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The Shifting Strategic Dimensions of the Persian Gulf Region: From Abraham Accords to the US-Israel War on Iran

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ABSTRACT

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The Abraham Accords Declaration, signed on August 13, 2020, stands out as a significant advancement in regional diplomacy amid the geopolitical changes and regional dynamics of the Middle East. The Arab Gulf states witnessed remarkable thaw in diplomatic proceedings with Israel during 2020 to 2023. However, the process of Arab-Israel reconciliation was again halted due to the Saudi Arabia-Iran rapprochement the Gaza War in 2023 and the U.S-Israel war on Iran in 2025 and 2026. Investigating the fundamental reasons behind these regional security dynamics, this study argues that, for the Arab Gulf states, normalizing relations with Israel had become a strategic cause in and of itself, separate from the conventional emphasis on the Palestinian cause. But, the rapprochement between two regional heavyweights Saudi Arabia and Iran, the Gaza War and Iran's unwavering attacks on energy and military facilities of the Gulf states in the aftermath of the U.S-Israel war on Iran have questioned relevance of the Abraham Accords in contemporary regional security dynamics. By applying regional security complex theory with mixed method research approach the study argues that from Abraham Accords to the Gaza War and the U.S-Israel war on Iran 2026, anarchy has intensified, regional polarity has disturbed and the patterns of amity and enmity have been transforming in the Persian Gulf sub-complex of the Middle East since the signing of the Abraham Accords.

Introduction

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Israel initiated the process of normalizing diplomatic ties through the Abraham Accords on August 13, 2020. In response to this announcement, Bahrain asserted on September 15, 2020, that it intended to restore diplomatic ties with Israel, with the backing of the U.S. For different reasons, the developments were unexpected. However, security considerations and common interests made the normalization of ties seem realistic. The same security concerns among signatory states over Iran were major driving force behind this normalization (Sorkin, 2023). These states expressed concern over Iran's expanding regional influence and demanded enhanced cooperation.

Abraham Accords is series of agreements for normalization of ties. It was pursued through reflection on the tangible perception that the U.S. is withdrawing from the Middle East and shifting its strategic emphasis to fortifying relationships in the Indo-Pacific

region to contain China (Guzansky and Marshall, 2020). As a result, in order to protect their interests in the face of the dramatic geopolitical changes taking place in the Persian Gulf, the Arab Gulf states were forced to form new alliances and foster diplomatic relations (Aras & Kardas, 2021). Furthermore, the advancement of the normalization process has been greatly aided by the rise of nationalist leadership in Saudi Arabia and the UAE. These states have consistently prioritized their national interests and adopted pragmatic ways in order to handle the complex security issues in the region. (Khan & Shahzad, 2021)

The imposition of contradictory sanctions by Washington proved ineffective in curbing the influence exerted by Tehran. Consequently, the Gulf states decided to initiate a fresh endeavour of forging diplomatic relations with the militarily and technologically advanced Israel, with the aim of containing Iran and safeguarding their own national interests. The establishment of normalized relations between the Arab Gulf states and Israel holds equal significance for all parties involved in the agreement. (Syed & Ahmed, 2021)

For Israel, the Abraham Accords can be characterized as a strategic approach rather than an official statement of diplomatic initiation among the parties that signed the agreement. These accords have been described as a strategic manoeuvring by Israel to establish spheres of influence in the region by exploiting various factors. This multifaceted strategy incorporates regional, religious, economic and military elements. (Sandler, 2020)

Israel entered into the Abraham Accords in an effort to establish diplomatic ties, and promote cooperation in the Middle East. Additionally, Israel has pledged to allocate resources towards the diplomatic ties, infrastructure development, telecommunications, technology, energy, healthcare and tourism (Solomon, 2021). Subsequently, Israel would have the capacity to gain entry into the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula. Israel established and maintained diplomatic ties with two Arab countries, specifically Egypt and Jordan prior to the Abraham Accords. These states, however, do not lie within the geographical boundaries of the Arabian Peninsula. Israel had devised diverse strategies to penetrate the Arabian Peninsula, including the utilisation of covert diplomacy and the manipulation of political and economic incentives for an extended period of time. (Sorkin, 2021)

The biggest aim of Israel and the U.S. for materializing Abraham Accords was to bring Saudi Arabia in its fold. There had been some informal meetings in that context; however, suddenly the regional strategic dimensions took a turn due to the initiation of multiple developments i.e. the Saudi-Iran reconciliation, the Israel-Hamas war in 2023 and the U.S-Israel war on Iran in 2026. The altered geopolitical scenario not only halted the Arab-Israel reconciliation process but also revitalized the Palestinian question, which had been put on the back burner in the aftermath of Abraham Accords. It is, therefore, pertinent to enquire how the regional security dynamics of the Persian Gulf sub-complex have been altered due to Abraham Accords and to what extent the Saudi-Iran rapprochement, the Israel-Hamas War and the ongoing U.S-Israel war on Iran have restored or further transformed the security landscape of the Persian Gulf region.

Conceptual Framework

The Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) has been utilized to analyse security dynamics of the Persian Gulf by evaluating trends at both the domestic and regional levels. There are several dimensions to consider in the domestic analysis, such as political, ideological, and economic factors. Likewise, analysis at the regional level focuses on developments that emerge between states to address security dilemma in aforementioned dimensions.

The basic assumptions of the RSCT emphasize state-centric and securitisation approach and the development of regional security units. The RSCT focuses on four fundamental variables in the study of regional security complexes i.e. anarchy, boundaries of the RSC, patterns of amity and enmity and polarity (Buzan and Waever, 2003). This study examines the Persian Gulf region as a distinctive security sub-complex by conducting an analysis of security dynamics through three variables including anarchy, patterns of amity and enmity and regional polarity. Since the boundaries of the Persian Gulf Security complex have not been altered during the reported period, therefore, this variable has not been studied. The Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) defines anarchy through two kinds of relations: power relations and patterns of amity and enmity. (Buzan & Waever, 2003) The power relations determine substructures of international system in terms of polarity. Likewise, the patterns of amity and enmity are extreme versions of maximalist realism (power theory) that reflects power relations.

Anarchy, Patterns of amity and enmity, and Regional polarity have been operationally defined with the help of following indicators.

Table 1: Indicators of RSCT Variables

Anarchy	Regional Polarity	Pattern of amity/enmity
Number of conflicts- Is there any increase or decrease in the number of conflicts?	Disturbance in regional balance of power- Has the polarity been disturbed due to economic or military expansion?	Ideological transformation-Has there been any ideological transformation took place due to change in leadership or pressure of a norm at the regional or global levels?
Intensity of conflicts- Has the severity of conflicts been increased or decreased?	Security alignments- Has there been any new or revised security alignments through bilateral engagement or through multilateral mechanism?	Convergence of strategic or economic interests due to common enemy-Have the states/non-state actors in the region witnessed convergence of security calculations vis-à-vis a common enemy? Has there been emergence of mutual economic interests of the actors essential for national security?
Dispute Resolving Mechanism- Has there been presence or absence of dispute resolving mechanism?	Dissolution or merger of security complexes- Has there any demographic change in the security complex in the form of addition or omission of actor (state or non-state)?	Exhaustion caused by war- Has any state(s) altered basis of amity/enmity due exhaustion caused by prolonged war or by international/regional isolation?

Anarchic Structure of the Persian Gulf Region

Barry Buzan and Ole Waever have designated Persian Gulf a regional security sub-complex embedded in a larger Middle Eastern regional security complex (MERSC). (Buzan & Waever, 2003). This sub-complex includes the GCC states, Iran and Iraq. The anarchic substructure enabled Arab Gulf states and Israel to seek security through power relations. The Abraham Accords signed in 2020 led to the establishment of diplomatic ties between Israel, Bahrain, and the UAE. The accords aimed to address regional anarchic structure, foster cooperation in economic, security and technological fields. (Yossef, 2021).

The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) between Israel and the UAE was signed in 2022 to foster economic cooperation to USD 10 billion in five years. (Uppal & Barrington, 2023) Strategic cooperation has been marked through joint venture between Abu Dhabi based company G42 and Israel state-owned Rafael Advanced Defence Systems in 2021 to commercialise artificial intelligence (AI) and big data technologies. (Embassy, 2022)

The number of conflicts has declined in the Middle East as Israel and Gulf States became party to the Abraham Accords. Subsequently, increasing interdependence has led to reducing tension and conflict based on Palestinian issue. Israel, Bahrain, and the UAE entered into four of six treaties by signing Abraham Accords just in 2020 (U.S. Department of State, The Abraham Accords Declaration, 2020). The period between 2020-2023 saw minimised conflict in the Persian Gulf region except the outbreak of violence in between Israel and Palestine in April 2022. As a whole, the Abraham Accords have delayed conflict resolution on Palestinian issue and demonstrated less likelihood of existence and recognition of state of Palestine. (Lynfield, 2022)

A dynamic shift in regional policy is reflected when Arab states rejected demand of settlement of Palestine issue for economic and security cooperation with Israel, neutralizing Iranian threat, countering political and ideological difference with Turkiye and filling the vacuum left by Washington's commitment to protect GCC states under the Carter Doctrine. (Ferziger & Bahgat, 2020). Palestine leaders and public denounced this deal with 64 % of the respondents responded against the Abraham Accords in Arab News YouGov Poll (Malvisi, 2023) and equated it as treason with Palestinians. (Guzansky & Marshall, 2021). Palestine also called back its ambassador from the UAE. Palestinians believe that they have been pushed to the side-lines again. The Foreign Minister of the UAE Anwar Gargash responded to the Palestinian condemnation of the UAE for formalizing relations with Israel. He claimed that the objective behind the recognition of Israel was to halt further annexation of the West Bank by Israel. (Prentis, 2022) Contrarily, former Saudi intelligence chief Prince Turki al Faisal contended,

“There is no evidence that embracing Israel has made it less aggressive towards Palestinians. Despite some Arab countries normalized their relationship with Israel, the situation in the West Bank and Gaza remains the same...” (Malvisi, 2023)

The regional security architecture changed with the U.S. role as an organizer rather than mediator fostering prospects of cooperation between the UAE & Bahrain with Israel. Israel might not have attracted Arab Countries towards Abraham Accords, in fact the security incentives guaranteed by the U.S. was the pulling factor. These guarantees included supply of F-35 jets to the UAE, inclusion of Israel in the CENTCOM (Singh, 2022), and safeguarding Bahrain’s royalist regime from Shia majority reformists (U.S. Embassy & Consulates in Morocco, 2020)

The Abraham Accords do not mention any specific dispute settlement mechanism for resolving contentious issues such as the Palestinian issue. The Israel-Palestine conflict is complicated and difficult to resolve than the 1970s Northern Ireland conflict. The conflict is entrenched due to deeper hostility, mistrust and widespread destruction. (Mitchell & Sachar, 2017) Despite of rising regional clout, Israel has been unable to address immediate challenge of the Palestine issue. Alon Liel, former Director General of Israel’s Foreign Ministry said,

“With unprecedented diplomatic capabilities, Israel could have said let’s be generous to the Palestinians, but instead it said we can do whatever suit us.” (Lynfield, 2022)

The Gulf states have undertaken the challenge of neutralizing threat of Iran, diversifying their economy and reducing dependence of hydrocarbons. These challenges are being addressed through multilateral forums such as the Abraham Accords and the Negev Forum. Though, the Abraham Accords did not provide dispute resolution mechanism, but the Negev Forum offers a framework for required momentum in resolving key regional issues. (U.S. Department of State, The Negev Forum Working Groups and Regional Cooperation Framework, 2023) The Negev framework states that:

“...these relations can be harnessed to create momentum in Israeli-Palestinian relations, towards a negotiated resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and as a part of efforts to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, UAE, 2022)

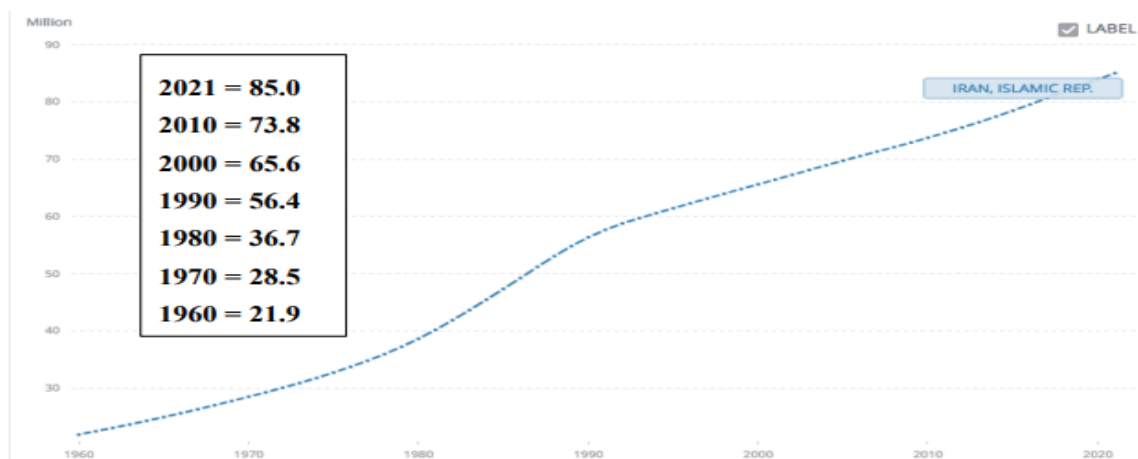
Regional Polarity

Polarity refers to the distribution of power among various units (Buzan and Weaver, 2003). In a RSC, power is divided among two or three units, while the remaining units align with any of the power poles considering their respective security interests. The variable of polarity is evaluated through an analysis of balance of power dynamics that arise from various factors including acquisition of armaments, economic expansion causing disturbance in balance of power, realignments, and the dissolution or merger of security complex units.

The power seemed to be imbalanced considering regional powers’ rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia with a new contender the UAE. The Persian Gulf states aim to diversify economy to reduce dependency on hydrocarbons. Initially, the Arab Gulf states and pre-revolutionary Iran were completely dependent on energy exports. The availability of abundant hydrocarbons has facilitated as a primary driver of regional development. (Mogielnicki, 2022) These states sought economic expansion through diversification a decade earlier when oil prices experienced drastic decline in 2014. (Hvidt, 2021) Moreover, the Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) pandemic made convinced Gulf states that oil era is grinding to a halt gradually and dependency creates vulnerability. Initially, the development was driven by small populations with high oil income per capita. Contrary to that, population has increased manifold with long-term decline in oil prices. (Hvidt, 2021) Following population graphs demonstrate increasing population in three regional powers of the Persian Gulf region. (Cordesman & Cormarie, 2022)

Iran: Total Population Growth (In Millions)

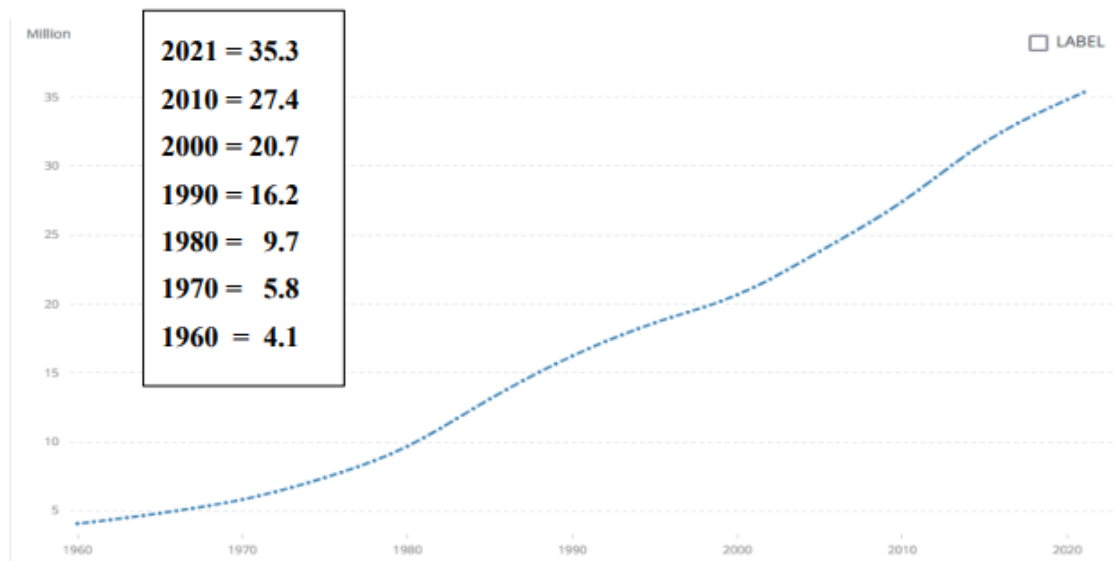
World Bank: 1960-2021



Source: World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=IN>

Saudi Arabia: Total Population Growth (In Millions)

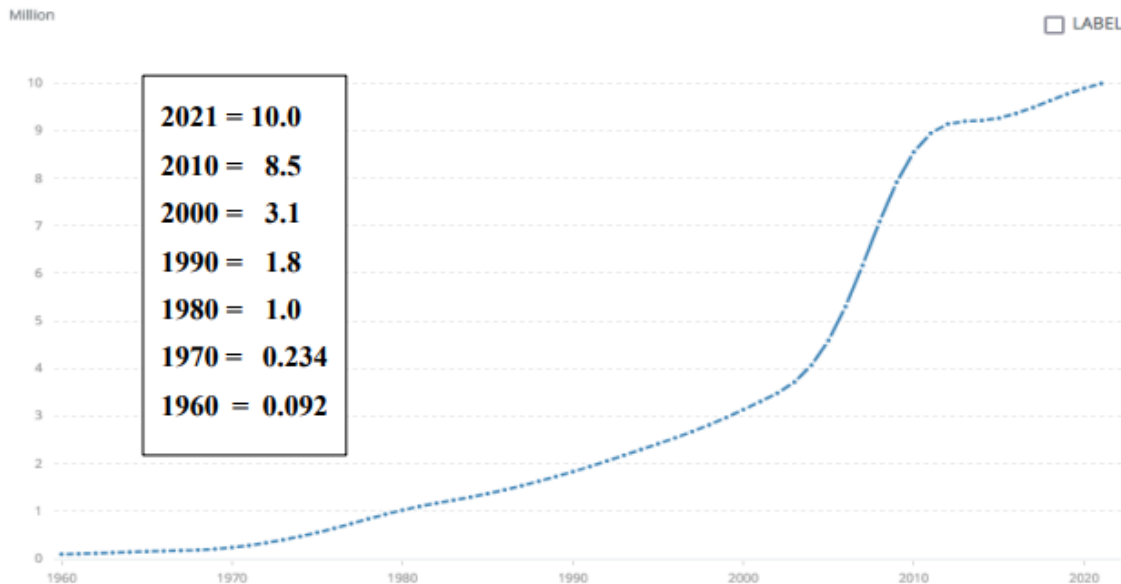
World Bank



Source: World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=YE>

UAE: Total Population Growth (Millions)

World Bank



Source: World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=YE>

The struggle for balance of power has led Iran and its Arab neighbours to indulge in arms race and search for economic markets even before signing of the Abraham Accords. Moreover, regional security dynamics have changed after the Abraham Accords, establishing bilateral and multilateral alignments between Israel and Gulf Arab countries. These developments have been fuelled by the geopolitics of the new Middle East in which Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkiye are expanding their clout. The Arab Gulf states' realignment with Israel demonstrate their need of emerging as accomplished region in the Middle East. For this purpose, the Gulf Arab states have been diminishing hydrocarbons dependency and broadening economic diversification in multiple service sectors like health, education, infrastructure, tourism and entertainment. The development of the Abraham Accords was viewed by Iran as an existential threat endangering country's ideological, strategic and geopolitical significance and influence. (Rad, 2023).

The balance of power has changed in the Middle East after the signing of the Abraham Accords. The U.S. pledged incentives to signatory states of the Abraham Accords. Israel has gained regional superiority viewed from the lens of balance of power in anarchic structure. The UAE has acquired modern weaponry from the U.S. as well (Yaman & Yigittepe, 2023).

Moreover, the balance of power dynamics has transformed polarity in the region. Iran's growing influence is a cause of changing polarity ostensibly. Israel's proven technological and military prowess has encouraged Israel and the Gulf Arab states to deepen cooperation. These states are cooperating in various domains including security issues, cyber security and engage in influence diplomacy with the U.S.

Patterns of Amity/Enmity

Another RSCT variable applied in this study is the pattern of amity/enmity. The variable is analysed through the examination of indicators such as ideological transformations, convergence of interests, mutual economic concerns and exhaustion caused by war. According to (Buzan and Waever, 2003), there have been recurring themes of amity/enmity within the Middle East Regional Security Complex (MERSC), which have traditionally been based on the rivalry between Arabism and Islamism, as well as the struggle between Islamists and Royalists.

The UAE has long history of tackling forces of Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamists outfits in Egypt, Syria, Bahrain and Yemen. The country has emerged successful in rising as an anti-Iran regional alliance with Israel and fighting rising threat of political Islam. Emirates has led region in war against Islamists from ousting Egypt's elected President Mohammad Morsi of

Muslim Brotherhood, fighting against Houthis in Yemen and challenging rise of Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Former U.S. envoy to the UAE Barbara Leaf stated,

"Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan (MBZ) is driven by certain fatalistic line of thinking that Arab Gulf states could no longer rely on the main supporter the U.S., especially after Washington abandoned Egypt's Hosni Mubarak during the 2011 Arab Spring." (Reuters, 2022)

Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan has demonstrated his concerns with then U.S. President Barack Obama regarding Washington's support to Islamists during Arab Spring. MBZ contended,

"... What would happen if protesters in Bahrain called for King Hamad to step down? Would the United States put out that same kind of statement that we had on Egypt? ...If Egypt collapsed and the Muslim Brotherhood took over, there would be eight other Arab leaders who would fall." (Obama, 2020)

In the aftermath of the Abraham Accords the growing economic and strategic partnerships between Israel and Gulf Arabs indicate the regional shifts in patterns of amity and enmity due to the effects of anarchy and polarity. The U.S. disengagement from the Middle East region led Arab Gulf states to address security dilemma through finding contemporary allies with convergence of interest and threat perception.

Change in patterns of amity/enmity was witnessed during negotiations for normalization of ties between Israel and Gulf Arabs to subside Iranian threat. Prior to 2020, Gulf Arab states expressed enmity towards Israel to reinforce solidarity for the Palestinian cause. However, the intimidation posed by Iran had significantly placed the importance on Gulf issues, including containing Iran's supremacy in the Gulf region and the prioritization of security interests. The Gulf Arab states acknowledged the critical nature of implementing containment measures against Iran by engaging into the Abraham Accords with Israel in 2020 (Cordesman & Harrington, 2018)

The Abraham Accords facilitated shift in regional security dynamics through changing patterns of amity/ enmity. Israel's perception as an aggressor or enemy state was altered. The Gulf Arab states are threatened by Iranian arms and its forward defense proxies threatening existence of royal regimes. The U.S. gradual disengagement from the Middle East region led Gulf Arab states to ensure regime security through strategic engagements. (Panikoff, 2022) Israel has everything needed by the Gulf Arab regimes from modern arms, technological advanced economy and weapons and potential of economic cooperation.

Former Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett visited Bahrain in February 2022. It was first ever visit by any Israeli prime minister. (Kingsley, 2022) This development demonstrated acceptance of Israel's increasing regional influence by Bahrain and Saudi Arabia and changing pattern of amity/enmity. Though the six-year ties have witnessed microscopic developments. In the midst of rising regional tensions, former Israeli defence minister Benny Gantz visited Bahrain in February 2022 and signed the first security cooperation agreement. The framework established by the memorandum of understanding (MOU) will serve as a foundation for all forthcoming industrial, military and intelligence cooperation. According to Benny Gantz,

"Only one year after the Abraham Accords, both states have achieved an important defence agreement that will contribute to regional security and stability." (Gross, 2022)

To sum up, Israel and Gulf Arabs are wary of Iran's nuclear program which poses strategic threat. These states have countered Tehran through diplomatic isolation, international sanctions and credible military deterrence. The pivotal drivers of the Abraham Accords were to build a coalition with Gulf Arab states on the basis of enmity with Iran.

Saudi- Iran Rapprochement

Saudi Arabia and Iran attempted rapprochement in March, 2023 with intense efforts of China. This rapprochement came due to various reasons. China needed peaceful regions to expand its network of Silk Road. Also, Riyadh and Tehran broke the ice for their own national interests. Iran's efforts towards rapprochement reflected its feeling of siege after signing of the Abraham Accords between Israel and the Gulf Arab states. Security and threat perception are major factors bringing Saudi Arabia closer to Iran. Tehran has great influence over regional proxies including the Houthis of Yemen who pose security threats to Riyadh. The

deterrence against Iran and pursuit of security remain top priorities of not only Saudi Arabia but also Israel and other Gulf Arabs. These states aim to reach a level of deterrence vis-à-vis Iran even during the U.S. disengagement from region. Moreover, the UAE's tilt towards Israel determines its regional aspirations. These developments have broken the bipolar order of the Middle East revolving around Saudi Arabia and Iran. The emergence of the UAE demonstrates its aim to reflect its economic and military might in the Persian Gulf region.

The Abraham Accords has run into multiple challenges simultaneously. First is the Saudi-Iran rapprochement brokered by China. Second, Israel's hard line policies to Palestinians before and after the October 7, 2023 Hamas attack on Israel has been a challenge. Lastly, the U.S-Israel war on Iran in 2026. Israel's actions in Gaza have been condemned by the Gulf Arabs. The much anticipated inclusion of Saudi Arabia in the Abraham Accords seems a distant reality. Washington will require intense diplomatic engagement with Riyadh to convince it to be a party to the larger set of arrangements including economic, energy, trade and military security even after the Gaza ceasefire and establishment of Board of Peace.

The Saudi-Iran rapprochement, marked by diplomatic engagements and efforts to de-escalate tensions during the U.S-Israel war on Iran, has introduced a nuanced dimension to regional dynamics. Saudi Arabia's cautious approach towards Iran, driven by mutual concerns such as Yemen's civil war and the threat of Iranian influence in the Gulf, has led to tentative cooperation in certain areas, despite enduring differences.

Riyadh's engagements with Tehran have altered the security dynamics in terms of patterns of amity/enmity. The rise in diplomatic engagement has widened Riyadh's regional clout while restraining Tehran's involvement with non-state actors. Israel is confronting challenges to form a coalition against Iran due to fragile rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran and Israel's expansionism in the region. The primary force behind this accord was Israel seeking Saudi Arabia's accession to the Abraham Accords. Moreover, the principal objectives for establishing this coalition was to create a tangible military existence, impose international sanctions on Iran for its nuclear development, and isolate it diplomatically. Tehran-Riyadh thaw seems to develop bilateral cooperation considering Israeli aggression in Gaza and Israel's increasing security zone. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman stated,

"Saudi Arabia did not want the situation with Iran to be difficult. At the end of the day, Iran is a neighbouring country and all that we hope for is to have good relations. Our problem is with Iran's negative behaviour, from its nuclear programme, to its support for outlaw militias in the region, or its firing of ballistic missiles." (BBC, 2021)

Nonetheless, Israel and the U.S. have indicated that Iran-Saudi Arabia détente is not an impediment to the Abraham Accords and its expansion. (Wimmen, et al., 2023) Rather, Riyadh's demands for normalization of ties with the Jewish state including security guarantees and far-right Israeli government's anti-Palestinian rhetoric and actions question relevance of the Abraham Accords in contemporary regional security dynamics.

Israel-Hamas War

The Abraham Accords initiated in 2020, have significantly shifted the focus of Gulf Arab signatories from the Palestinian cause towards their socio-economic and strategic priorities. The Abraham Accords was signed to deepen diplomatic ties between countries with interests in stability. Israel witnessed one of the deadliest attack from Hamas on October 7, 2023. This attack contributed to intense instability in the region. Several non-state actors such as Hezbollah and Houthis also joined their forces against Israel along with Hamas. The October 7, 2023 attack has questioned security architecture and Gulf Arabs' alignment with Israel. (Frantzman S. J., 2024).

The Israel-Hamas War left consequential impacts on the new security architecture which was being built before October 7, 2023 attack (IISS, 2023). Israel had become part of the U.S. Central Command. The country was also given access to the Fifth Fleet base in Bahrain. It provided Israel with defense drill opportunities and access to the Strait of Hormuz. There was also anticipation of air defense pact as security arrangement under auspices of the Abraham Accords with inclusion of Saudi Arabia. However, the war has diminished much anticipated developments for now.

The pattern of amity/enmity witnessed change in diplomatic and strategic engagements between Israel and Gulf Arab states after outbreak of Israel-Hamas War on October 7, 2023. The Abraham Accords had turned antagonistic relationship into an amicable

one. This pattern reversed after the Israel-Hamas War and Israel's efforts at increasing its security zone across the Middle East region. The Abraham Accords provided no help to Palestinian issue. The UAE and Israel emphasized that diplomatic relations between both countries would find an enduring solution to Palestinian issue. However, this notion is far from reality even after six years of signing of the Abraham Accords. Israel-Hamas War and Israeli aggression restricted earlier agreed cooperation through cultural and economic exchanges, strategic cooperation and intelligence sharing.

Moreover, another signatory Gulf Arab state Bahrain recalled its ambassador from Israel. Though, the country has not backed out of accord, but Manama closed its airspace to Israeli flights. It was anticipated that Riyadh will join the accords soon. Now, it all rests in the future when the conflict subsides. Jackie Northam stated,

"...The Biden administration recognizes any normalization between Israel and Saudi Arabia would need a Palestinian component." (Northam, 2023)

Iran-Israel Escalation

Iran-Israel escalation intensified after signing of the Abraham Accords and provision of direct access to Israel in the Strait of Hormuz through CENTCOM. The Abraham Accords have significantly impacted the regional patterns of amity and enmity in the Persian Gulf region from 2020 to 2026 by forwarding a covert security alliance aimed at countering Iran. The normalization of relations between Israel and several Arab Gulf states, including the UAE and Bahrain, led to enhanced military and intelligence cooperation, joint exercises and strategic coordination against Iranian influence. This has created a unified front that diplomatically isolated Iran and pressurized Tehran. Consequently, the Accords reshaped alliances, strengthening ties among signatory states while intensifying regional rivalries and tensions with Iran, thereby altering the landscape of regional security dynamics. (Arhama Siddiq, 2024)

Moreover, this escalation was witnessed in April 2024 when Israel attacked Iranian Consulate in Damascus, Syria. This attack proved deadly and killed seven Iranian officials including two generals. Iran retaliated against attack on consulate through launching first ever attack on Israel from its territory with three hundred missiles and drones (Khalil, 2024). This escalation deescalated after tit-for-tat attacks. However, the Iran-Israel conflict has led to great repercussions. It disturbed global markets through increasing energy prices (Brookings, 2024). The higher energy prices will have negative consequences on inflation process undergoing globally. This can be costly for developing states largely dependent on oil imports like Pakistan.

International trade was disrupted due to Houthis attacks on trade cargos in the Red Sea. (Sainz, 2025) These attacks were orchestrated to pressurize Israel to deescalate in Gaza after October 7, 2023 attack. Israel's attack on Iranian consulate and reciprocal attack by Iran on Israel can disrupt sea line further. The Red Sea witnessed further disruptions which increased shipping costs. These disruptions have intensified with engagement of conflict in the Strait of Hormuz after the outbreak of the U.S-Israel war on Iran in 2026. Subsequently, higher energy prices will contribute to inflation and negative impact economic activity. (Holmes, 2026)

These developments have reshaped the traditional anarchic structure, polarity and patterns of amity and enmity in the Persian Gulf region, with alliances shifting based on strategic interests and security imperatives. The emergence of non-state actors as significant players, particularly in conflicts involving Israel and Iran, has added complexity to the region's geopolitical landscape (International Crisis Group, 2023).

Iran-Israel War 2025

After the October 7th, 2023 attacks, the initiation of Israel's military campaign in Gaza, killing of Iranian generals in Damascus in 2024, and Iran's attacks on Israel after the assassination of Hamas and Hezbollah leaders, Israel launched large scale military campaign against Iran on June 13th, 2025. This war was launched after a day of an IAEA asserting Iran is violating its non-proliferation obligations. Israel attempted to dismantle Iran's air defence and missile capabilities. Moreover, the U.S. facilitated Israel on June 21st after striking Iran's nuclear facilities in Fordow, Isfahan and Natanz. (CFR, 2026) Subsequently, Iran launched retaliatory strike against U.S. forces at Al Udeid air base in Qatar on June 23rd, 2025. These developments indicate an intensifying anarchy in the Persian Gulf region due to multiple reasons such as Iran's retaliation against the Gulf Arab states after the U.S.

attacks on Iran and also vacuum left by the weakening Iran's proxies including Hamas, Hezbollah and ouster of Assad regime in Syria.

The Persian Gulf region has polarised after witnessing unprecedented military campaigns of Israel in Gaza, Syria, Lebanon and Iran. Israel also violated Qatar's sovereignty by striking Hamas officials in Qatar in 2025. This has led to insecurity of the Gulf states and increasing armament in the region considering Iran-Israel war and Israel's overt campaigning for the Greater Israel. Also, Israel's aggressive attacks in Gaza and the MENA region have reinforced the perception that Israel threatens regional stability. (Dzulhisham, 2025)

The Iran-Israel conflict has left a lasting impact on the Persian Gulf region. First, it has reversed the normalisation process between the Arab Gulf states and Israel. Second, continuous conflict has led to the military build-up and armament in the Gulf Arab states. Last, it has weakened Iran by dismantling its forward defense bloc in form of proxies such as Hamas, Hezbollah and the Assad regime. Consequently, other regional powers including Israel, Gulf Arab states and Türkiye are expanding influence in the region. Therefore, the Iran-Israel conflict has intensified anarchy, polarised the Persian Gulf region and exacerbated the already existing patterns of enmity.

The United States-Israel War on Iran 2026

From the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war to the U.S-Israel war on Iran, six years have witnessed increasing anarchy in the region. Israel's expansionist agenda has led Washington to lose its allies in the Gulf. Washington could not secure the Gulf states from drone and missile attacks of Iran on energy and military facilities. There is a growing perception that Washington prioritises and provides security umbrella to Tel Aviv. Therefore, the anarchy has intensified after the initiation of war on Iran in February, 2026. Moreover, the Gulf Arab states' relations with Iran have downgraded further. (Diwan, 2026) The UAE closed Iranian embassy and severed diplomatic ties with Iran. Qatar and Saudi Arabia have expelled security and military attaches. Bahrain had severed ties with Iran after an attack on Saudi embassy in 2016. After the war, reestablishment of ties seems a distant reality. This has been followed by the U.S-Israel war on Iran, drone and missile attacks on the Gulf states and the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz.

The U.S.-Israel war on Iran has transformed the regional polarity. Cessation of naval and aerial economic activity after the war has convinced the Gulf states to opt out of the U.S-led security architecture. In this regard, the Middle East has now a quartet including Egypt, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye. (Schneider, 2026) According to Robert Kagan, foreign policy analyst, the aftermath of the ongoing war can be a consequence of two directions: first neither war nor peace or the emergence of regional security architecture having region's major powers as security guarantors. Aforementioned quartet has conducted four high-level meetings in three months. This development indicates an emergence of an independent regional order. Also, the unexpected success of Tehran in asymmetrical warfare and leveraging the Strait the Hormuz convince major regional powers accommodating Iran rather than demonstrating antagonism. Despite of Iranian attacks on energy and military facilities, the Gulf is maintaining ties with Tehran. The Saudi Arabia-Iran rapprochement 2023 is fragile but it hangs on. (Akbarzadeh, 2026) Moreover, the UAE is realising the need of accommodating Iran unlike prior scepticism as well as inclining further in the U.S-Israel security architecture.

The recent outbreak of the U.S-Israel war against Iran on February 28, 2026 reflects the structural conflict between two civilizational ideologies. The patterns of enmity have been exposed as Iran has been referred as a biblical Amalekites. The U.S. supports the Israeli narrative of Amalekites and enmity as the U.S. ambassador to Israel said in an interview,

"It would be fine if they took it all." Mika Huckabee.

The war against Iran began on the promise of dismantling Tehran's nuclear ambitions, military disarmament and regime change. However, the political faultlines have been transformed into religious confrontation. The enmity has intensified even after signing of the Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on June 18, 2026 that did not last a month. (Khokhar, 2026)

The U.S-Israel war on Iran has unplugged a wave of persistent attack on the Gulf countries for being the Launchpad of war against Iran. This conflict can transform the pattern of amity between Washington and its Gulf allies, asserts March Lynch, Professor and director of the Project on Middle East Political Science at the George Washington University. (Lynch, 2026) The

Gulf states hoped to avoid endorsing and opposing Iran in this war. However, Washington has been instrumental in dragging the GCC countries in this war and bearing the brunt in form of casualties and economic damages. Another factor of frustration for the Gulf countries is regarding their forceful support for Israel without mentioning of resolution of the Palestine issue. The ongoing war has left the deepest strategic impact on the historical trade-off between the Gulf and the U.S. Washington has provided the security umbrella. It is likely that the GCC reassesses its security partnerships considering vulnerability of attack from Iran, stalled export revenues and closure of airspace. (Mansour, 2026)

Conclusion

The security engagement between the U.S. and Arab Gulf states led to the implementation of contemporary policies, including the Abraham Accords on the burden-sharing strategy. The security dynamics of the region have been profoundly impacted by this initiative. Moreover, ideological, economic, and political factors contributed to shifts in the dynamics of regional security. The Persian Gulf region has experienced an upsurge of diplomatic normalization after the Abraham Accords. The historical approach on anarchic structure, the patterns of amity/enmity and regional polarity have been significantly impacted by the normalization. The Abraham Accords were regarded as an extraordinary breakthrough in addressing the perceived threat posed by Iran and its influence on Islamist factions. Riyadh's engagements with Doha and Tehran, Gaza War and U.S-Israel war on Iran have altered the security dynamics and the historical perspective on three RSCT variables since January 2021. Israel is confronting challenges to form a coalition against Iran due to its expansionism. The primary force behind for establishing this coalition was to create a tangible military existence, impose international sanctions on Iran for its nuclear development, and isolate it diplomatically. Nonetheless, the military campaigns of Israel in Gaza, Lebanon and Iran have had a considerable impact on the anarchic structure of the Persian Gulf region as well as patterns of amity/enmity and polarization. The geopolitical landscape of the Middle East is undergoing significant transformations driven by recent developments such as the Israel-Hamas war and the U.S-Israel war on Iran. These developments have intensified existing tensions, reshaped alliances, and introduced new dimensions to regional dynamics. The reliance on external support and the prevalence of proxy conflicts further complicate efforts to achieve stability and peace in the region.

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