

Israel's Foreign Policy Interests in Normalizing Relations with Middle East Countries

Rio Sundari¹ Cifebrima Suyastri² Rendi Prayuda³ Faisyal Rani⁴

^{1,2,3} International Relations Department, Universitas Islam Riau, Pekanbaru

⁴ International Relations Department, University Riau, Pekanbaru

Corresponding Author: riosundari@soc.uir.ac.id

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Abstrak: This research aims to explain Israel's foreign policy interests in normalizing relations with Arab countries. Between 2020 and 2021, Israel concluded normalization agreements with 4 Arab countries (United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan, Morocco) announced and mediated by President Trump. Previously, in 1978, Egypt had already normalized relations with Israel by signing a peace agreement mediated by then US leader Jimmy Carter. In 1994, Jordan also followed in Egypt's footsteps to normalize relations with Israel in the Washington Declaration mediated by Bill Clinton. This research uses a descriptive qualitative research model approach in analyzed problems empirically. The qualitative approach used in this research is a type of literature study whose data sources are analyzed from books, journals and news portals that have a correlation with the research. The results of the study mentioned that the shift in the perspective of regional security to interests allowed the normalization of this relationship. However, this development does not mean that this normalization leads to peace and stability as the main goal. On the contrary, this diplomatic relationship is only an ulterior motive in carrying out interest mutualism to gain benefits, international status and global reputation that are more favorable to Israel.

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INTRODUCTION

Today, there is no common definition of "where great powers come from". The delimitation of great or small powers depends on the perspective of each country based on a comparison of its status, implications, advantages and affections towards other countries. Thus, a country may be considered weak in relation to one country but strong in relation to another. For example, Canada, Brazil and Australia are the largest countries in the world in terms of territory and resources; India, Indonesia and Pakistan are the most populous

countries. However, when the strengths of these countries are combined, they do not necessarily reach world power status. In fact, in determining and evaluating whether a country is a power or not, the prominent element of synergy is military power. Economic and technological strength also play a significant role.

Another example, the Netherlands is a small country in Europe, but its dominant power during the 15th-16th century gained world hegemony with the title "Car Driver on the Sea". England, a country with an area of more than 200,000 km² but in the 19th century was dubbed as the place where "The Sun never sets off". Today, the UK is only a medium-sized country in terms of area and population. But the UK is considered a world great power because of its synergy in military, economy and international status, similar to South Korea or even smaller countries like Singapore and Qatar only because they have impressive strength in military, economy, technology and international status instead of area and population. These criteria reflect a country's great power and Israel is no exception. (Stefano & O'Sullivan, 2019)

The diversity of the area of countries in the Middle East region, especially Israel, whose country size is relatively small, has implications for the tendency to expand its territory / space. This can be seen in Israel's expansion policy to countries close to it, such as Palestine, the Golan Heights, Sinai (Egypt) and South Lebanon. (Jatmika, 2017).

Greek philosophers emphasized the advantages of small and homogeneous governments. Plato calculated the optimal size of a government with a densely populated country, run by good laws such as Singapore. This observation raises how the nature of a small state is more likely to be self-reinforcing against outsiders and whether it is particularly important for the economic success and political power of the state. (Alesina, 2020)

As is known, almost all Arab countries including its neighbors are enemies of Israel. To survive in such a hostile environment, Israel developed many defense technologies and weapons. Due to hostile neighbors, Israel's economy does not depend on exports from them, they have to innovate and solve their own problems. Therefore, in addition to the synergy of increasing criteria in various fields. Israel is improving its social status with the help of the cooperation of the United States.

Small countries want to join forces with large countries to obtain redistribution, while there are restrictions on cooperation by large countries that shift the perception of mutual benefits. Thus, these constraints must be considered to maximize trade-offs and motivate cooperation patterns that attract benefits. The point is that small countries can prosper as long as they are open to international trade and cooperation. Conversely, small states must be highly profitable to maintain the regime. This is a strong reason for Israel to bind the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the rest of the Gulf region to normalization. (Krasna, 2022) Israel has the motivation to benefit from its normalization with the Gulf States. On the other hand, Israel opens up opportunities for the United States to gain its interests in the Middle East region and strengthen relations with its allies. In this case, Israel became a pioneer and king because it succeeded in cooperating with two major powers for its political interests. (Alexander, 2020).

Gulf states that were once nominal enemies became official allies when the foreign ministers of the UAE and Bahrain along with then Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu signed a peace agreement normalizing diplomatic relations between the two countries known as the Abraham Accords. This was an important achievement under then US President Donald Trump. Israel and the UAE have fundamental social, economic and political differences, being geographically distant and having experienced different historical experiences. (Rimapradesi & Sahide, 2021). Yet both countries have common interests stemming from common challenges and threats as well as shared opportunities for growth. These interests relate to diplomacy and security (regional and global), economics (trade, technology and knowledge) and civic issues (such as environmental protection and interfaith dialog). This generates significant potential for cooperation between the two countries. (Miller, 2022)

Almost 2 years after the signing of the Abraham Accord, the historic peace agreement between Israel, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. Furthermore, the agreement has been joined by other Arab Gulf states and a series of Middle East cooperations already appear to

be underway. Israel, several Gulf states, and the United States are working to create a regional alliance on air defense. According to UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, "the Middle East is not only a region of frequent conflicts, but a region of tremendous potential dynamism and capacity". While trade, tourism and other links made possible by the Abraham Accords will play an important role, security cooperation will also be key to integrating the region. Normalizing relations with the Gulf States is a true achievement for Israel. This motive provides the idea that Israel's strength as a small state but backed by great powers will eventually make the Gulf Arab States realize that their only option is to recognize Israel's existence.(Wardoyo & Valentino, n.d.)

Israel and the UAE also share common challenges, among which are Iran's nuclear project, its regional influence and presence in various countries, its training and arming of terror organizations, its maritime attacks on US allied ships, its use of military force through proxies, and the lifting of the international arms embargo against it. Then of great concern to both are Turkey's growing position as a regional power; the folding of the US defense umbrella in the Middle East and the continuing threat to the UAE and Israel's stability from terror organizations and radical factions. (Mundi, 2022)

The UAE is the most hawkish Gulf state in its attitude towards political Islam (particularly the Muslim Brotherhood), which mirrors Israel's worldview. At the same time, Israel's persistent struggle against Iran serves the UAE's interests, and the normalization of relations between the two countries could help map out joint defense plans and even military operations in the worst-case scenario of a violent regional struggle. (Muslimin & Hosny, 2021) The establishment of a relationship will also allow the UAE to equip itself with advanced technology and weaponry and allow Israel to cooperate with an ally that has high-quality military capabilities. (Zaga, 2020).

The UAE is an important economic center due to its key position as a transshipment point to various parts of the world. The economic and diplomatic advantages it generates are a magnet for countries and companies around the world and therefore have generated great interest in Israel, but also mean there will be significant competition to its integration into this circle of opportunity. The Emirati economy relies heavily on imports, and the port of Jebel Ali is the most important in the region. Closer ties between the UAE and Israel would contribute to the opening of a trade corridor for Israeli goods to the East and Emirati goods to the West and the Mediterranean Basin. Both countries also stand to benefit greatly from establishing direct economic ties. Israel's expertise in high technology and the UAE's wealth of energy resources could provide a platform for joint activities that serve mutual commercial interests. However, the size of both countries' economies in other commercial areas is quite limited compared to the competition posed by other countries. Over the past decade, the UAE has begun to develop its production capacity, which means its exports to Israel could gradually increase.(Tahmi et al., 2022) The UAE tends to be a fast developer and has a history of initiating large projects. By focusing on their infrastructure, Israeli companies can leverage their own know-how and gain significant economic benefits. One of the most notable collaborations is Israel's long experience with research and development centers that are now starting to flourish in the UAE. These projects also provide many opportunities for broader international partnerships due to the Emirates' open business culture. (Bowen, 2020).

RESEARCH METHODS

This research basically relies a lot on secondary data, due to the limitations of reaching the research location. Nevertheless, this research uses a qualitative research model approach that is carried out descriptively in describing the analysis of problems empirically. Instrument in the qualitative approach used in this research is a literature study whose data sources are analyzed from books, journals and news related to research on Israel's Motivation in Normalizing Relations with Arab Countries. Furthermore, the data is analyzed inductively by collecting various articles or journals relevant to this research. The next stage is to reduce

the data to get important points in mapping the typology of conflicts that occur, then provide conclusions from the research results which are the findings in this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

On September 15, 2020, Israel, the UAE, and Bahrain agreed to normalize regional relations by signing an agreement called Abraham. Israel also signed agreements with Morocco and Sudan on December 22, 2020 and January 2021, respectively. (Ilham, 2022) The four treaties stipulate an agreement to recognize each other and strengthen diplomatic relations.

However, when examined in depth, the relationship depicted in each Gulf region's individual agreements with Israel varies considerably. The Israel-UAE agreement builds on Israeli and Arab normalization in the 1990s, made possible by the Oslo peace process between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). At the time, this rapprochement facilitated trade and tourism between Israel and a number of Gulf states. Although to varying degrees there was the possibility of establishing diplomatic representation and bilateral trade between the countries. Later this relationship suffered a significant setback as a result of the intifada movement (a widespread resistance movement of the Palestinian people against the Israeli occupation) from 2000 to 2005.

Normalizing relations with all three countries is possible because none of them have a bilateral conflict with Israel. They have also never been significantly involved in Israel's wars. Israel and the UAE have developed close intelligence, military and civilian ties in recent years. With the agreement, these arrangements are now official, and efforts will be made to deepen and expand them to include a social dimension. Given the previous ties, this agreement hardly qualifies as a "peace agreement" as framed by US President Donald Trump (Baqi, 2022).

The deal between Israel and Sudan should be assessed differently, as both countries had been in a state of war until then. Sudanese contingents fought in the war against Israel, and under Omar al-Bashir (1989-2019), Khartoum maintained close ties with opponents of Israel, especially Iran and Hamas. Israel has repeatedly attacked convoys in Sudan carrying weapons to Hamas. As such, this agreement is in fact a "peace treaty", although it still awaits implementation (Benstead, 2022).

Political analysis illustrates that the joining of several Arab countries with Israel cannot be separated from US influence in the Middle East region. Bahrain and the US had previously had a good relationship when the US would open free trade with Bahrain if Bahrain stopped its boycott of Israel. (Al-Jazeera, 2020).

In January 2020, Trump presented his plan to create peace in the Middle East with the aim of ending the Palestinian and Israeli conflicts. One of Trum's ways to realize his plan is to tower over several Arab countries to replace or shift the Arab-Israeli conflict to Arab-Iran. Iran and Israel view each other as direct competition in the Gulf region. (Hitman & Kertcher, 2018).

Going back to the Israel-Iran incident in May 2018, several Arab governments, including Bahrain, were in an anti-Iran position and sided with Israel on the grounds of anticipating Iran's growing influence. This is because they consider that Iran's plan to develop nuclear power is to become a strong hegemon in the Arabian Gulf region. This is the key for the US to attract the attention of the Arab region to pressure Iran despite US interests in the Gulf region. There is fear for the US of Iran's nuclear development because it is feared that it will become a weapon against the US and Israel. For the US, the security of its ally Israel is a policy priority that will always be maintained. This cannot be separated from US interests in the Middle East region on the grounds that Israel is the closest ally and also has a strategic position in the Middle East to ensure its interests can be maintained in the region. (Sundari, 2020). Therefore, the opportunity was taken by the US significantly including one of them in June 2019, when Bahrain hosted the Peace for Prosperity Workshop where Donald Trump presented his plan for peace in the Middle East and Palestinian prosperity, although the

analysis concluded that the workshop was less about Palestine and more about the Gulf region in the peace process and deeper normalization with Israel. (Derajat & Kurniawan, 2020) Reversing the clauses "normalize by pursuing a strategy" or summarizing to improve relations with Israel as a means of pressuring the Palestinians towards a resolution. (Wicaksono, 2020). Then on 13 August 2020 when Trump announced the UAE's joining normalization with Israel, Bahrain supported the plan by allowing flights to and from Israel over its airspace.

Israel's Motivation for Normalizing Relations with Arab Countries

Israel's motivation in normalizing relations with Arab states may be based on four main implications of the deal. The first two are political while the last two are material rewards or concrete benefits. (Kolomiensky, 2021).

1. Such normalization suggests that Israel does not need to make peace with Palestine to normalize its relations with Arab states. The argument has the potential to foster the notion that countries that normalize with Israel risk being short sighted. Finally, normalization will likely give Israel and the United States an excuse to propose peace initiatives. Normalization becomes an Israeli and US solution as well as a bargaining chip. There are national interests above Palestinian dialogues. As such, normalization only serves to escalate the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which bodes ill for all parties involved. (Kurd, 2017).
2. Normalization can provide an alibi for Israel to refute the notion that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the main source of instability in the Gulf region. There are regional wars in Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen that have lasted a decade or more. In addition, Israel's partnership with the US will not weaken America's legitimacy in the region, but can serve as a model for Arab countries to emulate, as the UAE has done. It is to Israel's advantage to have the help of its ally the US to become a pioneer in the Gulf region. Apart from all that, it is important to know that Arab public opinion may continue to sympathize with the suffering of the Palestinian people, and this is Israel's fear of limited opportunities to build normalization in the future. (Kassin, 2022).
3. The normalization provides Israel with the means to maintain official representation in the Arabian Gulf. This normalization promises strategic cooperation with the UAE and Bahrain, which almost brings Israel as close to the Iranian border as Israel is to its borders with its partners in Lebanon, Syria, and Gaza. Over the past decade, Israel has fought low-scale wars with Iran in Iraq, Lebanon and Syria. There is some concern that Iran's partners in Yemen might also target Israel. Strategic cooperation with Bahrain and the UAE gives Israel easy access to Iran's longest border along the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. Furthermore, a normalization deal with Sudan should also end Sudan's strategic cooperation with Iran, which took place under the ousted al-Bashir regime. Bashir's government had allowed Hamas and Iran to smuggle Iranian weapons through Sudan to Sinai and Gaza. But it is important to point out that Israel will also be vulnerable to Iran in Bahrain and the UAE, and possibly Sudan. Tens of thousands of Israeli tourists flooded the Gulf after the normalization deal, and it will be difficult to fully protect them if Iran intends to target them. Iran has a history of hostage-taking, and this should be a concern.
4. Fourth, investment and trade deals with the UAE and Bahrain represent significant economic opportunities for Israel's high-tech industries, as well as its military defense and tourism industries. In particular, there are large co-investment opportunities in cyber defense, fintech, food technology, water desalination and renewable energy. For Israel, the investment opportunities have generated enormous anticipation. But there should also be concerns regarding the potential for sensitive dual-use advanced technologies ending up in the hands of third parties, especially given the Emirates' history as a regional entrepot.

5. Fifth, According to defense analysts, Israel's alleged security cooperation with the UAE is a revolutionary development that could turn it into a major regional power. In September 2022, according to the Tactical Report news website, UAE satellites revealed that the UAE had deployed Israel's Barak 8 Missile defense system to defend against Iranian missile and drone attacks. According to the Ministry of Defense, demand for Israeli defense products has soared in recent years. In fact in 2021, arms sales reached \$11.3 billion, with 7% of these purchases coming from Gulf countries. Israel first used the Barak system in July 2021, when it shot down a drone launched by the Iranian-backed Hezbollah group at the Karish gas field on the Mediterranean coast. The system has both land-based and maritime configurations and if it proves successful in the UAE, it could lead to other countries looking to purchase it as well. Some other analysts speak of deployments in the Gulf region as a positive development for Israel's standing. The UAE is expected to utilize such technology to counter the growing threat of the Iranian-backed Belligerent Group in Yemen that launched a number of missile and drone attacks on the Gulf state earlier this year. Based on this view, the UAE sees Israel as positively helping them to defend themselves. With this, Israel is labeled a player that can help Arab countries from a defense, military and security point of view, which will greatly strengthen Israel's position in the region.

Judging from the explanation above, the five implications that motivate Israel in normalizing with Arab countries, two of which provide concrete evidence that the normalization is carried out not on the basis of humanity but its national interests. Some of the economic and military benefits obtained by Israel through normalization of relations with Arab countries will be described next.

Economic Advantage for Israel in Normalizing with Arab Countries

Normalization of relations between the Gulf States and Israel has long-term economic benefits. Several sectors are experiencing significant growth. This agreement provides advantages for both in opening market access to attract each other's world attention in the economic sector by offering Asian market access for Israel and Europe-US for the Gulf States. (Al-ragawi, et.al, 2021).

Highlight of this normalization is that Israel will soon become the UAE's main trading partner. The UAE has been very interested in building trade relations, especially in the technology sector, with Israel. This sector is one of the main factors that encourage the UAE to open official diplomatic relations with Israel even though the Palestinian issue is far from over. UAE company Apex Group has signed a collaboration with Israeli group Tera for research and production of the Covid-19 vaccine. (Rahman, 2019)

On the other hand, Israel has long dreamed of penetrating the rich Gulf Arab market, known as the largest and most powerful market in the Arab world. The Gulf Arab states are members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which consists of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE and the Sultanate of Oman. The GCC, which was established in 1981, has an average per capita income of US\$34,265, 25th in the world. The UAE alone has a per capita income of 41,476 US dollars or 19th in the world and a GDP of 432,612 billion US dollars. The UAE is the second largest economic power in the Arab world after Saudi Arabia (Rahman, 2020). The huge market of the UAE and the GCC is now in front of Israel's eyes. Israel through the UAE region can more freely maneuver in the business sector in the rich Arab Gulf region. It can be seen here that the agreement between the UAE and Israel to normalize relations is also motivated by economic interests, even the deciding factor. Moreover, the normalization of relations between the UAE and Israel was also overshadowed by the UAE's purchase agreement for US F-35 aircraft, and if this did not materialize, the UAE threatened to terminate the deal. However, once again, economic interests seem to have come to the fore for the initial stages of officially opening normalization of relations between them. A similar process could occur with Morocco, the UAE, and Bahrain, although this possibility currently. (Muhamad, 2020)

Israel gained a global reputation from the normalization of relations between the Gulf states with the development of innovation and promotion Israel offers strategic agreements and Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) in the fields of health, biotechnology, agriculture, technology, military, commercial and food security. (Uziyel, 2022).

Israeli companies already have a Back-Channer presence in several Gulf countries as well as intergovernmental cooperation. Even before normalization, Israeli companies were thought to have a wide range of cybersecurity and artificial intelligence (AI) expertise. The UAE-Israel deal offers scope for cooperation in a number of areas. The Bahrain deal is less substantive given the much smaller economy but also allows easier access for Israeli companies to the Saudi market and opportunities in areas such as fintech where Bahrain has such strengths. (Mazel, 2020).

Indirectly, some of the benefits obtained by Israel in normalizing relations between Arab countries and Israel are as follows: First, the gains of Israeli-Arab normalization triggered Israeli motivation to engage with the US arms industry. The Israeli artillery industry sees this as the beginning of the influx of US arms supplies to the Gulf states. The UAE is expected to receive several units of F-35 fighter jets from the US after signing the normalization agreement with Israel. The US Department of Defense also revealed that Boeing has secured a deal with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to build 70 F-15 fighter jets. With a total contract value of 9.8 billion US dollars or the equivalent of 138 trillion.

Secondly, the Israeli air force indirectly benefits from the deal as the US will continue to upgrade and develop their F-15 fighter jets. Plus some of the parts for the fighter jets are also manufactured and fitted by the Israeli aviation industry.

Third, Israeli companies have advanced offerings in a number of new technologies, collectively known as the internet of things, which is the impetus for the industrial revolution 4.0. Israel has also signed a deal to deploy its navigation technology in taxi fleets in Dubai over the next two years. Additionally, in July, the US, Israel, UAE and India announced the formation of a new bloc, I2U2, with the aim of enhancing technological collaboration in the region and addressing transnational challenges in six key areas: Water, energy, transportation, space, health and food security.

Fourth, In the case of the UAE and Israel in particular. Tourism between the UAE and Israel has also been growing rapidly since 2020. Commercial flights between the two countries began in November 2020, with daily flights introduced the following year. The two countries have signed an agreement that will allow several airlines each to fly several times a week between the two countries and a visa-free travel system. The air travel and tourism market was severely curtailed by the coronavirus pandemic, but the opening of the Gulf will provide Israeli residents with a new travel destination and an important hub especially for travel to Asia, while flight permits will also ease conditions for airlines. Abu Dhabi-based Etihad and Dubai-based Emirates are preparing regular scheduled commercial flights to Israel. Tourism websites aimed at attracting Arab visitors to Israel encourage them to visit the Al-Aqsa Mosque and Jerusalem's Muslim Quarter, alongside the Museum of Islamic Art. The flow of tourists in the opposite direction is even greater. Between 2020 and 2021, around 230,000 Israelis visited the UAE, despite pandemic restrictions. UAE companies are also very keen to capitalize on potential opportunities; they are already bidding for Israel (an Israeli airline), and DP World Dubai (a multinational logistics company) is considering taking a stake in the port of Haifa. The latter would be particularly welcome given UAE companies' expertise in global trade and logistics.

Fifth, given the activities of anti-Israel normalization organizations by Egypt and Jordan, plus the neutral stance of the UAE, Bahrain and Morocco on the Palestinian issue, Israel seems to have to involve Egypt and Jordan in promoting the dialogue clause on Palestine. Finally, Saudi Arabia's joining the Abraham Accords, which is central in the Arab and Muslim world, is a distinct advantage for Israel. It will strengthen normalization in Egypt and Jordan and help persuade other Arab states to join diplomatic relations with Israel. (El-Nawawy et al., 2022)

Military Advantage for Israel in Normalization with Arab Countries

Militarily, many Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, participate in joint military exercises with Israel, the most important of which is the Red Flag exercise of advanced air combat supervised by the US Air Force. In March 2017 and April 2019, the UAE Air Force participated in a military exercise known as "Iniohos" in Greece, in which Israel also participated.

Due to the Iranian threat, Israel's relations with several Gulf Arab states have strengthened. In August 2019, Israel's then Foreign Minister, Israel Katz, stated that Israel was part of an international coalition to protect cargo ships crossing the Strait of Hormuz. The coalition was founded by the United States and includes Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, Bahrain, the United Kingdom, Australia and Albania and aims to improve the security and safety of commercial vessels passing through the maritime corridor. This statement is consistent with the assessment of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who in April 2018 told Time magazine when asked about the compatibility of Saudi interests with Israel that "We have a common enemy, and it seems we have many potential areas for economic cooperation."

This means that the relationship between the UAE and Saudi Arabia and Israel now goes beyond normalization to an alliance that offers mutual services, not just to confront Iran. These countries know that Israel will not confront Iran for them, but they coordinate and cooperate in influencing US policy in the region: abandoning the nuclear agreement with Iran, supporting the military coup in Egypt, defending Mohammed bin Salman after the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi, and sharing a common fear of democratic demands in the Arab region.

Thus, the truth is that this normalization is only a cover and sweetener and a cover for the main interests of the two countries, even the biggest profits are obtained by Israel and the US, which take advantage of the tense conditions between Saudi and Iranian and their allies as an opportunity for the arms trade market. (Asseburg, 2021).

CONCLUSION

Based on the description and analysis above, this research can be concluded that the Normalization of Arab countries with Israel is an integral part of the regional strategy, namely to enable the progress of Israeli-Palestinian peace. But over time, the normalization has become a new pattern that tends to lead to the advancement of cooperation and Israel's motivation to benefit. Israel's relationship with America is considered a counterweight to Iran's power in terms of politics, economy, security infrastructure, technology, science and defense, it becomes a key instrument for Arab countries in return by encouraging additional countries to also normalize their relations with Israel.

Ultimately, Israel and the Arab states have a stake in expanding cooperation in various fields centered on Israel's potential contribution. For Israel, formal relations with Arab states will accelerate its integration into economic and political circles while strengthening its legitimacy in the region. As for the Arab states, their security and defense are guaranteed. Thus, Israel's motivation in normalizing relations with Arab States offers a mutual political alliance.

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