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DIPLOMATIC RECOGNITION OF ISRAEL BY UAE AND BAHRAIN: REGIONAL REACTIONS AND INDIA'S CONCERNS

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Diplomatic Recognition of Israel by UAE and Bahrain: Regional Reactions and India's Concerns

Abstract

The recent Abraham Accords signed between Israel, the UAE and Bahrain marked the establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and the two GCC states. But clandestine relations between Israel and most of the GCC states have been going on since the past three decades and the Accords are merely a formalisation of an ongoing process. The establishment of diplomatic relations has brought about interesting reactions from the region, especially the different GCC states. Apart from the UAE and Bahrain, two different sets of reactions are visible among the GCC states. The first group, which includes Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Oman already has friendly relations with Israel but are not in a position to formally establish diplomatic relations because of various reasons. The second is the lone GCC state of Kuwait which is opposed to the normalisation of ties with Israel unless the Palestinian issue is settled. This paper looks not just at the regional reactions, but India's concerns with regard to the Abraham Accords, including long-term nuclear proliferation concerns in West Asia in the context of the recent starting of operations at UAE's Barakah nuclear power station and Israel's nuclear capability.

Introduction

The recently concluded peace deals between Israel on the one side and the Arab Gulf states of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain on the other, known as the Abraham Accords, pointing out to the shared heritage of the three Abrahamic faiths, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, have been widely acclaimed as a major breakthrough in the tumultuous environment of West Asia. It is seen as a major advancement in Arab-Israeli relations. The US administration of Donald Trump and especially his son-in-law Jared Kushner, who is Senior Advisor to the US administration and its point man in West Asia, has taken complete political credit for the success of brokering these deals. But detractors claim that these deals are merely formalisation or a coming out of the clandestine relations between Israel and most of the Arab Gulf states which have been going on for some time. While these claims are true, the point that is clear is that unlike the peace deals between Egypt and Israel in 1979 and Israel and Jordan in 1994, the present agreements between Israel and the Gulf states have mostly separated the Israel-Palestine dispute from the gamut of Arab-Israeli relations. While the earlier treaties achieved a 'cold peace' between Israel and the Arab states of Egypt and Jordan, the present agreements envisage the pursuit of warm relations and people-to-people contacts in several relevant areas between the two sides like business, tourism, scientific cooperation, direct flights, etc.

Contemporary History of Israel-GCC Relations

Clandestine relations between Israel and the Arab Gulf states had been going on since the previous decades, the scale of which increased in the 2000s.

The first instance of cooperation between the two sides was during the civil war in former North Yemen when Israel and Saudi Arabia collaborated clandestinely against Nasser's Egyptian forces in North Yemen.¹ But the overall nature of the relations between the two sides during most of this period was antagonistic. The founding fathers of the Arab Gulf states saw Israel as an enemy and sided with the Arab states that fought wars against Israel during its foundation in 1948 and the Arab-Israeli Wars that followed. The only exception to this rule was in the case of the former North Yemen as mentioned above. This feeling towards Israel lasted well into the 1990s. But the only Arab Gulf state that adopted a different stance even during this time was Oman, always an outlier among the Arab Gulf states, who publicly supported the then Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's peace negotiations and subsequent treaty with Israel during 1978-79 and was one of the three Arab states not to break diplomatic relations with Egypt. For this, it was 'ostracised' by its Gulf neighbours.²

Diplomatic relations between Israel and the GCC states began gradually after the 1991 Madrid Conference on Arab-Israeli peace.³ The first time an Israeli leader visited an Arab Gulf country was in December 1994, when the then Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin visited Salalah in Oman. Rabin's successor, Shimon Peres, also visited Oman in April 1996 and met Sultan Qaboos.⁴ Low-key Israeli trade offices then opened up in Oman and Qatar.⁵ These were closed after a surge in Israeli-Palestinian violence in the second Intifada which erupted in 2000.⁶ Israel continued to maintain a token presence at its Doha mission until the Qatari government closed it permanently in January 2009 to protest the Israeli offensive in Gaza that had started in December 2008.⁷ But a recent statement by Eli

1. Ulrichsen, Kristian Coates. 2016. *Israel and the Arab Gulf States: Drivers and Directions of Change*. Houston, Texas: James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy of Rice University, p. 2. Accessed September 19, 2020. <https://scholarship.rice.edu/bitstream/handle/1911/91811/CME-pub-GCCIsrael-090716.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

2. *Ibid*, p. 3.

3. *Ibid*, p. 3.

4. *Ibid*, pp. 3-4.

5. Gardner, Frank. 2020. "With UAE Deal, Israel Opens Tentative New Chapter with Gulf Arabs." Accessed September 17, 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-53805828>.

6. Landler, Mark. 2020. "Another Gulf State Recognizes Israel: Here is Why It Matters." Accessed September 19, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/12/world/middleeast/bahrain-israel.html?auth=login-email&login=email>.

7. Ulrichsen, Kristian Coates. 2016. *Israel and the Arab Gulf States: Drivers and Directions of Change*. Houston, Texas: James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy of Rice University, p. 4. Accessed September 19, 2020. <https://scholarship.rice.edu/bitstream/handle/1911/91811/CME-pub-GCCIsrael-090716.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

Avidar, an MP of the Israeli parliament, the Knesset, and former Israeli representative to Doha, revealed that even after the official closing of the Israeli trade office in Doha, Qatar continued to maintain relations with Israel in a low key manner.⁸

Generational changes in the leadership of the GCC states, excluding Oman, between 1995 and 2006, as the group of rulers in power since the 1970s and 1980s was succeeded by a younger group of leaders, brought about changes in the regional and foreign policies of these states, especially in the 2000s. The Arab Peace Initiative, launched by Saudi Arabia's then Crown Prince Abdullah at the Arab League Summit in Beirut, in 2002, brought about a major change in the earlier hard-line 'rejectionist' stance on Israel. The Arab Peace Initiative showed a willingness to formally and collectively recognise Israel's existence in exchange for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as capital.⁹ The onset of the "Arab Spring" protests in the Arab world for political changes brought about a shared concern among Israel and the GCC states about the rising influence of Iran in the Arab world and its interventions in the conflicts that were spawned by these protests. The two sides were especially worried about the efforts of the administration of the former US President Barack Obama to negotiate a nuclear agreement with Iran. There was a collaboration between the policymakers of the GCC states and Israel in their attempts to lobby against the nuclear deal with Iran in Washington, D.C., especially during the 20 months between the announcement of the Iranian nuclear negotiations in November 2013 and the actual agreement in July 2015.¹⁰ Since then, there has been sustained cooperation and coordination between Israel and the Arab Gulf states on various issues. But it is interesting

to note here that Sultan Qaboos of Oman, as a neutral party, provided the venue for the conduct of parleys between the Americans and the Iranians, leading to the Iran nuclear deal.¹¹ Here again, Oman proved that it was an outlier in the matter of the GCC's negative reactions to the Iran nuclear deal.

Relations, specifically between Israel and the UAE, improved after the passing away of Sheikh Zayed in November 2004.¹² These relations were especially crucial with regard to their common perception that Iran was a threat to the region. The relationship between Israel and the UAE, in the areas of military and intelligence sharing regarding Iran, has been going on since some time. Soon after Barack Obama became US President in 2009, Israel and the UAE joined forces for the first time to pressure Washington to take a strong stand against Iran.¹³ In some significant areas, the relationship between the two sides is deeper and wider than Israel's relationship with Jordan or Egypt. Israel and the UAE are employing similar surveillance technology to monitor the separation wall between Jerusalem and the West Bank in the former and in Dubai to prevent public disorder in the latter.¹⁴ In the field of cyber-espionage and big data analysis, Israeli companies have provided Abu Dhabi with niche capabilities.

Companies such as Dark Matter and NSO Group in the UAE were staffed with Israeli cyber experts, including veterans of the Israeli army's Unit 8200, who were paid high remuneration in dollars to hack phones, gather intelligence, and monitor Islamists, Arab dissidents and Gulf leaders. Former Israeli special forces soldiers have worked as military trainers and mercenaries for the UAE to hunt down Islamists in Yemen or assist Abu Dhabi's proxy, the warlord

8. "Qatar Deceived Arab States over Trade Office, Says Israeli Politician." 2020. Accessed September 26, 2020. <https://www.thenational.ae/world/gcc/qatar-deceived-arab-states-over-trade-office-says-israeli-politician-1.1066907>.

9. Ulrichsen, Kristian Coates. 2016. *Israel and the Arab Gulf States: Drivers and Directions of Change*. Houston, Texas: James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy of Rice University, p. 4. Accessed September 19, 2020. <https://scholarship.rice.edu/bitstream/handle/1911/91811/CME-pub-GCCIsrael-090716.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

11. Tran, Edwin. 2019. "The Rise and Fall of the JCPOA: Oman's Foreign Policy, Part 3." Accessed September 29, 2020. <https://international-review.org/the-rise-and-fall-of-the-jcpoa-omans-foreign-policy-part-3/>.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

13. Krieg, Andreas. 2020. "The UAE and Israel: More than a Marriage of Convenience." Accessed September 17, 2020. <https://www.middleeast-eye.net/opinion/uae-israel-ties-more-marriage-convenience>.

14. Burton, Guy. 2020. "What the Israel-UAE Agreement Means for Asian Powers." Accessed September 18, 2020. <https://thediplomat.com/2020/09/what-the-israel-uae-agreement-means-for-asian-powers/>.

Haftar in Libya.¹⁵ Such relations with Israel became significantly important from the perspective of the UAE leadership in the face of US inaction after Iran's attacks on the Saudi oil infrastructure in September 2019 and the understanding that any war with Iran would be borne solely by the Arab Gulf states.¹⁶ The economic ties deepened much before the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's initiatives and there are also significant people-to-people contacts.¹⁷ Around 3,000 Jews are estimated to live in Abu Dhabi and Dubai, many with dual citizenship. Since 2015, Israel has had formal representation at the International Renewable Energy Agency based in Abu Dhabi, with Israeli officials visiting the Gulf state frequently.¹⁸ The growth of Israel's trade with Dubai in particular was significant, especially the joint venture between Dubai-owned DP World and Israel's largest shipping firm Zim Integrated Shipping.¹⁹ The Emirati investment fund Mubadala, which has a capital worth of about \$230bn, is said to be one of the most important investors in the Israeli technology sector.²⁰

The Abraham Accords and Regional Reactions

The timing of these deals has been attributed to several factors. The more high profile deal between Israel and the UAE was concluded in August, 2020 to prevent Israeli plans to annex 30 percentage of the West Bank which contained Israeli settlements.²¹ The UAE was close to officially recognising Israel, but the annexation would have led to widespread protests in the Arab world making it difficult for the UAE to take

that step. When Netanyahu did not begin the process of annexation on July 1, as he had stated earlier, the UAE took the opportunity to promise full normalisation of relations if the annexation was stopped.²² Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has declared that the annexation has been temporarily halted as part of the Abraham Accords. But the real reason for the halt of the annexation plans is the likely victory of Joe Biden in the American Presidential elections. Both Israel and the UAE also know that the Democrats are likely to regain control of the Senate. Joe Biden and the Democrats in the Congress are more critical of Israel's actions, including attempts to annex parts of the West Bank, than the Republicans. Both Israel and the UAE want to maintain good relations with the Democrats. They also know that a Democrat US President is not likely to support an alliance against Iran like Donald Trump.²³ In fact, it can even be expected that a US administration under the Democrats might even try to reinstate the Iranian nuclear deal.

The Abraham Accords comes as a consolation for Muhammad bin Zayed, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, more popularly known as MBZ, who is also the de facto ruler of Abu Dhabi. In the wake of Muhammad bin Zayed's several failed projects such as his support for the coup attempt in Turkey by the US-based cleric Fethullah Gullen in 2016, the ongoing siege of Qatar and the failure of his surrogate forces led by the warlord Khalifa Haftar to seize Tripoli in the Libyan civil war, the Abraham Accords have arrived

15. Krieg, Andreas. 2020. "The UAE and Israel: More than a Marriage of Convenience." Accessed September 17, 2020. <https://www.middleeast-eye.net/opinion/uae-israel-ties-more-marriage-convenience>.

16. Krieg, Andreas. 2020. "The UAE and Israel: More than a Marriage of Convenience." Accessed September 17, 2020. <https://www.middleeast-eye.net/opinion/uae-israel-ties-more-marriage-convenience>.

17. Avishai, Bernard. 2020. "The Israel-U.A.E. Deal May Boost Both Economies, but It's also Another Netanyahu Ploy." Accessed September 18, 2020. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/the-israel-uae-deal-may-boost-both-economies-but-its-also-another-netanyahu-plot>.

18. Krieg, Andreas. 2020. "The UAE and Israel: More than a Marriage of Convenience." Accessed September 17, 2020. <https://www.middleeast-eye.net/opinion/uae-israel-ties-more-marriage-convenience>.

19. Ulrichsen, Kristian Coates. 2016. *Israel and the Arab Gulf States: Drivers and Directions of Change*. Houston, Texas: James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy of Rice University, p. 4. Accessed September 19, 2020. <https://scholarship.rice.edu/bitstream/handle/1911/91811/CME-pub-GCCIIsrael-090716.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

20. Al-Anani, Khalil. 2020. "Israel-UAE Deal: The Emiratis are Now under Israel's Thumb." Accessed September 17, 2020. <https://www.middleeast-eye.net/opinion/israel-uae-deal-mohammed-bin-zayed-under-israeli-thumb>.

21. "The Israel-UAE Deal is Good News for a Troubled Region: Even if Tensions Remain High Elsewhere in the Middle East." 2020. Accessed September 17, 2020. <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2020/08/20/the-israel-uae-deal-is-good-news-for-a-troubled-region>.

22. Cook, Steven A. 2020. "What's Behind the New Israel-UAE Peace Deal?" Accessed September 16, 2020. <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/whats-behind-new-israel-uae-peace-deal>.

23. Telhami, Shibley. 2020. "The Biden Factor in the UAE-Israel Deal." Accessed September 18, 2020. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/08/15/the-biden-factor-in-the-uae-israel-deal/>.

as God-given.²⁴ The UAE's deal with Israel helps it buy US F-35 stealth fighter jets, Predator drones and EA-18G Growler jets and securing the Israel lobby's support in Washington to help conceal its unpopular interventions in Yemen, Libya, Egypt and other arenas. There are also benefits for the UAE in the area of medical research. After the deal was announced, UAE-based APEX National Investment said it agreed to conduct research on the coronavirus with Israel's Tera Group.²⁵

The deals were opportune for Netanyahu as he was under fire in Israel over allegations of corruption and his poor handling of Covid-19. Because of these developments, Netanyahu can temporarily duck the issue of annexation of the Israeli settlements in the West Bank as demanded by his nationalist allies by placing the deals as much needed political attainments. This is also in accordance with the views of the nationalists who have always rejected the notion of "land for peace" and have insisted that peace for peace would be enough.²⁶ There are also economic benefits for Israel. It is expected that Abu Dhabi's US\$700 bn sovereign wealth fund will contribute to investments in Israel.²⁷ Trump had put forward proposals for Israel-Palestine peace in January this year, which included a plan to hand over Jerusalem to Israel and permit it to extend its sovereignty to all Jewish settlements in the West Bank, which was promptly rejected by the Palestinians.²⁸ These peace deals will help Trump to deflect attention from the failure of the "Deal of the Century" that was proposed

by him. It was widely criticised as being favourable to Israel.²⁹

Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan and Oman publicly welcomed the Abraham Accords. Saudi Arabia was silent, but there is speculation that the silence is a sign that the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman supports the agreement but is constrained because his father, King Salman bin Abdulaziz, opposes normalisation of ties with Israel.³⁰ King Salman is more traditional in his approach and is more pro-Palestine. The Crown Prince Abdullah Peace Plan of 2002, well known as the Arab Peace Initiative and launched at the Beirut Arab summit, was authored by Saudi Arabia. The plan had declared that the Arab countries were willing to normalise relations with Israel if it agreed to withdraw to its 1967 borders.³¹ Moreover, any Saudi attempt at normalisation of ties with Israel could lead to calls by rivals like Iran, Qatar and Turkey internationalising the two holy mosques of Mecca and Medina, the two holiest sites of Islam.³² A prestigious title of the king of Saudi Arabia is "Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques," which has religious as well as political significance. The present deals are vehemently opposed by the Palestinians as they see them as weakening their bargaining position with Israel. The veteran Palestinian politician Hanan Ashrawi tweeted "May you never be sold out by your friends".³³ President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority, who retorted that the deal was a "betrayal" by the UAE has been disengaged from the Trump administration for the last two years for its

24. Hearst, David. 2020. "UAE-Israel Deal: The New Hegemons of the Middle East." Accessed September 17, 2020. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/israel-uae-deal-middle-east-new-hegemons>.

25. Wainer, David. 2020. "Why U.A.E. Struck a Deal with Israel and Why it Matters." Accessed September 18, 2020. https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/why-uae-struck-a-deal-with-israel-and-why-it-matters/2020/08/19/0da78b54-e1d4-11ea-82d8-5e55d47e90ca_story.html.

26. "The Israel-UAE Deal is Good News for a Troubled Region: Even if Tensions Remain High Elsewhere in the Middle East." 2020. Accessed September 17, 2020. <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2020/08/20/the-israel-uae-deal-is-good-news-for-a-troubled-region>.

27. Al-Anani, Khalil. 2020. "Israel-UAE Deal: The Emiratis are Now under Israel's Thumb." Accessed September 17, 2020. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/israel-uae-deal-mohammed-bin-zayed-under-israeli-thumb>.

28. Subramanian, Nirupama. 2020. "After Israel-UAE-US Deal: Gainers and Losers, and Key Takeaways." Accessed September 18, 2020. <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/israel-uae-us-deal-gainers-losers-key-takeaways-6555197/>.

29. "Trump Announces 'Peace Deal' between Bahrain and Israel." 2020. Accessed September 18, 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-54124996>.

30. Cook, Steven A. 2020. "What's Behind the New Israel-UAE Peace Deal?" Accessed September 16, 2020. <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/whats-behind-new-israel-uae-peace-deal>.

31. Ayoob, Mohammed. 2020. "The UAE-Israel Deal isn't About Peace." Accessed September 17, 2020. <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/the-uae-israel-deal-isnt-about-peace/>.

32. "Israel 'Normalisation': Is Saudi Arabia Softening Its Stance?" 2020. Accessed September 29, 2020. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/09/16/israel-normalisation-is-saudi-arabia-softening-its-stance/>.

33. Waxman, Dov. 2020. "UAE and Israel Deal is neither a Peace Treaty nor will it End the Palestinian Conflict." Accessed September 17, 2020. <https://theprint.in/world/uae-and-israel-deal-is-neither-a-peace-treaty-nor-will-it-end-the-palestine-conflict/486981/>

pro-Israel stand.³⁴ The Palestinians were especially exasperated when the Arab League refused to hold an emergency meeting to condemn the Israel-UAE deal. It was a sign that the Palestinian veto on Arab-Israeli relations was being challenged within the Arab League.³⁵ Arab states may await the outcome of the November US presidential elections before making further attempts to normalise relations with Israel.³⁶

On the other hand, Iran, Qatar and Turkey have all criticised the Accords, with the latter threatening to withdraw its ambassador from Abu Dhabi.³⁷ Relations between Turkey and the UAE have been deteriorating since some time. Turkey has been Qatar's prime supporter and supplier of essential goods, which has helped the latter to defy the embargo that Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the UAE and Bahrain had imposed on it in 2017 for its close relations with Iran. Turkey has a military base in Qatar and sent additional troops to the country when there was a possibility of a clash with Saudi Arabia and the UAE in 2017. Turkey and the UAE support opposite sides in Libya. Relations between Israel and Turkey have also been strained.³⁸ Qatar's position is the most complicated with regard to Arab-Israeli relations. Qatar declared on September 14 that it would not normalise relations with Israel unless the Palestinian question was settled.³⁹ Qatar has managed to maintain ties with parties as far apart as Iran, Israel, the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas as part of its strategy to become the main mediator in the region, thereby increasing its regional and international prestige. It is also part of Qatar's strategy to ensure its autonomy vis-a-vis the domination of the GCC by Saudi Arabia and also competition from its

rival, the UAE.

When Israel conducted an offensive on the Gaza Strip in January 2009, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Kuwait refused to attend an Arab summit that was hastily convened by the Qatari leadership in Doha. They expressed their anger at Qatar's support for Hamas. The three countries instead organised a rival summit in Riyadh. This was an early example of the growing differences between Qatar and its Gulf neighbours that came out into the open after the Arab Spring.⁴⁰ Besides the steps taken by Qatar to open relations with Israel mentioned earlier, Qatar has cooperated with Israel to maintain peace in the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip. Qatar pays US\$30 million per month to Gaza to maintain the peace.⁴¹ When the blockade of Qatar was imposed by Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain and Egypt in 2017, the impact of the crisis reached Washington where representatives of the UAE, sought to secure President Donald Trump's support for their blockade by focusing on Doha's links to Hamas. There was the threat of dragging Israel into this dispute between the GCC states. But Israel effectively stayed out of this dispute by quietly extending Qatar a diplomatic lifeline through accelerating cooperation in Gaza, which helped Qatar regain its footing in Washington. Qatar's close relations with Israel was proved by the fact that even after the end of formal diplomatic relations between Qatar and Israel in 2009, Qatar hosted American Jewish rabbis for interfaith dialogue as part of the Doha International Centre for Interfaith Dialogue and former emir of Qatar Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani was very proud of his country's relations with

34. Subramanian, Nirupama. 2020. "After Israel-UAE-US Deal: Gainers and Losers, and Key Takeaways." Accessed September 18, 2020. <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/israel-uae-us-deal-gainers-losers-key-takeaways-6555197/>.

35. Toameh, Khaled Abu. 2020. "Arab League Rejects Palestinian Demand to Condemn Israel-UAE Deal." Accessed September 18, 2020. <https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/palestinians-urge-arabs-to-reject-israel-uae-deal-641653>.

36. Miller, Aaron David. 2020. "Success in the UAE-Israel Accord is Good News for Everyone Except the Palestinians." Accessed September 18, 2020. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/08/31/success-in-uae-israel-accord-is-good-news-for-everyone-except-palestinians-pub-82616>.

37. Cook, Steven A. 2020. "What's Behind the New Israel-UAE Peace Deal?" Accessed September 16, 2020. <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/whats-behind-new-israel-uae-peace-deal>.

38. Ayoob, Mohammed. 2020. "The UAE-Israel Deal isn't about Peace." Accessed September 17, 2020. <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/the-uae-israel-deal-isnt-about-peace/>.

39. "Qatar Rules Out Normalising Relations With Israel." 2020. Accessed September 24, 2020. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/09/15/qatar-rules-out-normalising-relations-with-israel/>.

40. Ulrichsen, Kristian Coates. 2016. *Israel and the Arab Gulf States: Drivers and Directions of Change*. Houston, Texas: James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy of Rice University, p. 5. Accessed September 19, 2020. <https://scholarship.rice.edu/bitstream/handle/1911/91811/CME-pub-GCCIsrael-090716.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

41. Hassanein, Haisam. 2020. "Qatar's Media Campaign against UAE-Israel Deal Reflects a Wider Gulf Rift." Accessed September 25, 2020. <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/qatars-media-campaign-uae-israel-deal>.

Israel. In fact, Qatar's close relations with Israel had also angered Saudi Arabia.⁴² There were reports of a visit by Mossad director Yossi Cohen to Doha, which was followed by reports that a cease-fire between Hamas and Israel had been brokered after the most recent flare up.⁴³ Considering its needs to continue to maintain relations with Iran and organisations such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas, Qatar had opted for continuing relations with Israel in a low-key manner which was very apt in a tensed and volatile region like West Asia.

There is extensive competition between Qatar and the UAE in their regional foreign policies and within Washington policy circles. The UAE's peace deal with Israel threatens to harm Qatar's unique space for itself in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process as a bridge between Israel and Hamas. This is seen as threatening Qatar's ability to influence the situation with regard to peace between Israel and the Arabs. There is also a religious angle to this competition with the grant of the right to Abu Dhabi to fly Muslims from its airports to visit Al-Aqsa mosque, the third holiest site in Islam. These trips will provide the Emirates with a new level of religious prestige as it presents itself as a bridge between the Muslim world and Al-Aqsa mosque.⁴⁴ Civil society organisations remain steadfast in their opposition to normalising ties with Israel. These include groups in the Gulf.⁴⁵

There is a possibility that Oman might normalise relations with Israel. Netanyahu had met with the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said in Muscat in late 2018, the first visit of an Israeli Prime Minister to the Arab Gulf states in over two decades. However, Sultan Haitham

bin Tariq, who came to power in January 2020 after the death of Qaboos, could act more cautiously regarding relations with Israel as he consolidates his rule. It is believed that other Arab countries such as Sudan and Morocco might sign their own deals with Israel.⁴⁶ Kuwait reacted to the Israel-UAE deal by stating that it would not have diplomatic relations with Israel without the settlement of the Palestinian issue and that it would be the last Arab Gulf state to normalise relations with Israel.⁴⁷ There are several factors responsible for Kuwait's stand on the peace deals. One is that Kuwait has the most representative political system among the Arab Gulf countries. Kuwait's National Assembly wields significant power and channels public sentiment against normalisation. The relative autonomy of Kuwait's Islamist political opposition and its strength in parliament is also an important factor.⁴⁸ Kuwait's parliament is the only legislative body in the Arab Gulf which had a role in electing its leader in 2006.⁴⁹ Besides its parliament, Kuwait's vibrant political culture is also reflected in *diwanyiya*, gatherings that regularly take place in parlours attached to homes, where there are more free exchange of ideas than the majlis gatherings in other GCC states, which are under government oversight. This creates opportunities for a more vibrant Kuwaiti civil society that has been able to mobilise opinion against normalisation of relations with Israel. Besides these aspects of political organisation in Kuwait, the historical ties that the country has with the Palestinians is also an important factor. Kuwait has around 80,000 Palestinians—one of the largest numbers in the Gulf.⁵⁰ The views of the majority of the native citizens of the other GCC states, who are

42. Neubauer, Sigurd. 2020. "Jews and Qatar are Partners in Peace, Not Enemies- Opinion." Accessed September 26, 2020. <https://www.jpost.com/opinion/jews-and-qatar-are-partners-in-peace-not-enemies-638597>.

43. Hassanein, Haisam. 2020. "Qatar's Media Campaign against UAE-Israel Deal Reflects a Wider Gulf Rift." Accessed September 25, 2020. <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/qatars-media-campaign-uae-israel-deal>.

44. Ibid.

45. Cook, Steven A. 2020. "What's Behind the New Israel-UAE Peace Deal?" Accessed September 16, 2020. <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/whats-behind-new-israel-uae-peace-deal>.

46. Ibid.

47. "Kuwait Says it'll be 'Last to Normalize' with Israel, will Stand by Palestinians." 2020. Accessed September 20, 2020. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/kuwaiti-officials-reject-israel-normalization-reaffirm-support-for-palestinians/#gs.gmxvnf>.

48. Parker, Tyler B. 2020. "Why Kuwait Rejects Normalization With Israel." Accessed September 24, 2020. https://www.fairobserver.com/region/middle_east_north_africa/tyler-parker-kuwait-news-israel-relations-uae-gulf-arab-news-international-media-news-79163/.

49. "Kuwait's Emir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad Al-Sabah Dies at Age 91." 2020. Accessed September 29, 2020. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/kuwaits-emir-sheikh-sabah-al-ahmad-al-sabah-dies-at-age-91/articleshow/78388985.cms>.

50. Parker, Tyler B. 2020. "Why Kuwait Rejects Normalization With Israel." Accessed September 24, 2020. https://www.fairobserver.com/region/middle_east_north_africa/tyler-parker-kuwait-news-israel-relations-uae-gulf-arab-news-international-media-news-79163/.

not able to express their opinions freely with regard to the normalisation of ties with Israel, are likely to be similar to that of Kuwait. Therefore, the political opinion of Kuwait is very important in gauging the sentiments of the wider GCC public.

Less than a month after the Israel-UAE peace deal, Bahrain announced in September that it would normalise relations with Israel. Following the Israel-UAE agreement, Bahrain had stated that it would allow flights between Israel and the UAE to use its airspace.⁵¹ The Abraham Accords were signed on September 15 at the White House by the leaders and representatives of the three countries presided by US President Donald Trump. Bahrain being a Shia majority country, ruled by a Sunni monarch, may experience more popular opposition to the deal with Israel than the UAE.⁵² In contrast to Bahrain's official media channels, the channels controlled by the Bahraini Shia opposition have opposed the peace deal.⁵³ Opposition to the deal with Israel was trending high on Bahraini twitter. Relations between Israel and Bahrain came to light when Bahrain hosted the Trump administration's Peace to Prosperity economic conference as part of the President's Middle East peace proposal in June 2019. Bahrain has a cultural-historical element which provides meaning to the deal with Israel. Bahrain has a small Jewish community which has both a synagogue and cemetery operational to this day.⁵⁴ This community has been in Bahrain since the late nineteenth century and is

well integrated in Bahraini society. It is understood that Bahrain would not make a decision on this issue without Saudi approval as it has been under Saudi influence since some time, especially since the Saudi and Emirati-led intervention in 2011 to quell the protests on the island against the ruling al-Khalifa family. As Saudi Arabia is not in a position to normalise relations with Israel, it expects that Bahrain's signing of the deal with Israel⁵⁵ would be politically seen by the Americans and Israelis as Saudi's indirect support for the Abraham Accords, without attracting wider criticism from the Muslim world. Bahrain's step could help it to obtain air defence systems from the US.⁵⁶

India's Concerns

India generally reacted in a positive manner to the Abraham Accords but was also cautious. India's Ministry of External Affairs brought out the statement that "India has always supported peace and stability in West Asia, which is our extended neighbourhood," but it also reiterated that India supported resumption of direct negotiations for an acceptable two-state solution.⁵⁷ In such a manner, India balanced its interests by supporting its strategic partners such as Israel and the UAE along with its traditional support for the Palestinian cause.⁵⁸ Besides India's close relations with Israel, which is the second largest source of arms for India, the Narendra Modi government has prioritised building relations with the UAE.⁵⁹ Therefore, in one way, it is in India's interests

51. "Trump Announces 'Peace Deal' between Bahrain and Israel." 2020. Accessed September 18, 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-54124996>.

52. Landau, Noa, and Reuters. 2020. "Bahrain Normalizes Ties with Israel Weeks after UAE Deal." Haaretz, September 12. Accessed September 18, 2020. <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/premium-bahrain-normalizes-ties-with-israel-trump-announces-weeks-after-uae-deal-1.9147932>.

53. Hassanein, Haisam. 2020. "Qatar's Media Campaign against UAE-Israel Deal Reflects a Wider Gulf Rift." Accessed September 24, 2020. <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/qatars-media-campaign-uae-israel-deal>.

54. Landau, Noa, and Reuters. 2020. "Bahrain Normalizes Ties with Israel Weeks after UAE Deal." Haaretz, September 12. Accessed September 18, 2020. <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/premium-bahrain-normalizes-ties-with-israel-trump-announces-weeks-after-uae-deal-1.9147932>.

55. Nahmias, Omri, Tovah Lazaroff and Reuters. 2020. "Bahrain Agrees to Normalize Relations with Israel, Trump Announces". September 12, 2020. Accessed September 19, 2020. <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/trump-expected-to-announce-historic-bahrain-israel-normalization-agreement-641961>

56. Landler, Mark. 2020. "Another Gulf State Recognizes Israel: Here is Why It Matters." Accessed September 19, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/12/world/middleeast/bahrain-israel.html?auth=login-email&login=email>.

57. "India Welcomes Abraham Accords, Calls for Talks on 'Two-State Solution.'" 2020. Accessed September 29, 2020. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/india-welcomes-abraham-accords-calls-for-talks-on-two-state-solution/story-g5MOU9PIpwxQ0Zzc5CfZ3N.html>.

58. Mishra, Kasturi. 2020. "India and the Abraham Accord." Accessed September 29, 2020. <https://www.asiainglobalaffairs.in/reflections/india-and-the-abraham-accord/>.

59. Hazarika, Ishan, and Badri Narayanan Gopalakrishnan. 2020. "Post Abraham Accords, UAE Finds Itself in India's Shoes." Accessed September 29, 2020. <https://theguardian.com/post-abraham-accord-uae-finds-itself-in-indias-shoes/>; "UAE-Israel Deal has Opened 'Lots of Opportunities': S. Jaishankar." 2020. Accessed September 18, 2020. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/uae-israel-deal-has-opened-lots-of-opportunities-s-jaishankar/story-nS364lj7ccwqihpAfsJCIK.html>

that two of its strategic partners develop closer relations which could in the future turn into a trilateral cooperation between the three countries.

Nevertheless, growing cooperation between Israel and the UAE can impact India's interests in certain areas as clearly mentioned by ex-Indian diplomat Mahesh Sachdev in *The Hindu*. Israel has niche strengths in areas such as pharmaceuticals and gem and jewellery, precisely the areas in which India has established a footprint in the Arab Gulf region. Israel can bring such skills into the Arab Gulf markets, especially if the UAE and Bahrain become entrepôts to Israeli exports of goods and services to diverse geographies. Moreover, Israel has the potential to supply skilled and semi-skilled manpower to the GCC states, especially from the Arabic-speaking Sephardim and Mizrahim ethnicities besides Israeli Arabs who can easily bridge the cultural gap.⁶⁰ As mentioned by Sachdev

“Israeli foray into the Gulf has the potential to disrupt the existing politico-economic architecture India has carefully built with the GCC states.”⁶¹

Diplomatically, India does not face as many challenges in relation to the Abraham Accords as it did when it normalised relations with Israel in 1992. That decision was a reversal of the ideological stand that India had followed for decades since its independence supporting the Palestinian cause and maintaining support for the Arab states in their dispute with Israel. India at that time did not have the stature as an economic and nuclear power that it has today. Rather than any kind of opposition from Arab and non-Arab Muslim states in West Asia because of its relations with Israel, what India will have to deal with is the rivalry among the GCC states such as Qatar and the UAE. It is here that India requires

deft in balancing its relations with the GCC states and thereby protecting its interests. India will also have to expect growing questions on the relevance of the GCC alliance in the face of intractable differences among its members. The kind of alignment that existed with regard to defence and foreign policies among GCC states during the 1980s and 1990s began to break down from the late 2000s. But like other nations of the world, India had maintained bilateral relations with the individual GCC states rather than the GCC alliance as a whole. What can be expected in the future is that GCC states might not react in the same manner or in a united fashion to developments in West Asia unlike the past.

The real concern for India with regard to the Abraham Accords is if the strategic purpose behind the deals was an alliance against Iran.⁶² If such an intention is the main purpose behind the peace deals, then the southern Persian Gulf could become the new battleground for a proxy war between Iran and Israel, especially in the Shia pockets.⁶³ This could also threaten shipping in the Straits of Hormuz, the world's most important oil chokepoint, through which on an average 21 million barrels per day flowed in 2018, amounting to 21 per cent of the global petroleum liquids consumption. It made up about one-third of the total global seaborne traded oil in 2018. Also, more than one-quarter of global liquefied gas trade transited the Strait of Hormuz in 2018.⁶⁴ Nearly two-thirds of India's hydrocarbon imports pass through the narrow Straits of Hormuz. Any conflict involving Iran, Israel and its GCC allies can lead to blocking of the Straits. It should be remembered that the Abraham Accords is signed in the backdrop of Israeli airstrikes against Iranian forces and Iranian-backed Shia militias in Syria, including its eastern region near the Iraqi border. These have been conducted on a regular basis in Syria by Israel to prevent Iran and

60. Sachdev, Mahesh. 2020. “India and the Abraham Accords.” *The Hindu*, September 22. Accessed September 29, 2020. <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/india-and-the-abraham-accords/article32662790.ece>.

61. Ibid.

62. Burton, Guy. 2020. “What the Israel-UAE Agreement Means for Asian Powers?” Accessed September 18, 2020. <https://thediplomat.com/2020/09/what-the-israel-uae-agreement-means-for-asian-powers/>.

63. Sachdev, Mahesh. 2020. “India and the Abraham Accords.” *The Hindu*, September 22. Accessed September 29, 2020. <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/india-and-the-abraham-accords/article32662790.ece>.

64. Barden, Justine. 2019. “The Strait of Hormuz is the World's Most Important Oil Transit Chokepoint.” Accessed September 29, 2020. <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=39932>.

the Hezbollah from gaining a foothold in the country and develop capabilities to target Israel.⁶⁵ The UAE's territory could be used by Israel to spy on Iran.⁶⁶ The UAE hopes to gain Israeli aerial and intelligence help on Iran, including on its abilities to threaten the Strait of Hormuz.⁶⁷

While these are more short-term concerns, there is another possibility that cannot be completely discounted in the present environment of West Asia. This is the possibility of nuclear cooperation between Israel and the UAE leading to the latter attaining nuclear weapons capability resulting in wider nuclear proliferation and a nuclear arms race in the region. It is true that there are factors which could prevent such an eventuality. But there are also aspects which could lead to such a development. On the side of the UAE, there would be little that would make the leadership reject such an opportunity, especially considering the fact that the UAE is only a beginner in developing nuclear technology. The major concern for the UAE would be attracting international opprobrium for openly declaring itself as a nuclear weapons power, especially considering its international trade and commerce and links with Western powers. But as a study of the history of nuclear weapons programmes of states will prove, states can pursue such a capability in a clandestine manner and might decide not to reveal its status even after it has developed significant capability. The prime example of this is Israel itself. South Africa revealed in 1993 that it had constructed seven enriched uranium warheads before President de Klerk dismantled them in 1990.⁶⁸ The UAE could follow such a path.

This means that such a decision will mainly depend on Israeli willingness to provide such capability to the UAE. Israel is the only nuclear weapons power in West Asia, believed to have produced enough weapons-grade plutonium for 100 to 200 warheads.

One of the factors that do not favour Israel providing such help to the UAE is obviously helping an Arab and Muslim nation to attain such a power in a regional environment where religious and sectarian rivalries abound. The second is providing such a capability to a monarchy rather than a democracy or even a military/single-party autocracy. But it has to be remembered that the UAE and other Arab Gulf monarchies have never fought wars with Israel and as mentioned earlier, relations between Israel and the UAE and cooperation in various areas between the two have been robust at least from the 2000s. The Arab protests and conflicts of the 'Arab Spring' have shown that the monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula have proved more resilient in comparison to the military dictatorships and autocracies of other parts of the Arab world. There are continuing Israeli concerns about the UAE's increasing conventional military capabilities as proven by concerns that Israel would lose its conventional military edge in the region if the UAE were to acquire the F-35 stealth fighter jets from the US. But such concerns could decrease with time if very close relations were to emerge between the two countries in the backdrop of rising tensions with Iran and also if there was an alarm that Iran was likely to obtain nuclear weapons capability shortly.

The Israelis could also factor in the good relations between the US and UAE and the leverage that the US could exert over the UAE to act in a responsible fashion. As far as the Israelis are concerned, the emergence of the UAE as a nuclear weapons power can complicate the nuclear deterrence environment in West Asia in Israel's favour if and when an Iranian nuclear weapons capability becomes a reality, as then Iran will have to deal with two rival nuclear threats instead of one. India already has an experience of deliberate proliferation in its own neighbourhood with the Chinese support for Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme as a counter to India's capability. The

65. "Early Morning Airstrike Said to Hit Iranian-Backed Militias in Syria." 2020. Accessed September 18, 2020. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/early-morning-airstrike-said-to-hit-iranian-backed-militias-in-syria/>.

66. Al-Anani, Khalil. 2020. "Israel-UAE Deal: The Emiratis are Now under Israel's Thumb." Accessed September 17, 2020. <https://www.middle-asteye.net/opinion/israel-uae-deal-mohammed-bin-zayed-under-israeli-thumb>.

67. Avishai, Bernard. 2020. "The Israel-U.A.E. Deal May Boost both Economies, but it's also Another Netanyahu Ploy." September 1, 2020. Accessed September 18, 2020. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/the-israel-uae-deal-may-boost-both-economies-but-its-also-another-netanyahu-ploy>.

68. Jackson, Ian. 2009. "Nuclear Energy and Proliferation Risks: Myths and Realities in the Persian Gulf." *International Affairs* 85(6):1157.

end result is India having to contend with two nuclear entities as rivals in its neighbourhood. It is interesting to note the ideological dissonance between China, a communist state and Pakistan, a Muslim state with an avowed Islamic ideology, proving that ideological differences mean little in the face of common threats. This could be a template for understanding the possible future course of relations between Israel and the UAE in the area of nuclear cooperation.

Apart from the political and ideological reasons, there are also technological aspects that could help bring about cooperation between the two sides in the nuclear arena. In the present scenario, the UAE has agreed to maintain transparency with regard to its civilian nuclear programme. The UAE announced in July 2020 that it had started operations in the first of four reactors at the Barakah nuclear power station—the first nuclear power plant in the Arab world. The UAE has declared that it would not enrich its own uranium or reprocess spent fuel.⁶⁹ It has also signed up to the UN's nuclear watchdog's Additional Protocol, significantly enhancing inspection capabilities.⁷⁰ While the UAE might genuinely desire to engage in a peaceful civil nuclear power programme, it could inadvertently begin a nuclear arms race in the region, especially if state intentions are misunderstood. A civilian nuclear energy programme has an implied military value because it keeps the opponents guessing if the state has hidden nuclear weapons capability.⁷¹ Given its present capabilities, the UAE has two means to develop a nuclear weapon. One is trying to manufacture a less efficient but much simpler and more reliable gun-type enriched uranium nuclear device. But the drawback with this model in comparison to a high-tech implosion-type plutonium nuclear weapon is that the former requires greater quantity of enriched uranium.

The second option is building an implosion-type

plutonium nuclear weapon by using civilian-grade plutonium or 'dirty plutonium' by diverting this material from a nuclear power reactor. This is especially crucial as plutonium is required to build the more difficult implosion bomb.⁷² While such a device might not be as efficient as a bomb made of weapons-grade plutonium, it can still cause sufficient damage. Such a model requires a comparatively lesser amount of nuclear material in comparison to the gun-type enriched uranium nuclear device. In practice, it is difficult but not impossible to divert this material from a pressurised water reactor (PWR), the kind of nuclear power units that have been installed at Barakah by the UAE without attracting the attention of visiting IAEA safeguards inspectors.⁷³ Reactors like the Canadian CANDU PWR design and the British AGR gas-cooled reactor design have the capability to extract and replace fuel rod assemblies from the core, which is sometimes necessary occasionally when a fuel rod bursts open or fails. Over a period of time, several fuel assemblies could be covertly removed and diverted to a small-scale reprocessing plant to extract plutonium from the spent fuel. The reprocessing plant would probably be hidden to avoid attention from spy satellites in a manner similar to Iraq's former underground nuclear facilities discovered at Al Tuwaitha. Iran tried to hide its own secret uranium enrichment plant named the Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant underneath a mountainside Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) base near the holy city of Qom.⁷⁴

These options are enough for a breakout nuclear state as a very low amount of uranium-235 or plutonium-239 is needed to make a single atomic weapon. They are useful to make a one-off nuclear weapon that might be useful for its deterrent value as a single military defensive weapon of last resort, rather than as a part of a larger arsenal of

69. *Ibid*, p. 1157.

70. Sabga, Patricia. 2020. "UAE Starts First Nuclear Reactor at Controversial Barakah Plant." 2020. Accessed September 19, 2020. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/08/uae-starts-operations-arab-world-nuclear-power-plant-200801101118964.html>.

71. Jackson, Ian. 2009. "Nuclear Energy and Proliferation Risks: Myths and Realities in the Persian Gulf." *International Affairs* 85 (6):1159.

72. *Ibid*, p. 1164; pp. 1167-68.

73. Jackson, Ian. 2009. "Nuclear Energy and Proliferation Risks: Myths and Realities in the Persian Gulf." *International Affairs* 85(6):1159; "Barakah Nuclear Power Plant". n.d. Accessed September 30, 2020. <https://www.power-technology.com/projects/barakah-nuclear-power-plant-abu-dhabi/>.

74. *Ibid*, pp. 1168-69.

offensive tactical nuclear weapons with second strike capability. The amount of fissile material that the UAE would require for such a purpose is low enough to be secretly procured from a friendly ally like Israel. But the risk inherent in such a transaction is largely due to the chronometric and classified explosion code forensic signatures that would identify the supplying country of origin. These would expose the supplier to international opprobrium, sanctions or even more serious consequences.⁷⁵ What Israel could provide the UAE instead is technical knowhow on how to develop nuclear weapons capability. The Israelis expertise would become more valuable if the UAE were to cross the stage of either building a gun-type enriched uranium nuclear weapon or an implosion-type plutonium nuclear weapon by using civilian-grade plutonium. The Israelis could help the UAE in the development of implosion-type plutonium nuclear weapons or thermonuclear weapons using weapons-grade plutonium which would be required for a larger arsenal of tactical nuclear weapons to ensure survivability and an effective counter-strike response.

The UAE is not the only country among the GCC states that has declared its intention to acquire nuclear capabilities. Even more than the UAE, Saudi Arabia has sent open signals that it desires to develop a nuclear capability to counter that of Iran. After the US, under the Obama administration, concluded the nuclear deal with Iran in 2015 known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Iran had to give up 97 percent of its fuel stockpile, but left open a path to production in the future. As a result of this agreement, the Saudis have been working on the basis of the logic that they would not be able to depend on the US to restrain Iran's nuclear capabilities and they will have to develop their own nuclear deterrent. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman pledged in 2018 that his country would

try to develop or acquire nuclear weapons if Iran continued its work towards a bomb.⁷⁶ The Saudi energy minister has openly noted that enrichment opens up the possibility of military proliferation which is even admitted by the US government officials. Saudi officials have made it clear on more than one occasion that they were interested in a nuclear energy programme because of the relationship of the civilian programme to nuclear weapons.⁷⁷ US intelligence agencies recently circulated a classified analysis about the efforts undertaken by Saudi Arabia with Chinese help to process raw uranium into a form that could later be enriched into weapons fuel. This report also identified a newly completed structure near a solar-panel production area near Riyadh that is suspected to be an undeclared nuclear sight.⁷⁸ An article in the *Wall Street Journal* stated that Western officials were concerned about a different facility in Saudi Arabia's north-west desert which was part of a programme with the Chinese to extract uranium yellowcake from uranium ore. This is a necessary first step in the process of obtaining uranium for later enrichment, either for use in a civilian nuclear reactor, or enriched to much higher levels in a nuclear weapon.⁷⁹

The reason why Saudi Arabia is more emboldened than the UAE about the motives of its attempts to develop nuclear technology could be because of its lesser dependence on international trade and financial relations with the international community unlike the UAE. Saudi Arabia is a much bigger state than the UAE, being the largest in the Arabian Peninsula. It shares borders with not just all of the GCC states, including the island of Bahrain to which it is connected by a causeway, but also with Yemen, Jordan and Iraq along with coastlines in the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. Accordingly, it sees itself as having larger strategic requirements than the other

75. *Ibid*, pp. 1165-66.

76. Mazzeti, Mark, David E. Sanger, and William J. Broad. 2020. "U.S. Examines Whether Saudi Nuclear Program Could Lead to Bomb Effort." Accessed September 25, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/05/us/politics/us-examines-saudi-nuclear-program.html>.

77. Dorfman, Paul. 2019. "Gulf Nuclear Ambition: New Reactors in United Arab Emirates." Nuclear Consulting Group, pp. 5-6. Accessed September 30, 2020. <https://www.nuclearconsult.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Gulf-Nuclear-Ambition-NCG-Dec-2019.pdf>.

78. Mazzeti, Mark, David E. Sanger, and William J. Broad. 2020. "U.S. Examines Whether Saudi Nuclear Program Could Lead to Bomb Effort." Accessed September 25, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/05/us/politics/us-examines-saudi-nuclear-program.html>.

79 P. Strobel, Warren, Michael R. Gordon, and Felecia Schwartz. 2020. "Saudi Arabia, with China's Help, Expands its Nuclear Program." Accessed October 3, 2020. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/saudi-arabia-with-chinas-help-expands-its-nuclear-program-11596575671>.

GCC states and also as a frontline state in the rivalry with Iran. Ultimately, the decision to develop nuclear weapons is a political decision. Developments in recent decades in West Asia and the pro-active defence and military policies of the GCC states like Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar have shown that the image of the GCC states as subservient to and dependent on the military protection of Western powers like the US and Britain is soon becoming a memory. This was most proved by the Saudi, Emirati and Qatari intervention in the civil war in Yemen when even ground troops from Saudi Arabia and the UAE participated in the war. They are seeking to play the roles in the Arab world that were earlier played by Egypt, Iraq and Syria from the 1950s to right even up to the 2000s when Syria withdrew from Lebanon. Having established their conventional military abilities to intervene in conflicts in the region, it is natural that the Saudis and Emiratis would try and develop nuclear capabilities which could later end up as nuclear weapons capability to counter Iran.

India could have concerns about the possibility of nuclear proliferation and nuclear arms race in West Asia as part of the long-term impact of the Abraham Accords. This is because of the likely impact that such a race can have on India's own neighbourhood. As mentioned by the MEA, West Asia is a part of India's extended neighbourhood. Pakistan, which is a nuclear power, is very much part of the wider West Asian politics, especially since it shifted its attention to the west after the loss of East Pakistan in the 1971 Indo-Pak War. Any wider nuclear conflagration in West Asia can drag Pakistan into it, threatening India's own security interests. A simplistic view that the Abraham Accords in West Asia is a win-win situation for India does not take into account the volatile and dynamic nature of West Asian politics. Therefore, it would be prudent for India to adopt a more holistic and long-term view of these peace deals and their impact on India's interests in the region.

