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# THESIS

**THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA'S OPPOSITION TO NORMALIZATION WITH ISRAEL**

by

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December 2021

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This thesis addresses the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's refusal to normalize relations with Israel. The United States is the facilitator of normalization between Arab states and Israel and possesses an interest in successful rapprochement for regional stability and peace. KSA's opposition to formal diplomatic relations with Israel presents a challenge to U.S. interests of regional stability and peace. To determine why KSA refused normalization, this thesis analyzes international, domestic, and individual factors. The main findings of the research are that each level holds explanatory power, and combined, these factors help one understand why KSA did not normalize relations with Israel. I argue that the international factor that explains KSA's refusal is its offensive realist foreign policy approach. The domestic factors that dissuade KSA from normalization create fear for KSA regime survival. These domestic factors include public opinion, internal government opposition, and resistance from the Muslim world. The individual factors analysis sheds light on the historical opposition to normalization with Israel in the Saud family. To meet U.S. interests of peace and stability in the Arab world, it is paramount to understand why KSA did not normalize relations with Israel.

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**THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA'S OPPOSITION TO NORMALIZATION WITH ISRAEL**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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# ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's refusal to normalize relations with Israel. The United States is the facilitator of normalization between Arab states and Israel and possesses an interest in successful rapprochement for regional stability and peace. KSA's opposition to formal diplomatic relations with Israel presents a challenge to U.S. interests of regional stability and peace. To determine why KSA refused normalization, this thesis analyzes international, domestic, and individual factors. The main findings of the research are that each level holds explanatory power, and combined, these factors help one understand why KSA did not normalize relations with Israel. I argue that the international factor that explains KSA's refusal is its offensive realist foreign policy approach. The domestic factors that dissuade KSA from normalization create fear for KSA regime survival. These domestic factors include public opinion, internal government opposition, and resistance from the Muslim world. The individual factors analysis sheds light on the historical opposition to normalization with Israel in the Saud family. To meet U.S. interests of peace and stability in the Arab world, it is paramount to understand why KSA did not normalize relations with Israel.

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# LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| GRI | Government Restriction Index |
| KSA | Kingdom of Saudi Arabia |
| MBS | Mohammad bin Salman |
| SHI | Social Hostilities Index |
| UAE | United Arab Emirates |
| U.S. | United States |

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# I.    INTRODUCTION

The Arab-Israeli conflict has been the source of international attention for decades and continues to be of relevance in foreign policy decisions. This thesis will focus on the topic of normalization between Israel and Gulf countries, specifically the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

## A.    QUESTION AND MAIN FINDINGS

Normalization has been a topic of discussion between Arab states and Israel since the end of the 20th century. Only a few states in the region have normalized relations with Israel, two of which include Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in 2020. This is a new and important development in U.S. efforts to facilitate normalization between Arab states and Israel in the interest of regional peace and stability. During this time, the U.S. administration made attempts to persuade other regional partners, primarily the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) to do the same–KSA refused to normalize with Israel regardless of efforts made by the U.S. This thesis will focus on relations between KSA and Israel in the current political context. Specifically, this thesis seeks to answer the following question: Why has KSA refused to normalize relations with Israel? To answer this question, this thesis will pursue possible explanations using three levels of analysis and existing hypotheses, diving into relevant international, regional, and individual dynamics to determine what prevents or potentially drives the Kingdom's decision-making process for normalization.

In answering this question, this thesis will contribute to a larger body of work in the scholarly field regarding relations between KSA and Israel. To do so, this thesis will take a theoretical and historical approach. Specifically, it will analyze relevant political relationships, domestic influence, and state leadership by using historical accounts and theories derived from international relations. This analytical approach is unique because it incorporates existing ideas concerning normalization within a single case study framework supported by international relations theories and historical accounts. This approach will

assess prominent hypotheses in contemporary academic literature and contribute to the existing debate.

## B.     SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION

This research question is directly related to the continuous political issues in the Middle East that are of great concern to U.S. policy in the region. KSA and Israel are two U.S. partners in the Middle East that are heavily relied on for regional influence and, to some extent (in the case of Saudi Arabia), U.S. economic prosperity. The focus of the U.S. administration on urging Arab states to establish diplomatic ties with Israel was especially prominent during Donald Trump's presidency. It continues to be an important topic for the Biden administration as it attempts to navigate regional political dynamics. Policy decisions loom on the horizon for the Biden administration regarding ties between the U.S. and KSA as well as ties between the U.S. and Israel. Increasing pressure has been put on the administration in part due to the escalatory actions taking place between Israel and Palestine as well as KSA's abysmal record on human rights inside the Kingdom (highlighted by the murder of Jamal Khashoggi in October 2018). Furthermore, the decision of normalization between the two countries is affected by the growing threat of Iran, which is a key problem that the Biden administration faces. In attempts to re-establish the full requirements of the agreement to limit Iran's nuclear program between Iran and the P-5+1, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the administration must consider its allies in the Arab World. Israel and KSA have historically been at odds with the Iranian regime, but recent events indicate KSA is pursuing diplomatic channels with Iran to address regional differences.[1] This thesis will focus on Iran as a potential factor in driving or preventing prospects of normalization. In a strategic context, normalization between KSA and Israel would be largely beneficial for the U.S. because it would provide the opportunity for increased stability in the region.

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[1] Joost Hiltermann, "From Diatribes to Dialogue: Why Iran and Saudi Arabia Are Talking," *Democracy for the Arab World Now*, May 7, 2021, https://dawnmena.org/from-diatribes-to-dialogue-why-iran-and-saudi-arabia-are-talking/.

## C. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the academic literature, two camps with opposing hypotheses exist: those that argue KSA will not normalize relations with Israel and those who argue that KSA will normalize. Each of these camps contain scholars with varying reasoning as to why or why not normalization will occur. Those which argue KSA will not normalize point to domestic factors, with the Kingdom's stance on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as the primary reason.[2] Those that argue KSA will normalize with Israel place an emphasis on the shared concern that both countries have on Iran's growing influence and power.[3]

This literature review will first review scholarly work which directly addresses normalization between KSA and Israel. Second, it will discuss existing literature on KSA's political relationship between relevant states, to include Israel, the U.S., and Iran. Third, it will review prominent academic work on the main state figureheads of KSA, the U.A.E. and Bahrain. Lastly, it will examine international relations literature that will be used to theoretically support analysis in this thesis.

### 1. Saudi Arabia-Israel Normalization

The most relevant academic literature that contributes to this thesis is that which directly discusses the topic of KSA and Israeli normalization. The scholarly debate over the Israeli-Saudi relationship features a wide scope of arguments. Scholars have analyzed Israeli-Saudi relations in an attempt to explain how they have evolved and if they will reach the point of normalization. Initial research reveals two main arguments. One argument is that the current threat of Iran will push Saudi Arabia to normalize with Israel in the interest of national security, and furthermore, that the Iranian threat has diminished the importance of the Palestinian cause. Scholars Rynhold and Yaari share this stance but recognize that

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[2] Jacob Abadi, "Saudi Arabia's Rapprochement with Israel: The National Security Imperatives," *Middle Eastern Studies* 55, no. 3 (2019): 433–49; Yoel Guzansky*, Saudi Arabia and Normalization with Israel*, 1396 (Israel: Institute for National Security Studies, October 2020), https://www.inss.org.il/publication/saudia-israel-normalization/.

[3] Jonathan Rynhold and Michal Yaari, "The Transformation of Saudi-Israeli Relations," *Israel Affairs* 26, no. 6 (2020): 799–818.

the Palestinian cause still holds weight in the international realm and for that reason Saudi Arabia has not moved forward with normalization.[4] Guzansky argues that the KSA will normalize in the future, but current internal stability and regional status prevent KSA from doing so.[5] On the other hand, Abadi argues that Saudi Arabia will not normalize with Israel until the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has been resolved.[6] This theory is similar to the argument of Rynhold and Yaari, but does not consider the growing threat of Iran as a driving factor. These two opposing sides, that KSA will normalize with the increasing threat of Iran and that KSA will not normalize until the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is resolved, are seen throughout discussions regarding normalization in news outlets and opinion pieces.

## 2.      Relevant State Relations

Sigurd Neubauer's recently published book offers historical accounts and insight into Gulf state political dynamics, not only with one another, but also with the state of Israel. Furthermore, it elaborates on the regional dynamics with regards to the threat of Iran. Lastly, it touches on relations between GCC member states and the United States.[7] His work will provide invaluable historical accounts and modern-day considerations that will assist in the international level of analysis. Additionally, many have offered a comprehensive overview of the history of Saudi Arabia that is essential to the thesis and will be used to analyze its international relationships. Most notable are the works of Bruce Riedel, which present a comprehensive and overarching view of the Saudi kings and their historical relationship with the United States.[8] Riedel's first-hand accounts of Saudi-US communications and relations provide insight into how the Kingdom's relationship with

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4 Rynhold and Yaari.

5 Guzansky, Saudi Arabia and Normalization with Israel.

6 Jacob Abadi, "Saudi Arabia's Rapprochement with Israel."

7 Sigurd Neubauer, *The Gulf Region and Israel: Old Struggles, New Alliances* (New York: Kodesh Press L.L.C., 2020).

8  Bruce Riedel, Kings and Presidents: Saudi Arabia and the United States since FDR (La Vergne: Brookings Institution Press, 2017).

the U.S. and how its stance towards Israel evolved over time. This work will be essential in demonstrating how KSA's individual leadership has shaped the states stance on relations with Israel.

### 3.        State Leadership

To conduct an individual level of analysis on the respective leaders of the Gulf states, this thesis will rely on available peer-reviewed literature, articles, and will supplement where necessary with primary and secondary sources. Many have contributed to the academic literature regarding Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman (MBS), the most prominent of which is from authors Hope and Scheck. Their recent book provides significant insight to the actions and leadership of MBS that will be used in this thesis on the individual level of analysis for the KSA case study. [9] Aarts and Roelants provide additional insight to the transition of power in the Kingdom and a critical analysis of MBS's actions soon after being chosen as King Abdullah's successor.[10] Regarding the UAE's leadership, there is a limited amount of peer-reviewed literature that speaks to the country's current leader, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan (Sheikh Zayed). It is known that the one who holds the most power in the UAE is the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan (MbZ), and thus literature focusing on MbZ will be used. The available scholarly work by al-Suwaidi and Davidson provides historical accounts and analysis of Sheikh Zayed that will contribute to the individual level of analysis.[11] Many prominent news agencies such as *The New York Times*, academic journals, and work from the Washington Institute will be used to inform this analysis. While previous works will provide insight to Bahrain's state leader, King Hamad bin Isa

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[9] Bradley Hope and Justin Scheck, *Blood and Oil: Mohammed Bin Salman's Ruthless Quest for Global Power* (New York: Hachette Book Group Inc., 2020).

[10] Paul Aarts and Carolien Roelants, "The Perils of Transfer of Power in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia," *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 9, no. 4 (2016): 596–606.

[11] Christopher Davidson, "After Shaikh Zayed: The Politics of Succession in Abu Dhabi and the UAE," *Middle East Policy* 13, no. 1 (2006); Abdulla al-Suwaidi, "The United Arab Emirates at 40: A Balance Sheet," *Middle East Policy* 18, no. 4 (2011): 44–58.

Al Khalifa, this thesis will rely on historical accounts and current reports on the actions of King Khalifa. Gardner's Book provides a brief history of Bahrain while Moore-Gilbert's article offers deeper insight into history of Bahrain's ruling family.[12]

### 4.      International Relations Literature

Scholars in international relations literature provide a variety of theories and insight which will assist in conducting and analyzing the research in this thesis. Specifically, these theories will contribute to the analysis of potential explanatory variables within the case study. Although one cannot directly correlate each IR paradigm with a specific level of analysis, many theories found within the main IR paradigms are largely applicable to the research design of this thesis. First, the establishment of similar cases is supported by the constructivist paradigm and the work of Barnett, who argues that the GCC states not only have a shared identity, but that the shared identity contributes to the process of identifying possible threats and alliances.[13] Second, at the international level of analysis the work on structural realism of Waltz, Walt, and Jervis provides a sufficient theoretical framework to analyze the state relationships within the case study.[14] Third, on the domestic level of analysis this thesis will utilize liberal theories on institutions and cooperation from Keohane and Milner.[15] Though this thesis will only focus on a specific portion of domestic

[12] Andrew Gardner, "Pearls, Oil, and the British Empire: A Short History of Bahrain," in *City of Strangers* (Cornell University Press, 2017); Kylie Moore-Gilbert, "From Protected State to Protection Racket: Contextualising Divide and Rule in Bahrain," *Journal of Arabian Studies* 6, no. 2 (2016): 163–81.

[13] Michael Barnett, "Identity and Alliances in the Middle East," in *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*, ed. Peter Katzenstein (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

[14] Kenneth M. Waltz, "Anarchic Orders and Balances of Power," in *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1979); Stephen M. Walt, "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power," *International Security* 9, no. 4 (1985): 3–43; Robert Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics* 30, no. 2 (1978).

[15] Robert Keohane, "Cooperation and International Regimes," in *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton University Press, 1984); Helen Milner, "Review: International Theories of Cooperation Among Nations," *World Politics* 44, no. 3 (1992).

politics, this literature will assist in explaining the findings of the study. Lastly, on the individual level of analysis, the work of Weber , Heinrich, and Mills offers a logical way to categorize the leaders of each respective state.[16] Furthermore, this thesis will reference the work of Levy to assist in explaining and analyzing the historical and contemporary actions of individual state leaders.[17]

## D.    POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES

The potential explanations that I have identified for KSA's decision to not normalize relations with Israel are based on previous academic work and the inferences that can be drawn from the analysis. The potential explanations for this research question are nested in international relationships, domestic implications, and individual leadership characteristics. These potential explanatory factors will be researched and analyzed in the thesis. The three potential explanations are as follows:

1.    The international level of analysis provides the best explanations for KSA's decision to not normalize relations with Israel.

   **Hypothesis 1:** The strength of relationship with between KSA and the United States prevents KSA from pursuing normalization.

   **Hypothesis 2:** The strength of the relationship with Iran prevents KSA from pursuing normalization.

2.    The domestic level of analysis provides the best explanation for KSA's decision to not normalize relations with Israel.

   **Hypothesis 3:** The level of domestic support for the Saudi regime and potential consequences in the domestic arena prevents KSA from pursuing normalization.

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[16] Max Weber, Gerth Hans Heinrich, and C. Wright Mills, "Politics as a Vocation," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 77–128.

[17] Jack Levy, "Loss Aversion, Framing Effects, and International Conflict: Perspectives from Prospect Theory," in *Handbook of War Studies II*, by Manus I. Midlarsky (University of Michigan Press, 2000), 193–221.

3.      The individual level of analysis provides the best explanations for KSA's decision to not normalize relations with Israel.

**Hypothesis 4:** The leadership style and characteristics of King Salman prevents KSA from pursuing normalization with Israel.

**Hypothesis 5:** The leadership style and characteristics of Crown Prince MBS prevents KSA from pursuing normalization with Israel.

## E.      RESEARCH DESIGN

I will conduct my research using a single case study approach. I will determine which key variable(s) holds the most explanatory power for KSA's decision to not normalize relations with Israel. Within the framework of the singular case study, I will analyze the case using an international relations lens and related theories. Using these lenses will allow me to categorize the possible variables, providing more clarity to determine viable explanations. The results of the case study will inform the conclusions I make.

This study will rely on the normalization experiences of the UAE and Bahrain to inform the case study. These countries all have a considerable number of similarities, to include type of government, major religion, location, membership in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and major economic exports. The decision to use these countries experiences is based upon a common identity shaped by their similarities. The work of Michael Barnett supports the shared identity argument of GCC states and emphasizes the role identity plays in perceived threats and alliances.[18] This is important because it directly relates to the decision of Gulf States to normalize relations with Israel. These two cases will provide a political context and demonstrate potential drivers or barriers to normalization.

To determine the key explanatory variable, I will utilize the three levels of analysis: the international level, the domestic level, and the individual level. Specifically, on the

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[18] Barnett, "Identity and Alliances in the Middle East".

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international level, I will analyze the relationship between KSA and the U.S., Israel, and Iran. The relationship will then be categorized as weak, moderate, or strong. Furthermore, incentives and disincentives of normalization within the context of these relationships will be analyzed and will contribute to the conclusion of this thesis. To determine the categorization of the respective relationships, I will rely on historical accounts from academic articles, reputable news outlets, and think tanks. Following the preliminary categorization, further analysis will be conducted to provide additional information to inform the research question.

On the domestic level, I will research and analyze public opinion pre-normalization. Sufficient research will provide support for the public opinion's effect on a regimes decision to normalize. I will utilize reputable research organizations and opinion polls to collect data on support for the regime in each respective country. If the data is unavailable, I will rely on primary sources and academic work to make a well-informed decision. Furthermore, potential domestic consequences of normalization will be considered in assessing the domestic level factors. The decision to focus on this aspect of the domestic level is directly tied to one of my hypotheses.

On the individual level, I will conduct a historical analysis of individual leaders of KSA to determine the royal families outlook on normalization with Israel. In addition, I will give close attention to the current leadership of KSA- King Salman and Crown Prince MBS. This analysis will first determine the characteristics of the state leaders and will infer how these characteristics affect the decision-making process. This inference allows for an initial understanding of each leader and their impact as a factor of normalization. Furthermore, research utilizing primary sources, university published books, and academic articles will provide the necessary information to elaborate on leadership styles and the respective model of authority. In utilizing the three levels of analysis to research potential variables, I aim to determine which factor(s) are most supported by theoretical and historical evidence. Depending on the number of factors and which level of analysis they lie in, I will utilize an international relations lens and subsequent theories to explain and further analyze how that factor affects KSA's normalization decision. Table 1 shows the research approach in tabular format.

Overall, I will read and rely on secondary source new reporting, peer-reviewed academic articles, think tanks, government reports and historical accounts found within either academic articles or university published books. This material will provide the information required to conduct an analysis on the international, domestic, and individual level.

## F.    MAIN FINDINGS

The results of this research approach indicate that the international and domestic factors hold greater explanatory power than the individual level factors. The individual factors are important in understanding the historical context of normalization and position of the Saud family on the foreign policy decision, but do not present strong evidence for the decision to not normalize with Israel. On the international level an analysis of KSA's relationship with the U.S., Israel, and Iran illustrates the potential costs and benefits of normalization. Furthermore, it sheds light on KSA's transition from a defensive realist state to an offensive realist state. I argue that KSA's offensive realist foreign policy approach prevents KSA from normalizing relations with Israel because normalization does not present KSA a power maximizing opportunity.  The domestic factors of public opinion, internal government opposition, and resistance from the Muslim world create fear of survival for the Saudi regime. Fear of regime survival prevents KSA from normalizing relations with Israel. Lastly, the individual leadership analysis shows how each Saudi king from the Saud family has responded to the Arab-Israeli conflict and past U.S. attempts to facilitate normalization. This analysis exemplifies the Saud family's long-standing opposition to Israel. The international and domestic factors hold the greatest explanatory power for KSA's refusal to normalize relations, while the individual analysis provides important information to contextualize and understand KSA's history with Israel.

## G.    THESIS OVERVIEW

This thesis will be organized with respect to the case study and potential explanations on each level. To begin, it will discuss and analyze recent normalization between Israel and Gulf states UAE and Bahrain. Chapter II will provide support for analysis existing in following chapters of the thesis. Following this chapter, the thesis will

be organized by each respective hypothesis which logically correlates with each level of analysis. Chapter III focuses on the international level and will analyze KSA's relevant foreign relationships; both historically and contemporarily. Chapter IV deals with the domestic level of analysis and focus on the role of public support in the process of normalization, KSA's role in the Muslim world, and domestic threats to the regime. Chapter V analyzes the historic and current Saudi leadership to build and to illustrate the royal family's positioning on the Arab-Israeli conflict. Finally, this thesis will conclude with a discussion of its findings, downfalls, and propositions for further research.

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## II.   CASES OF NORMALIZATION—THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES AND BAHRAIN

On September 15, 2020, UAE Minister of Foreign Affairs, and International Cooperation, HH. Abdullah bin Zayed al Nahyan, signed the Abraham Accords Peace Agreement along with the Prime Minster of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, and President Donald Trump.[19] Among the affirmations, desires, and intentions outlined in the agreement, the UAE formally agreed to "Peace, diplomatic relations and full normalization of bilateral ties … between the United Arab Emirates and the State of Israel."[20] The same day, on behalf of His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa bin Salman al-Khalifa of Bahrain, Foreign Minister Abdullatif Al Zayani also signed the Abraham Accords. The cases of UAE and Bahrain, as two Gulf countries and members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, provide context to a broader phenomenon of Gulf-Israeli relations. Although GCC member states are unique in many aspects, like their foreign policy approaches, there is value in briefly going over the normalization of relations between GCC member states, The UAE and Bahrain, that have decidedly pursued relations with Israel. This study will not focus on a comparison between GCC states who have and have not made the decision to normalize, but the value in laying out these cases is that they demonstrate potential drivers or barriers to normalization with the Israeli state. Consistent with my framework of analysis for KSA, one must look to the incentives or disincentives to normalize and analyze the international, domestic, and individual level factors. By doing so, it will shed light on the difference in incentive structure between KSA and the other Gulf states – Bahrain and the UAE.

### A.   THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

In dealing with international level incentives and disincentives, one may look to the international political relationships between countries. Of the most influential, ties with the

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[19] Abraham Accords Peace Agreement: Treaty of Peace, Diplomatic Relations and Full Normalization Between The United Arab Emirates and The State of Israel, September 15, 2020.

[20] Abraham Accord Peace Agreement.

United States play a critical role in incentivizing Arab countries to normalize relations with Israel. On the international arena, the idea of succeeding to the wishes of a great power, such as the United States, to gain favor and additional benefits is exemplified by the UAE case of normalization. What does the UAE have to gain from this political transaction? The UAE and U.S. have had formal diplomatic relations for almost 51 years (since 1972) constituting a variety of cooperation.[21] The strong economic ties between the two countries may be considered a major influential factor in driving foreign policy making for the UAE. Over one-thousand U.S. firms operate in the UAE and the UAE is a major export destination for the U.S. in the region.[22] For the case of the UAE, economic ties with the U.S. serve as a major incentive for normalization with Israel. The phenomenon of pleasing the great power to receive greater favor is not new to the UAE. Neubauer provides an example from 2005, in which UAE-U.S. economic ties pushed the UAE to strengthen relations with Israel to further UAE economic prosperity. Neubauer states, "With the strategic objective of protecting itself from tumultuous U.S. partisan politics, Abu Dhabi sought to overcome DP World controversy by strengthening its relationship with Israel and subsequently its supporters in Washington."[23] The controversy over the Emirati corporation, DP, was in relation to the threat of undermining U.S. national security and the threat of terrorism.[24] Not only does this event signify the willingness of the UAE to play the strategic game on the international arena, but it also demonstrates the success of doing so. As Neubauer explains, the UAE managed to emerge from the controversy over DP and successfully obtain advantages in nuclear knowledge from the US.[25] Furthermore, shortly after signing the Abraham Accords, in January 2021 the UAE and U.S. signed an

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[21] "U.S. Relations With United Arab Emirates," United States Department of State, 2021, https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-united-arab-emirates/.

[22] "U.S. Relations With United Arab Emirates.".

[23] Neubauer, The Gulf Region and Israel.

[24] Neubauer.

[25] Neubauer.

agreement for the sale of F-35 jets and armed drones.[26] This agreement exemplifies the beginning of Emirati security benefits from the U.S. for agreeing to establish diplomatic ties with Israel. The Emirati strategic decision to build relations with Israel to receive economic and military benefits from the U.S. laid the groundwork for future cooperation and demonstrated the weight of a great power like the U.S. to influence international relations.

Normalization is not exclusively beneficial for the UAE. The costs of normalization for the UAE on the international arena center on perception of regime by other state actors and potential economic consequences. By submitting to the persuasion of the US, the UAE risks being perceived as a puppet state that lacks true autonomy or as a self-serving actor apathetic to the Palestinian struggle. Unsurprisingly, Egypt, Jordan, and U.S. European Allies supported the Emirati decision, while others deemed the act as hypocritical.[27] Former Iranian President Hassan Rouhani stated, "the Emirate rulers think that if they approach America and the Zionist regime, their security will improve, and their economy will grow… but this is totally wrong."[28] President Rouhani accurately described Emirati interests and his statement exemplifies the costs of normalization for regime perception. However, minimal damage to the image of the Emirati regime, especially from the Iranian regime, is not detrimental to UAE prosperity. The projected strengthening of UAE national security and economic growth resulting from normalization far outweighs the costs of international backlash. An additional factor to consider for UAE normalization is Iranian-UAE relations and ongoing nuclear talks. While the playing field between Gulf States, the U.S., Israel, and Palestine is the major focus of this discussion, it is difficult to ignore the Iranian influence. The UAE is the top GCC exporter to Iran and the two states possess

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[26] "UAE Signs Deal with U.S. to Buy 50 F-35 Jets and up to 18 Drones: Sources," Reuters, January 20, 2021, sec. Middle East & Africa, https://www.reuters.com/article/usa-emirates-f35-int-idUSKBN29P2C0.

[27] "How the World Reacted to UAE, Israel Normalising Diplomatic Ties," Al Jazeera, August 15, 2020, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/8/15/how-the-world-reacted-to-uae-israel-normalising-diplomatic-ties.

[28] "How the World Reacted."

strong economic relations.[29] Although President Rouhani detested Emirati decision to normalize, any further aggressive actions that may have factored into potential consequences for the Emirati regime were thwarted by the mutually beneficial economic relationship between Iran and the UAE. Furthermore, the UAE must carefully consider how its relationship with Iran will impact ongoing nuclear talks between the U.S. and Iran.

On the domestic level, of the factors that hold the most weight for normalization is domestic support for the regime, namely support from the Emirati population. Domestic support plays a significant role in foreign policy decisions because it impacts regime survival. The decision to normalize may have decreased or increased support for the regime and played into the decision-making process for the UAE. Unlike KSA, the UAE does not hold an influential role in the Muslim world and thus faces smaller costs for normalization. Data from the Washington Institute indicates that the Emirati population is less passionate about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict than those of other Arab countries. Concerns for internal reform have risen in the past three years and seem to be a priority for UAE citizens over matters outside their borders. 73% say their government should focus on internal reforms. [30] From this data one can infer that the consequences of normalization for public opinion were less worrisome and detrimental for the Emirati regime.

UAE foreign policy has transformed under the leadership of HH President Khalifa bin Zayed al Nahyan and Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan (MbZ) from internally focused, to externally focused.[31] MbZ is the de-facto ruler of the UAE and holds the majority of power in UAE foreign policy and international affairs. MbZ is a key factor in understanding how, on the individual level,

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[29] "Diplomacy With Iran: Opportunities and Risks for the UAE*," Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington*, February 26, 2021, https://agsiw.org/diplomacy-with-iran-opportunities-and-risks-for-the-uae/.

[30] David Pollock and Shaina Katz, "Half of Emiratis Approve Domestic Policies, But Just 20% Want Israeli Ties," *The Washington Institute*, 2020, https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/half-emiratis-approve-domestic-policies-just-20-want-israeli-ties.

[31] Kristian Ulrichsen, "Transformations in UAE's Foreign Policy" (Al Jazeera, June 8, 2017).

regime leadership impacts the decision of normalization. MbZ is considered as one of the most powerful leaders in the Arab world, with astounding wealth and considerable influence.[32] Although he espouses tolerance in the UAE, exemplified by opening the country to believers of all Abrahamic faiths, he rules by repression.[33] According to Freedom House, Emirati citizens face harsh restrictions on civil liberties and possess limited political rights – exemplifying the repressive nature of the Al Nahyan regime under MbZ.[34] MbZ's repressive leadership is justified by some as a measure against Islamist groups and as the only solution to maintaining security in the Gulf region. [35] The characteristics of MbZ's leadership are not unique, as the Arab world has and currently suffers from repressive regimes, but the similarity to other GCC member states is a factor to consider.

In demonstrating how individual leadership factors into the equation, it is worth noting, for the purpose of this chapter to provide a context for analysis of KSA, that the leadership style of MbZ is largely like that of Crown Prince MbS of KSA. MbS and MbZ are described by Springborg as, "highly personalistic autocracies" and their leadership style

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[32] David D. Kirkpatrick, "The Most Powerful Arab Ruler Isn't M.B.S. It's M.B.Z.," *The New York Times*, June 2, 2019, sec. World, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/02/world/middleeast/crown-prince-mohammed-bin-zayed.html.

[33] "Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan to Receive Prestigious Scholar-Statesman Award," The Washington Institute, September 14, 2021, https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/about/press-room/press-release/sheikh-mohammed-bin-zayed-al-nahyan-receive-prestigious-scholar.

[34] "United Arab Emirates: Freedom in the World 2021 Country Report," Freedom House, 2021, https://freedomhouse.org/country/united-arab-emirates/freedom-world/2021.

[35] Robert F. Worth, "Mohammed Bin Zayed's Dark Vision of the Middle East's Future," *The New York Times*, January 9, 2020, sec. Magazine, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/09/magazine/united-arab-emirates-mohammed-bin-zayed.html.

as a "twenty-first-century strain of 'sultanism'[36]. The Crown Princes of KSA and the UAE maintain close ties, but further analysis conducted in this thesis will find that this is factor has minimal influence in the decision to establish diplomatic ties with Israel.

UAE's decision to normalize, from a rational perspective, was based on a simple cost-benefit analysis internationally, domestically, and individually. On each of these levels, the risks to the regime did not dissuade the country from establishing diplomatic ties with Israel.

## B.    BAHRAIN

Bahrain's relationship with Israel receives less attention from news agencies and academics than the UAE and KSA, but the drivers of normalization in this case possess value in demonstrating potential factors of gulf countries' decision to normalize with Israel. Bahrain is a constitutional monarchy under the control of the Khalifah family, King Hamad Ibn Isa Al Khalifah and Prime Minister Salman ibn Hamad Al Khalifah.[37] On the international level, the primary factors that influence the decision to normalize are the nature of Bahraini foreign policy, economic growth, and the relationship with the U.S. and Iran. After obtaining independence in the early 1970s, Bahrain has remained a relatively peaceful international actor with minimal involvement in international conflicts. The mission statement of the Bahraini Ministry of Foreign Affairs reflects the state's commitment to peace, security, and stability through diplomatic relations. Like the UAE, Bahraini benefits of normalization can be found in the economic and military sector. The potential for economic growth because of formal diplomatic relations with Israel and improved rapport with the United States is a large factor in the cost-benefit analysis. A recent study conducted by the RAND Corporation indicates that Bahrain economy would greatly benefit from normalization. As a result of bilateral free trade agreements following

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[36] Robert Springborg, "From Sheikhs to Sultanism: Statecraft and Authority in Saudi Arabia and the UAE," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 48, no. 3 (May 27, 2021): 541–43, https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2021.1903148.

[37] "Bahrain: History, Flag, Population, Map, Currency, Religion, & Facts," Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d., https://www.britannica.com/place/Bahrain.

normalization, cumulatively, after ten years, Bahraini economic growth would amount to $1.6 billion in economic activity and a 0.8% increase in GDP.[38]

In addition to economic benefits, Bahrain will potentially also benefit from increased security cooperation from the U.S. and Israel. Like other Gulf countries, Bahrain relies heavily on U.S. security cooperation for protection. The U.S. and Bahrain possess diplomatic relations dating back to the year of Bahrain's impendence in 1971 and is considered a U.S. strategic ally in the gulf.[39] U.S. military aid is necessary for Bahrain regional security, amounting to $28.434 million since 2014.[40] Bahrain has benefited from strong relations with the U.S., thus the costs of refusing normalization may have risked reduction in U.S. military aid, consequently threating Bahrain's regional security. Lastly, the growing perception of Iran as a threat to Bahrain security serves as an additional driving factor towards normalization. Through a realist lens, Bahrain's decision to normalize with Israel can be seen as a case of bandwagoning. By appeasing the U.S. and gaining another powerful ally, Bahrain improves its security and defense against Iran. On the international level, the benefits of normalization outweighed the costs of not normalizing with Israel. It will increase economic growth, arguably strengthen Bahraini national defense, and improve relations with powerful international actors.

On the domestic level, domestic support for the Khalifa regime is the primary factor in the decision to normalize relations with Israel. Bahrain has a troublesome history of domestic conflict and regime perception. In 2011, the Khalifa family was criticized as protests took place in the streets calling for political reform and less power for the royal

[38] Daniel Egel, Shira Efron, and Linda Robinson, "Peace Dividend: Widening the Economic Growth and Development Benefits of the Abraham Accords" (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, March 18, 2021), https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PEA1149-1.html.

[39] "U.S. Relations with Bahrain," *United States Department of State*, 2021, https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-bahrain/.

[40] "U.S. Security Cooperation With Bahrain," *United States Department of State*, 2021, https://www.state.gov/u-s-security-cooperation-with-bahrain/.

family.[41] The result was a government crackdown of repressive nature and a shifting of blame to Iranian regime. [42] The historic repression, coupled with limitations on political rights and restrictions on civil liberties undoubtedly reduces domestic support for the regime. Nonetheless, the ability to quell the 2011 uprisings, recover from the domestic conflict, and coup-proof the regime gives greater confidence that any attempt to detest the decision to normalize relations with Israel would be unsuccessful. Interestingly, a recent poll, conducted in 2021, revealed that 40% of Bahraini's support the decision to normalize relations with Israel and furthermore protest seems unlikely as 71% of Bahrainis agreed that it was favorable that they are not experiencing protests like other Arab countries.[43] The importance was that risks of domestic unrest in Bahrain due to normalization were not of large concern to Bahrain throughout the decision process. On the individual level, the current state and government leaders of the Khalifa family factor into the analysis of rapprochement. The patrimonial rule of Bahrain is consistent with other Gulf countries such as the UAE, authoritative and repressive in nature. These characteristics, similar to the UAE, enable a semi-independent and inconsequential decision-making process. This analysis demonstrates that the costs for Bahrain, on the international, domestic, and individual level, were not outweighed by the benefits of normalization.

From these two cases, one may argue that the decision to normalize was a strategic foreign policy decision resulting in increased economic growth and strengthened national security. The UAE and Bahrain will benefit from increased economic transactions with the U.S. and Israel in additional to increased military aid and technological acquirement. The potential domestic backlash for these two states did not cause concern for the regime due to on the threat of their historical repressive nature. The domestic preference for internal

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[41] Simon Mabon, "The End of the Battle for Bahrain and the Securitization of Bahraini Shi'a," *The Middle East Journal* 73, no. 1 (2019): 22.

[42] Mabon.

[43] Henry Petrillo and David Pollock, "Bahrainis Support Internal Political Focus, but Differ Somewhat on Foreign Policy Priorities," *The Washington Institute*, 2021, https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/bahrainis-support-internal-political-focus-differ-somewhat-foreign-policy.

reforms exceeded their desire to be involved in international conflicts. Lastly, the nature of individual leadership in the two regimes allowed for a decisive and uncontested decision-making process leading to normalization.

# III.   THE INTERNATIONAL ARENA: SAUDI ARABIA, THE UNITED STATES, IRAN, AND ISRAEL

The international arena holds explanatory power for KSA's refusal to normalize relations with Israel. Investigating the international level of analysis through a realist lens offers further insight into the decision based upon KSA's relevant relations. A cost-benefit analysis of normalization's impact or lack of impact on Saudi relations with Israel, Iran, and the U.S., presents the decision in a rational manner. This chapter will utilize realist theories to assess the international level and KSA's foreign relations. The chapter will first provide and explain tools from the realist paradigm that will be used in the chapter. Second, it will dive into KSA-Israeli relations and KSA's foreign policy paradigmatic shift. Third, the chapter analyzes the implications of the Iranian threat and how it affects the decision to normalize. Lastly, it will address the costs and benefits of normalization in the context of KSA-U.S. relations. The international level of analysis indicates that KSA, as an offensive realist-oriented state, did not normalize relations with Israel because doing so would not maximize state power. It finds that KSA opposed normalization because it would reduce KSA's relative state power and feared Israeli acquisition of power.

## A.   REALISM: TOOLS FOR THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

The realist lens allows one to analyze the state of KSA as an actor on the international arena within a focused framework. This framework provides tools that help explain KSA's decision to not normalize relations with Israel and ignores factors on the domestic and individual level, simplifying the analysis. Many have argued that KSA is a realist-oriented state, but first one must understand Realism. Of the many known realists in the academic field of realism, this chapter will rely on the work of Waltz, Walt and Mearsheimer because their literature provides optimal tools to analyze the case of KSA's decision to normalize. Specifically, their insight on rational actor theory, offensive and defensive realism, balancing and band wagoning will be helpful in unpacking KSA's decision to not normalize with Israel in the context of the international arena.

Offensive realism is put forth by Mearsheimer, arguing against the concept of defensive realism. In simple terms, defensive realism holds that states in an anarchical system only need to reach the status quo, or in other words, states only need a certain level of security to be satisfied.[44] Mearsheimer opposes this idea and instead argues that states are never satisfied; rather, they seek to maximize power to survive.[45]The concepts of offensive and defensive realism are important because KSA has arguably transitioned from a state oriented towards defensive realism to a state acting in accordance with offensive realism. There has been a clear paradigm shift in KSA's foreign policy decisions since the current King, King Salman, claimed the throne.[46]

Mearsheimer provides key assumptions that are necessary to the theory of offensive realism.[47] One of these, and the most important in illustrating the decision made by KSA, is the assumption that all states are rational actors. Mearsheimer states that:

> The fifth assumption is that great powers are rational actors. They are aware of their external environment, and they think strategically about how to survive it. In particular, they consider the preferences of other states and how their own behavior is likely to affect the behavior of those other states is likely to affect their own strategy for survival. Moreover, states pay attention to the long term as well as the immediate consequences of their actions.[48]

KSA is arguably a rational actor. This will be demonstrated through an analysis of the state's past foreign policy decisions. A simple way to display the rationality of the state is by looking at potential costs and benefits of decisions presented to the state and how the state responded to those decisions based on the potential outcomes.

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[44] Michael Glosny, "Hegemonic Realism" (lecture, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey CA, February 1, 2021).

[45] Michael Glosny, "Hegemonic Realism."

[46] Ben Rich and Kylie Moore-Gilbert, "From Defense to Offense: Realist Shifts in Saudi Foreign Policy," *Middle East Policy* XXVI, no. 3 (2019): 62–76.

[47] See Mearshimer, Ch. 2, for additional key assumptions.

[48] John Mearsheimer, "Ch. 2 Anarchy and the Struggle for Power," in *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: WW Norton, 2001), 31.

The final tool provided by the realist lens that helps unravel the decision-making process of KSA regarding normalization is the concept of balancing and bandwagonning. This concept was originated by Waltz and adopted by Walt in his further investigation of the concept. Walt, in accordance with Waltz, states that "states may either balance (ally in opposition to the principal source of danger) or bandwagon (ally with the state that poses the major threat)."[49] Walt, in critiquing the original theory of this concept, provides that states choose to balance or bandwagon based on the level of threat rather than on the amount of power.[50] Of the types of threat, the most relevant to the case of KSA is threat from proximity. Proximate threat is the idea that states that are geographically nearby pose a greater threat than those that are far away.[51] This is a relevant threat because KSA's neighboring state Iran poses a threat to the Kingdom that KSA must take into consideration when deciding whether to normalize with Israel. In the context of KSA's decision to normalize relations with Israel, it must choose to either balance against its enemy Iran with the U.S. and Israel or to bandwagon with the neighboring country, Iran, in hopes of survival.

Utilizing the theories of realism, one can unpack the implications of normalization for KSA in the context of relevant international relations. The most influential relationships are KSA's relationship with the U.S., Israel, and Iran. The following seeks to answer these primary questions: How has KSA's disposition towards offensive realism impacted its decision? How, as a rational actor, has KSA weighed its decision in the international arena? Has KSA decided to balance or bandwagon against its neighboring threat? These questions will help one understand why KSA has withheld from normalization with Israel on the international level of analysis.

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[49] Stephen Walt, "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power," *International Security* 9, no. 4 (1985): 4.

[50] Walt, "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power," 1985.

[51] Stephen Walt, "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power," *International Security* 9, no. 4 (1985): 10.

## B. KSA-ISRAELI RELATIONS: A PARADIGM SHIFT

The practical place to begin analyzing on the international level is KSA's relationship with Israel. Establishing official diplomatic ties would result in costs and benefits for the kingdom in the international arena. To begin, one must attempt to determine the potential outcomes of normalization and how these outcomes would be viewed by an offensive realist-oriented state. Conversely, the opposite must also be done—what are the outcomes of declining to normalize relations with Israel? Weighing these costs and benefits, within the international arena and context of security and economic prosperity, will lead to a comprehensible understanding of KSA's current position.

KSA and Israel have been at odds since the Kingdom was established, at least as interpreted by the statements of the Kingdom's leaders (see Chapter V). The opposition historically has been due to the Kingdom's support for their Arab brothers in Palestine throughout the Palestinian-Israeli crisis. Opposition to Israel was widespread throughout the Arab world at the onset of and throughout the crisis, but many Arab states have come to overlook the issue and decidedly moved forward with diplomatic relations. KSA has not. The difficulty in making sense of this decision is that on the international level of analysis, these two states share many interests that official diplomatic ties would mutually benefit.

The two countries have quietly cooperated in the past and maintained secrecy throughout this cooperation. In the context of state security, KSA and Israel have cooperated on the same side of conflict. The first account of this cooperation was in 1962, when Egypt, under President Nasser, interfered with the coup occurring in Yemen.[52] KSA feared that Egypt was after its oil, key to Saudi security, and decided to support the Yemeni regime against the coup.[53] Israel secretly assisted in this matter by providing necessary supplies to the Yemeni regime.[54] Both KSA and Israel had a shared interest in deterring

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[52] Elie Podeh, "Saudi Arabia and Israel: From Secret to Public Engagement, 1948–2018," *The Middle East Journal* 72, no. 4 (2018): 563–86.

[53] Podeh.

[54] Podeh.

Nasser's regime from gaining power.[55] Podeh points out that it was very likely that KSA was aware of Israeli assistance and accepted it.[56] Although KSA and Israel did not formally balance against Egypt, this account reflects the rationality of KSA as an actor in the international arena. The decision to allow Israeli interference in the Yemeni coup was strategically beneficial to the survival of the state because it helped maintain the security of Saudi oil fields. This occurrence also exemplifies KSA's previous tendencies towards defensive realism. Rather than seeking to maximize their power—for example, by deciding to acquire additional land or resources at the expense of the Yemeni regime—they instead maintained the status quo by only defending what they already had. The outcome may have been different if the current offensive realist-oriented regime had been in power during the 1962 Yemeni coup.

Why hasn't KSA normalized relations with Israel? Leading up to the current Saudi leadership, King Salman and Crown Prince MBS, who took power in 2015, this question could be explained by international-level analysis. It has been established that prior to 2015, KSA held a largely defensive realist position in the international arena.[57] The decision to not normalize can be explained by analyzing the situation through the defensive realist lens.

Throughout the Arab-Israeli conflict, KSA has played a minimal role in the wars that have occurred between the two sides. The only involvement has been statements made by Saudi regimes discrediting and opposing Israel (see Chapter V). In addition to these statements, KSA has provided financial support to the Arab cause.[58] Israel posed no real threat to the security of KSA, and therefore, to maintain the status quo, it was ideal for KSA to avoid provoking Israel too aggressively as to mitigate risk of direct conflict and to state security.[59] Conversely, during the earlier periods of the Arab-Israeli conflict, when

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[55] Podeh.

[56] Podeh.

[57] Rich and Moore-Gilbert, "From Defense to Offense."

[58] Rich and Moore-Gilbert.

[59] Rich and Moore-Gilbert.

no Arab country had yet established diplomatic ties, it would be too costly for KSA to be the first Arab country to normalize relations with Israel, because normalization would threaten their position in the region and their Arab state alliances. Now that KSA has undergone a paradigm shift, one must look at its relationship with Israel from a different perspective.

Historically, defensive realism was prevalent in the Saudi state and is seen in past interactions with the state of Israel. To obtain the status quo, just enough security to be satisfied, KSA has at times engaged in secret negotiations with Israel. This is no longer the case. A paradigmatic shift has occurred in Saudi foreign policy, from defensive realist oriented to offensively oriented.[60] This shift is exemplified in the foreign policy decisions made by KSA towards Qatar in the 21st century. In 2017, Qatar was accused of supporting terrorist groups and criticized by other GCC member states for its friendly relationship with Iran.[61] KSA, enemy of Iran, aggressively sought to establish its position as regional hegemon through its foreign policy towards Qatar, exemplifying its shift towards offensive realism. KSA severed diplomatic ties with Qatar, closed the only Qatari land border, and enacted an economic blockade until Qatar met a list of high demands presented by KSA and other GCC members.[62] These demands included cutting diplomatic ties with Iran; aligning in all aspects with other Arab countries; and ceasing to fund organizations deemed terrorist organizations by GCC member states and the U.S.[63] These demands greatly constricted Qatari freedom in foreign policy decisions and reinforced KSA's position as the regional hegemon. In response to the proximate threat of Iran, it is a rational act by KSA to ensure that other neighboring states in the Gulf do not have diplomatic ties with Iran.

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[60] Rich and Moore-Gilbert.

[61] "Qatar Crisis: What You Need to Know," BBC News, 2017, sec. Middle East, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-40173757.

[62] "Qatar Crisis."

[63] "Qatar Crisis."

The paradigm shift to offensive realism of KSA is also exemplified by the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in 2018.[64] Khashoggi was a critic of the Saudi government, and his statements presented a threat to the survival of the state. The U.S. Office of the Director of National Intelligence assessed that Crown Prince MBS approved the capture or murder of Khashoggi.[65] Some of Khashoggi's critiques featured in the *Washington Post* include the following:

Saudi Arabia wasn't always this repressive. Now it's unbearable.

Saudi Arabia's crown prince is acting like Putin.

Today, Saudi Arabia alone is the most politically stable and economically secure country in the region. Neither the kingdom nor our conflict-ridden region can afford to see my country lose its footing. MBS's rash actions are deepening tensions and undermining the security of the Gulf states and the region as a whole.

Saudi Arabia's crown prince already controlled the nation's media. Now he's squeezing it even further.[66]

Khashoggi's critiques of the Saudi government, primarily of Crown Prince MBS, were threatening to the Saudi state because they drew international attention to KSA in a negative light. This negative view of KSA risked not only its hegemonic position in the Gulf region, but also risked its relationship with the U.S. and other allied countries. From the perspective of KSA as a rational actor, the benefit of preventing the threat stemming from Khashoggi's critiques, which would diminish state power, outweighed the costs of facing criticism for committing a horrendous act. The potential backlash, which for KSA would have ideally been prevented, posed less of a threat than the words of Khashoggi.

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[64] "Assessing the Saudi Government's Role in the Killing of Jamal Khashoggi," [Redacted], Washington, D.C.: Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2021, https://permanent.fdlp.gov/gpo152216/Assessment-Saudi-Gov-Role-in-JK-Death-20210226v2.pdf.

[65] "Assessing the Saudi Government's Role in the Killing Jamal Khashoggi."

[66] Jamal Khashoggi, "Read Jamal Khashoggi's Columns for The Washington Post," *The Washington Post*, 2018, https://www.proquest.com/blogs-podcasts-websites/read-jamal-khashoggi-s-columns-washington-post/docview/2116662073/se-2?accountid=12702

From KSA's offensive realist perspective on the international arena, one can infer the costs and benefits of establishing official diplomatic ties with Israel. Direct involvement in the Arab-Israeli conflict, in support of the Palestinians, would provide little benefit to the Saudi State. There is little that the Palestinians could offer that would maximize Saudi security, and direct conflict with Israel would be too great of a cost. Conflict with Israel would almost certainly result in a large security threat to KSA. Conversely, normalizing relations with Israel from an offensive realist perspective may be rational. It should be made clear that normalizing relations would not mean that KSA directly supports Israel in the Arab-Israeli conflict; rather, it would open doors for security and economic cooperation between the two states. Therefore, broadly speaking, KSA would benefit from increased security cooperation and economic growth if it decided to establish diplomatic ties with Israel. This increase in power would be a rational decision for a state seeking to maximize its power in the international arena. The costs of normalizing with Israel on the international level would be surpassed by the predicted benefits. In addition to economic and security cooperation between the two states, KSA's relationship with the U.S. and Iran also impact the cost-benefit analysis of normalization.

## C. KSA-IRAN: BALANCE VERSUS BANDWAGON

Defense against the Iranian threat is a mutual interest of KSA and Israel. In the context of Saudi-Israeli normalization, Iran plays a major role. The Israeli-Hezbollah War of 2006 demonstrates the beginnings of the adverse relationship between Israel and Iran. Iran's involvement in this war was via its support of the Lebanese Shia militant group Hezbollah. It is a "known reality" that Iran has major influence and control of Hezbollah.[67] Furthermore, Hezbollah grew to be a major opponent of Israel in the early 1980s mainly because of its western affiliations and aggressions towards the Palestinians.[68] The Israeli-Hezbollah war was initiated by Hezbollah rocket attacks that injured soldiers in the Israeli

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[67] Zisser Eyal, "Iranian Involvement in Lebanon," *Military and Strategic Affairs* 3, no. 1 (2011): 3.

[68] Eyal, p. 3-16.

Defense Force.[69] This war also demonstrated Iranian ability to threaten Israeli state security. The ability and desires of Iran to meddle in Arab affairs also concerned KSA because this indicated a potential risk for Saudi hegemony in the region.[70] Therefore, the Israeli-Hezbollah war exemplified the beginnings of shared mutual interest between KSA and Israel in deterring the Iranian threat. These shared interests were recognized by KSA and Israel. It was reported by an Israeli newspaper in 2006 that a secret meeting between the Israeli Prime Minister and a Saudi official was held to discuss the Iranian threat.[71] The meeting was denied by both states, so it is difficult to determine the reliability of this report, but it seems highly likely that the two states considered working together to combat the Iranian threat. Although the Israeli-Hezbollah War of 2006 demonstrates the Iranian threat to Israel, it does not fully encapsulate the rivalry between KSA and Iran.

While KSA and Israel have some shared interests, KSA and Iran have mostly rival interests. Primarily, Iran threatens KSA's position as the regional hegemon and therefore is an enemy to the Saudi state. There are no diplomatic relations between KSA and Iran; instead, the two states engage in confrontation, often through indirect conflict. [72] The indirect conflict between KSA and Iran is often carried out through proxy wars. For example, in the Iraqi conflict, Iran provided support to one side, the Shiites, while KSA provided support to the other side, the Sunnis, to maintain their power in the region.[73] Additionally, in the Syrian Civil War, Iran provided military aid to the ruling Assad regime

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[69] Eyal.

[70] Abadi, "Saudi Arabia's Rapprochement with Israel: The National Security Imperatives."

[71] Greg Myre, "Israeli Premier and Saudi Said to Hold Secret Meeting," *The New York Times*, September 26, 2006, sec. World, https://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/26/world/middleeast/israeli-premier-and-saudi-said-to-hold-secret-meeting.html.

[72] Valeri Modebadze, "The Battle for Regional Dominance Between The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and The Islamic Republic of Iran," *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs* 4, no. 3 (2018): 66–71.

[73] Modebadze.

while KSA aided the forces that opposed the regime.[74] Iran and KSA have competing interests in the region; each state wishes to obtain regional dominance by ensuring that it maintains influence in the Arab world.

Indirect conflict and proxy wars are the common mode of hostility between KSA and Iran, but one instance reflects a direct Iranian attack on the Saudi state. In late 2019, Saudi Aramco, an oil production facility, was damaged by drone missiles.[75] Although not definitively proven, U.S. intelligence officials assessed that the attack was carried out by Iran.[76] This rare occurrence exemplifies the proximate threat that Iran presents to Saudi state security and economy.

If KSA decided to normalize relations with Israel, balancing against the shared threat of Iran would be a legitimate factor weighing into the cost-benefit analysis. According to Waltz's definition of balance, KSA normalizing relations with Israel would, in the context of Iran, be a balancing act against the source of danger. From Mearsheimer's perspective of offensive realism, KSA's normalization with Israel would not exemplify the act of balancing. Mearsheimer holds more explanatory power in analyzing why KSA has not normalized relations with Israel. As an offensive realist-oriented state, KSA potentially does not see an opportunity to "gain power at the expense of its rivals" or an opportunity to "take advantage of those situations when the benefits outweigh the costs" that would allow them to achieve the goal of being a regional hegemon.[77] In other words, Waltz's theory of balance would indicate that KSA would normalize with Israel, but that has not occurred. Mearsheimer, who challenges Waltz's theory of balance, holds greater explanatory power. KSA has not balanced with Israel against Iran because that is not in the

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[74] Modebadze.

[75] Bradley Hope and Justin Scheck, Blood and Oil: Mohammed Bin Salman's Ruthless Quest for Global Power (New York: Hachette Book Group Inc., 2020), p. 318.

[76] Hope and Scheck.

[77] Glenn Snyder, "Mearsheimer's World-Offensive Realsim and the Struggle for Security: A Review Essay," *International Security* 27, no. 1 (n.d.): 151.

interest of the state according to offensive realism. KSA has yet to determine if the benefits outweigh the costs in normalizing with Israel within the context of the Iranian threat.

## D.      KSA-U.S.: BENEFITS OF NORMALIZING RELATIONS

KSA's relationship with the U.S. also plays a role in the kingdom's decision to normalize. At the international level, the relationship between KSA and the United States provides many benefits that would indicate a move towards normalization and few costs. In alignment with KSA's interests, normalization would likely result in increased economic prosperity and strengthened security via U.S. aid, assistance, and arms deals. KSA has benefited from its strong diplomatic relationship with the U.S. since it was first established in 1931.[78] The U.S. and KSA share one main interest: both states desire peace, stability, and security in the Gulf region and Arab world.[79] This shared interest has kept the relationship between the U.S. and KSA intact, because the U.S. relies heavily on KSA for influence in the region and KSA relies on U.S. global dominance and wealth. Nonetheless, KSA must frequently appease the U.S. so that its non-democratic and occasional human rights violations are overlooked. It is a priority for KSA to maintain a good relationship with the U.S. For example, in 1988 KSA signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty at the behest of the U.S.[80] This was an effort by KSA to please U.S. interests in the Gulf.

By assessing the current relationship between KSA and the U.S., specifically security and economic cooperation, one can infer how the refusing normalization has impacted the Kingdom. The Abraham Accords was not the first time the U.S. elicited normalization between the Arab countries and Israel, and KSA has declined these previous requests. Therefore, the current relationship exemplifies the benefits and costs of KSA's decision in 2020 to not move forward with diplomatic relations with Israel facilitated by the U.S.

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[78] "U.S. Relations With Saudi Arabia," *United States Department of State*, November, 2021, https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-saudi-arabia/.

[79] "U.S. Relations With Saudi Arabia."

[80] Abadi, "Saudi Arabia's Rapprochement with Israel: The National Security Imperatives."

The U.S. State Department offers an overview of current security cooperation and a full list of arms deals between the U.S. and KSA. As of 2020, the U.S. continues to support KSA security by training and equipping Saudi forces in order to promote stability and peace in the region.[81] In 2017, U.S. arms sales to KSA included the following: "Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) anti-missile systems; Patriot Advanced Capability-3 air defense systems; follow-on support for the Royal Saudi Air Force; M1A2 Abrams Main Battle Tanks; High Mobility Multi-Purpose Wheeled Vehicles (HMMWVs); Light Armored Vehicles; F-15SA, C130J, and KC-130J aircraft; AH-64D Apache, UH-60M Blackhawk, AH-6I Light Attack, MH-60R Multi-Mission, and CH-47F Chinook helicopters."[82] KSA is heavily dependent on the U.S. to obtain modern warfighting technology that contributes to Saudi security and state power. This is a major benefit of the Saudi-U.S. relationship. Security cooperation between the two states is not significantly affected by KSA's declination of normalization with Israel. Therefore, the costs of not normalizing with Israel in the context of Saudi-U.S. relations are minimal—hinting at the rationality behind KSA's decision on the Abraham Accords.

In addition to security cooperation, KSA and the U.S. benefit from strong economic relations. According to the U.S. State Department, in 2020 the U.S. was KSA's "second largest trading partner," approximately half a million barrels of oil per day are exported from KSA to the U.S., and both states have signed a trade agreement.[83] Furthermore, KSA's 2030 Vision plan includes U.S. trade in its goal to diversify the economy away from oil production and sales.[84] Similar to security cooperation between the two states, economic cooperation is not significantly impacted by KSA's decision to not normalize. The two states continue to maintain a strong economic relationship and have signaled that

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[81] "U.S. Security Cooperation with Saudi Arabia," *United States Department of State*, 2021, https://www.state.gov/u-s-security-cooperation-with-saudi-arabia/.

[82] "U.S. Security Cooperation with Saudi Arabia."

[83] "U.S. Relations with Saudi Arabia."

[84] "U.S. Relations with Saudi Arabia."

they will continue these beneficial relations in the future. The lack of negative impact on economic cooperation indicates low costs for KSA's decision to not normalize with Israel.

The costs of normalizing relations with Israel concerning KSA's relationship with U.S., is based on logical assumptions because there is no hard evidence to support an assessment of costs. It is likely that the costs of normalization are either minimal or non-existent as they relate to KSA's relationship the U.S. KSA's relationship with the U.S. does not offer motivation for KSA to normalize with Israel. There is no opportunity for KSA, as an offensive realist-oriented state, to take advantage of the situation or to gain power. The lack of opportunity is explained by the already beneficial relationship with the U.S. and lack of costs of normalization. KSA already maximizes its beneficial relationship with the U.S.; therefore, normalization does not increase power to the Kingdom. A potential hinderance to this analysis is that it does not consider a scenario in which Saudi-U.S. relations deteriorate, whether it be due to excessive human rights violations or aggressive foreign policy. If KSA recognizes a decline in Saudi-U.S. relations, normalization with Israel would present an opportunity to restore relations and get back into the good graces of the U.S. It is possible the KSA is waiting to normalize relations with Israel until it sees an opportunity to maximize benefits or to regain its power.

## E.     CONCLUSION

Normalization would strengthen relations between KSA, the U.S., and Israel—resulting in greater security and a more prosperous economy for the Kingdom. KSA has shared interests with Israel and the U.S. These benefits would indicate that KSA, as a rational actor, would normalize, but it has not.  Normalization does not offer a power-maximizing opportunity to the offensive realist- oriented Kingdom. The international level of analysis, although nuanced, provides a logical explanation to KSA's refusal to normalize relations with Israel.  KSA refused to normalize relations with Israel because it would not gain relative state power.

# IV.    DOMESTIC OBSTACLES

The domestic implications of normalization for KSA serve as a major prohibiting factor to moving forward with formal diplomatic ties. KSA's decision on normalization impacts the Kingdom internally in three main ways. First, the decision affects the Saudi population's view and support of the Saud family regime. Second, it causes turmoil among officials in the Saudi government. Lastly, it affects the Kingdom's position in the Muslim World as the Guardian of the two holy mosques. The chapter will be organized in respect to these three factors and in the aforementioned order. These three aspects of the domestic level of analysis produce costs and benefits that are integral to the calculation conducted by the Saudi regime. This chapter will analyze these three impacts in attempt to explain why KSA has not normalized relations with Israel. It will argue that the domestic level of analysis holds compelling explanatory power for KSA's decision on normalization.

## A.    PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR THE SAUDI REGIME

The current Saudi regime, under King Salman and Crown Prince MBS, must maintain stability in the country for their own regime survival. Primarily, the regime holds concern for the possibility of revolution or an uprising in the country that would result in their own deposition. Therefore, public support must be in favor of King Salman and Crown Prince MBS and any opposition to their rule must be silenced. The decision to normalize relations with Israel plays a critical role in maintaining public support and deterring revolutionary thought. I argue that KSA has not normalized relations with Israel, in part, because the regime fears that normalization will be followed by protest or an uprising that threatens regime survival. Concern of regime survival arguably began after the 1979 Iranian Revolution and grew after the 2011 Arab Spring. The Arab Spring was a time when the Arab regimes throughout the Arab World experienced uprisings, revolutions, and attempts to overthrow governments. The Saudi regime, under King Abdullah, made great efforts to ensure there were no uprisings in the Kingdom during the Arab Spring. To incentivize Saudi citizens from protest, King Abdullah offered $100 billion for domestic use and deployed thousands of security forces in the Kingdom to

prohibit gathering and protest.[85] The uprisings that took place in other Arab countries were very impactful revolutions and others were not, nonetheless, this event reasonably created fear for the Saudi regime and its survival.

It is difficult to gauge public support for the current Saudi regime because any anti-government expression is fervently punished. There exists little freedom of expression in KSA, minimal civil liberties, and almost no political rights.[86] Furthermore, payments from the Saudi government to its citizens disincentivize political activism or creates what others call a "rentier mentality".[87] Government payments in Saudi Arabia occur via the Citizen Account Program to low- and middle-income families.[88] One potential explanation for disincentivized political activity is that the cost are too high. Opposing the government would not only threatens one's own life but may also threaten their livelihood. While almost no data exists on Saudi public support for the current regime, there is some data on Saudi citizens' stance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that sheds light on the domestic implications of normalization.

According to the Washington Institute, only 14% of Saudi citizens believe that President Trump's peace plan for the Arab-Israeli conflict will have a positive effect and 54% of Saudi citizens think the UAE and Bahrain peace agreement is negative.[89] Additionally, the Palestinian issue has become less important to the Saudi citizens

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[85] Toby Craig Jones, "Saudi Arabia Versus the Arab Spring," *Raritan* 31, no. 2 (Fall 2011): 43–59, 164.

[86] "Saudi Arabia: Freedom in the World 2021 Country Report," Freedom House, 2021, https://freedomhouse.org/country/saudi-arabia/freedom-world/2021.

[87] Steffen Hertog, "The 'Rentier Mentality', 30 Years on: Evidence from Survey Data," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 47, no. 1 (January 1, 2020): 6–23, https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2020.1714870.

[88] Hertog.

[89] David Pollock, "Correction: New Saudi Poll Shows Sharp Rise in Support for Israel Ties, Despite Caveats," The Washington Institute, December 08, 2020, https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/correction-new-saudi-poll-shows-sharp-rise-support-israel-ties-despite-caveats.

compared to other international concerns.[90] Although doubts about the peace plan and agreements are not in the overwhelming majority, the Saudi public's perspective on normalization remains a concern for the Saudi regime. Normalization may be the tipping point that results in an anti-government uprising that would threaten the current Saudi regime. This is too great of a risk for the current regime to take even though it is not a guaranteed outcome. In addition to the risk of an uprising from the Saudi public, the current regime also faces potential backlash from internal government affairs if they chose to normalize relations with Israel.

## B.      INTERNAL GOVERNMENT TURMOIL

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is currently undergoing a transition under the leadership of King Salman and Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS). The Saudi Vision 2030, created by MBS, is one of the most striking examples of this transition. These progressive changes have undoubtedly faced criticism and resistance from the conservative actors in the Kingdom. Normalization would be considered very progressive decision for the current Saudi regime that would cause internal government turmoil. The Saud family has faced critique for a myriad of reasons, but recently the authority and religious backing has come to the forefront of criticism. In addition to criticism from the exterior, the Saud family has historically dealt with internal tension and animosity. The reasons for critique and tension have changed and evolved over time, but currently surrounds the actions of MBS, who is the main decision maker for the matter of normalization.

One source of critique and turmoil in the Kingdom are the Islamist factions that exist within it. Multiple Islamist factions exist within the Kingdom that possess different ideas and beliefs about how the Kingdom should look and how it should be ruled. Ayoob references scholar Guilain Denoeux, who defines political Islam or Islamism as "a form of instrumentalization of Islam by individuals, groups, and organizations that pursue political objectives."[91] This definition is essential to understanding the different Islamist factions in

[90] Pollock.

[91] Mohammed Ayoob, *The Many Faces of Political Islam: Religion and Politics in Muslim Societies*, Second edition. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2020).

Saudi Arabia. These factions differ in many ways, but all of them ultimately seek to use Islam and an instrument to achieve political goals and aspirations. This section will focus on the Islamist faction in Saudi Arabia that presents the greatest threat to the Saudi regime regarding normalization.

Conservative Islamists are those which adhere to the strict and literal interpretations of the Quran and Sunna. Groups that fall into this faction often oppose liberalization and modernization of Saudi politics and society. This Islamist faction is majorly constituted of Wahhabists, although even among those that adhere to Wahhabism there are factional splits. Wahhabism is "a revival and reform movement founded in central Arabia in the mid-eighteenth century by scholar and jurist Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab".[92] Abd al-Wahhab was a Sunni theologist who adhered to and valued the practices of early Islam and rejected modern practices.[93] He possessed a conservative view of Islam and how the daily life of Muslims should be conducted to be considered pious. The core tenants of Wahhabism are *tawhid* and avoidance of *shirk*. *Tawhid* literally means oneness and is the Islamic belief in one true god. *Shirk* is polytheism and idolization of many gods and is to be avoided at all costs. Wahhabism is the official ideology in Saudi Arabia and plays an important role in the political and societal structure of the kingdom. Al-Atawneh states, "According to Wahhabi doctrines, Islam is not only a religion, but is a comprehensive system for governing everything public, social, and political…".[94] The role of Wahhabism and the ideological constraints on politics in the country distinguishes adherents of Wahhabism as an Islamist faction.

Wahhabism uses Islamic authority to influence politics through the grand mufti and Islamic scholars. The grand mufti is one who holds the highest religious and legal authority

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[92] Jonathan Hoffman, "Religion, the State and Politics In Saudi Arabia," *Middle East Policy* 26, no. 3 (2019): 45–61, https://doi.org/10.1111/mepo.12437.

[93] Carol E. B. Choksy and Jamsheed K. Choksy, "THE SAUDI CONNECTION: Wahhabism and Global Jihad," *World Affairs* 178, no. 1 (2015): 23–34.

[94] Muhammad K. Al-Atawneh, *Wahhabi Islam Facing the Challenges of Modernity: Dar Al-Lfta in the Modern Saudi State* (Leiden, Netherlands, The Brill, 2010), http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ebook-nps/detail.action?docID=634969.

in the Kingdom. He holds the most religious influence on the Saudi court system and issues fatwas (opinion) on legal matters and on social affairs.[95] The split between political and religious authority in Saudi Arabia, between the ruling family and religious authorities, stems from a historical alliance. In 1744 Ibn Saud, the founder of the Saudi Kingdom and father of the Saud regime, made an alliance with 'Abd al-Wahhab, founder of the Wahhabist ideology, to divide political and religious power.[96] Ibn Saud became the political leader and 'Abd al-Wahhab became the religious leader. The relationship between the political and religious authorities in the kingdom has given legitimacy to the Saud family as they make political decisions based on religious opinion and influence.

The *ulema* are a group of Islamic scholars which provide input to the ruling family, on policies and their consistency or adherence to Islam. The influence of the ulema has waned over the years and some argue that they only play a minor role in the creation of political and societal policies in Saudi Arabia. The Ulema are split between the factions that exists in the kingdom, but, overall, they provide the most resistance to the liberalization of the kingdom. The faction of Islamists that adhere to literal and strict interpretation of the Quran and oppose liberalization constitute the majority of Conservative Islamists.

Al-Sahwa al-Islamiyya (Islamic Awakening) or Sahwa, is a term used to refer to a social movement that took place throughout the 1960s and 1970s in Saudi Arabia.[97] The movement constituted of largely Saudi youth who participated in Islamic activism in the political realm. This movement originated from the Muslim Brotherhood whose core goals were to oppose foreign occupation and to establish an Islamic state that followed sharia law. Throughout the mid-late 1900s, members of the Muslim Brotherhood traveled to Saudi Arabia seeking refuge and over time obtained a significant amount of influence in the country. The Muslim Brotherhood members that traveled to the kingdom eventually

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[95] Al-Atawneh.

[96] Al-Atawneh.

[97] George Holoch, Stephane Lacroix, and George Holoch, *Awakening Islam: Religious Dissent In Contemporary Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge, Mass, United States: Harvard University Press, 2011), http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ebook-nps/detail.action?docID=3300965.

gained positions in the Saudi government and key roles in the education sector of the kingdom.[98] This increase in influence led to the beginnings and inspirations of the Sahwa movement.

The Sahwa movement is an ideological hybrid of Wahhabism and Muslim Brotherhood and they view Islam as a governing system for every detail of life.[99] Their political agendas are similar to those of the Muslim Brotherhood and their religious ideologies are consistent with Wahhabist beliefs. Holoch and Lacroix provide that the distinctness of the Muslim Brotherhood and Wahhabism is what allowed for the creation of the Sahwa ideology, because it combines the two distinct ideologies into one.[100] The Sahwa movement has been repeatedly repressed by the Saudi regime since its emergence in the late 20th-century but has maintained its influence in the region. The movement is mostly conservative when it comes to social reform and largely opposes liberalization of society, but its political ideas challenge the Saudi Regime. Sahwa members have urged for an increase in the role of religious scholars in politics and call for representation in the state which challenges the power of the Saud family.[101] Although the ulema play a role in advising the royal family on political decisions they hold little influence, and the Saud regime has the ultimate authority. An increase in religious scholars' involvement in politics would hinder the regimes' ability to make decisions with almost complete autonomy. Furthermore, it challenges the regimes current decision-making process and the legitimacy of their adherence to Islam. In 2019 MBS began squashing any opposition to the Saud family, which consequently included members of the Sahwa movement. For example, scholars who were involved with or inspired by the movement have been detained and their sentence is in question.[102] The Sahwa movement contains many members with different

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[98] Arwa Ibrahim, "What Is Sahwa, the Awakening Movement under Pressure in Saudi?," Al Jazeera, 2019, https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2019/6/5/what-is-sahwa-the-awakening-movement-under-pressure-in-saudi.

[99] Holoch, Lacroix, and Holoch, Awakening Islam.

[100] Holoch, Lacroix, and Holoch.

[101] Ibrahim, "What Is Sahwa, the Awakening Movement under Pressure in Saudi?"

[102] Ibrahim.

ideas, but it is largely a conservative Islamist group that posits a threat to the Saudi regime and contributes to the fractured nature of Islamist groups in the Kingdom. The Sahwa movement rejects normalization with Israel and continue to support the Palestinian cause.[103]

Under the leadership of King Salman and MBS with consideration given to the Vision 2030 plan for the Kingdom, the Sahwa movement presents the largest threat to the Kingdom and the ruling family. The Sahwa movement calls for greater religious involvement in politics in the Kingdom which would diminish the amount autonomy and control of MBS. Furthermore, increased involvement and influence of the religious scholars would potentially present greater resistance to the liberalization of Saudi society and thus, to normalization with Israel. Normalization would result in tremendous pushback from the Sahwa movement and would result in a greater threat to the Saudi regime. The conservative Islamists, Wahhabists and Sahwis. hold many key religious roles, such as the Grand mufti and the ulema, and they present the strictest implementation of the Quran and adherence to their view of Islam in the Kingdom. Due to the lack of influence of the *ulema* in the Kingdom, the factional divides do not present excessive friction to the progression of the kingdom but present barriers to Saudi normalization with Israel. Therefore, internal threat stemming largely from the religious contingency of the Saudi government increases the costs of normalization and provides insight into KSA's decision.

## C.    AS GUARDIAN OF THE HOLY MOSQUES

As a guardian of the two holiest sites for the Muslim world, backlash to cozying up with the Sephardic enemy would lose credibility for the kingdom. Mecca and Medina are the two most visited sites by Muslims around the world, as it is the place of pilgrimage replicating that of prophet Muhammed. Normalization would not only create backlash from the conservative Islamists exiting within and outside the government, but it may also

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[103] "Iraqi Groups Denounce as 'Treacherous' Event Calling for Normalization with Israel," Farsnews Agency, September 25, 2021, https://www.farsnews.ir/en/news/14000703000672/Irai-Grps-Dennce-as-%E2%80%98Treachers%E2%80%99-Even-Calling-fr-Nrmalizain-wih-Israel.

threaten the Kingdom's position in the Muslim world. The religious debate on normalization is divide and largely based on individual interpretation of Islamic teaching and the Quran. Some argue that Islam promotes peace and therefore normalization, while others argue that normalization is inherently opposed to Islam.[104] Those in the Muslim world who combat and oppose normalization present the greatest threat to the Saudi regimes position in the Muslim world. The influence of these actors may result in a formidable end to KSA's position as the Guardian of the Two Holy Mosques. Although this is an inconceivable change to the Muslim world, it is a cost to normalization that must be considered.

Not only does the Saudi regime have an interest in pleasing the Muslim world, but it also maintains a closed religious market with little tolerance for other religions inside its country. The lack of religious freedom in KSA helps explain the decision to not normalize relations with Israel because normalization conflicts with the internal religious governance of the Kingdom. According to the Associate of Religion Data Archives (ARDA), KSA is one of the most restrictive religious countries and has little religious freedom. This assessment is based on the government restrictions index (GRI) and the social hostilities index (SHI). The GRI is based on 20 indicators of religious restriction and reflects the level of government restriction (0 representing the lowest and 10 representing the highest amount of restriction). The SHI reflects how individuals and groups in a society stop other religions from growing and operating based on 13 indicators (0 is lowest and 10 is highest level of hostility). Figure 1 reflects KSA's GRI and Figure 2 shows KSA's SHI from 2007-2016.[105] The data shows KSA's consistently higher levels of religious restriction and intolerance compared to UAE and Bahrain. KSA is one of the most restrictive and hostile countries in the world towards outside religions. The comparison between the UAE and

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104 Ofir Winter and Yoel Guzansky, "Islam in the Service of Peace: Religious Aspects of the Abraham Accord," *INSS Insight* 1379 (2020), http://www.inss.org.il/publication/israel-uae-deal-and-islam/.

105 Brian Grim and Roger Finke, "Global Restrictions on Religion, 2007–2016," Pew Research Center, December 2009, https://www.thearda.com/Archive/Files/Descriptions/PGR07_16.asp.

Bahrain provides insight into the decision on normalization. A potential explanation for the decision to not normalize, based on this data, is that KSA is not open to the religious integration of the Jewish community into their country. Furthermore, the hostility against other religions is arguably a barrier that is integrated into the normalization decision. The opening of the religious market in KSA has the potential to increase the viability of normalization.
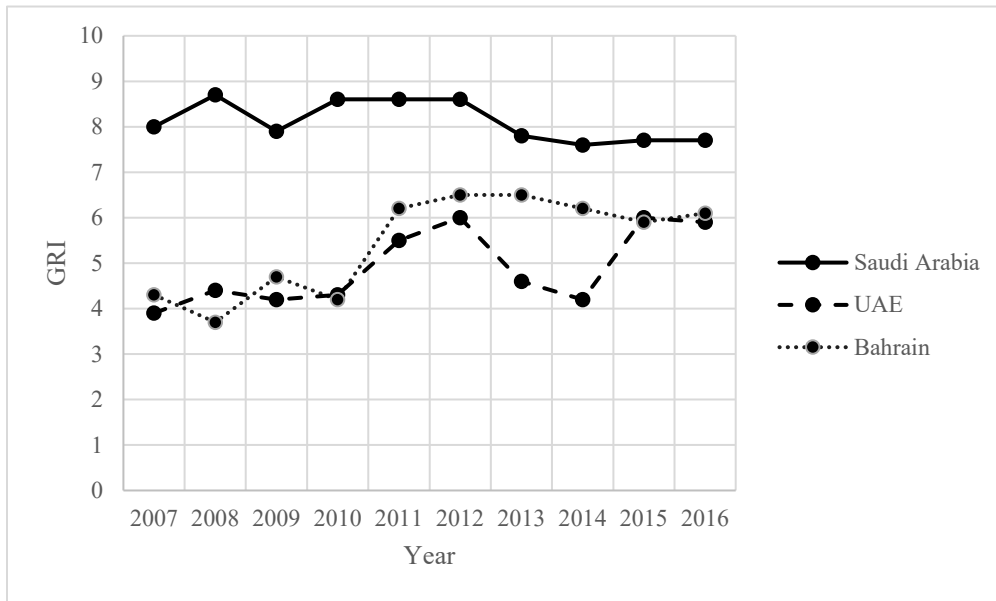


Figure 1.    Government Restrictions Index (2007-2016)
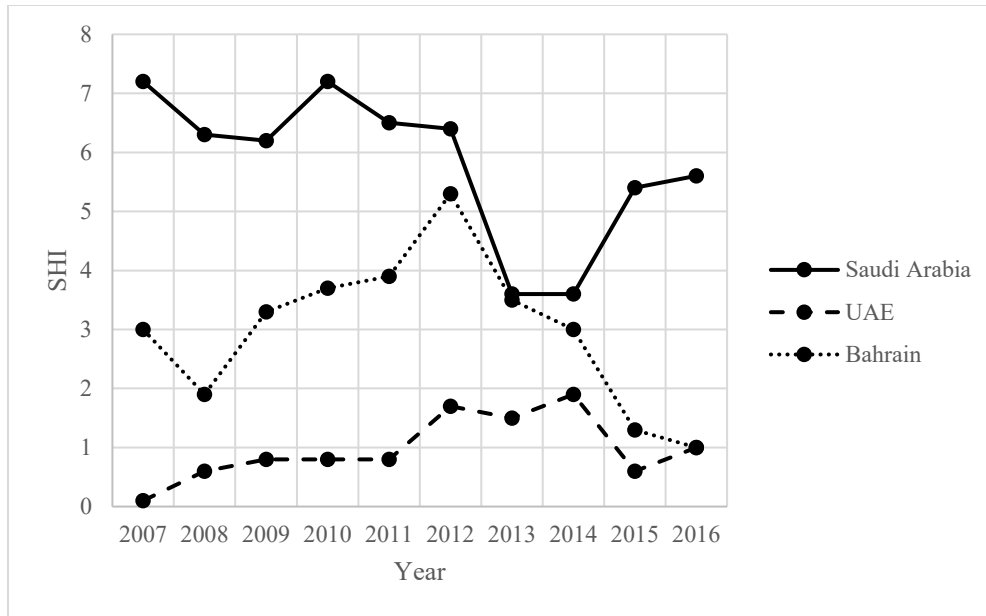
Figure 2.    Social Hostilities Index (2007-2016)

## D.    CONCLUSION

The Domestic Level of analysis provides explanatory power for KSA's decision to not normalize relations with Israel. The main prohibiting factor of normalization is the domestic threat to regime survival. This threat derives from public opposition, the religious vestige of the Saudi government, and from combatants of normalization in the Muslim world. While each of these domestic factors present little threat individually, combined they are a rational prohibiting factor for normalization.

# V.    INDIVIDUAL LEADERSHIP OF KSA

Since the beginning of the Arab-Israeli conflict to now, Saudi Kings have shifted their stances towards Israel; ranging from anti-Israel, pro-Arab, pro-peace, and to believing in Israel's claim to land. These positions are best demonstrated in the communications and relational developments with the United States throughout history. Although Saudi Kings have faced many threats, issues, and problems throughout their history, this chapter will solely focus on the events which demonstrate the kingdom's evolution of its stance towards Israel. Furthermore, this chapter will analyze the leaders of Saudi Arabia from the reign of Ibn Saud in 1932 to the current leadership of King Salman and his son Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS). In addition, it will recognize events that put pressure on leaders of Saudi Arabia to decide between the Palestinian cause and relations with the West. I argue that on the individual level, the historical stance of the Saud family provides insight to the evolution of KSA's position on normalization, but does not hold significant explanatory power for KSA's recent refusal to normalize relations with Israel.

## A.    IBN SAUD (1932–1953)

Ibn Saud is known as the founder of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. He is arguably the most famous leader of Saudi Arabia due to his success in uniting the territories of the Hejaz and Nejd as one kingdom to form the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.[106] King Ibn Saud established the foundation for Saudi's stance toward Israel and towards western influence. His reign possessed the strongest opposition to recognition and negotiations with Israel and had strong support for the Palestinian cause. His stance towards the conflict is exemplified in the declassified documents that recorded communications between President Franklin Roosevelt and King Ibn Saud. In the written communications about the status of Palestine in 1943, King Ibn Saud writes, "the Jews have no right to Palestine and their claims are an act of injustice unprecedented in the history of the human race. Palestine has from the

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[106] James Wynbrandt, *A Brief History of Saudi Arabia*, 2nd ed. (Boston, Massachusetts: Credo Reference, 2010), ProQuest.

earliest history belonged to the Arabs."[107] From this statement, one can gather Ibn Saud's strong support for the Palestinian cause. King Ibn Saud saw Israel's claim as unjust and he chose vibrant words to display his utter contempt with Israeli ideas. Furthermore, he writes that the "vagrant Jews who have no ties with this country [Palestine] except an imaginary claim, which … has no grounds except what they invent through fraud and deceit."[108] Ibn Saud not only believed that Israeli claims were unjust, but he also considered them to be imaginary. The notion of normalizing relations with Israel would seem absurd and outlandish to King Ibn Saud. His beliefs were resolute and were very different from the beliefs of future Kings to come.

Following the communications of 1943, King Ibn Saud traveled to the United States to discuss the Palestinian matter as well as other international concerns with President Roosevelt. President Roosevelt attempted to persuade Ibn Saud to accept the immigration of Jews to Palestine following WWII.[109] Ibn Saud resisted President Roosevelt's attempts to persuade him, he contested, "Give the Jews and their descendants the choicest lands and homes of the Germans who have oppressed them."[110] He was cemented in his position and saw no reason to give Arab land to the Jews. While President Roosevelt did not fully succeed in persuading Ibn Saud, he promised the King that he would not take any actions towards the Arab-Israeli conflict before consulting with Saudi Arabia.[111] Communications between President Roosevelt and Ibn Saud are just one example of the intense anti-sematic and anti-Israeli stance Ibn Saud held and how the U.S. attempted to change that stance. Saudi Arabia in the early 1930's – 1950's held a firm position on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict that was shaped by its founder Ibn Saud.

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[107] "King Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud's Communications with President Roosevelt Concerning the Status of Palestine," 1943, History Vault: World War II: Documents on Planning, Operations, Intelligence, Axis War Crimes.

[108] "King Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud's Communications with President Roosevelt Concerning the Status of Palestine."

[109] Leslie McLoughlin, *Ibn Saud* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1993).

[110] McLoughlin.

[111] Riedel, *Kings and Presidents*.

## B.    SAUD (1953–1964)

Crown Prince Saud became king after the death of his father Ibn Saud in 1953. His time as king was not easy as he faced challenges to his position from his brother and from other groups.[112] This opposition was due to his financial irresponsibility as King and to his blatant favoritism shown towards his sons.[113] Furthermore, Saud had to deal with the rising of pan-Arabism and Nasser of Egypt. The tension of the Saudi-Egyptian relationship brought about problems for the Kingdom and impacted Saudi Arabia's relationship with the US. Among these issues, the relationship between King Saud and President Truman was not reflective of the relationship between Ibn Saud and President Roosevelt. President Truman took a different stance than his predecessor and did not uphold prior agreements to consult with Kingdom before taking any action on the issue.[114] Truman placed greater importance on pleasing Americans than on maintaining a strong relationship with Saudi Arabia; at that time American public opinion was shifting towards a pro-Israeli stance.[115] The shifting stance of the U.S. pushed Saudi to have a stronger bond with Egypt who possessed a strong Anti-Israeli alliance. This led to King Saud to form a relationship with the pan-Arabism leader of Egypt Gamal Nasser, a staunch supporter of the Palestinian cause.

The relations between Saudi Arabia and Egypt did not last long, causing King Saud turned to other Middle Eastern countries for an alliance. The falling out with Egypt and shift in allies harmed Saudi Arabia's credibility in its support for the Palestinian cause and decreased public support for King Saud. Since Egypt was such a strong supporter of the Palestinian cause, when King Saud broke relations, the Arab world perceived it as a decline in support for the Palestinians. The lack of support was exacerbated by King Saud's plan

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[112] Wynbrandt, *A Brief History of Saudi Arabia*.

[113] Sarah Yisraeli, "The Remaking of Saudi Arabia: The Struggle between Saud and Crown Prince Faysal, 1953–1962," *Middle East Policy* 6, no. 2 (1998).

[114] Wynbrandt, *A Brief History of Saudi Arabia*.

[115] Wynbrandt.

to assassinate Gamal Nasser and consequently, Saud was removed from the throne.[116] Saud intended to maintain the same position towards the Arab-Israeli conflict as his father Ibn Saud, but his actions did not reflect that position. Overall, Saud did not to prove to have the same strength and leadership qualities of his father. Saud's decisions about the relationship with Egypt and Nasser incited resentment against him and resulted in his abdication.

## C.    FAISAL (1964–1975)

Faisal, Son of Ibn Saud, took over as king in 1964 after the abdication of his brother.[117] He made a great effort to lower the debt of Saudi Arabia and attempted to nationally integrate the Kingdom.[118] He was a much stronger king than his brother Saud. His positioning towards the Arab-Israeli conflict remained strongly anti-Israeli even though he was a more modern and progressive king. Most notably, his stance toward Israel can be seen in the fallout of the Six Day War in 1967. The previous tension between Egypt and Saudi Arabia subsided in significance due to pressures of the Six Day war and thus they moved toward agreements. Nasser and King Faisal agreed at the Arab Summit conference in Khartoum, Sudan in 1967 to fund the war against Israel.[119] Furthermore, it was decided that there would be "no peace, no direct negotiations, and no recognition" with the state of Israel.[120] The decision made by Faisal exemplified his resistance to normalize with Israel.

Furthermore, Prittie and Nelson provide that "King Faisal was notorious for handing anti-Semitic literature to visitors and journalists and for publicly praising Adolf

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[116] Wynbrandt.

[117] Riedel, *Kings and Presidents: Saudi Arabia and the United States since FDR*.

[118] Wynbrandt, *A Brief History of Saudi Arabia*.

[119] Wynbrandt.

[120] Mai Yamani, "The Two Faces of Saudi Arabia," *Survival* 50, no. 1 (2008).

Hitler's policies towards Jews."[121] Faisal's stance was much stronger than those of future Saudi Kings. His beliefs about Jews in Israel were consistent with his father Ibn Saud. There was much hatred for Israel and the Jews in the early Kings of Saudi Arabia. In 1975, a member of the Saud family assassinated Faisal for his actions as a modernizer.

## D.    KHALID (1975–1982)

Following the death of his brother, Faisal, Khalid took the throne in 1975. King Khalid was ill and faced health complications during his reign, thus he relied heavily on help from his brother Crown Prince Fahd.[122] The time of King Khalid's rule marks a shift in the ideological stance towards Israel in the history of Saudi Arabia. Khalid's predecessors were strongly opposed to negotiations and settlements with Israel that undermined the Palestinian cause, but Khalid was not so resistant to the thought of a settlement. A CIA assessment determined that "Khalid's top priority was a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, especially the Jerusalem issue."[123] The willingness to reach a settlement that would resolve the issue was not an option presented by the prior Kings of Saudi Arabia. The CIA assessment proved to be accurate when Crown Prince Fahd traveled to the U.S. on behalf of King Khalid to discuss with President Carter how to achieve peace in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The discussion shed light on the willingness of the Saudis "to live with Israel if the territories that Israel had occupied in 1967 were returned to the Arabs with minor border rectifications."[124] The Saudis still supported the Palestinians under King Khalid, but the potential acceptance of an agreement for an Israeli state marked a historical shift in Saudi thought.

Although this seemed like a promising shift that would better align with U.S. strategy, the Saudi strong support for the Palestinians was reinforced during the Arab

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[121] Edward Sheeran, "Economic War against the Jews," in *The Arabs, Israelis, and Kissinger: A Secret History of American Diplomacy in the Middle East* (New York: Reader's Digest Press, 1976), 72.

[122] Riedel*, Kings and Presidents: Saudi Arabia and the United States since FDR.*

[123] Riedel.

[124] Riedel.

Summit of 1978. After Egypt's peace with Israel, a major event of Khalid's reign, the Arab countries met in Baghdad to discuss the matters of the conflict. Crown Prince Fahd attended this summit and was presented with a challenging decision. The Saudi kingdom had to decide whether to maintain Arab unity and support the Palestinian cause or to sustain relations with the U.S. and Egypt. King Khalid chose the Palestinian cause.[125] Riedell explains "Khalid's decision to break was consistent with Saudi policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict."[126] Although King Khalid and Crown Prince Fahd showed a greater willingness to find a peaceful solution to the conflict, they remained steadfast in their decision to support the Palestinians. Under Khalid, the Palestinian cause carried more weight than a healthy relationship with the United States.

## E.    FAHD (1982–2005)

The beginning of Fahd's time in power and his influence over the Saudi Kingdom was witnessed during his time as Crown Prince. The almost twenty years as King provided even deeper insight into his position on the Arab-Israeli conflict. Although there were growing threats to the Saudi Kingdom, King Fahd was persistent in his attempts to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict in a way that would not reflect poorly on the kingdom. In the early days of his time as King, Fahd proposed an eight-point peace plan that called for Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem, as well as the establishment of a Palestinian state.[127] It was the first peace initiative that had been offered, but it was opposed by Arabs because it contained a clause which insinuated recognizing Israel.[128] The clause stated, "all states in the region should be able to live in peace."[129] The clause signaled a potential desire for normalizing relations between Israel and the Arab

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[125] Riedel.

[126] Riedel, 64.

[127] Riedel.

[128] Elie Podeh, "Saudi Arabia and Israel: From Secret to Public Engagement, 1948–2018," *The Middle East Journal* 72, no. 4 (2018).

[129] Podeh.

states. This plan demonstrated the consistent support of the Palestinians, but it also demonstrates the change of Saudi leadership towards greater Israeli acceptance.

During Fahd's twenty years of leadership there was one of many events that caused great turmoil: the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. King Fahd relied heavily on the U.S. as an ally, under the leadership of President Bush, to combat that Iraqi threat to the Kingdom. This marked a high point in the U.S.- Saudi relationship that would eventually decline due to anti-western sentiment in the Kingdom. Al-Rasheed, an Islamic scholar, proclaimed "the enemy Saudi Arabia faced was not Iraq, but rather, an evil greater than Saddam, that is the USA."[130] Furthermore, "the priority assigned to Saudi-American relations declined substantially with the 1993 inauguration of President Bill Clinton … [who] was largely preoccupied with Arab-Israeli peacemaking."[131] The invasion of Kuwait increased tension between Saudi Arabia and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (the organization that politically represented the Palestinians). The PLO supported Iraq in its primary stages of invading Kuwait, causing Saudi Arabia, under King Fahd, to respond with harsh repercussions. Due to this perceived betrayal, Saudi Arabia halted the subsidies granted to the PLO and many Palestinians lost their homes.[132] Approximately 400,000 Palestinians resided in Kuwait and because of the PLO's action many were forced to flee while others were subject to harassment.[133] This event made it clear that Saudi Arabia, although they supported the Palestinian cause, placed their own country's security above their concerns over the Arab-Israeli conflict. The actions taken by the PLO complicated the Kingdom's position on the conflict, but reasonably a state will place its own security over another state's cause. This act can be perceived as a betrayal to the Saudi Kingdom, which warranted some form of reprimand. King Fahd grew ill and towards the end of his reign

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[130] Madawi Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[131] Josh Pollack, "Saudi Arabi and the United States, 1931–2002," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 6, no. 3 (2002): 77–102.

[132] Riedel, *Kings and Presidents: Saudi Arabia and the United States since FDR.*

[133] William Cleveland and Martin Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 6th ed. (Colorado: Westview Press, 2016).

his brother, Crown Prince Abdullah, "ruled in all but name."[134] Crown Prince Abdullah succeed his brother, Fahd, as King of Saudi Arabia.

## F.    ABDULLAH (2005–2015)

King Abdullah officially took the throne of Saudi Arabia after the death of his brother Fahd. Prior to his succession he practically ran the kingdom for his brother Fahd due to his illness.[135] Abdullah's position in leadership began in the late 1900's until 2015 and during that time he, like his brothers, faced significant challenges. His stance towards the Arab-Israeli conflict is exemplified in his actions. One of the most notable products of King Abdullah was during his time as Crown Prince; the creation of the Saudi Peace Plan in 2002.[136] At the Arab Summit in Beirut, King Abdullah presented the Saudi Peace Plan to the states who were present at the conference. The peace initiative was similar to the conditions for peace held by King Khalid and to the plan presented by Fahd. The Saudi Plan states:

> Having listened to the statement made by his royal highness Prince Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz, … it which his highness presented his initiative calling for full Israeli withdrawal from all the Arab territories occupied since June 1967… and Israeli'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.[137]

The Saudi Peace Plan was one of the more realistic and viable options for Arab-Israeli peace. Unlike his brother Fahd's eight-point plan, it was a feasible solution for both Arabs and Israelis. It did not present outlandish requests that would not be accepted by either side. The effort put forth by Abdullah and his ideas in the peace plan show his willingness to concede Arab land to create peace Additionally, Abdullah's plan would allow for full

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[134] Sherifa Zuhur, *Saudi Arabia* (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO. LLC, 2011), https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.libproxy.nps.edu/lib/ebook-nps/detail.action?pq-origsite=primo&docID=1887856.

[135] Riedel, *Kings and Presidents: Saudi Arabia and the United States since FDR*.

[136] Ian Bickerton and Carla Klausner, *A History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, Sixth (Pearson Education Inc, 2010).

[137] Bickerton and Klausner. 387

normalization with Israel which was an incredible leap in the Saudi stance towards Israel. Unlike Ibn Saud, Abdullah did not see the Jewish claims as imaginary, but accepted that in order to create peace a realistic plan had to be established.

Although King Abdullah showed a greater willingness to compromise and possessed a stance that may have been questioned by his Arab brothers, he maintained awareness of his actions during attempts to establish peace. For example, during the signing process of the Oslo Deal in the White House, where both sides of the conflict and Saudi Arabia was present, the Saudis attempted to stay out of the spotlight. Riedel states that an aide to President Clinton wrote "The Saudis helped U.S. quietly on the peace process, where they willing to provide funding for Arafat's Palestinian Authority but were wary of engaging with Israel."[138] This was a smart way to achieve their goals of peace without inciting an uproar amongst the anti-Israeli Arabs for negotiating with Israel. If the Saudis were seen in direct negotiation with Israel it would cause problems for them amongst the Saudi population and the Arab world.

Furthermore, King Abdullah's commitment to resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict is seen when ties with the U.S. were weak. At this point, Khalid, Fahd, and Abdullah had made great efforts to establish peace between the two opposing sides. The tense relationship between KSA and the U.S. encouraged President Bush to take action in order to restore their relationship. The offer put on the table was one which was valued by the King Abdullah and helped restore relations. In 2001, prior to the attack on the twin towers, President Bush wanted to repair relations with KSA and drafted a letter to then Crown Prince Abdullah.[139] Riedel was one of the people who was responsible for drafting the letter. Riedel states, "our instructions were to find a way to heal the breach with Abdallah and get the relationship back on track."[140] Furthermore, Riedel explains, "Bush's letter was the first overt and formal American commitment to a Palestinian state. Bush promised in the letter to announce publicly his commitment at the United Nations General Assembly

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[138] Riedel, *Kings and Presidents: Saudi Arabia and the United States since FDR.*

[139] Riedel.

[140] Riedel.

meeting."[141] The letter repaired U.S. relations with Saudi Arabia.[142] The willingness for the U.S. to publicly commit to the creation of a Palestinian state was a favorable notion to Abdullah. Abdullah, as leader of Saudi Arabia, had to be careful about his relations with the U.S., because it threatened stability in the Kingdom. The commitment of a western power to support the Arabs rather than the Israeli's was a factor that Abdullah could use to appease the pro-Palestinian Arabs in the Saudi Kingdom and in the Middle East.

The repaired relationship between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia did not last long. During the Bush Administration they had once again grown contentious. President Obama attempted to repair the relationship, using the same leverage as President Bush, by attempting to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict. President Obama tried to set up a meeting between Israeli leadership and King Abdullah.[143] When President Obama discussed the option with Abdullah, he responded "[the Kingdom] will be the last to make peace with the Israelis."[144] Once again, the Kingdom's stance was made clear during a discussion between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia. King Abdullah wanted peace, but he was not willing to normalize with Israel.

The events that occurred during Abdullah's time as Crown Prince and as King that exemplified his stance towards the Arab-Israeli conflict are plentiful. The examples provided do not cover the vast scope of history, the twenty years of Abdullah's rule, but they help to illuminate the shift in ideas during Abdullah's reign. Furthermore, these examples demonstrate how U.S.-Saudi ties influenced Abdullah's position on the conflict. He like his predecessors was faced with appeasing the pro-Palestinian Arabs and supporting the Palestinian cause versus maintaining ties with Western powers. Nonetheless, his time as King starkly contrasts with the decisions that would have been made by founder of the Saudi Kingdom, Ibn Saud. Willingness to compromise and

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[141] Riedel.

[142] Riedel.

[143] Riedel.

[144] Riedel.

negotiate a peace plan for the Arab-Israeli conflict was not an option to Ibn Saud, because he vehemently disliked the Jews.

## G.    KING SALMAN (2015–CURRENT) AND CROWN PRINCE MBS

Salman became king of Saudi Arabia in 2015 following the death of King Abdullah.[145] King Salman is the current King of Saudi Arabia and his son Mohammed bin Salman is the crown prince. King Salman seems to hold the traditional Saudi views towards Israel and he supports the Palestinians. In May 2017, President Trump and King Salman officially met in Saudi Arabia to discuss their relations.[146] This meeting resulted in a Joint Statement that featured agreements and an overview of their positions on current issues in the international realm. Among the issues addressed was the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict. The Joint statement states, "The two sides also stressed the importance of reaching a comprehensive peace between Israelis and Palestinians. The leaders agreed to do everything they can to promote an environment that is conducive to advancing peace."[147] The meeting between President Trump and King Salman, and the resulting joint statement, helps to illustrate Salman's stance towards the conflict. King Salman supported peace for the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. This document does not clarify to what extent he supported it or his position towards Israel.

King Salman holds the some of the views of his predecessors, albeit to a less extreme extent, but he faces the challenges presented by a new generation. The challenges are especially clear in the relationship between King Salman and his son Crown Prince MBS. Kalin writes, "Saudi Arabia's monarch, King Salman bin Abdulaziz has been at odds with his son, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, over embracing the Jewish state. The King is a longtime supporter of the Arab boycott of Israel and the Palestinians' demand for

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[145] Wynbrandt, *A Brief History of Saudi Arabia.*

[146] "Joint Statement by President Trump and King Salman Bin Abd Al-Azi Al Saud of Saudi Arabia," May 2017,
https://congressional.proquest.com/congressional/docview/t67.d72.2017-53-055?accountid=12702.

[147] "Joint Statement by President Trump and King Salman Bin Abd Al-Azi Al Saud of Saudi Arabia."

an independent state. The prince wants to move past what he sees as an intractable conflict to join with Israel in business and align against Iran." [148] This news article provides insight into the familial tension that is currently taking place concerning the Arab-Israeli conflict. There has been some historical tension between the King and Crown Prince in Saudi Arabia's history, but not necessarily about the Saudi stance on the Arab-Israeli conflict. This a new dynamic that the Saud family has not seen before. The challenges presented by his son complicates the position of King Salman.

While King Salman and his son quarrel over there stances on the Arab-Israeli conflict, King Salman has made decisions that have proven his interests in economic ties with Israel. Rundell refers to the *Atlantic* and quotes King Salman who stated, "Israel is a big economy compared to its size and it's a growing economy, and of course there are a lot of interests we share with Israel—and if there is peace, there would be a lot of interest between Israel and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries."[149] King Salman's statement exemplifies his recognition of ties with Israeli being economically beneficially. In contrast to King Faisal who declared "no peace, no negotiations, and no recognition" with Israel, King Salman maintains a very different stance.[150] Although King Salman's statement may be perceived as a willingness to normalize, it is not so. King Salman still desires peace for the Palestinians and his views are not as pro-Israel leaning as his son MBS.

Crown Prince MBS can be described as a powerful, aggressive, and ruthless leader. His turning point of recognition occurred in 2017 when he jailed some of the wealthiest and influential members of the Saudi government in the Ritz Carlton for accusations of corruption.[151] After this unanticipated and shocking act, Crown Prince MBS quickly

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[148] Stephen Kalin, "Saudi Royal Family Divides over Future Ties with Israel–King and Crown Prince Are at Odds over Embracing the Jewish State," *Wall Street Journal*, Eastern Edition, September 19, 2020.

[149] David Rundell, "Evolving Arabia," in *Vision or Mirage* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2020), 255.

[150] Yamani, "The Two Faces of Saudi Arabia."

[151] Hope and Scheck, *Blood and Oil: Mohammed Bin Salman's Ruthless Quest for Global Power.*

became notorious in the Arab World. MBS's views are more progressive than those of the royal family and are exemplified by his domestic policy decisions and visions for the country. Regarding his stance on Israel, his position was made clear in his comments to *The Atlantic.* In an article about Crown Prince MBS, Goldberg states MBS told him "he recognizes the right of the Jewish people to have a nation-state of their own next to a Palestinian state."[152] This statement shows the drastic changes of ideas since the establishment of the kingdom by Ibn Saud. While prior Saudi Kings proposed peace plans that would allow for both an Israel and Palestinian state, they never bluntly stated their support for the Jews or for a rightful Jewish state. This is just one example of the progressive and modern ideas possessed by MBS. The remaining time of King Salman as leader of Saudi Arabia will be interesting. As he grows older, the succession of Crown Prince MBS grows nearer. The current King and Crown Prince hold starkly different views towards the Arab-Israeli conflict than their predecessors. King Salman's resistance to recognize Israel is still contingent on a peace agreement, but Crown Prince MBS's leadership characteristics indicate that he may pursue a radically different approach to Israel in the future.

## H.    CONCLUSION

From the creation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to modern day, there has been a shift in the positions taken by the Kings of Saudi Arabia. The Saudi stance began as anti-Israel and anti-Semitic with no intent on allowing Jews into Palestine. This stance was held by King Ibn Saud, King Faisal, and to some extent King Saud. Throughout the years, Saudi Kings attempted to resolve the conflict by proposing solutions for peace. This period marked a willingness to allow for minimal Israeli presence in the region but made large demands and required the establishment of a Palestinian State to defined borders. The willingness to create a plan for peace is seen during King Khalid, King Fahd, and King Abdullah's time in power. Finally, the modern world is witnessing a regime who leans

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[152] Jeffrey Goldberg, "Saudi Crown Prince: Iran's Supreme Leader 'Makes Hitler Look Good,'" *The Atlantic*, April 2, 2018, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/04/mohammed-bin-salman-iran-israel/557036/.

more towards Israel and a Crown Prince who recognizes the Israeli right to a nation state. The Saudi stance historically evolved, but the necessity to support the Palestinians is steadfast. King Salman possess slightly different views and certain economic predilections, but still maintains remnants of ideas from his predecessors. The eventual passing of King Salman and the succession of MBS may mark the extinction of the beliefs held by the old royal family. Until there is a radical shift in individual leadership of KSA, the individual level of analysis holds little explanatory power for KSA's refusal to normalize relations with Israel.

# VI. CONCLUSION

Why has KSA refused to normalize relations with Israel? The international, domestic, and individual levels of analysis offer unique insight into KSA's decision making process on normalization with Israel. The research and analysis conducted in this thesis exemplifies that one level of analysis does not hold sufficient explanatory power for the research question. All levels combined offer factors, that when combined, best explain KSA's decision to not normalize relations with Israel.

On the international arena, hypothesis 1 and 2 of this thesis were incorrect (the strength of relationship with between KSA and the United States prevents KSA from pursuing normalization or the strength of the relationship with Iran prevents KSA from pursuing normalization). The strength of KSA's foreign relations played less of a role in the decision-making process, rather KSA's offensive realist foreign policy approach prevented KSA from normalization. In each of KSA's foreign relations analyzed in this thesis there was no opportunity to increase KSA's relative state power. On the domestic level, hypothesis 3 (the level of domestic support for the Saudi regime and potential consequences in the domestic arena prevents KSA from pursuing normalization) was supported by sufficient evidence but supplemented by additional factors. KSA's refusal of normalization with Israel can be explained in part by the fear of public opposition, internal government threat, and disapproval from the Muslim world. Lastly, hypotheses 4 and 5 (the leadership style and characteristics of King Salman prevents KSA from pursuing normalization with Israel or the leadership style and characteristics of Crown Prince MBS prevents KSA from pursuing normalization with Israel) are supported by little evidence and do not hold explanatory power for the research question. The individual level analysis conducted showed historically how the Saud family has predominantly opposed normalization and continues to do so. The predisposition within the Saud family to oppose normalization with Israel holds insufficient explanatory power. A significant shift in the future of KSA leadership would warrant additional analysis and would potentially hold explanatory power for KSA's decision on normalization. The contributing factors on all

levels combined provide a comprehensive and detailed understanding of KSA's decision to refuse normalizing relations with Israel.

Distinguishing and understanding these prohibiting factors is the first step in any future U.S. attempts to persuade KSA to normalize relations with Israel. It is paramount to first understand the problem before attempting to search for solutions. Normalization between KSA and Israel would allow the U.S. to gain footing in the region and meet its interests of peace and stability. Furthermore, KSA-Israeli relations would be beneficial in the U.S. attempts to diminish the Iranian threat. An attempt to address all the prohibiting factors at once would be almost impossible and fruitless. The U.S. may tackle these factors individually to increase the likelihood of normalization between KSA and Israel.

Of the international factors, the U.S. interests would be served by demonstrating to KSA the grave threat of its Iranian neighbor. This would potentially push KSA to bandwagon with the U.S. and Israel in order to maintain its own regional hegemony. This approach is the most realistic and the best viable option to move towards meeting U.S. interests in the Gulf region. The only obstacle on the domestic level that the U.S. can address is KSA public opinion because it cannot change the perspective of the Muslim world or Islamists. U.S. actions to hold the Saudi regime responsible for human rights violations is a risky attempt at facilitating normalization. It is possible that if KSA was held accountable for human rights violations by the U.S. it would normalize relations with Israel to get back into the good graces of the U.S. It is also possible that it would sour the relationship between the U.S. and KSA and only push KSA farther away from the idea of normalization. The likelihood of these two outcomes requires further research to better inform which course of actions would produce the desired outcome. On the individual level there is little that the U.S. can do to further its interests.

Future research to assist in the U.S. interest would include determining how to address KSA's concerns of normalization and factors that prevent the Kingdom from moving forward. Specifically, addressing the Iranian threat as perceived by KSA and possible courses of action to persuade KSA to bandwagon with the U.S. and Israel. Additionally, further research is needed concerning the implications of public opinion for KSA-Israeli normalization if the U.S. holds KSA accountable for human rights violations

Lastly, research on how other GCC member states or Arab states could persuade KSA to normalize relations with Israel would be beneficial to this issue. This is an option that would serve U.S. interests, but its viability is questionable.

KSA's refusal to normalize relations with Israel has not had any sever impacts on U.S. interests but would be beneficial for future foreign policy decisions and U.S. national security. It will be difficult to achieve, but future developments in the region may provide an opportunity for normalization to occur.

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# APPENDIX. ABRAHAM ACCORDS PEACE AGREEMENT

The following is a copy of the Abraham Accords Peace Agreement.[153]

**ABRAHAM ACCORDS PEACE AGREEMENT:**

**TREATY OF PEACE, DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS AND FULL NORMALIZATION**

**BETWEEN**

**THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES**

**AND**

**THE STATE OF ISRAEL**

The Government of the United Arab Emirates and the Government of the State of Israel (hereinafter, the "Parties")

*Aspiring* to realize the vision of a Middle East region that is stable, peaceful and prosperous, for the benefit of all States and peoples in the region;

*Desiring* to establish peace, diplomatic and friendly relations, co-operation and full normalization of ties between them and their peoples, in accordance with this Treaty, and to chart together a new path to unlock the vast potential of their countries and of the region;

*Reaffirming* the "Joint Statement of the United States, the State of Israel, and the United Arab Emirates" (the "Abraham Accords"), dated 13 August 2020;

*Believing* that the further development of friendly relations meets the interests of lasting peace in the Middle East and that challenges can only be effectively addressed by cooperation and not by conflict;

*Determined* to ensure lasting peace, stability, security and prosperity for both their States and to develop and enhance their dynamic and innovative economies;

*Reaffirming* their shared commitment to normalize relations and promote stability through diplomatic engagement, increased economic cooperation and other close coordination;

*Reaffirming* also their shared belief that the establishment of peace and full normalization between them can help transform the Middle East by spurring economic growth, enhancing technological innovation and forging closer people-to-people relations;

*Recognizing* that the Arab and Jewish peoples are descendants of a common ancestor, Abraham, and *inspired*, in that spirit, to foster in the Middle East a reality in which Muslims, Jews, Christians and peoples of all faiths, denominations, beliefs and nationalities live in, and are committed to, a spirit of coexistence, mutual understanding and mutual respect;

*Recalling* the reception held on January 28, 2020, at which President Trump presented his Vision for Peace, and *committing* to continuing their efforts to achieve a just, comprehensive, realistic and enduring solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict;

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[153] Abraham Accords Peace Agreement: Treaty of Peace, Diplomatic Relations and Full Normalization Between The United Arab Emirates and The State of Israel, September 15, 2020.

Recalling the Treaties of Peace between the State of Israel and the Arab Republic of Egypt and between the State of Israel and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and committed to working together to realize a negotiated 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;

*Emphasizing* the belief that the normalization of Israeli and Emirati relations is in the interest of both peoples and contributes to the cause of peace in the Middle East and the world;

*Expressing* deep appreciation to the United States for its profound contribution to this historic achievement;

Have agreed as follows:

1. **Establishment of Peace, Diplomatic Relations and Normalization:** Peace, diplomatic relations and full normalization of bilateral ties are hereby established between the United Arab Emirates and the State of Israel.

2. **General Principles:** The Parties shall be guided in their relations by the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of international law governing relations among States. In particular, they shall recognize and respect each other's sovereignty and right to live in peace and security, develop friendly relations of cooperation between them and their peoples, and settle all disputes between them by peaceful means.

3. **Establishment of Embassies:** The Parties shall exchange resident ambassadors as soon as practicable after the signing of this Treaty, and shall conduct diplomatic and consular relations in accordance with the applicable rules of international law.

4. **Peace and Stability:** The Parties shall attach profound importance to mutual understanding, cooperation and coordination between them in the spheres of peace and stability, as a fundamental pillar of their relations and as a means for enhancing those spheres in the Middle East as a whole. They undertake to take the necessary steps to prevent any terrorist or hostile activities against each other on or from their respective territories, as well as deny any support for such activities abroad or allowing such support on or from their respective territories. Recognizing the new era of peace and friendly relations between them, as well as the centrality of stability to the well-being of their respective peoples and of the region, the Parties undertake to consider and discuss these matters regularly, and to conclude detailed agreements and arrangements on coordination and cooperation.

5. **Cooperation and Agreements in Other Spheres:** As an integral part of their commitment to peace, prosperity, diplomatic and friendly relations, cooperation and full normalization, the Parties shall work to advance the cause of peace, stability and prosperity throughout the Middle East, and to unlock the great potential of their countries and of the region. For such purposes, the Parties shall conclude bilateral agreements in the following spheres at the earliest practicable date, as well as in other spheres of mutual interest as may be agreed:

   - Finance and Investment
   - Civil Aviation

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- Visas and Consular Services
- Innovation, Trade and Economic Relations
- Healthcare
- Science, Technology and Peaceful Uses of Outer-Space
- Tourism, Culture and Sport
- Energy
- Environment
- Education
- Maritime Arrangements
- Telecommunications and Post
- Agriculture and Food Security
- Water
- Legal Cooperation

Any such agreements concluded before the entry into force of this Treaty shall enter into effect with the entry into force of this Treaty unless otherwise stipulated therein. Agreed principles for cooperation in specific spheres are annexed to this Treaty and form an integral part thereof.
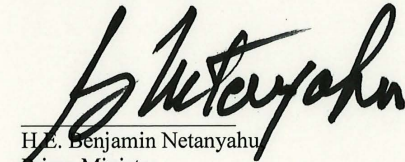
6. **Mutual Understanding and Co-existence:** The Parties undertake to foster mutual understanding, respect, co-existence and a culture of peace between their societies in the spirit of their common ancestor, Abraham, and the new era of peace and friendly relations ushered in by this Treaty, including by cultivating people-to-people programs, interfaith dialogue and cultural, academic, youth, scientific, and other exchanges between their peoples. They shall conclude and implement the necessary visa and consular services agreements and arrangements so as to facilitate efficient and secure travel for their respective nationals to the territory of each other. The Parties shall work together to counter extremism, which promotes hatred and division, and terrorism and its justifications, including by preventing radicalization and recruitment and by combating incitement and discrimination. They shall work towards establishing a High-Level Joint Forum for Peace and Co-Existence dedicated to advancing these goals.

7. **Strategic Agenda for the Middle East:** Further to the Abraham Accords, the Parties stand ready to join with the United States to develop and launch a "Strategic Agenda for the Middle East" in order to expand regional diplomatic, trade, stability and other cooperation. They are committed to work together, and with the United States and others, as appropriate, in order to advance the cause of peace, stability and prosperity in the relations between them and for the Middle East as a whole, including by seeking to advance regional security and stability; pursue regional economic opportunities; promote a culture of peace across the region; and consider joint aid and development programs.

8. **Other Rights and Obligations:** This Treaty does not affect and shall not be interpreted as affecting, in any way, the rights and obligations of the Parties under the Charter of the United Nations. The Parties shall take all necessary measures for the application in their bilateral relations of the provisions of the multilateral conventions of which they are both parties, including the submission of appropriate notification to the depositaries of such conventions.

9. **Respect for Obligations:** The Parties undertake to fulfill in good faith their obligations under this Treaty, without regard to action or inaction of any other party and independently of any

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instrument inconsistent with this Treaty. For the purposes of this paragraph each Party represents to the other that in its opinion and interpretation there is no inconsistency between their existing treaty obligations and this Treaty. The Parties undertake not to enter into any obligation in conflict with this Treaty. Subject to Article 103 of the Charter of the United Nations, in the event of a conflict between the obligations of the Parties under the present Treaty and any of their other obligations, the obligations under this Treaty shall be binding and implemented. The Parties further undertake to adopt any legislation or other internal legal procedure necessary in order to implement this Treaty, and to repeal any national legislation or official publications inconsistent with this Treaty.

10. **Ratification and Entry into Force:** This Treaty shall be ratified by both Parties as soon as practicable in conformity with their respective national procedures and will enter into force following the exchange of instruments of ratification.

11. **Settlement of Disputes:** Disputes arising out of the application or interpretation of this Treaty shall be resolved by negotiation. Any such dispute which cannot be settled by negotiation may be referred to conciliation or arbitration subject to the agreement of the Parties.

12. **Registration:** This Treaty shall be transmitted to the Secretary-General of the United Nations for registration in accordance with the provisions of Article 102 of the Charter of the United Nations.
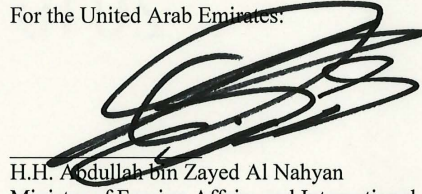
Done at Washington, DC, this day Elul 26th, 5780, Muharram 27th, 1442, which corresponds to 15 September 2020, in the Hebrew, Arabic and English languages, all texts being equally authentic. In case of divergence of interpretation, the English text shall prevail.
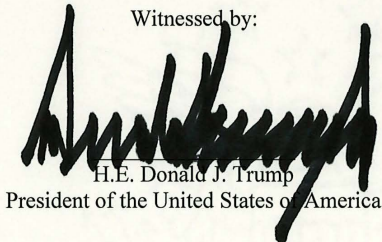
For the State of Israel:

H.E. Benjamin Netanyahu
Prime Minister

For the United Arab Emirates:

H.H. Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan
Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

Witnessed by:

H.E. Donald J. Trump
President of the United States of America

4

## ANNEX

Pursuant to Article 5 of the Treaty of Peace, Diplomatic Relations and Full Normalization between the United Arab Emirates and the State of Israel, the Parties shall conclude bilateral agreements in spheres of mutual interest, in furtherance of which they have agreed to the following provisions. Such provisions are annexed to the Treaty and form an integral part thereof.

### Finance and Investment

Further to the Agreed Protocol signed between the Parties on September 1, 2020, in Abu Dhabi, the Parties shall cooperate to expeditiously deepen and broaden bilateral investment relations, and give high priority to concluding agreements in the sphere of finance and investment, recognizing the key role of these agreements in the economic development of the Parties and the Middle East as a whole. The Parties reaffirm their commitment to protecting investors, consumers, market integrity and financial stability, as well as maintaining all applicable regulatory standards. Recognizing also their shared goal to advance regional economic development and the flow of goods and services, the Parties shall endeavor to promote collaborations on strategic regional infrastructure projects and shall explore the establishment of a multilateral working group for the "Tracks for Regional Peace" project.

### Civil Aviation

The Parties acknowledge the importance of ensuring regular direct flights between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, for passengers and cargo, as an essential means for developing and promoting their relations. They recognize as applicable to each other the rights, privileges and obligations provided for by the multilateral aviation agreements to which they are both a party, their annexes and any amendments thereof applicable to both Parties, particularly the 1944 Convention on International Civil Aviation, opened for signature at Chicago on the seventh day of December 1944, and the 1944 International Air Services Transit Agreement. Accordingly, the Parties shall as soon as practicable conclude all the necessary agreements and arrangements governing civil aviation, and consequently work towards establishing an international air corridor between their two States in accordance with international law. They shall also reach and implement the necessary agreements and arrangements with respect to visas and consular services to facilitate travel for the citizens of both States.

### Tourism

The Parties affirm their mutual desire to promote tourism cooperation between them as a key component of economic development and of developing closer people-to-people and cultural ties. To this end, the Parties shall facilitate the exchange of information through advertisement spots, published and audiovisual promotional materials, and participation in tourist fairs. They shall also work together to promote joint tourism projects and packages between tourist operators so as to enhance tourism from third States. They shall work towards carrying out reciprocal study tours in order to increase knowledge in the development, management and marketing of heritage, cultural and rural tourism with a view to diversifying and deepening touristic links between them; and endeavor to utilize national marketing budgets to promote mutual tourism between the States.

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**Innovation, Trade and Economic Relations**

The Parties shall enhance and expand their cooperation in innovation, trade and economic relations, so that the dividends of peace are felt across their societies. Recognizing that the principle of the free and unimpeded flow of goods and services should guide their relations, as well as the potential for diversification of bilateral trade opportunities, the Parties shall cooperate in order to enable favorable conditions for trade, and the reduction of trade barriers.

**Science, Technology and Peaceful Uses of Outer-Space**

The Parties acknowledge the important role of science, technology and innovation in the growth of multiple key sectors and shall strengthen joint action and mutual cooperation in scientific and technological advancement. This shall include furthering scientific cooperation and exchange, including between scientists, research and academic institutions, pursuing the establishment of joint research and development centers, and exploring the possibility of joint funding of research and scientific projects in select fields of mutual interest.

The Parties further express their common interest in establishing and developing mutually beneficial cooperation in the field of exploration and use of outer space for peaceful purposes, in a manner consistent with each Party's respective applicable national laws and international obligations. Such cooperation may include implementation of joint programs, projects and activities in the fields of science, space exploration, space related technologies and education, exchange of experts, information and best practices, and the promotion of cooperation between their respective space industries.

**Environment**

The Parties acknowledge the importance of protecting, preserving and improving the environment, and shall promote environmental innovation for the sustainable development of the region and beyond. The Parties shall endeavor to cooperate to develop environmental protection strategies on priority issues, including on biodiversity conservation, marine environment protection and climate change mitigation and adaptation, and on the possible establishment of a center for developing pioneering solutions to climate challenges in arid and semi-arid environments.

**Telecommunications and Post**

The Parties recognize the necessity of mutually beneficial cooperation for the continued development of telecommunications, information technologies and postal services. They take note of the establishment between them of direct communications services, including telephone lines, and agree to promote, in accordance with relevant international conventions and regulations, direct postal exchange, submarine cables and e-commerce solutions, as well as utilize available satellite systems, fiber optical communication, and broadcasting services. The Parties will strive to develop frameworks for innovation in ICT, including advanced fixed and wireless communications, collaboration on 5G networks, smart cities, and use of ICT solutions to foster innovation and the creation of best services.

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### Healthcare

The Parties welcome progress made in cooperation between them regarding the treatment of, and the development of a vaccine for, the Covid-19 virus, as a sign of the tremendous potential for cooperation between them in the healthcare sphere. Recognizing the importance of building ties in the fields of health and medicine, the Parties shall cooperate, *inter alia*, on: medical education, training and simulations, digital health and artificial intelligence innovation in the health sector, and emergency management and preparedness.

### Agriculture and Food Security

The Parties recognize the great importance of sustainable agricultural development, recognizing its vital role in addressing food security concerns, as well as in the preservation of the environment. They shall cooperate to harness and maximize existing technologies, actively facilitate new collaborations, and share and develop knowledge, technologies and innovative approaches in the field of arid agriculture, irrigation technologies, mariculture techniques in shallow sea water, sustainable nutritious fish feed production, and seed enhancement in hot and humid climates.

### Water

The Parties recognize the critical importance of sustainable water use and shall cooperate for their mutual benefit to address issues of water supply, water treatment and management, water security, efficiency, wastewater management and re-use, as well as water conservation and desalination.

### Energy

The Parties take note of the strategic importance of the energy sector and in particular of their need to promote renewable energy, cooperation in the natural gas field, regional grids, alternative energy and energy security. They shall advance and develop mutual cooperation in energy projects, share best practices and discuss policies in energy forums that will help to promote and unlock the energy potential of the region, coordinating where appropriate with the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), headquartered in Abu Dhabi.

### Maritime Arrangements

Each Party shall recognize the right of vessels of the other Party to innocent passage through its territorial waters in accordance with international law. Each Party will grant normal access to its ports for vessels and cargoes of the other Party, as well as vessels and cargoes destined for or coming from the other Party. Such access shall be granted on the same terms as generally applicable to vessels and cargoes of other nations. The Parties shall conclude agreements and arrangements in maritime affairs, as may be required.

### Legal Cooperation

Recognizing the importance of a supporting legal framework for the movement of people and goods and for fostering a continuous business friendly environment between them, the Parties shall make best efforts to grant each other the widest measure of legal cooperation, including, inter alia, in respect of mutual legal assistance in civil and commercial matters, in accordance with their national laws and shall endeavor to conclude specific agreements and arrangements in this sphere.

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