

The Abraham Accords: Israeli, Palestinian, and Gulf Responses

By Olivia Babski



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On September 15, U.S. President Donald Trump hosted the foreign ministers from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain, as well as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, at the White House to sign the Abraham Accords: the Treaty of Peace, Diplomatic Relations and Full Normalization Between the United Arab Emirates and the State of Israel.

Four versions of the Abraham Accords were signed for each signatory state in their respective languages—English, Arabic, and Hebrew. This treaty marks the UAE and Bahrain's official recognition of the State of Israel. These Gulf states are now the third and fourth Arab States to normalize ties with Israel, following Egypt in 1979 and Jordan in 1994.

The treaty creates a framework for participants to pursue diplomatic exchanges of ambassadors, economic cooperation and coordination, and a joint strategy to peace building and peacekeeping in the Middle East, with a collective effort to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.¹

Palestinian Response

It is hard to see the benefits of this treaty on furthering a cooperative deal between Israelis and Palestinians. While the treaty prevents Israel from immediately annexing the West Bank, it does not prevent annexation from taking place in the future.

Ammar Hijazi, assistant minister of multilateral affairs for the Palestinian Authority (PA), called the signing ceremony “a sad day.”² But “sad” may not capture the sense of betrayal and rage that Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank have expressed.³

In response to the deal and to defend Palestinian self-determination, PA President Mahmoud Abbas, along with other heads of Palestinian leadership groups, gathered in Ramallah to form a joint Palestinian coalition.² The group wishes to separate themselves from Israel and become an independent state based on the de facto borders prior to the Six-Day War.

Domestic Responses in Signatory States

UAE Even though the state supported normalization as a signatory to the normalization treaty, the UAE has faced criticism at home. In response, a group of six Emirati academics founded an alliance named the “UAE Resistance Union Against Normalization” and created a Charter against the Bahrain-UAE-Israel normalization deal.⁴ The Charter is spreading across social media platforms, particularly Twitter, and has reached nearly two million signatures.⁵

Bahrain Although the kingdom officially endorses normalization, many of its citizens oppose normalization and have expressed their dissent both through Twitter (with the hashtag #Bahrain_against_normalization) and on the streets. On Twitter, over 15 political and non-political Bahraini associations have



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issued statements against normalization; however, out of fear of government crackdown, street demonstrations have remained small.⁶

Israel While many officials have applauded Netanyahu on the deal, a few, including head of Jordan Valley Regional Council David Elhayani, have criticized Netanyahu for “deceiv[ing] half a million residents of the area and hundreds of thousands of voters” by pausing annexation plans in the West Bank.⁷

Although annexation plans have not proceeded, a plan for 3,122 settler homes is underway—despite UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Process Nickolay Mladenov’s call to immediately cease all settlement activity.⁸ While Israeli civilian views on normalization remain unclear, the deal has not won back the hearts of voters, half of whom continue to demand for Netanyahu’s resignation.⁷

Gulf Regional Responses

Saudi Arabia Israel, the U.S., and the Arab signatories of the treaty are waiting for the approval signature of the “Big Boss” of the region—Saudi Arabia; however, their position as the “bastion” of Arab identity does not fare well with talks of normalization.⁹ While the country supports the idea of a Palestinian state and has not officially responded to the deal, the Kingdom has tacitly approved of normalization.

The Kingdom’s Foreign Minister Prince Faisal declared during a news conference in Berlin, “Any efforts that could promote peace in the region and that result in holding back the threat of annexation could be viewed as a positive.”¹⁰

Faisal noted that a peace settlement between the Palestinians and the Israelis remains crucial. “Once that is achieved, then all things are possible.”¹⁰

The country has also allowed flights between the UAE and Kuwait to cut across Saudi airspace, vastly reducing travel time.¹⁰ Thus, it appears that Saudi Arabia welcomes normalization but does not want to commit to signing a treaty—at least not until Israelis and Palestinians have reached a deal, which remains uncertain in the near future.

Oman Despite rumors of Oman being the next in line to establish normalization with Israel, it appears that Oman will continue its policy of neu-

trality in the region. The Sultanate is currently undergoing government change; its long serving minister of foreign affairs, Yusu bin Alawi, will be replaced by Badr bin Hamad Al Busaidi. Despite the change, bin Hamada—who is well-respected by Western nations such as the U.S.—is expected to continue Oman’s neutrality in foreign policy.¹¹

Qatar Among the most vocal regional opponents to the treaty is Qatar, who views normalization as an effort to undermine the Palestinian struggle for statehood. While Qatar engaged in commercial ties with Israel in the past, both the government and Qatari civilians have expressed strong opposition to the deal.

Normalization “can’t be the answer,” Qatar’s foreign minister spokesperson Lollwah al-Khater stated in an interview with Bloomberg.¹² Consequently, the state has bolstered its efforts to support the PA through increased political and financial support.¹³

Kuwait Kuwait is perhaps the only Gulf state that has taken an official stance against the normalization deal and has never engaged in any formal or informal ties with Israel.

“Kuwait maintains its position and will be the last country to normalize with Israel,” Kuwaiti newspaper Al-Qabas reported on the Kuwaiti government’s stance.¹⁴

On a domestic level, Kuwaiti civilians have mirrored their government’s response, expressing their strong opposition to the deal, and emphasizing their support for Palestinian independence. Kuwait’s semi-democratic government, large Palestinian community, and long-held Pan-Arab solidarity makes the country a strong voice for Palestinians.¹⁵

The Abraham Accords have triggered a widespread response not only within the signatories’ states but across the Middle East and the globe. Its significance within the Gulf and the MENA region remains contentious. It will only be with time—if other Arab states continue normalizing ties with Israel—that we can determine the extent of its impact.

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