Iran's security as unacceptable and punishable.

This combination of religious fervor and nationalist resolve served to legitimize Iran's hardline stance and its continued support for proxy groups engaged in asymmetric warfare against Israel and its allies. It also reinforced Iran's narrative of resistance, which remains a cornerstone of its foreign policy identity.

Impact on Iran's Foreign Policy

The Abraham Accords have profoundly influenced Iran's foreign policy, compelling Tehran to recalibrate its diplomatic, security, and proxy strategies in response to the shifting regional order. The normalization of relations between Israel and several Arab states challenged Iran's longstanding regional dominance and ideological narrative, prompting a multifaceted response that includes strategic realignment, military posturing, and intensified support for proxy groups. This section examines these impacts in detail.

A. Strategic and Diplomatic Reorientation

In the wake of the Abraham Accords, Iran sought to strengthen its diplomatic ties with regional and global powers to offset the diplomatic isolation imposed by the new Arab-Israeli alignment. Iran has notably deepened its relationships with Turkey, Qatar, China, and Russia, viewing these partnerships as essential to counterbalance the

emerging Arab-Israeli-US bloc. Turkey and Qatar, despite their differences with Iran, have engaged in pragmatic cooperation, particularly in regional security and economic arenas, as part of a broader Muslim coalition excluding Israel. Iran's former foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, proposed the Mwada (Muslim West Asian Dialogue Association) initiative, aiming to unite Sunni and Shiite Muslim countries around shared security and prosperity goals, explicitly excluding Israel on religious grounds (Carnegie Endowment, 2025). This initiative reflects Iran's effort to offer an alternative regional framework to the Abraham Accords.

China's role has been pivotal, especially following its mediation of the 2023 Saudi-Iran détente, which marked a significant thaw in Gulf-Iran relations. Beijing's expanding influence in the Middle East provides Tehran with economic and diplomatic leverage, reducing its dependence on Western powers and helping it navigate sanctions and isolation (Carnegie Endowment, 2025). Similarly, Iran has bolstered its ties with Russia, particularly in military cooperation, supplying drones and potentially ballistic missiles to Moscow and seeking advanced weaponry such as hypersonic missiles and Sukhoi Su-35 fighter jets to enhance its strategic depth (Stimson Center, 2023).

Iran's increased diplomatic outreach to Asia and Russia is part of a pragmatic approach to diversify its alliances and secure economic lifelines amid U.S. sanctions and regional isolation (IEMED, 2024). This reorientation also reflects Tehran's recognition that the Abraham Accords have altered the regional security architecture, necessitating new partnerships to maintain its influence.

B. Security and Military Posturing

The Abraham Accords have prompted Iran to intensify its military preparedness and deterrence capabilities. Tehran has conducted more frequent and sophisticated military drills and naval exercises, particularly in the Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz, signaling its readiness to defend its interests against perceived threats from Israel and normalized Gulf states (IEMED, 2024). Iran has also expanded its missile programs, emphasizing ballistic missile development as a cornerstone of its deterrence strategy. This expansion aims to counterbalance Israel's

qualitative military edge and the growing security cooperation between Israel and Gulf states (NSI Virtual Think Tank, 2020). The missile program enhancement is complemented by asymmetric warfare tactics, including the use of drones and naval swarm attacks, which exploit vulnerabilities in Gulf states' defenses and complicate conventional military responses (IEMED, 2024). The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has played a central role in these developments, viewing the Abraham Accords as a direct security threat. Iranian military leadership has warned that the UAE and Bahrain, as signatories to the accords, are now potential targets in any regional conflict, signaling a shift in Iran's threat calculus (Foreign Policy, 2020). This posture aims to deter further normalization and assert Iran's capacity to impose costs on adversaries.

C. Proxy and Asymmetric Responses

Iran's response to the Abraham Accords has heavily relied on its network of proxy groups and asymmetric warfare strategies. Tehran has reinforced its support for Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, and Shiite militias in Iraq, leveraging these actors to challenge the legitimacy and security of Israel and its new Arab partners (NSI Virtual Think Tank, 2020).

These proxy groups have adopted narratives that frame the Abraham Accords as a betrayal of the Palestinian cause and a threat to Muslim unity, aligning with Iran's ideological messaging. Hezbollah and the Houthis have increased their rhetoric and military activities, including cross-border attacks and missile launches, aimed at destabilizing the Gulf region and Israel (Foundation for Defense of Democracies, 2024). Iran's financial, logistical, and military support to these groups has intensified, reflecting Tehran's strategy to maintain influence through asymmetric means despite diplomatic setbacks. This support also serves to project Iranian power beyond its borders and complicate the security environment for the Gulf states and Israel (NSI Virtual Think Tank, 2020).

Regional and Global Responses to Iran's Shifts

The Abraham Accords, by normalizing relations between Israel and several Arab states, notably the UAE and Bahrain, have significantly altered the geopolitical dynamics of the Middle East. Iran's regional posture and rhetoric have shifted

in response, prompting varied reactions from regional actors and global powers. This section analyzes the responses of Arab Gulf states, the United States, and the European Union, and the balancing roles of China and Russia in the context of Iran's strategic adaptations.

Arab Gulf States' Alignment with Israel

The Abraham Accords epitomize a strategic realignment of several Arab Gulf states toward Israel, driven primarily by shared concerns over Iran's regional ambitions. The UAE and Bahrain's formal normalization with Israel marked a departure from the traditional Arab consensus that conditioned relations with Israel on progress toward Palestinian statehood. These Gulf States perceive Iran's expanding influence—militarily through proxies and politically through alliances in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen—as a direct threat to their national security and regional stability (Carnegie Endowment, 2025). The alignment with Israel has enabled Gulf States to access advanced Israeli technology, intelligence sharing, and military cooperation, strengthening their deterrence capabilities against Iran (Modern Diplomacy, 2025). Furthermore, economic cooperation has flourished, with increased trade, investment, and tourism flows, signaling a pragmatic approach that prioritizes national interests over ideological divides (Carnegie Endowment, 2025).

Saudi Arabia, while not a formal signatory of the Accords, has exhibited cautious openness toward normalization, reflecting a broader regional trend of recalibrating relations with Israel in light of Iran's assertiveness (Carnegie Endowment, 2025). The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states' collective posture underscores a strategic bloc increasingly united by countering Iran's influence, albeit with varying degrees of public engagement with Israel.

US and EU Responses to Iran's Rhetoric and Policies

The United States has been a principal architect and patron of the Abraham Accords, viewing them as a mechanism to consolidate its role as the regional security guarantor and to counterbalance Iran's influence without direct military confrontation. The Trump administration's "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran was complemented by these

diplomatic breakthroughs, which aimed to isolate Tehran politically and economically (Modern Diplomacy, 2025).

The Biden administration has largely endorsed the Accords, seeking to expand their scope, particularly by encouraging Saudi Arabia's participation. However, the October 7, 2023 Hamas attacks and Israel's subsequent military response in Gaza complicated U.S. efforts, provoking regional and global condemnation and testing the durability of the Accords (Carnegie Endowment, 2025). Despite these challenges, the U.S. continues to support the Accords as a framework for regional peace and security, balancing condemnation of violence with diplomatic engagement. The European Union has expressed cautious support for the Abraham Accords, recognizing their potential to foster peace and cooperation in the Middle East. The EU's official stance emphasizes promoting interfaith dialogue, economic cooperation, and conflict resolution, while continuing its role as a donor to Palestine (European Parliament, 2020). However, the EU's policies have faced criticism for perceived inconsistencies, such as continued engagement with Iran and reluctance to designate Hezbollah fully as a terrorist organization, which some argue undermines peace efforts (European Parliament, 2020). Both the U.S. and EU responses reflect a balancing act: supporting normalization and regional stability while managing the complex realities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Iran's regional activities.

China and Russia's Balancing Roles

China and Russia have emerged as key balancing actors in the Middle East, leveraging Iran's shifts and the Abraham Accords to expand their influence. China's diplomatic mediation of the 2023 Saudi-Iran détente exemplifies its growing role as a regional power broker, offering Tehran economic and political support that mitigates the impact of Western sanctions and diplomatic isolation (Carnegie Endowment, 2025). Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative and expanding trade ties with Middle Eastern countries, including Iran, provide Tehran with crucial economic lifelines. China's approach contrasts with U.S. policies by emphasizing non-interference and economic partnership, thus appealing to Iran and other regional actors seeking alternatives to Western dominance (Carnegie Endowment, 2025).

Russia similarly has deepened military and diplomatic ties with Iran, supplying advanced weaponry and coordinating on regional conflicts, particularly in Syria. Moscow's engagement serves to counterbalance U.S. and Israeli influence while maintaining strategic partnerships with Gulf States, positioning Russia as a pivotal power able to navigate competing interests (Carnegie Endowment, 2025). Both China and Russia's balancing acts complicate the regional security architecture, offering Iran avenues to circumvent isolation and challenging the U.S.-led order underpinning the Abraham Accords.

Future Scenarios and Policy Implications

The Abraham Accords have ushered in a new phase of Middle Eastern geopolitics, challenging traditional alliances and Iran's regional influence. Looking forward, the trajectory of the Accords and Iran's responses will shape the region's security, diplomatic, and economic landscape. This section explores four key future scenarios: the momentum and potential expansion of normalization, Iran's strategic choices between containment and adaptation, the impact on nuclear negotiations and the JCPOA, and the prospects for a regional security architecture that may exclude Iran.

Normalization Momentum and Its Expansion

Since the Abraham Accords' inception in 2020, normalization between Israel and Arab states has gained notable traction. Initial agreements between Israel, the UAE, and Bahrain were soon followed by Morocco and Sudan, creating a foundation for broader regional integration. Economic cooperation has been a major driver: Israel and the UAE signed a historic free-trade agreement in May 2022, aiming to boost bilateral trade to \$10 billion annually within five years, while Bahrain and Morocco have also deepened security and economic ties with Israel (AJC, 2022). The Biden administration seeks to build on this momentum by encouraging additional countries, including Saudi Arabia and Syria, to join the Accords (Security Distillery, 2025). Saudi Arabia's potential inclusion would be transformative, given its regional influence and symbolic leadership in the Muslim world. However, progress has been complicated by the October 2023 Hamas attacks on Israel and the ensuing conflict in Gaza, which have strained

regional dynamics and tested the Accords' resilience (Carnegie Endowment, 2025).

Despite setbacks, the Accords have demonstrated durability because they are increasingly driven by pragmatic interests—security cooperation, economic benefits, and technological exchange—rather than ideological positions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Chatham House, 2023). The economic dimension, particularly projects tied to Gaza's reconstruction and regional infrastructure initiatives, is viewed as a crucial factor for sustaining and expanding normalization (Carnegie Endowment, 2025). If successful, these efforts could foster trust and shared prosperity, encouraging more states to join. Negotiations reportedly extend beyond the Middle East, with Israel engaging countries like Indonesia, Somalia, Niger, and Mauritania to broaden the Accords' reach (i24NEWS, 2023). This signals a potential shift toward a more globalized framework of Arab-Israeli relations, albeit one that remains sensitive to regional conflicts and Palestinian statehood issues.

Iran's Containment or Adaptation Strategy

Iran faces a strategic crossroads in responding to the Abraham Accords and the evolving regional order. Tehran has pursued a dual approach combining containment efforts with selective adaptation.

Containment: Iran has intensified support for proxy groups such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, and militias in Iraq to counterbalance the growing Arab-Israeli alliance (FDD, 2024). Military posturing, missile program expansion, and asymmetric warfare tactics reflect Iran's efforts to deter and disrupt normalization efforts perceived as threats to its influence. The IRGC has explicitly warned Gulf States that normalization with Israel makes them targets, signaling a more confrontational posture (Foreign Policy, 2020).

Adaptation: Simultaneously, Iran has shown pragmatic flexibility. The 2023 Saudi-Iran détente, brokered by China, exemplifies Tehran's willingness to engage in regional diplomacy to reduce isolation and manage conflicts (Carnegie Endowment, 2025). Iran's outreach to Turkey, Qatar, China, and Russia further reflects a diversification of alliances aimed at mitigating the impact of the Accords and Western sanctions (Carnegie Endowment, 2025).

This dual strategy complicates regional dynamics, as Iran balances resistance with accommodation to preserve its core interests. Tehran's ability to sustain this approach will influence the region's stability and the Accords' long-term viability.

Impact on Nuclear Negotiations and JCPOA

The Abraham Accords have indirectly influenced nuclear diplomacy with Iran. By isolating Tehran politically and strengthening regional security cooperation, the Accords have increased pressure on Iran to moderate its nuclear ambitions. The U.S. and its allies have leveraged this framework to reinforce sanctions and diplomatic isolation, aiming to bring Iran back into compliance with the JCPOA (Carnegie Endowment, 2025). However, the failure to fully revive the JCPOA amid mutual distrust and regional tensions has prolonged uncertainty. Iran's nuclear advancements continue, raising proliferation concerns. The Accords' success in isolating Iran may incentivize Tehran to pursue nuclear capabilities as a deterrent, complicating diplomatic efforts (Carnegie Endowment, 2025). Conversely, regional normalization could create incentives for Iran to engage constructively in nuclear talks, as improved ties between Israel and Arab states reduce the likelihood of confrontation and open channels for multilateral dialogue. The JCPOA's future remains intertwined with the broader regional security environment shaped by the Accords.

Potential for Regional Security Architecture without Iran

The Abraham Accords have laid the groundwork for a regional security architecture centered on Israel and moderate Arab states, potentially excluding Iran. This emerging bloc aims to coordinate intelligence sharing, military cooperation, and counterterrorism, presenting a united front against Iranian influence (Chatham House, 2023). Such an architecture could enhance stability by formalizing alliances and reducing conflict risks through deterrence. However, excluding Iran risks alienating a major regional actor, potentially exacerbating tensions and driving Tehran toward more aggressive postures or alternative alliances with China and Russia (Carnegie Endowment, 2025). For sustainable peace, some analysts argue Iran's inclusion or engagement in regional dialogues is

essential. Without it, proxy conflicts, asymmetric warfare, and nuclear proliferation risks remain high. Balancing exclusion with engagement will be a critical challenge for policymakers aiming for long-term stability.

Conclusion

The Abraham Accords represent a transformative shift in Middle Eastern geopolitics, breaking with decades of Arab consensus on Israel and reshaping regional alliances. The accords have fostered unprecedented normalization between Israel and several Arab states, notably the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan, with significant cooperation in economic, technological, and security domains (AJC, n.d.; The Security Distillery, 2025). This realignment has directly challenged Iran's regional ambitions, undermining its traditional role as the primary antagonist to Israel and the unifying force for anti-Israel resistance movements.

Iran's response to the Accords has been multifaceted. Officially, Tehran condemned the agreements as a betrayal of the Palestinian cause and a threat to Muslim unity, framing the Accords as a "strategic idiocy" and a "stab in the back" by Gulf States (Foreign Policy, 2020). Iran intensified its support for proxy groups such as Hezbollah, the Houthis, and Iraqi militias, escalating asymmetric warfare tactics to counterbalance the growing Arab-Israeli alliance (FDD, 2024). Simultaneously, Iran pursued strategic and diplomatic reorientation by strengthening ties with Turkey, Qatar, China, and Russia, and proposing alternative regional frameworks like Mwada, which excludes Israel on religious grounds (Carnegie Endowment, 2025). The Abraham Accords have also influenced global dynamics. The United States and European Union have supported the Accords as tools to isolate Iran and promote regional stability, while China and Russia have balanced their relations by deepening ties with Iran and mediating regional détente, notably the 2023 Saudi-Iran agreement (Carnegie Endowment, 2025). The Accords' future momentum faces challenges from ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict flare-ups and Iran's nuclear ambitions, which continue to complicate regional security.

Evaluation of Iran's Success/Failure in Countering the Accords

Iran's efforts to counter the Abraham Accords have met with mixed success. On one hand, Iran has effectively mobilized its proxy networks to impose costs on Israel and its new Arab partners, sustaining a persistent security threat that complicates normalization efforts (FDD, 2024). Its diplomatic outreach to non-Arab regional powers and the creation of alternative frameworks like Mwada demonstrate Tehran's adaptability and resilience (Carnegie Endowment, 2025). On the other hand, Iran has largely failed to prevent the expansion and consolidation of the Accords. The normalization process has continued despite Iranian opposition, with Gulf states deepening cooperation with Israel and pursuing economic and security benefits (AJC, n.d.; The Security Distillery, 2025). The 2023 Saudi-Iran détente, while reducing immediate tensions, also reflects Iran's pragmatic recognition of changing regional realities rather than outright rejection of the new order (Carnegie Endowment, 2025).

Moreover, Iran's nuclear program remains a focal point of international concern, with diplomatic efforts to revive the JCPOA facing significant hurdles. The Accords have indirectly contributed to Iran's isolation, yet Tehran's nuclear advancements and regional influence persist, indicating limitations in Iran's containment (Carnegie Endowment, 2025; The Middle East in 2025, 2025).

Recommendations For Iran

Iran should pursue a balanced strategy that combines pragmatic engagement with regional actors alongside maintaining its security interests. Tehran's promotion of inclusive initiatives like Mwada could serve as a foundation for dialogue with Arab states, potentially reducing regional isolation and mitigating conflict risks (Carnegie Endowment, 2025). Iran should also consider constructive participation in nuclear negotiations to alleviate sanctions and improve economic conditions, which would enhance its regional standing and reduce incentives for confrontation. At the same time, Iran must recalibrate its support for proxy groups to avoid escalating conflicts that undermine its diplomatic efforts and provoke broader regional instability.

A measured approach that prioritizes diplomacy and economic development over military confrontation will better serve Iran's long-term interests.

For Regional Actors

Arab Gulf states and Israel should continue to build on the Abraham Accords by expanding economic, security, and cultural cooperation, while addressing the Palestinian issue with renewed commitment to avoid alienating key regional stakeholders (AJC, n.d.; Chatham House, 2023). Gulf States, particularly Saudi Arabia, should leverage their influence to encourage inclusive regional dialogues that incorporate Iran, reducing the risk of prolonged conflict and proxy wars. Regional actors must also develop coordinated strategies to manage Iran's nuclear ambitions through diplomacy backed by credible deterrence. Strengthening multilateral frameworks for conflict resolution and economic integration can foster stability and shared prosperity.

For Global Powers Involved in Middle Eastern Affairs

The United States and European Union should maintain bipartisan support for the Abraham Accords while actively facilitating diplomatic engagement between Iran and its neighbors to reduce tensions (The Middle East in 2025, 2025). Reviving and enforcing the JCPOA remains critical to preventing nuclear proliferation and stabilizing the region. China and Russia's growing influence should be acknowledged by Western powers, encouraging multilateral cooperation that includes these actors to address regional security challenges comprehensively (Carnegie Endowment, 2025). Global powers must balance pressure on Iran with incentives for constructive diplomacy, ensuring that sanctions and military posturing do not derail dialogue. A coordinated international approach that supports regional integration, addresses core conflicts, and promotes economic development will be essential for sustainable peace and security in the Middle East.

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