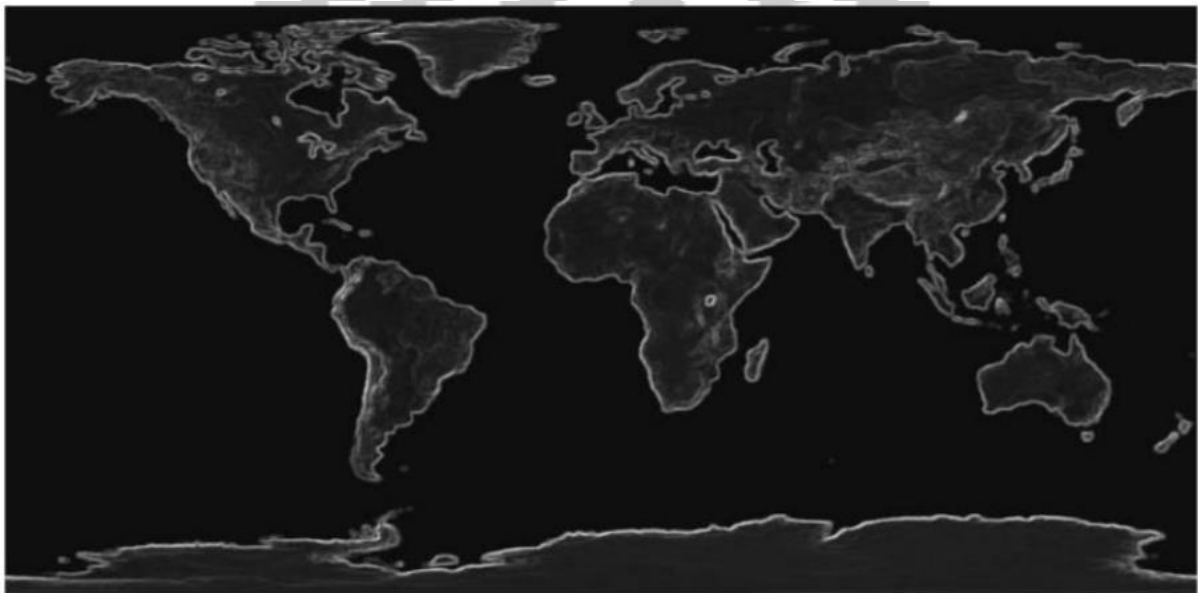


EVOLVING DYNAMICS BETWEEN ISRAEL AND THE MIDDLE EAST: TRANQUILLITY OR TURBULENCE?

Unravelling the renewed Middle East fault lines following the Israel-UAE Deal

Veritas et Aequitas



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If there already were not enough significant events happening in the year 2020, another one has been added. After about 26 years, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is the third Arab state and the first Arab Gulf state to formally recognize Israel, and this decision and the signing of the agreement between the two, on the 13th of August 2020, has been historically important. Under the Abraham Accord or Israel- United Arab Emirates Peace agreement, there are hopes for increased security, economic and commercial relations. Along with this, there are also greater chances of renewed relations between the Israeli population and the Palestinians, who have faced decades-long issues. This deal comes from a long-conflicted history, and it will map out the future not just for the two countries but for the entire Middle East and its future, which will become clearer only with the time to come.

With several clashes, wars, uprisings, and whatnot, the history and recognition of Israel remains contradictory for different countries, especially the Arabs. Israel is formally the world's only Jew state and is located east of the Mediterranean Sea. With Lebanon to the north, Syria to the northeast, and bounded by Jordan in the east and southeast. Jerusalem is the government proclaimed capital but has not been given complete international recognition. Along with this, the disputed ethno-regional population hailing from the Israeli land are referred to the Palestinians with Palestine as the territory, are the followers of Islam, and are wanting to establish their separate state. Demographically, the Jews majorly flee from the persecution in Europe to establish their nation-state in the territory that was majorly claimed by the Arabs and the Muslim majority in the Ottoman and British empire. The disputes and conflicts thus began. With the Arabs claiming their rights and Jews establishing their control, it led to several conflicts.

Their history also includes the religious and political movement, known as Zionism that emerged in the 19th and 20th centuries among the Jews. It was because they wanted to establish themselves in Palestine and, thus, migrated to the holy land. Around 1947-1948, the United Nations voted for the Partition of Palestine into a Jewish and Arab state, and conflicts broke out immediately. Further, on the 15th of May 1948, British forces withdrew from Israel, but the next day the Arab forces occupied parts of the region, which also resulted in a large number of refugees. There were disputes over the city of Jerusalem, and it ended up with Israelis. This war and conflicts are remembered to this day as the War of Independence. Following this, in 1956, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser took over the Suez Canal and nationalized it, following which Israel re-captured the Suez Canal and attacked the Sinai Peninsula. Later, in 1964, the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) was formed to represent and create a platform for the Palestinian state within Israel. In 1967, Israel then defeated Egypt, Jordan, and Syria in six days. Israel further took over and occupied the Gaza strip, Sinai Peninsula, West Bank, and the Golan Heights. This was followed by the Yom Kippur War, where Israel was attacked by Egypt across the Suez Canal and by Syria on the Golan Heights. After Israel's withdrawal from Sinai, there were tensions between Israeli's and Palestinians, and resultant was the Israeli bombing of Beirut, where the PLO was powerful and in control. It resulted in Israel invading Lebanon, but later Israeli government had to halt its advancement in Lebanon after negotiations with PLO. In 2007, Gaza Strip was taken under control by Hamas, a Palestinian Sunni-Islamic militant organization, and was declared under it by Israel. Hamas was hostile and undertook power cuts, imports, and border closures. It continued to attack



Israel, and Israel continued to attack the Gaza Strip. In June 2008, Israel and Hamas implemented a truce, but soon it was violated. The border hostilities continued along with airstrikes for a while, and a week later, Israeli forces initiated a campaign into the Gaza Strip and there were calls from the international community for a ceasefire. Almost three weeks later, a total of 1000 were killed, and several thousand were left homeless. But, the issues between Hamas and Israel continued.

With the disputes continuing to this day, Israelis and Palestinians are divided on issues of territory, specifically, the capital city of Jerusalem, and they also blame each other for terrorist attacks. The contention arises when the question of Israel and its recognition pops up. With over 149 countries officially recognizing Israel, almost 25 Arab countries still have not made peace with it, all of them being Israel's neighboring countries. Back in 1949, more than 70 years ago, Israel was admitted as the 59th member to the United Nations, a year after the state of Israel was formally and internationally recognized. David Ben-Gurion was proclaimed as the head and the Prime Minister on the 14th of May 1948.

The United States, followed by the USSR, were the first countries to grant de-jure recognition. The relations with its neighbors remain turbulent, and in the past, after having fought wars with them, Israel has only established peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan. The relations with Syria and Lebanon, the immediate neighbors, along with Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia, remain problematic. It also brings about the question of Palestine and its recognition. Although Israel, as a country, does not recognize it, several countries across the world do so. Almost 137 countries recognize Palestine as a separate nation but nations like the United States and Israel itself have stepped out of this and only recognize the PLO as the party speaking for the Palestinians. Although, in the United Nations, Palestine serves as a non-member observer state and was upgraded to this status on 29th November 2012. But, the struggle by the Palestinians continues, for statehood, for identity, and for greater recognition.

There have been several tries and approaches to resolve the ongoing conflict. One of them has been a two-state solution, and Palestine would be an independent state with the Gaza and West Bank territory, but the two sides are still divided on the issue. In the one-state solution, where both the areas are one territory, either Israel or Palestine, which would, in turn, cause more issues, but it is becoming a more plausible solution with time. Back in 1937, the Peel Commission recommended the partition of British Mandatory Palestine to halt the Arab-Jewish violence, following which several plans were proposed by several countries, leaders, and institutions but were rejected by both the groups, Arabs and Israelis. In 1947, the United Nations approved the partition of Palestine into two states, Jewish and Arab, but the Arabs rejected it. The formation of two independent states would end up endangering Israel's existence and would take a very long time to re-establish. The one-state solution would also result in giving them an option between offering them citizenship or keeping them stateless, and there, in turn, arises another question of leadership of the country. The integration would also result in the side-lining of the Jews and would defeat the purpose of a Jewish state.



via: The New York Times

Why is the deal between Israel and UAE so important then? It is because the deal comprises several steps that will mold the future of Israel and a slim hope for the Arabs and the Israeli state to reconcile. This move is being seen as a pathway for the two countries to develop and strengthen ties in commerce, technology, business, tourism, direct flights to become operational, scientific cooperation, and much more. With Israel being one of the most developed countries in terms of technology in the region, UAE can draw support from it to develop itself and also hopes to be the first Arab country to send a mission to Mars. The Abraham agreement between the two nations and brokered by United States, President Donald Trump, there is a commitment to halt the Israeli annexation of the West Bank and for improvement in relations between Palestinian and Israeli counterparts. Although, in the short run, these negotiations have less probability. The deal also looks at more security cooperation against regional threats like Iran and other nations. Reportedly on the 1st of July, the annexation of West Bank was set to take place, but it did not open doors for this agreement. It is also said that the two nations have always had security ties, but now with the negotiations, it is more formal. In 2015, Israel opened a diplomatic office in Abu Dhabi, UAE, that was tied to the International Renewable Energy Agency. Although, as of now, UAE might not set up their embassy in Jerusalem. Further, Israeli athletes have also participated in competitions in UAE like most recently in Dubai's World Expo 2020, which is now scheduled to open in October 2021 due to the pandemic. After this move, Oman, Bahrain, and Morocco likely are to follow the same path. UAEs de facto ruler Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed considers this as a gamble but has hopes of it working out with the side aim to also tackle the growing supremacy and control of Iran in the region.



With UAE being the third Arab country to have relations with Israel, the world is keeping a close eye on this move. The United States has received this as a historic breakthrough between the two nations. The Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu also called this a historic day. The UN General Secretary, Antonio Guterres has also said that the normalization of the ties between the two nations, Israel and UAE, will help realize the two-state solution with Palestine and the hope for a better future. There is also an increased opportunity for the nations in the Middle East to consider improving ties with Israel and recognizing it in some way. The Emirati diplomats and leaders announced it as a way to stop the Israeli annexation of Palestine. Egypt and Jordan, the only two other countries who have relations with Israel in the region, also said that this move will help bring about more peace and stability as it will stop the annexation of the Palestinian land. Although Bahrain and Oman have also publicly welcomed the move, and the future seems optimistic. On the other hand, the Arab nations, including Palestine, have called for the rejection of the deal. A Palestinian official also framed it as “being sold out by our friends.” They have denounced the move and the relation between Israel, UAE, and the US trilateral. It has also been said that this move does not serve the cause of the Palestinians. Even the right-wing Israeli’s are upset with this move, because they want to annex the West Bank, and said that they have been deceived by their leader. The use of the term “suspend” while referring to the plan of the annexation of the West Bank by the Israeli leader is only a way to pacify the situation.

The situation today is an obstacle to peace in the region. Until and unless both sides of the territory come to a resolve, the situation is far from improving. The resources and power in both countries can be better utilized for the development of the country, the region, and its people. There is hope for a stabler future for both the Israelis and Palestinians if the free UN member states demand the governments of both countries to reconcile and stand together for peace and stability. In the world we are living, religion, race, ethnicity, and the nationality form the top of the pyramid, and out of the above, the situation here is a fight for nationality and the land and, it rises way beyond the question of being Jews or Muslims or Judaism or Islamism, for that matter. With the complexity of the scenario, there is no surety of an end to it. But, what stands important here is the fulfillment of the wants of the people on both sides of the territory, and an end to the hatred and violence, because there already is enough!

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