



PERSPECTIVES

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Implications of the Israel-UAE Peace Deal

by Jonathan Fulton and Roie Yellinek

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: While normalization between the UAE and Israel is probably not the game-changer some believe it to be, it does firm up a changing regional environment. The deal will create a new dynamic on three levels: domestic, regional, and international. Expect more pieces to fall into place soon as other countries adjust.

The announcement that Israel and the UAE are normalizing relations is less of an [earthquake](#) than it might appear, as Israel and several Gulf states have [been moving](#) in that direction. The breakthrough appears to be the logical outcome of the trajectory followed by PM Benjamin Netanyahu and the UAE's Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Zayed, who have had secret diplomatic contacts for some time. Their agreement is the third peace deal between Israel and an Arab country, following Egypt (1979) and Jordan (1994). It will create a new dynamic on three levels: domestic, regional, and international.

Domestically, the two states' leaders chose to describe the deal differently to reflect their different audiences. The Emiratis emphasized that the deal will postpone Israel's planned application of sovereignty to portions of the West Bank, making normalization consistent with support for the Palestinians. The Israelis used the breakthrough to shift attention away from local economic and political problems, and even as a starting point for an election campaign. Both sides agreed that the rapprochement is an historic step that can give real hope to the region.

Within the UAE public sentiment has been largely supportive, as would be expected. While an older generation of Emiratis grew up with a harsh view of Israel, the Palestinian cause has been less of a rallying cry for those who came of age in the 21st century, a time of great regional turmoil. Among younger Emiratis, a more pragmatic view of Israel seems to be the norm, especially as

Iranian imperialism and militant Islam have taken on a larger role in the regional threat perception in the post-Arab uprisings era.

Beyond the domestic level, the announcement has significant regional implications. Turkey and Iran both reacted as one would expect. Iranian FM Muhammad Javad Zarif criticized the deal during his recent visit to Lebanon, [describing](#) it as a stab in the back for Lebanon and other Arab countries. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan [threatened](#) to cut diplomatic ties with the UAE and shut its embassy over the deal. The new alignment threatens both Iran and Turkey and challenges their regional policies.

Reactions from other local governments have been more measured. Egypt, Oman, and Bahrain all [expressed support](#). Bahrain [is expected](#) to be the next Arab state to recognize Israel, and Oman has long advocated for warmer relations. In 2018, Oman's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Yousef bin Alawi bin Abdulla [speculated](#) that "maybe it is time for Israel to be treated the same [as other states] and also bear the same obligations." Saudi Arabia [has remained](#) quiet about its relationship with Israel, though there is speculation that the UAE deal might open the door for the Saudis to follow suit.

On the international level, responses have varied between support and indifference. One development to keep an eye on is the US-China rivalry in the Middle East. Last month's leaked details of a supposed agreement between Beijing and Tehran intensified tensions between Washington and Beijing, and the Middle East is increasingly looking like a possible theater of competition between the two superpowers. The agreement between the UAE and Israel, both US allies, could be interpreted as a counter to the Iran-China deal. However, both countries also enjoy advanced relations with China, and it is unlikely that leaders in either state would want to antagonize Beijing. Regardless, any developments that alter the Middle East's strategic landscape will have implications on the broader international level, and the responses of leaders in the US, China, and Russia will bear watching.

Jonathan Fulton is an assistant professor of political science at Zayed University in Abu Dhabi and a nonresident senior fellow with the Atlantic Council. Follow him on Twitter: @jonathandfulton.

Roie Yellinek is a PhD student at Bar-Ilan University, a doctoral researcher at the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, and a non-resident scholar at the Middle East Institute.