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Keep America In, China and Russia Out, and Iran Down

The Global Strategy Behind the U.S.' Effort to Create an Israeli–Arab Alliance

This article argues that the Trump administration's core Middle East strategy – expanding the Abraham Accords into the wider Arab and Muslim world – reflects a renewed, Cold War-inspired containment of China and rollback of Iran. Normalisation between Israel and pivotal Arab countries, in particular Saudi Arabia, should be analysed through the prism of great power competition and as a potential catalyst for a broader geopolitical realignment between the Judeo-Christian and Islamic civilisations. The article situates Israeli–Arab normalisation and the significant investment of the U.S. in the region within the strategic imperative by the U.S. National Security Strategy to counter the emerging CRINK alliance – China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea. These converging interests in the region will be measured across several key economic, diplomatic, and security-related indicators. It assesses how Iran's nuclear programme and regional posture have reshaped Arab threat perceptions, prompting a departure from longstanding preconditions tying peace with Israel to the Palestinian issue. Events following the 7 October attacks, including the 2025 strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities, the 2026 U.S.–Israeli military campaign in Iran, and the Gaza ceasefire agreement, are examined as accelerants of this shift. The article ultimately contends that an expanded Israeli–Arab peace would reinforce an American-led regional order at the expense of that of CRINK, further cementing its global dominance.

Keywords: Trump, Middle East, Israel, Abraham Accords, Iran

Introduction

One of the Trump administration's key strategic objective for the Middle East is the expansion of the Abraham Accords, the Israeli–Arab peace treaties signed in 2020, into the rest of the Arab and Muslim world. Normalising relations between the Jewish State and Saudi Arabia – the custodian of the holy places to Islam, possibly could serve as a catalyst for a domino effect, resulting in a reshaping of the dynamics between the Judeo-Christian civilisation and the Islamic one.

This article examines how Israeli–Arab normalisation reflects a Cold War-inspired American strategy of containment. In the Cold War, its main focus was countering Communism, represented by the Soviet Union; today, containment focuses on the alliance between China, Russia, Iran, as well as North Korea – which shall be named CRINK. This

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interest and single issue-based partnership is designed to counter the so-called Western ‘imperialism’, represented and led in their view by the United States.

This article places the Iranian issue as well as the Israeli–Arab conflict within the perspective of this larger American vision, and takes a broader look at seemingly isolated theaters: Iran’s nuclear programme, considered as a shared national security threat to both Israel and the Arab world; and its role in triggering an unprecedented paradigmatic shift in the Arab world’s approach to normalising with Israel. The Iranian threat forced Arab leaders to re-envision existing preconditions to peace with Israel, namely abandoning the orthodoxy that resolving the Israeli–Palestinian conflict in a specific fashion should precede it. Iran, a predominantly Shi’ite country led by a regime committed to instilling its ideological hegemony and influence primarily via its proxy network over its Sunni-majority Arab neighbours and the Jewish state of Israel, has combined this contrarian vision with the gradual development of nuclear weapons as from the late 1990s, yet significantly ramped up its efforts in the 2010s and the 2020s. The 7 October attacks in Israel triggered a large regional war between Israel and the Iranian axis, which not only resulted in the 12-day war with Iran, that included strikes on Iran’s nuclear facilities with the participation of the U.S. in June 2025, but also led to the significant organisational and substantial military degradation of Hamas and Hezbollah, all of which ultimately contributed – together with the October 2025 Gaza ceasefire agreement – to creating a new momentum for a new Middle East.

If successful, the efforts to bring Israeli–Saudi peace, potentially even a comprehensive Middle East and Judeo-Islamic peace plan, will result in a resounding affirmation and strengthening of the vision for an American-led world order, the amplification of Israel’s political credit, the integration of the Middle East around interests rather than religious divisions, and the dispelling of existing predominant prescriptions to ensure lasting peace in the region. Reshaping the region’s security architecture under an American-led coalition, answerable to all parties’ security concerns and vested interests, has higher chances of success than relying on outdated perceptions of the region’s priorities and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, including the two-state plan. Success will also share the spoils with Europe with the envisioned trade and energy corridors.

In sum, this article reviews the diplomatic, economic, and security indicators to the Israeli and Arab priorities, and places them in a larger American prism on homeland security and global peace and stability. It argues that the underlying motivation behind expanding the American sphere of influence in the Middle East is to counterbalance that of China, Russia, and Iran. To paraphrase Lord Ismay, the first Secretary General of NATO – securing Israeli–Arab peace could serve as a facilitator to keep America in, China and Russia out, and Iran down.

Countering the Soviet Union then, and CRINK today

As a cornerstone of its foreign policy, the United States has a vested interest in weakening the global sphere of influence of China in particular, as well as that of Russia, including in the Middle East, as part of the great power competition interplay. This rationale goes back

to the post-WWII Truman Doctrine, in which the United States committed to counter Communism – today represented most notably by the Chinese Communist Party as well as Russia – by holding back its expansion into territories of interest worldwide.

Formulated in George Kennan's telegram, the strategy of containment was “designed to confront the Russians with unalterable counter-force at every point where they show signs of encroaching upon the interests of a peaceful and stable world”.² Per Richard Snow, the then-editor of *American Heritage*, the Kennan “X” document has become the “founding document” and the “cornerstone on which the West built its Cold War strategy”.³ Per historian John Lukacs, containment – beyond merely “an American commitment to the defense of non-Soviet Europe”, was designed to “sooner or later, lead to a withdrawal of [...] Russian armed presence” by both economic means – the Marshall Plan as a vehicle to underwrite the economic reconstruction of Europe – and military means.⁴

President Trump's administration reiterated this principle during his first term, in the 2017 National Security Strategy (NSS) that recognised a “competitive world”, namely responding to “political, economic, and military competition” facing the U.S. globally. The strategy stressed that “sustaining favorable balances of power will require a strong commitment and close cooperation with allies and partners” since they “magnify US power and extend US influence”.⁵ It also cited the Reaganesque principle of “peace through strength” as a cornerstone of homeland security, meaning empowering the U.S. military capabilities and credible deterrence against security threats while ensuring no region in the world is dominated by one power, and advancing American interests.⁶

The strategy underscored in particular the importance of countering the growing axis of China–Russia–Iran–North Korea – which shall be named CRINK. “The revisionist powers of China and Russia, the rogue states of Iran and North Korea [...] are actively competing against the United States and our allies and partners”, aiming to “shift regional balances of power in their favor”. This challenges “American power, influence, and interests”.⁷ Similarly, in the 2025 National Security Strategy published by the second Trump administration, reiterated the commitment to a balance of power worldwide, preventing domination of other forces in other regions while working with local partners. It underscored the objective to “rebalance” relations with China while being cautious of encouraging active confrontation against either China or Russia, and pointed out Iran as the “chief destabilizing force” in the Middle East. The strategy highlights the administration's interest in “expanding the Abraham Accords” while taking a different perspective than the traditional one. It welcomes partnership between local actors, investments in fields such as AI and defence technologies, reiterated the commitment to Israel's security,

² Kennan, George F.: *The Sources of Soviet Conduct*. [online], Hanover College, 1947. Source: history.hanover.edu [24.03.2026].

³ Kennan, George F. – Lukacs, John (1997): *George F. Kennan and the Origins of Containment, 1944–1946: The Kennan–Lukacs Correspondence*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 10.

⁴ Kennan–Lukacs 1997: 5, 11, 17.

⁵ *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. [online], The White House, 12.2017. Source: trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov [24.03.2026], 12–13, 55.

⁶ The White House 2017: 14.

⁷ The White House 2017: 35–36.

and departed from past “hectoring” around ideological issues – a clear indication of the intention to counter the Biden administration’s tensions with Arab countries over human rights issues. Most prominently, it stressed that the U.S. should be phasing out its focus from the Middle East and moderate its omnipresence in American politics as directly stemming from the rather optimistic prospects for regional self-reliance.⁸

This philosophy helps explain the multitude of objectives of the current Trump administration in engaging proactively in the Middle East: promoting peace and stability in the region as a force multiplier to American homeland security; removing clear and present threats on both the region in the U.S. as an obstacle to constructive progress – namely Iran’s nuclear programme and its proxy network; and advancing American diplomatic, economic, and security-related influence in the countries of the region at the expense of other, competing world powers, in particular Communist ones.

That said, the isolation and containment of the abovementioned CRINK members, in particular China, has its own glass ceiling. Unlike the USSR during the Cold War, China’s dominance in global trade and its positioning as the world’s second largest economy makes it almost impossible to isolate it altogether. China’s share of global trade has more than tripled over two decades, from 3.9% in 2001 to 13.9% in 2024; it is deepening its trade and investments with Middle Eastern nations; and increasing its use of “petroyuan” in its oil trade with Saudi Arabia and other regional actors.⁹ However, moderating its military and political sphere of influence in the Middle East across select categories has been proven feasible in both of Trump’s administrations. As outlined below, the doctrine therefore focuses on maximising the containment of China’s sphere of influence while aspiring to roll back Iran’s military and economic force buildup.

U.S.–Arab relations in the region: the Saudi case study

Saudi Arabia is a key actor in the potential future expansion of the Abraham Accords. It is the custodian of the holy sites of Islam, a self-considered leading regional actor who gave its tacit approval to the 2020 Abraham Accords between Israel and smaller Gulf countries, as well as the destination of President Trump’s first foreign presidential visits in both of his terms in office. It is also the object of his recurrent references on the expansion of the Accords. An examination of the U.S.–Saudi alliance in the larger Middle East contest in the critical areas of diplomatic, economic, and security-related cooperation, contrasted with their and Iran’s ties to China and Russia, can shed light on the countering forces in today’s competition over balance of power in the region.

Overall, Saudi Arabia’s economic relations with the United States are significantly deeper than those it holds with China, and far exceed those with Russia. This has been the case independently of the Trump administration’s recent commitments with Saudi Arabia on trade, investments, and arms deals – as trendlines show, this policy has been

⁸ *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. [online], The White House, 11.2025. Source: [whitehouse.gov](https://www.whitehouse.gov) [24.03.2026], 10, 23–24, 27–29.

⁹ Chang, Charles et al.: *Saudi-China Ties and Renminbi-Based Oil Trade*. [online], S&P Global, 20.08.2024. Source: [spglobal.com](https://www.spglobal.com) [24.03.2026].

longstanding. Financially, data from the Saudi Ministry of Investment reveals the reliably rising Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) and stocks with the United States between 2017–2022, far exceeding that of China and Russia.

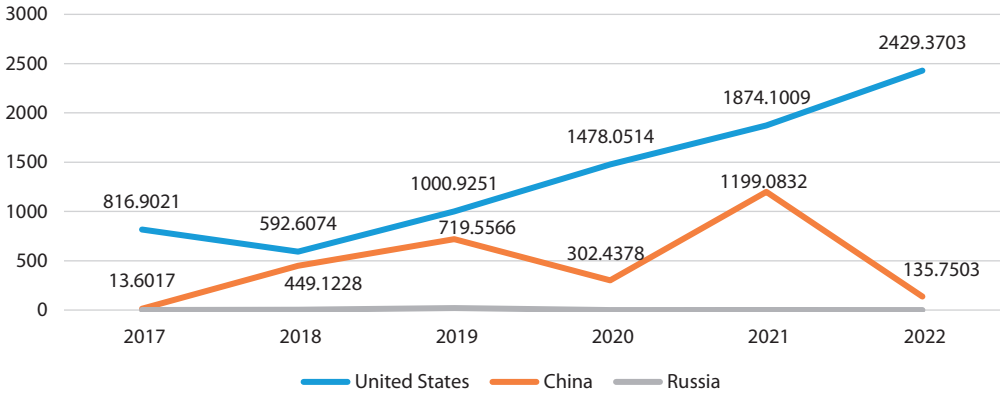


Figure 1: FDI inflow to Saudi Arabia by the United States, China, and Russia between 2017–2022 in USD million
* in million USD, per January 2024 SAR to USD conversion rate of 0.2667

Source: Saudi Arabia Foreign Direct Investment Report, Saudi Arabia Ministry of Investment, January 2024¹⁰

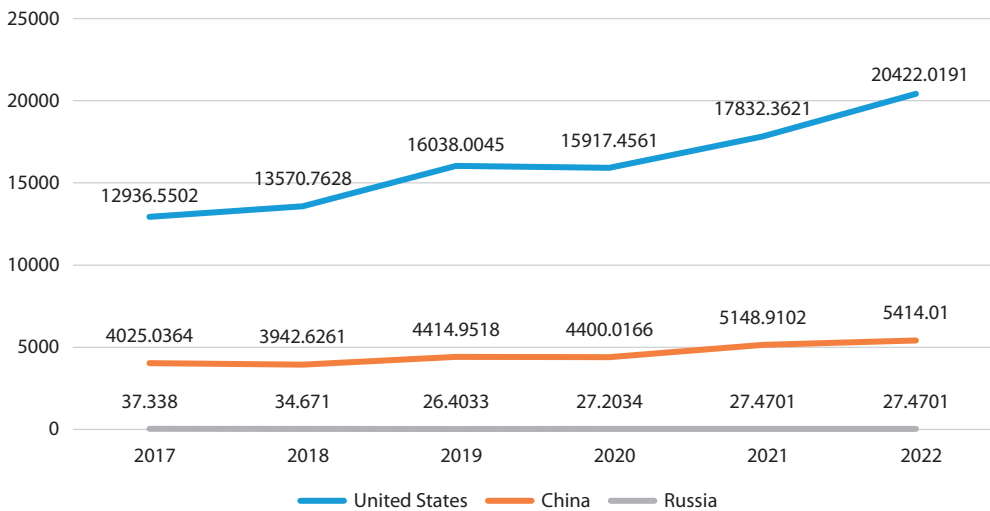


Figure 2: FDI stock in Saudi Arabia by the United States, China, and Russia between 2017–2022 in USD million
* in million USD, per January 2024 SAR to USD conversion rate of 0.2667

Source: Saudi Arabia Foreign Direct Investment Report, Saudi Arabia Ministry of Investment, January 2024¹¹

¹⁰ Saudi Arabia Ministry of Investment: *Saudi Arabia Foreign Direct Investment Report*. [online], 01.2024. Source: misa.gov.sa [24.03.2026], 32.

¹¹ Saudi Arabia Ministry of Investment 2024: 33.

Militarily, an analysis by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) reveals that Saudi Arabia stands out as a main arms recipient from the United States, alongside other GCC countries such as Qatar, Bahrain, and the UAE. The U.S. is the top arms exporter to Saudi Arabia, supplying 74% of the Kingdom's imports, and globally, Saudi Arabia is the top arms importer from the U.S., with 12% of the total U.S. arms exports. Alongside it, the U.S. is the top arms importer of Qatar, Bahrain, and the UAE as well, with 48%, 97%, and 42%, respectively. Saudi Arabia and Qatar are among the top five arms importer globally.¹²

It is to be noted that on an overall regional perspective, SIPRI's analysis identified a steady increase in arms imports to the Middle East between 2015–2024. A markedly higher percentage of these arms originated in the U.S. – 50.3% between 2020–2024, with Russia at just 4.1% and China at 1.2%. Imports from Russia and China focused heavily on tanks and fire-support vehicles, followed by artillery equipment, as well as a certain share of combat aircraft – 71 and 57 respectively, as opposed to the far-exceeding 996 from the United States. The region imports far more arms from European countries such as Italy, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom than the perceived great superpowers, China and Russia. Authors of the report observed that the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) includes some of the biggest arms importers in the world, with its members sharing several common threat perceptions and security priorities as well as intertwined, and sometimes tense, security dynamics, including with Iran.¹³

Although Saudi Arabia joined the Belt and Road Initiative, hosted President Xi in Riyadh in 2016 to sign the Sino-Saudi High-Level Joint Committee and integrated to the Kingdom's Vision 2030,¹⁴ this pre-Trump development was overshadowed by the intensification of American–Saudi relations, in particular with the Trump administration. Saudi Arabia declined to join BRICS despite prior anticipation,¹⁵ possibly in light of the negative effect such a move can have on its relations with the U.S. A closer look at the Trump administration's strategy to the Middle East, in particular when considering the United States' historic strategic alliance with Israel, and its relations with Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar, reveals an indisputable effort to boost diplomatic, economic, and security-related ties with these countries simultaneously. In doing so, President Trump has manifested a more pragmatic and interest-based approach, while relying on a strategic commitment to the containment of CRINK, as opposed to the more international standards-based and ideological approach by the Biden administration, that highlighted human rights abuses and the pursuit of democratic values.

The Trump administration's commitment to deepen the American sphere of influence in the region, while aiming to eventually decrease its direct military involvement

¹² George, Mathew et al.: *Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2024*. [online], Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), 03.2025. Source: sipri.org [24.03.2026], 2, 6.

¹³ Hussain, Zain – Tartir, Alaa: *Recent Trends in International Arms Transfers in the Middle East and North Africa*. [online], Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), 10.04.2025. Source: sipri.org [24.03.2026].

¹⁴ Alghannam, Hesham: *How China Aligned Itself with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030*. [online], Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 21.01.2025. Source: carnegieendowment.org [24.03.2026].

¹⁵ Magid, Pasha – El Dahan, Maha – Saini, Manya: *Saudi Arabia Sits on Fence over BRICS with Eye on Vital Ties with US*. [online], Reuters, 08.05.2025. Source: reuters.com [24.03.2026].

and presence, stems from objectives laid out in the National Security Strategy, to secure America's national security and interests by fostering alliances abroad. In both his first and second terms, President Trump chose the Middle East as the target for his first official foreign visit, symbolically selecting Saudi Arabia as his first stop.¹⁶ In both trips, conversations involved both diplomatic engagement, declarations on large-scale bilateral economic investments, and securing arms deals on the one hand; and statements highlighting the underlying mutual security threats by Iran on the other.

A comparative analysis of both visits sheds light on the omnipresence of all of the above factors as a recurring theme, reflective of the administration's interests in the region. In his 2017 trip, an Arab-Islamic–American Summit was gathered, where Trump advocated for advancing interest and values-based alliances to promote security and stability. In terms of economic ties, Trump announced a bilateral investment of 400 billion USD with Saudi Arabia, which includes a significant 110 billion USD component of defence purchases, allowing the Kingdom to “take a greater role in security operations”. Regarding the threat by CRINK and geopolitical vision, Trump defined a “battle between good and evil”, called on the “Abrahamic Faiths” of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam to cooperate to promote peace, urged regional countries to fight terrorism, and extensively criticised Iran as a regime responsible for instability in the region – while avoiding the direct mentioning of China or Russia.¹⁷ In his 2025 trip, Trump praised the 2020 Abraham Accords and called on Saudi Arabia to join them. He once again underscored the doctrine of “peace through strength”. Specifically on the region, he outlined “a future where the Middle East is defined by commerce not chaos, where it exports technology not terrorism”, in an inter-religious harmony. He reiterated his strong criticism on Iran as a destabilising actor that “fund[s] terror and bloodshed” and committing that “Iran will never have a nuclear weapon”,¹⁸ a commitment reiterated by all American presidents since Bill Clinton. In terms of economic ties, once again investments were announced, this time worth 600 billion USD with Saudi Arabia,¹⁹ 1.2 trillion USD with Qatar,²⁰ and 1.4 trillion USD with the UAE.²¹ These deals placed a high premium on defence expenditure and technological development, artificial intelligence, and energy. Later that year, the commitment with Saudi Arabia was increased to 1 trillion USD, against the backdrop of signing the U.S.-Saudi Strategic Defense Agreement, affirming the Saudi view of the U.S. and its main

¹⁶ *President Trump Delivers Remarks at the Arab Islamic American Summit*. [online], The White House, 21.05.2017. Source: trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov [24.03.2026].

Fact Sheet: President Donald J. Trump Secures Historic \$600 Billion Investment Commitment in Saudi Arabia. [online], The White House, 13.05.2025. Source: whitehouse.gov [24.03.2026].

¹⁷ *President Trump's Speech to the Arab Islamic American Summit*. [online], The White House, 21.05.2017. Source: trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov [24.03.2026].

¹⁸ Trump, Donald J.: *Remarks at the Saudi–United States Investment Forum in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia*. [online], The American Presidency Project, 13.05.2025. Source: presidency.ucsb.edu [24. 03. 2026].

¹⁹ *Fact Sheet: President Donald J. Trump Secures Historic \$600 Billion Investment Commitment in Saudi Arabia*. [online], The White House, 13.05.2025. Source: whitehouse.gov [24.03.2026].

²⁰ *Fact Sheet: President Donald J. Trump Secures Historic \$1.2 Trillion Economic Commitment in Qatar*. [online], The White House, 14.05.2025. Source: whitehouse.gov [24.03.2026].

²¹ *Fact Sheet: President Donald J. Trump Secures \$200 Billion in New U.S.-UAE Deals and Accelerates Previously Committed \$1.4 Trillion UAE Investment*. [online], The White House, 15.05.2025. Source: whitehouse.gov [24.03.2026].

strategic partner. Trump also approved a major defence sale package, including future F-35 planes²² – a highly-sought-for asset that is currently operated exclusively by Israel in the region.²³ It is to be mentioned that the issue of sale of F-35 aircrafts to other Middle East actors has been the source of controversy in Israel as well as in the United States, sparking concern over the breach of the QME – Qualitative Military Edge, enshrined by the Act on strategic cooperation.²⁴

By comparing the Saudi record with world superpowers and that of Iran, one can discern a clear anomaly. Iran has been solidifying its diplomatic, economic, and security-related ties with China and Russia, as opposed to Saudi Arabia, that has been solidifying these very ties with the United States. In terms of trade, petroleum products constitute the backbone of the Iranian economy, with 57% of the nation's total export earnings in 2024. Iran holds an estimated 9% of the global proven oil reserves,²⁵ and this indispensable source of income represents roughly 18% of its GDP as of 2021.²⁶ Recognising oil's potential in leveraging economic pressure on Iran, international sanctions led by the U.S. targeted this sector of the Iranian economy in the leadup to the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in order to bring Iran to the negotiating table. These sanctions were lifted in 2016, and re-imposed in 2018 with the withdrawal of the Trump administration from the JCPOA in light of its claimed inability to enforce Iran's denuclearisation and its lack of reference to Iran's other malign activities such as the development of long-range ballistic missiles and promotion of regional and global terrorism.²⁷

Despite the negative effect of these sanctions on the Iranian economy, Iran turned to China as a substitute to its traditional trade partners, defying U.S. sanctions²⁸ – in order to avoid economic collapse. Thus, in spite of sanctions, Iran kept stable oil exports of some 1.5-1.7 million barrels per day, increasing its year-over-year revenue by almost 20% to an estimated 43 billion USD in 2024, almost reaching pre-sanction level. China has begun purchasing about 90% of Iran's total oil exports,²⁹ for an irregularly low price with a 15% discount.³⁰ China's oil imports from Iran are effectively the central lifeline of the nation's economy, creating a *de facto* substantial political leverage.

Iran has also been increasing its military relations with Russia, selling Iranian UAVs and UAV technology to Russia and agreeing to build a joint UAV factory in Russia worth

²² *Fact Sheet: President Donald J. Trump Solidifies Economic and Defense Partnership with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*. [online], The White House, 18.11.2025. Source: whitehouse.gov [24.03.2026].

²³ McCartney, Micah: *F-35 Map Shows Who Is Buying US Stealth Fighter Jets*. [online], Newsweek, 02.04.2025. Source: newsweek.com [24.03.2026].

²⁴ *Public Law 112-150 – July 27, 2012*. [online], Library of Congress, 2012. Source: congress.gov [24.03.2026].

²⁵ *Iran Oil Export Data 2024–25: Iran Oil Exports by Country & Iran Oil Production*. [online], TradeImex, 13.10.2025. Source: tradeimex.in [24.03.2026].

²⁶ *Oil Rents (% of GDP) – Iran, Islamic Rep.*. [online], World Bank Group. Source: data.worldbank.org [24.03.2026].

²⁷ FAQ Topic Page: *Iran Sanctions*. [online], Office of Foreign Assets Control. Source: ofac.treasury.gov [24.03.2026].

²⁸ Ghaseeminejad, Saeed: *Sanctions? Iran's Secret Oil Network Fuels Its Regime*. [online], Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), 24.05.2025. Source: fdd.org [24.03.2026].

²⁹ TradeImex 2025.

³⁰ Etasi, Amirreza: *Rising Risk to China's Covert Iran Oil Lifeline*. [online], Asia Times, 28.08.2025. Source: asiatictimes.com [24.03.2026].

1 billion USD, critical to its military engagement in Ukraine.³¹ Bilateral relations include ballistic missile imports, nuclear energy technology, aircrafts, sensors, and missile defence technology. According to SIPRI, Iran has been relying on fewer and fewer international suppliers, mostly on Russia, which with Moscow providing 98% and 100% of Iran's arms imports between 2015–2019 and 2020–2024, respectively. Iran received a total of 6 light combat aircraft from Russia in 2023 and 2024 and has pending deliveries for 42 combat aircraft.³²

However, CRINK as an alliance remains a highly questionable determination. There is no singular political or strategic driver that unifies the above actors, except an underlying contrarianism to Western “imperialism” and a ruling form of autocracy. China is an activist global economic actor, deeply entrenched in global investments and infrastructure projects, aspiring to replace the U.S. as a leading currency, oil trader, and political hegemon. Indeed, in some areas, Saudi Arabia and other Arab regional actors have been hedging against American disengagement by developing economic and political relationship with China across several key indicators; Russia focuses on regional achievements to secure its borders while drawing global isolation; North Korea has chosen international isolation while relying on China's foreign policy and protégé status; and Iran aspires to instill its hegemony in the region and partners with like-minded actors in Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia, aligning with anti-Western actors and leading a hardline ideological tone – while still aspiring to trade freely with the West and open to investment.

Yet while China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea often find their national interests clashing, rather than converging, issue-based cooperation is noticeable. Alternative frameworks to Western alliances such as NATO, G7 and other institutions include BRICS (originally Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), the SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization), the Belt and Road Initiative, and the EEU (Eurasian Economic Union). In March 2021, China and Iran signed a 25-year strategic partnership on a series of areas.³³ In June 2024, Russia and North Korea signed a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Treaty that includes a mutual military assistance clause; Pyongyang has assisted Russia in its war in Ukraine by supplying munitions and missiles, and committing troops.³⁴ In January 2025, Russia and Iran signed a strategic partnership as well. These agreements notably did not include any NATO-like military or defence commitments.³⁵ In February 2022, shortly before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, China and Russia agreed on a strategic partnership with “no limits” on a series of areas of cooperation,³⁶ later deepened

³¹ Waller, Julian G. et al. (2025): *The Evolving Russia-Iran Relationship. Political, Military, and Economic Dimensions of an Improving Partnership*. [online], The Center of Naval Analyses (CNA), 01.2025. Source: cna.org [24.03.2026].

³² Hussain–Tartir 2025.

³³ Reuters: *Iran and China Sign 25-Year Cooperation Agreement*. [online], Reuters, 27.03.2021. Source: reuters.com [24.03.2026].

³⁴ Bowen, Andrew S. – Manyin, Mark E. – Nikitin, Mary Beth D.: *Russia-North Korea Relations*. [online], Library of Congress, 13.06.2025. Source: congress.gov [24.03.2026].

³⁵ Smagin, Nikita: *New Russia-Iran Treaty Reveals the Limits of Their Partnership*. [online], Carnegie Politika, 21.01.2025. Source: carnegieendowment.org [24.03.2026].

³⁶ *Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on the International Relations Entering a New Era and the Global Sustainable Development*. [online], President of Russia, 04.02.2022. Source: en.kremlin.ru [24.03.2026].

in November 2025.³⁷ In March 2025, China, Russia, and Iran held their fifth joint naval drill, committing to strengthening “multilateral cooperation”.³⁸

The shift in the Arab world: from refuting Israel’s right to exist to normalisation, against the backdrop of the Palestinian question

By examining the process that led up to the 2020 Abraham Accords between Israel and several countries from the Arab world – the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco, alongside the attempts to expand on its basis during the following five years, one can discern the key elements surrounding the rationale of the parties to engage in rapprochement. This paradigmatic shift occurred at least in parallel to, and most likely as a result of significant developments in the Middle East, most notably in the Iranian theater. While developments in the Palestinian arena have always played a vital rhetorical role in the process and may have nuanced or affected it, they have done little to fundamentally change the core principles at the basis of the parties’ interest to engage.

Historically, the hostility between Israel and the larger Arab and Muslim world originated in the latter’s opposition to the creation of a Jewish State and the Zionist movement, since the late 19th century and peaking in the foundation of Israel in 1948. The reasoning behind it varied, though mostly rooted in religious and anti-Imperialist rationale.

Following the Israeli victory in the 1967 Six Day War, what has been dubbed Arab rejectionism was notably expressed in the Khartoum Declaration, in which the Arab League affirmed the notion of Arab unity facing Israel, and declared “no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, no negotiations with it”.³⁹ This dictum was paraphrased by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to illustrate that the tables have turned, as Sudan signed a peace treaty with Israel in 2020, reversing the Three No’s to Three Yes’s.⁴⁰

In the years since 1967, international processes attempting to lead the region into rapprochement and peace focused heavily on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict as key to progress in the larger Israeli–Arab and Muslim circle. As the Cold War ended, Israel’s newly-elected Labour government in 1992 led by Yitzhak Rabin made a major breakthrough in the Palestinian arena in the form of the Oslo Accords, embracing unprecedented security and territorial concessions while inviting in PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat as a partner. Per Efraim Karsh, Arafat “turned the PLO into one of the world’s most murderous terror organizations with the overarching goal of bringing about Israel’s demise”. Per Joel Fishman, the two-state plan was designed as a “bait that conceals their ultimate strategy of bringing about the politicide of Israel by other means”, citing Article 21 of the Palestinian covenant that determined how the “Arab Palestinian people, expressing themselves by the armed Palestinian revolution, reject all solutions which are substituting

³⁷ Abbasova, Vusala (2025): *Russia, China Sign 15 Cooperation Agreements, Pledge to Deepen Strategic Partnership*. [online], Caspian News, 05.11.2025. Source: caspiannews.com [24.03.2026].

³⁸ FDD: *Russia and China to Discuss Iranian Nuclear Program Following Joint Naval Drills*. [online], Foundation for Defense of Democracies, 13.03.2025. Source: fdd.org [24.03.2026].

³⁹ *LAS Khartoum Resolution*. [online], United Nations, 01.09.1967. Source: un.org [24.03.2026].

⁴⁰ *PM Netanyahu on the Declaration of Normalization between Israel and Sudan*. [online], Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, communicated by the Prime Minister’s Media Adviser, 24.10.2020. Source: gov.il [24.03.2026].

for the total liberation of Palestine”.⁴¹ Indeed, the Oslo Accords and the incarnation of Arafat’s PLO brought about significant security deterioration within Israel, leading to 9.3 times more Israeli civilian casualties by Palestinian terrorism between the signing of the Accords in 1994 to 2022 (prior to the October 7 attacks) and the entire period between Israel’s foundation in 1948 to 1994.⁴²

World leaders have repeatedly made it clear that resolving the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is key to Israeli–Arab normalisation. The 1978 Israel–Egypt peace treaty underscored that the “resolution of the Palestinian problem”, including self-determination, is key to instil “peace in the Middle East”, describing Israeli territorial concessions to the Palestinians as “the only agreed basis for a peaceful settlement of the Arab–Israeli conflict”.⁴³ Following the 1993–1995 Oslo Accords, progress in the Israeli–Arab front indicated the Arab and Muslim world’s willingness to engage with Israel only in case the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is resolved. Such was the case of the signing of the 1994 Israeli–Jordanian peace treaty, or the establishment of low-level diplomatic relations between Israel and Arab countries such as Morocco and Oman. With the forestalment of the Israeli–Palestinian peace process, the so-called 2002 Arab Peace Initiative led by Saudi Arabia recognised that “a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East is the strategic option of the Arab countries”, and to make this a reality, it called for “full Israeli withdrawal from all the Arab territories occupied since June 1967, in implementation of [...] the land-for-peace principle, and Israel’s acceptance of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital, in return for the establishment of normal relations in the context of a comprehensive peace with Israel”.⁴⁴ The paradigm stipulating that the only path to reach Israeli–Arab peace goes through the resolution of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict – with significant Israeli concessions, the establishment of a Palestinian state and the division of Jerusalem – has thus become the gold standard for continuous attempts to bridge the divide. This may be called the internationalisation of the Israeli–Arab conflict.

The 1980 Venice Declaration by the European Council recognised the principle of “comprehensive peace settlement” between Israel and the Arab world based on “a just solution [...] to the Palestinian problem”.⁴⁵ Multiple UN General Assembly resolutions have made a similar determination. U.S. President Barack Obama stressed that the two-state plan is the “only solution” to the conflict, with Arab leaders referring back to the Arab Peace Initiative as late as 2010.⁴⁶ Then-Secretary of State John Kerry reaffirmed

⁴¹ Fishman, Joel: *The “Two-State Solution” and the Arab Palestinians: Partition or Politicide?*. [online], Jerusalem Center for Security and Foreign Affairs (JCSA), 16.02.2023. Source: jcsa.org [24.03.2026].

⁴² Avivi, Amir – Yissachar, Or – Hacohen, Gershon: *The Oslo Debacle: 30 Years to the Accords that Changed Israel*. [online], David Institute for Security Policy, 13.09.2023. Source: davidinstitute.org [24.03.2026].

⁴³ *Draft Text Prepared by the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs (Saunders)*. [online], United States Department of State, Office of the Historian, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977–1980. Source: history.state.gov [24.03.2026].

⁴⁴ *Beirut Declaration on Saudi Peace Initiative, March 28, 2002*. [online], Government of Israel, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 28.03.2002. Source: gov.il [24.03.2026].

⁴⁵ *Venice Declaration on the Middle East*. [online], United Nations, 12–13.06.1980. Source: un.org [24.03.2026].

⁴⁶ *Remarks by President Obama, President Mubarak, His Majesty King Abdullah, Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas Before Working Dinner*. [online], The White House, President Barack Obama, Office of the Press Secretary, 01.09.2010. Source: obamawhitehouse.archives.gov [24.03.2026].

this view in 2016, declaring that “No, no, no, and no. [...] There will be no advance and separate peace with the Arab world without the Palestinian process and Palestinian peace. Everybody needs to understand that. That is a hard reality.”⁴⁷

These attempts to bridge the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have not materialised, which has led to decades-long stalemate in the larger Israeli-Arab political process. Supposedly, the key to this larger normalisation was the *resolution* of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, rather than mere *progress*. Various explanations were offered, most notably, Palestinian rejectionism of repeated generous offers in 1996, 1999, 2000, 2004 with President George W. Bush’s Roadmap, and 2008. Some interpreted it as an attempt to make impassable offers that Israel cannot fathom without significantly compromising on its national security, portraying the Arab world in a positive light while passing the ball to Israel’s court. Karsh noted that “the latest condition for ‘peace’ [...] happens to entail Israel’s self-destruction”,⁴⁸ while Eitan Gilboa (among many others) commented that “the maximum Israel is prepared to concede doesn’t meet the minimum the Palestinians demand”.⁴⁹ As stipulated by President Clinton, “I killed myself to give the Palestinians a state. [...] There’s nobody who’s blameless in the Middle East, but we cannot really ever make a fundamental difference in the Middle East unless the Israelis think we care whether they live or die.”⁵⁰ Per Clinton, Arafat “walked away from a Palestinian state” despite generous offers agreed to by Israel.⁵¹

Yet while the parties have not reached the resolution of the conflict – indeed, the conflict only escalated – the larger Israeli–Arab circle began to materialise independently and irrespectively of progress toward resolution on the Israeli–Palestinian front. In August 2020, the United States has arbitrated peace agreements between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan, formally named the “Abraham Accords”, yet short of notable Israeli concessions on the Palestinian front.

Granted, the text of the Abraham Accords reflects the evolution in the attitude by the Arab world between 2002 and 2020, including the sidelining of UN resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative, and Palestinian statehood as precondition for peace with Israel. Rather, it included a vague commitment to “continuing [the] efforts to achieve a just, comprehensive, realistic and enduring solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict [...] that meets the legitimate needs and aspirations of both peoples, and to advance comprehensive Middle East peace, stability and prosperity”.⁵² Netanyahu explained this as a strategy

⁴⁷ *13th Annual Saban Forum: Challenge for the Trump Administration in the Middle East, A Conversation with U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry*. [online], U.S. Department of State, 04.12.2016. Source: brookings.edu [24.03.2026].

⁴⁸ Karsh, Efraim: *The Palestinians and the “Right of Return”*. [online], Commentary, 05.2001. Source: commentary.org [24.03.2026].

⁴⁹ Weinberg, David M.: *Israeli-Palestinian Diplomacy: Whereto?*. [online], The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies (BESA), 29.09.2013. Source: besacenter.org [24.03.2026].

⁵⁰ Gurciullo, Brianna: *Bill Clinton: ‘I Killed Myself to Give the Palestinians a State’*. [online], Politico, 13.05.2016. Source: politico.com [24.03.2026].

⁵¹ TOI STAFF: *Bill Clinton: Young Americans Shocked to Learn Arafat Turned Down Palestinian State*. [online], The Times of Israel, 05.12.2024. Source: timesofisrael.com [24.03.2026].

⁵² *Abraham Accords Peace Agreement: Treaty of Peace, Diplomatic Relations and Full Normalization between the United Arab Emirates and the State of Israel*. [online], United States Department of State, 15.09.2020. Source: state.gov [24.03.2026], 1–2.

to circumvent the Palestinian veto over Israeli–Arab peace without their consent, as opposed to past paradigms.⁵³

By examining previous and current statements surrounding the prospect of an Israeli–Arab peace and developments in the Middle East and globally, the following segments will explore the reasoning behind this notable paradigm shift from viewing the Palestinian issue as a precondition to peace, to viewing it secondary to other, more pressing considerations.

Iran

Since its ascent to power following the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, the regime has transformed Iran from a regional actor with strong ties to the West, led by the Pahlavi monarchy, to a regional destabilising force seeking to “export the revolution”, namely expand its influence regionally and globally. Driven by the Shi’ite preachings, the Iranian regime’s “central pillar” was defined by strong anti-Western and anti-Semitic philosophies.⁵⁴ Article 3, Clause 5 of the Iranian Constitution enshrined the anti-Western sentiment into the foundational texts of the Iranian regime, stipulating the “complete elimination of imperialism and the prevention of foreign influence”.⁵⁵ In his 1970 book “Islamic Government: Jurist’s Guardianship” (*Velayat-e Faqih*), Khomeini accused the “incompetence” of Muslim rulers in allowing “imperialist penetration”, while in his last will and testament, he called the United States a “self-indulging terrorist” with “its ally [being] international Zionism”.⁵⁶

Khomeini’s successor as Supreme Leader of Iran, Ali Khamenei, has continued this paradigm, referring to Israel as the “Zionist regime”, a “cancerous tumor” in the region that has to be “eradicated”, and to the United States as a supporter of anti-Muslim forces and detrimental to Muslim unity⁵⁷ as a consistent theme in his sermons and publications. That, while continuously highlighting the Palestinian “struggle” as a binary moral choice, with no option but military resistance until Israel falls, calling it “the most important issue of the world of Islam”.⁵⁸

This philosophy has been increasingly combined with military force buildup and increased regional activism, to the detriment of other, Sunni-majority Arab countries and Israel, in a four-legged effort. First, an effort to expand Iran’s “strategic depth” orchestrated by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps’ Qods Force, led to the establishment of a militant axis in the Middle East aligned with Iran. Overtime, Iran supported or

⁵³ Yaari, Ehud: *The Road Beyond UAE-Israel Normalization*. [online], The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 10.09.2020. Source: washingtoninstitute.org [24.03.2026].

⁵⁴ *In the Shadow of the War, Iranian Hostility toward Israel is Growing While Denying its Existence*. [online], The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, 08.11.2023. Source: terrorism-info.org.il [24.03.2026].

⁵⁵ *Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran*. [online], Legal Tools. Source: legal-tools.org [24.03.2026], 8.

⁵⁶ Khomeini, Sayyid Ruhullah Musawi: *Imam Khomeini’s Last Will and Testament*. [online], Al Islam. Source: al-islam [24.03.2026].

⁵⁷ Khamenei, Ali: *If the Islamic Ummah Uses its inner Strength, It Can Eradicate that Cancerous Tumor – the Zionist Regime*. [online], Khamenei.ir, 21.09.2024. Source: english.khamenei.ir [24.03.2026].

⁵⁸ Khamenei, Ali: *The Most Important Problem of the Islamic World: Selected Statements by Ayatollah Khamenei About Palestine*. [online], Khamenei.ir., s. a. Source: english.khamenei.ir [24.03.2026], 11.

established terrorist groups Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis, militant groups in Iraq, efforts in Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia, and the Assad regime in Syria, likely investing over 2 billion USD annually in this force buildup.⁵⁹ Given the outlawing of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, it follows that tackling Hamas, an offshoot of the Brotherhood, serves these countries' national interests as well. Second, Iran has encouraged or was actively involved in destabilisation efforts, even attempts to overthrow Arab leaders during the so-called Arab Spring of 2011, including protests encouraged or instigated by Iran in Bahrain that led to a direct Saudi military interference.⁶⁰ In the following years, relations further deteriorated with the pan-Arab blockade on Qatar as a reaction to the interference by Iran and the Kingdom in their domestic affairs, and the 2019 Iranian attack on the Aramco petroleum facilities in Saudi Arabia, that results in no military retaliation.⁶¹ In this period, proxy warfare has also evolved between Iran and Saudi Arabia across several theaters, including the abovementioned Bahraini case, as well as the Iranian support for the Yemen-based Houthi group Ansar Allah and their repeated offensive of Saudi territory. Saudi Arabia launched a military campaign against the group, which resulted in a heavy casualty toll, while failing to secure its southern Yemeni border altogether. Meanwhile, Israel and the U.S. have proven a solid outreach in Yemen by striking select targets across the Houthi group's ports, military leadership, and assets.

Third, Iran has been developing a significant long-range and intercontinental ballistic missile arsenal, and planned to develop up to 20,000 such missiles within six years, capable of covering all of the territory of Israel and Saudi Arabia.⁶²

Fourth, and most ominously, Iran has been developing a covert nuclear weapons programme, disguised as a civil nuclear programme. A party to the NPT – Non-Proliferation Treaty, Iran continuously denied the military aspect of the programme in spite of strong intelligence evidence, and committed not to develop nuclear weapons as part of the 2015 JCPOA. Yet at least since the 1990s' "Project AMAD" and most notably until the signing of the JCPOA and as from 2021, Iran has accelerated the development of critical components in its military nuclear programme despite its international obligations. Shortly before the June 2025 strike on Iran, the IAEA declared Iran's non-compliance with the NPT, for the first time in 20 years; Israel estimated Iran was within days of reaching sufficient fissile material for the first nuclear device.⁶³

Iran's nuclear programme has been viewed as a foremost security threat by both Israel and Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain, given its coupling with Iran's antithetical philosophy to the region, the Arab world, and the West. This represented

⁵⁹ Yissachar, Or – Kuperwasser, Yossi: *Nuclear Iran: an Existential Threat to the Zionist Enterprise*. [online], Israel's Defense and Security Forum (IDSF), 06.2022. Source: idsf.org.il [24.03.2026], 43–46.

⁶⁰ Bronson, Rachel: *Saudi Arabia's Intervention in Bahrain: A Necessary Evil or a Strategic Blunder?*. [online], Foreign Policy Research Institute (FPRI), 03.03.2011. Source: fpri.org [24.03.2026].

⁶¹ Burgess, Sanya: *Attack on Saudi Oil Fields 'Legitimate Defence' by Houthis, Iran Says*. [online], Sky News, 30.09.2019. Source: news.sky.com [24.03.2026].

⁶² *Security Snapshot | "Rising Lions": Israel on a War to Remove an Existential Nuclear and Missile Threat by Iran*. [online], David Institute for Security Policy, 15.06.2025. Source: idsf.org.il [24.03.2026].

⁶³ David Institute for Security Policy 2025.

a potentially bleak development that has been a determinative factor for the Arab world in recalculating its previous approach to Israel, outweighing existing, traditional factors such as the Palestinian cause or historic grievances. This shared threat perception of Iran by both Israel and the Arab world is omnipresent on the part of Israeli officials, such as Netanyahu's continuous rhetoric against Iran as posing "a grave threat, not only to Israel, but also the peace of the entire world [...] the greatest danger facing our world is the marriage of militant Islam with nuclear weapons".⁶⁴ Yet it remained largely absent from Arab leaders' public remarks, favouring a more discreet approach to the regime. Among the irregular instances was the 2024 statement issued by the Ministerial Council of the Gulf Cooperation Council, cautiously calling for "constructive understandings" on Iran's "nuclear file" surrounding the limits on uranium enrichment to civil and peaceful levels as well as addressing Iran's ballistic missile programme and other security concerns, to achieve "good-neighbourliness".⁶⁵ Among the rarer instances of direct public statements against Iran are Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman (MBS)'s comments in an interview with *Atlantic Magazine* in 2018, with no similar remarks since. MBS called Iranian leader Khamenei the "Hitler of the Middle East", fearing a similar disinterest in rising extremist forces as prior to World War II. Unprecedentedly for a king-in-waiting of the custodian of Islam's holy sites, he also referred positively to the notion of peace with Israel based on shared economic interests, recognising both the Palestinians and Israel's right to land.⁶⁶ Other instances included the leaked video from the 2019 Warsaw Middle East conference. Foreign Ministers from Bahrain, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia referred to Iran as an "evil" regional actor and security threat that forestalls peace, while at the same time referring to the previous centrality of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict as outdated.⁶⁷

While Arab countries adopted a more cautious style in public, Israel was allowed to join the United States' Central Command, conducting drills with fellow Arab militaries, and hosting the IDF Chief of Staff in Bahrain;⁶⁸ continuous reports insisted on covert Israeli–Arab security cooperation regarding Iran.

The stable wall: fluctuating caution by Arab leaders between U.S. administrations

In exploring the rationale behind this paradigmatic pivot by the Arab and Muslim world toward normalisation with Israel, it is vital to explore the key priorities of Arab leaderships who have been steering it. "Leaning against a stable wall" is a common Arab proverb to

⁶⁴ *PM Netanyahu's Speech to a Joint Session of the US Congress*. [online], Government of Israel, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 03.03.2015. Source: gov.il [24.03.2026].

⁶⁵ General Secretariat – Riyadh: *Statement Issued by the Ministerial Council of the Gulf Cooperation Council During its 161st Session*. [online], Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC), General Secretariat, 09.09.2024. Source: gcc-sg.org [24.03.2026].

⁶⁶ Goldberg, Jeffrey: *Saudi Crown Prince: Iran's Supreme Leader 'Makes Hitler Look Good'*. [online], The Atlantic, 02.04.2018. Source: theatlantic.com [24.03.2026].

⁶⁷ Ahren, Raphael: *In Clip Leaked by PMO, Arab Ministers Seen Defending Israel, Attacking Iran*. [online], The Times of Israel, 14.02.2019. Source: timesofisrael.com [24.03.2026].

⁶⁸ I24 News: *Israeli Army Chief on First Official Visit to Bahrain*. [online], I24 News, 09.03.2022. Source: i24news.tv [24.03.2026].

indicate that only stable partners secure Arab trust, and that a reliable superpower should be maintaining the stability of the Arab leaders' rule. As such, efforts by the Obama administration to secure the JCPOA in 2015 have triggered animosity among both Israel and Arab actors, leading Netanyahu to assert the deal "brought Israel and many Arab states closer together than ever before in an intimacy and friendship that I have not seen in my lifetime and would have been unimaginable a few years ago".⁶⁹ Trump's contrarian approach to Iran and his "maximum pressure" philosophy was therefore perceived as reassuring. As assessed by Del Sarto and Soler i Lecha (2024), "the 2015 Iran nuclear deal prompted Saudi Arabia and the UAE to feel increasingly insecure and thus pursue their own plans for the region".⁷⁰

Efforts by the Biden administration to revive the deal were not highly regarded either, viewed as attempts to appease Iran with no credible solution to its nuclear aspirations. In parallel to the increased uranium enrichment in Iran, and to the U.S. efforts to revive the JCPOA, an unprecedented Saudi–Iranian normalisation agreement with China's mediation took place in March 2023. It was interpreted as symbolic with no strategic consequences, but also an unusual Chinese involvement in Middle East political affairs, one that sends a strong signal to the Biden administration. In that, Saudi Arabia expressed its discomfort with the administration's Middle East policy, specifically in regard to Iran's rising power, preferring to appease it rather than attempt to moderate the negative effects of a more emboldened Iran.⁷¹

In June 2025, Israel has launched a pre-emptive strike on Iran, successfully targeting numerous nuclear sites and allegedly sending the Iranian nuclear programme years back, while thwarting some 65% of its ballistic missile capabilities. Later, the U.S. joined to strike the Fordow nuclear site with B-2 Stealth Bombers, as well as the sites in Isfahan and Natanz.⁷² President Trump asserted they have "taken a big dark cloud off of the Middle East by bringing Iran back down to its size. [...] This is a totally different Middle East right now, and you have countries that want to make peace."⁷³ Trump and Netanyahu continued to draw a direct line between the removal of the Iranian threat and the improved chances to reach Israeli–Arab peace.

In February 2026, Israel and the United States launched an all-out military campaign against the Iranian regime. That included the targeted killing of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei alongside a deliberate effort to eliminate the senior political leadership of the country, as well as the command structure of the IRGC, Army, and Basij. Nuclear sites, military bases, and even energy infrastructure was heavily targeted, in a declared effort to

⁶⁹ *At UN Assembly, Israel's Netanyahu Claims Iran Harboring Secret Nuclear Site*. [online], United Nations, 27.09.2018. Source: news.un.org [24.03.2026].

⁷⁰ Del Sarto, Raffaella A. – Soler i Lecha, Eduard (2024): *Regionalism and Alliances in the Middle East, 2011-2021: From a "Flash in the Pan" of Regional Cooperation to Liquid Alliances*. *Geopolitics*, 29(4), 1447–1473.

⁷¹ Leiter, Yechiel M.: *Saudi-Iran Rapprochement and Saudi-Israel Normalization: No Contradiction Intended*. [online], Jerusalem Center for Security and Foreign Affairs (JCFA), 24.05.2023. Source: jcfa.org [24.03.2026].

⁷² *Final Situation Report | "Rising Lion", Israel-Iran War: Day 1–12. Updated June 26, 2025 14:00PM (Israeli Standard Time GMT+3)*. [online], David Institute for Security Policy, 26.06.2025. Source: idsf.org.il [24.03.2026].

⁷³ Fox News [@FoxNews]: *President Trump on Mamdani, 'Seditious' Democrats | Brian Kilmeade Show*. YouTube, 21.11.2025. timestamp 19:11. Source: youtube.com [24.03.2026].

give tools to the Iranian people to potentially topple the regime – continuing the wave of mass protests that was ignited in December 2025.

In addition, progress on the Gaza front was further seen as removing a major obstacle to Arab approval of the peace process with the October 2025 ceasefire agreement in Gaza. The agreement saw the release of all Israeli hostages, founded the Board of Peace, and called for the demilitarisation of Hamas in particular and Gaza writ large, widely endorsed in a public signing ceremony in Cairo by European, Arab, and Muslim leaders including Pakistan and Indonesia.⁷⁴

Conclusion

While examining the underlying rationale of the Trump administration's involvement in the Middle East, a narrow regional or bilateral prism cannot suffice. Rather, a broader outlook is warranted, one that considers the geostrategic interests of the United States in countering its geostrategic adversaries CRINK – in the spirit of the Cold War era's containment and rollback doctrines; advancing the U.S. sphere of influence as means to secure the American homeland; and their expression in the American foreign policy. The limited yet aggressive military campaigns of the United States and Israel in Iran in June 2025 and as from February 2026 suggest a willingness to apply these principles while also stopping short of lengthy entanglements. There is strong evidence to suggest two contrasting vectors are currently interplayed in the region – heavy diplomatic, economic, and security-related investment of the U.S., particularly in Saudi Arabia and a strong alliance with Israel; countered by the heavy investment by China and Russia in Iran. These trends coalesce the great power competition with the Middle East as its microcosm.

The potential expansion of the Abraham Accords from their 2020 model – focusing on bilateral agreements between Israel and the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan – to include Saudi Arabia as a gateway to the larger Muslim world, including Indonesia, exhibits a considerable promise for a larger reconstruction of the dynamics between the Judeo-Christian civilisation and Islam. While the Palestinian issue is still important for domestic reasons, especially in light of the Gaza War, but has gradually become secondary to the dominant one: the threat assessment of Iran's political and military ambitions and advancements. Without Iran's activity, it is likely that Israeli–Arab normalisation would have continued to depend on progress, even resolution of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Yet these two vectors – growing threat on the part of Iran and stalemate on the Palestinian arena were conflicting, rather than converging. The Arab world thus had to continue independently into a breakthrough in the process.

After decades of hostility, Arab rejectionism of Israel, and the internationalisation of the conflict, adherence to a singular orthodoxy regarding the Israeli–Palestinian conflict has been undermined, and the *sine qua non* asset of the two-state plan as a basic given has

⁷⁴ Lahav, Eran – Gelb, Yishai (2025): *Israel Weekly War Summary Week #106 | October 13 – October 18, 2025*. [online], David Institute for Security Policy, 19.10.2025. Source: davidinstitute.org [24.03.2026].

diminished facing a changing reality – while factoring in the dominance of the Gaza War on the relationship.

Prohibitive preconditions to the Arab world's normalisation with Israel have thus become unprecedentedly flexible in the service of the core set of priorities. Namely, looking for strong superpower auspices as means to remain in power. The means to obtain that had been alienating Israel, yet changed into embracing it as a reliable regional partner and a strong American ally. In short, the core set of priorities of the Arab world remained intact, while geostrategic developments have forced the process into a fundamental re-envisionment. Namely, Israel has transitioned from pariah to partner, realising how Jerusalem is a gateway to Washington.

Moving forward, and as the Abraham Accords may finally expand, a success in doing so will also be reflected upon Europe's willingness to cast aside existing dogmas and embrace realistic visions for the region. Encouraging stability in its immediate neighbourhood is a central pillar to the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy. A more stable Middle East will ease irregular migration to Europe and reduce the chances for conflict escalation, that affects Europe as well. Yet the path to reach this eventuality has traditionally focused on demands for far-reaching territorial concessions by Israel rather than an interest- and security-based alliance that places pragmatism and the shared threat perception of Iran front and center.

Europe can share the spoils of the planned regional interconnectivity that will stem from such rapprochement between Israel and the Arab world. This will include energy networks and trade corridors, that are already in the works and awaiting the final conclusion of multilateral agreements between countries. Joining these initiatives, such as IMEC – the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor – or planned innovation initiatives surrounding security technology, agriculture, and fintech, can boost Europe's investment opportunities in positive and constructive regional actors. Empowering the economy in the Middle East can also be interpreted as attempting to replicate – to a degree – the mercantilist approach at the basis of the EU, with trade interdependence as pillar for stability. Transcending Europe, bringing Israel and the Arab and Muslim world closer together will further contribute to easing tensions between East and West, and in turn, reshape the contemporary form of global security architecture.

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