

We are witnessing an amazing time in the history of the Middle East. Within the span of 29 days, from August 13 to September 11, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain both announced their plans to normalize relations with the State of Israel, leading to the September 15 signing of the Abraham Accords at the White House. These normalizations were followed by the October 23 announcement that Sudan would normalize relations with Israel and the December 10 announcement that Morocco would do the same. To underscore how rare normalizations of this sort are, over the first 72 years of Israel's existence, Egypt and Jordan were the only two Arab countries to sign peace treaties with Israel, thereby normalizing relations with the Jewish state. While these treaties have held since they were signed in 1979 and 1994 respectively, some analysts deem them "cold." In contrast, it seems that the new official relations Israel has with both the UAE and Bahrain, and will have with Morocco, contain a warmth that has not yet been found in the relations between Israel and any other Arab country. It will be interesting to follow how the future normalization between Israel and Sudan and future normalizations between Israel and other Arab states, whether in the Gulf or elsewhere, compare to the aforementioned normalizations, old and new.

When I commenced work on my capstone in the spring and summer of 2019 while a student at The Fletcher School, I was struck by the growing yet quiet relationships between Israel and some of the countries in the Gulf. Two analogous interactions to these modern relationships were the contacts Israel had with Morocco and Tunisia in the 1950s and 1960s as the nascent Jewish state was finding its footing on the international stage. In those cases, just as we are learning more about today, like challenges presented opportunities for covert relations. As I conducted more research and analyzed various sources, I asked myself why Israel and the six Arab countries analyzed in the capstone (Morocco, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab

Emirates, Oman, and Bahrain) had not taken the steps of making their relationships public, in the cases of Morocco and Tunisia decades earlier and in the cases of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Oman, and Bahrain, recently.

One can certainly say that there are diplomatic, economic, security, and tourism reasons, among many others, for the UAE and Bahrain coming forth to normalize relations with Israel and for Sudan and Morocco announcing that they will. However, one could also add that the UAE's and Bahrain's courage to do so first, to stand with Israel in the face of regional and global challenges while recognizing the shared opportunities that lay before them, not only make all three countries (and those who will follow suit) stronger, but also gives credence to the idea that the UAE and Bahrain want to be genuine friends of the Jewish state. The UAE and Bahrain, and later Sudan and Morocco, decided that they would not be held back by decades of bitterness aimed at Israel. It was time for a new way forward, a way that would prove beneficial to all people in the region.

The world is vastly different today than it was on April 6, 2020, the day I submitted the final version of my capstone. No one had an idea of how the coronavirus pandemic would continue to change life as we knew it, nor the uncertainty it would throw our way. Despite the unknown, the desire of the good peoples of the world to strive for peace and a better future for future generations has not changed. The public relationships that Israel now shares with the UAE and Bahrain, the announcements of normalized relationships between Israel and Sudan and Israel and Morocco, and the likely future normalizations between Israel and other Arab states (such as Saudi Arabia and Oman) should serve as models for all countries in the region and around the world, illustrating that out of some of the most difficult challenges can arise some of the most beautiful opportunities.

Joshua Z. Lavine

December 15, 2020

**OPENLY COVERT**

**AN ANALYSIS OF ISRAEL'S RELATIONSHIPS WITH MOROCCO AND  
TUNISIA IN THE MAGHREB AND SAUDI ARABIA, THE UNITED ARAB  
EMIRATES, OMAN, AND BAHRAIN IN THE GULF**

Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy Capstone Project  
In Full Fulfillment of the MALD Capstone Requirement

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The sources I interviewed for this project were very gracious and happy to help me shed more light onto this emerging subject. They all deserve an immense amount of appreciation. Due to the complexity of some of the information discussed, and the desire for many of my interviews to remain anonymous, I have decided to keep all my interviews for my capstone confidential. Nevertheless, this does not change my gratitude for their assistance in providing me information and direction.

I would like to thank my Fletcher classmates, professors, and the greater Fletcher community for always inspiring me to think more deeply about the challenges and opportunities that face our world.

Lastly, I would like to thank my family. Mom and Dad, thank you for always encouraging me and pushing me to be my best. Melissa, thank you for being the best sister and for always having my back. I know that whenever I need, you will always be there for me. Rikki, I will always be grateful for your love and support throughout my time at Fletcher. You are the best wife anyone could ask for and my best friend. To my entire family, I love you all. I hope I make you proud.

## **Abstract**

The Middle East is a highly unpredictable region. For decades, open relationships between Israel and its Arab neighbors were deemed unthinkable. We now know that after Israel's establishment in 1948, two states in the Maghreb, Morocco and Tunisia, took the bold steps of developing covert relations with the Jewish state for pragmatic reasons. Some of the legacies of those friendships are being replicated between Israel and its Gulf neighbors today as the two sides move closer due to mutual regional threats. This capstone traces the relationships between Israel and its North African allies in Morocco and Tunisia as well as the burgeoning relationships between Israel and its friends in the Gulf: Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, and Bahrain. Why did these relationships begin and what can we learn from the history of these relationships? How are they similar or different to each other? Where will the relationships head in the future and why are they important for the international arena? While the answers to these questions are constantly in flux, this capstone attempts to answer them utilizing various sources to provide a holistic analysis and explain why past lessons can inform future policy.

## **Introduction**

In a speech to the United Nations Security Council in August 2019, Israel's Ambassador to the United Nations, Danny Danon, stated, "Today, an unprecedented wave of normalization is sweeping the region as Israel continues to develop and improve relations with our Arab neighbors."<sup>1</sup> The following developments between Israel and its Arab neighbors have taken place since October 2018:

- October 2018: Israeli Ambassador to the United States Ron Dermer and United Arab Emirates Ambassador to the United States Yousef Al Otaiba shared a table at the Jewish Institute for National Security of America annual dinner.<sup>2</sup>
- October 2018: Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu traveled to Oman where he met with the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said. This visit was broadcast on Omani state television.<sup>3</sup>
- November 2018: Israeli Transportation Minister Israel Katz attended a transportation conference in Oman.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "(Part I) Maintenance of International Peace and Security – Security Council, 8600<sup>th</sup> meeting" *UN Web TV*, August 20, 2019 <<http://webtv.un.org/search/part-1-maintenance-of-international-peace-and-security-security-council-8600th-meeting/6075248616001/?term=&lan=english&page=3>> (accessed November 7, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> Amir Tibon, "Israel's U.S. Envoy Shared Dinner Table with UAE Counterpart in Rare Sign of Warming Ties," *Haaretz*, October 11, 2018 <<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-israel-s-u-s-envoy-shares-table-with-uae-counterpart-in-sign-of-warming-ties-1.6548090>> (accessed April 2, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> Elie Podeh, "Israel's renewed affair with Oman," *The Jerusalem Post*, November 8, 2018 <<https://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Israels-renewed-affair-with-Oman-571410>> (accessed November 8, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> Alexander Cornwell, "Israeli intelligence minister calls for Gulf cooperation on aviation security, other areas," *Reuters*, November 8, 2018 <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-gulf-aviation-security/israeli-intelligence-minister-calls-for-gulf-cooperation-on-aviation-security-other-areas-idUSKCN1ND201>> (accessed April 2, 2020).



- December 2018: *The Wall Street Journal* reported that Ahmed al-Assiri, a Major General in the Royal Saudi Air Defense Forces, had been in contact with Israel and had been the highest Saudi official to visit the Jewish state.<sup>5</sup>
- February 2019: Israel participated in a U.S. sponsored conference on the Middle East in Warsaw, where cooperation between Israel and its Arab partners in resisting Iran became more widely known.<sup>6</sup>
- June 2019: Israeli journalists traveled to Bahrain for the Peace to Prosperity summit. During an interview with Raphael Ahren, an Israeli journalist, Bahraini Foreign Minister Sheikh Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa says, “Israel is a country in the region, in the Middle East, the State of Israel...And it’s there to stay, of course.”<sup>7</sup>
- June/July 2019: Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz traveled to the United Arab Emirates for a meeting on the environment hosted by the United Nations.<sup>8</sup>
- October 2019: Dana Benvenisti-Gabay, the head of the Foreign Ministry’s Regional Security and Counter-Terrorism Department, formally represented Israel in Bahrain at the Working Group on Maritime and Aviation Security.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> “Felicia Schwartz, Margherita Stancati and Summer Said, “Covert Saudi Outreach to Israel Sputters After Journalist’s Murder.” *The Wall Street Journal*, December 18, 2018 <<https://www.wsj.com/articles/covert-saudi-outreach-to-israel-sputters-after-journalists-murder-11545129001>> (accessed November 7, 2019).

<sup>6</sup> “Netanyahu meets Omani foreign minister, hints other Arab states warming to Israel,” *Reuters*, February 13, 2019 <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-summit-netanyahu-oman/netanyahu-meets-omani-foreign-minister-hints-other-arab-states-warming-to-israel-idUSKCN1Q21V4>> (Accessed November 8, 2019).

<sup>7</sup> Raphael Ahren, “Bahrain’s FM Tells ToI he hopes ‘to visit Israel, when it’s all open, peaceful,’” *The Times of Israel*, June 27, 2019 <<https://www.timesofisrael.com/bahrains-fm-tells-toi-he-hopes-to-visit-israel-when-its-all-open-peaceful/>> (accessed November 7, 2019).

<sup>8</sup> Herb Keinon, “Minister Katz visits Abu Dhabi: A ‘significant step’ in Israel-Arab relations,” *The Jerusalem Post*, July 1, 2019 <<https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/minister-katz-visited-abu-dhabi-first-visit-by-israeli-official-594280>> (accessed April 2, 2020).

<sup>9</sup> TOI Staff, “In rare formal visit, Israeli official attends anti-Iran conference in Bahrain,” *The Times of Israel*, October 21, 2019 <<https://www.timesofisrael.com/in-rare-formal-visit-israeli-official-attends-anti-iran-bahrain-conference/>> (accessed November 7, 2019).

- October 2019: A private plane took off from Ben-Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv, landed in Amman for a few minutes, then took off and landed in Riyadh. About an hour later, the plane returned to Israel. No one knows for sure who was on the plane but speculation abounds that it was one or more high-ranking Israeli officials on a diplomatic trip to discuss regional tensions.<sup>10</sup>
- November 2019: Following an April 2019 announcement that Israel had been invited by the government of the United Arab Emirates to participate in the Expo 2020 hosted in Dubai, the UAE will most likely allow Israelis holding Israeli passports to enter the country and visit after the expo ends.<sup>11</sup>
- December 2019: The UAE's Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation tweeted an article with the headline, "Islam's reformation: an Arab-Israeli alliance is taking shape in the Middle East."<sup>12</sup>
- March 2020: Israel sent a delegation to participate in an anti-terrorism conference in Morocco.<sup>13</sup>

The importance of these developments cannot be understated. Located in the middle of the Middle East, the third iteration of the Jewish state has long been surrounded by countries that have been hostile to its existence. Since declaring statehood in 1948, many of Israel's neighbors

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<sup>10</sup> Alisa Odenheimer, "Mysterious Private Jet Flight From Israel to Saudi Arabia Has Media Guessing," *Bloomberg*, October 24, 2019, <<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-10-24/mysterious-flight-from-israel-to-saudi-arabia-has-media-guessing>> (accessed April 1, 2020).

<sup>11</sup> TOI Staff, "UAE said readying to open doors to Israeli tourists, starting with 2020 Expo," *The Times of Israel*, November 6, 2019 <<https://www.timesofisrael.com/uae-said-readying-to-open-doors-to-israeli-tourists-starting-with-2020-expo/>> (accessed November 8, 2019).

<sup>12</sup> Seth J. Frantzman, "UAE foreign minister tweets article about Israel, Arab alliance," *The Jerusalem Post*, December 22, 2019 <<https://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/UAE-foreign-minister-tweets-article-about-Israel-Arab-alliance-611660>> (accessed March 10, 2020).

<sup>13</sup> Raphael Ahren, "Israel uses anti-terror conference in Morocco to rally world against Iran," *The Times of Israel*, March 10, 2020 <<https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-uses-anti-terror-conference-in-morocco-to-rally-world-against-iran/>> (accessed March 15, 2020).

have sought its destruction, leading to overt conflicts in 1948, 1956, 1967, and 1973, with other military engagements frequently taking place. After the 1973 War (known to Israelis as the Yom Kippur War and to Arabs as the Ramadan War), no country has since directly attacked the Jewish state with military force. The Lebanon War of 1982 was fought against the Palestine Liberation Organization and Fatah led by Yasser Arafat. The Lebanon War of 2006 was fought against Hezbollah, an Iranian proxy. The wars in Gaza in 2008-2009, 2012, and 2014 were fought against Hamas, the terror group that ruthlessly runs the Gaza Strip.

What caused the change in Arab demeanor, from state on state war to terror group on state war? This change is due in part to the unique and ever-developing relationships Israel has with some of its neighbors. Morocco and Tunisia, in particular, were two of Israel's first Arab contacts, with Morocco remaining an underground ally since. In its nascent years, Israel greatly benefitted from the security relationship with these two states. In later years, collaboration in other areas greatly benefitted all three countries.

In recent years, a looming cloud in the Middle East has been forming. The Islamic Republic of Iran has cast a darkness over the region and has left states wondering if their current security apparatuses provide enough protection in the face of Iran's hegemonic ambition. A 2019 poll conducted by ASDA'A BCW, the Middle East branch of the global public relations firm BCW, indicated that 87% of Arab youths in Gulf Cooperation Council countries view Iran negatively.<sup>14</sup> The mutual trepidation of Iran has resulted in closer relationships between Israel and Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Oman, and Bahrain.

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<sup>14</sup> "Two-third of Arab youth view Iran as an enemy, survey shows," *Arabian Business*, September 30, 2019 <<https://www.arabianbusiness.com/politics-economics/429190-two-thirds-of-young-arabs-view-iran-as-an-enemy-survey-shows>> (accessed November 7, 2019).

However, security is not the only area where Israel and its new Arab allies have, or should, be in contact with each other. These countries contribute much in science, technology, humanitarian aid and other disciplines. There is so much each of these countries has to offer individually: imagine what could be attained if they publicly worked together?

This capstone seeks to accomplish several goals. First, it will provide a history of Israel's relationships with its North African allies in Morocco and Tunisia. Second, it will provide a history of the burgeoning relationships between Israel and its friends in the Gulf: Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Oman, and Bahrain. Third, it will explore some key similarities and differences between Israel's relationships in the Maghreb and the Gulf. Sections four and five will provide some recommendations for where Israel's relationships with the Maghreb and the Gulf should lead respectively.



## **Part One: Israel and the Maghreb**

### ***The Relationship between Israel and Morocco***

Among the Arab states discussed in this paper, Morocco has the richest Jewish history. While there had been Jews in the Maghreb for thousands of years, the Jewish community in the region was augmented around the 1500s as a result of the 1492 Alhambra Decree in Spain, which began the Spanish Inquisition, and the expulsion of Jews from Portugal that followed. While not always smooth, Jews historically lived relatively well in Morocco.

The outbreak of World War II threatened Jews not just in Europe, but also in North Africa. At the time, Morocco was a French Protectorate. After the German invasion of France in

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<sup>15</sup> *Google Maps* <<https://www.google.com/maps/@24.1324018,11.8106214,4.43z>> (accessed April 5, 2020).

May 1940, France entered a controversial treaty with the Nazis.<sup>16</sup> Hitler had no desire to fight France as he viewed the country as somewhat of a military power with streams of potential backup from their colonies in Africa, such as Algeria.<sup>17</sup> The treaty divided France into two parts: a northern part occupied by Germany and a southern part known as Vichy France. Vichy France included Morocco and Tunisia.

The Jews of Morocco were spared some of the negative effects of Vichy France for a few reasons. One reason is that as a French Protectorate, not a full part of France, the Jews did not have French citizenship. Therefore, there was no stripping Jews of their French citizenship in the same manner of Jews elsewhere (in Algeria, the Jews lost their citizenship on October 7, 1940). Another reason is that since many of the Jews kept to themselves and established their jobs and education within their communities and did not have as much interaction with the secular world, their livelihoods and educational pursuits were not as affected.<sup>18</sup>

A third reason was due in part to the support of Morocco's Sultan Mohammed V. While there are many different accounts of the Sultan's role in keeping Jews safe during the war, it is widely accepted that he refused to single out his Jewish subjects for persecution.<sup>19</sup> At the beginning of World War II, Sultan Mohammed V met with representation from the Nazis and Vichy France. At this meeting, the Sultan informed his hosts that he would not subject his Jewish citizens to the horrors of the concentration camps and that they would be safe in Morocco. He

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<sup>16</sup> This treaty was so controversial, French Prime Minister Paul Reynaud resigned from his position. Sheryl Silver Ochayon, "The Jews of Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia," *Yad Vashem: The World Holocaust Remembrance Center*, <<https://www.yadvashem.org/articles/general/the-jews-of-algeria-morocco-and-tunisia.html>> (accessed November 7, 2019).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Jessica M. Marglin, *Across Legal Lines: Jews and Muslims in Modern Morocco* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2016), 201.

was reported to have said, “There are no Jews in Morocco. There are only Moroccan subjects.”<sup>20</sup> While there were approximately 2,100 Jews who ended up in Moroccan labor camps during the war,<sup>21</sup> the Sultan’s act of defiance protected the approximately 250,000 Jews living in Morocco from the Nazis.<sup>22</sup>

Despite the Sultan’s actions during the war, the Jews of Morocco were not spared from the anti-Semitic attacks that took place after the State of Israel was established in May 1948. Nevertheless, in the immediate aftermath of the creation of Israel, many Moroccan Jews chose not to immigrate to the new Jewish state. In fact, from May 1947 to May 1948, as it was becoming increasingly clear that the British Mandate of Palestine would be coming to an end and the possibility of a Jewish state became increasingly likely, only 2,000 Jews chose to move to the Land of Israel and cast their lot with the potential state.<sup>23</sup>

Days after the state was established, Sultan Mohammed V warned his country’s Jews not to show, “solidarity with the Zionist aggression.”<sup>24</sup> This threat was followed with another warning, this one for the Muslim community not to attack the Jewish community. However, this warning did not stop an angry mob from attacking the Jewish communities of Oujda and Jerada, killing 44 individuals.<sup>25</sup> While some Moroccan Jews might have believed that the Sultan would not allow harm to come to them, many feared another pogrom. The Moroccan government also enacted a prohibition on immigration to Israel which proved to be a stark contrast to the policies of other Arab countries such as Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Libya, and Yemen, where the Jews were

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ochayon.

<sup>22</sup> Marglin, 200.

<sup>23</sup> David B. Green, “This Day in Jewish History: Anti-Jewish Rioting in Morocco Leaves 44 Dead,” *Haaretz*, June 8, 2014 <<https://www.haaretz.com/jewish/.premium-this-day-44-dead-after-anti-jewish-rioting-in-morocco-1.5251018>> (accessed November 7, 2019).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

essentially forced out in the years following Israel's establishment.<sup>26</sup> Even though immigration to Israel was prohibited from 1948-1956, 110,000 Jews were able to leave Morocco for Israel.<sup>27</sup>

Israel began the process of establishing underground relations with Morocco in the late 1950s.<sup>28</sup> The nascent relationship could have been based on two components, aided by Morocco's age-old ties to the Jewish community. First, Morocco could have realized a strategic value in opening a diplomatic channel with the Jewish state based on similar circumstances: both countries were emerging from under a colonial power. Just as Israel had emerged from under the British Empire, so too was Morocco emerging from under the French Empire, having gained independence in April 1956. Morocco possibly wanted to have a partner by which "best practices" could be established. However, Morocco wanted to remain a member of the Arab League (it became a member in October 1958) and therefore did not want to make their relationship with Israel public. This explains why the relationship had to be underground.

The second reason is that Israel most likely wanted to have a diplomatic partner in the Arab world. During the 1948 War of Independence, Israel was attacked by seven Arab countries and volunteers from numerous others, including Morocco and Tunisia. If Morocco was willing to open a diplomatic channel with Israel, Israel was probably overjoyed at the prospect of having a friend, albeit quiet, from the side of the presumed enemy.

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<sup>26</sup> Yarden Schwartz, "For Jews and Muslims of Morocco, a Supportive Relationship Built on a Complex History," *NBC News*, July 15, 2017 <<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/jews-muslims-morocco-supportive-relationship-built-complex-history-n782796>> (accessed November 7, 2019).

<sup>27</sup> Green.

<sup>28</sup> "Israel researcher: Israeli-Moroccan relations are growing," *Middle East Monitor*, July 31, 2018 <<https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20180731-israeli-researcher-israeli-moroccan-relations-are-growing/>> (accessed November 7, 2019).



The beginning of this relationship entailed the evacuation of Jews from Morocco to Israel.<sup>29</sup> While this might seem odd that the emigration of a group of people from one country to another cemented the two countries' relationship, there were two longer-term plans involved. The first involved King Hassan wanting to secure the support of the United States. By allowing Jews to leave Morocco if they chose, Morocco would look like a moderate country. As such, Israel and the Jewish community of Morocco would speak positively about Morocco to their Jewish brethren in the United States. If this happened, then Jewish Americans would lobby their elected officials to support Morocco. The second involved King Hassan's desire to be seen as a player in the Middle East. Establishing a covert relationship with Israel would allow for Morocco to be seen as a legitimate intermediary.

Isser Harel and Meir Amit became central figures in the evacuation of Jews from Morocco to Israel. Operation Yachin, the secret evacuation of Jews from Morocco to Israel, set the stage for further ties. During this time, there were secret reciprocal visits of Mossad and Moroccan intelligence officials to Morocco and Israel.<sup>30</sup> One of the Israeli visits to Morocco led to the organization of a course for the protection of VIPs. The methods learned in this course became the basis for some of King Hassan's security detail.<sup>31</sup>

When Meir Amit succeeded Isser Harrel as Director of Mossad in 1963, Israel's relationship with Morocco grew. At the outbreak of the Algeria-Morocco War, Amit was granted an audience with King Hassan in Marrakech, during which he presented the King with information about Egypt (still a sworn enemy of Israel at this point) and Moroccan dissidents in

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<sup>29</sup> Samuel Segev, "Israel-Morocco Relations From Hassan II to Muhammad VI," trans. Yvette Shumacher, *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs*, 2 (3) (2008): 52.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

Egypt.<sup>32</sup> King Hassan was impressed. He allowed the Mossad to establish a communication station in Rabat and subsequently purchased weapons from the Jewish state. In turn, the Mossad helped to train Moroccan tank crews and pilots and improved their equipment.<sup>33</sup> This relationship was not exclusively security related. Israel sent economists, business leaders, water specialists, agriculture experts, and military officials to Morocco.<sup>34</sup> It is not known what Israel received in return but one can estimate that the intelligence ties Morocco granted Israel would be reason enough for Israel to help its new Arab friend.

An example of this intelligence relationship paid dividends in the leadup to the Six Day War in June 1967. In September 1965, King Hassan of Morocco allowed members of the “Birds” unit of the Mossad to tap the suites and rooms of Arab leaders during the Arab League summit in Casablanca. The main topic of the summit was whether the Arab countries were ready for an armed conflict with Israel. It is possible that the King had second thoughts about hosting Israeli agents on his territory and that he would be exposed as a collaborator with Israel. He therefore kicked the Mossad agents out the day before the conference began but provided information about the conference to Israel after.<sup>35</sup> While many in Israel and around the world viewed the leadup to the war as an existential threat to Israel’s very existence, individuals within the Israeli intelligence and military communities believed that Israel would defeat the Arab armies due to

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 53-54.

<sup>35</sup> Ronen Bergman, “Mossad listened in on Arab states’ preparations for Six-Day War,” *Ynet*, October 15, 2016 <<https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4866702,00.html>> (accessed November 7, 2019).

the information they acquired and that which Morocco provided.<sup>36</sup> The information that Israel gained from this series of events proved critical to the Israeli victory during the war.<sup>37</sup>

In October 1965, about a month after the Arab League summit in Rabat, Morocco approached Israel and asked for help in handling Mehdi Ben-Barka, the head of the National Union of Popular Forces, a left-wing group that was opposed to the ruling family. When Ahmed Dlimi, one of King Hassan's confidants and military officials, approached the Mossad and asked them to return the favor and help with the Ben-Barka problem, Israel was probably not that upset. King Hassan viewed Ben-Barka as a threat to his rule as Ben-Barka frequently spoke out against the Moroccan ruler. From Israel's perspective, while he not on the hit list for crimes against Jews or the Jewish state, the fact that Ben-Barka spoke out against African relations with Israel<sup>38</sup> probably did not engender good feelings with the Israeli intelligence services. While the Mossad did not actively assassinate Ben-Barka, they helped the Moroccan authorities track him, allowed Moroccan authorities to use Mossad safe houses, and devised a plan by which Moroccan intelligence, with the help of some corrupt French police officers, could assassinate him in Paris.<sup>39</sup>

Some sources say that at the outset of the Western Sahara War in 1975, Morocco reached out to Israel for guidance in conduct against guerilla warfare. In turn, Israel helped Morocco

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<sup>36</sup> Sue Surkes, "Morocco tipped off Israeli intelligence, 'helped Israel win Six Day War,'" *The Times of Israel*, October 16, 2016 <<https://www.timesofisrael.com/morocco-tipped-off-israeli-intelligence-helped-israel-win-six-day-war/>> (accessed November 7, 2019).

<sup>37</sup> David Horowitz, "How Israel's leaders use targeted killings to try to 'stop history,'" *The Times of Israel*, January 26, 2018 <<https://www.timesofisrael.com/how-israels-leaders-use-targeted-killings-to-try-to-stop-history/>> (accessed November 7, 2019).

<sup>38</sup> Mohammed Jaabouk, "1965: When Mehdi Ben Barka warned African leaders against Israel," trans. Latifa Babas, *Yabiladi*, December 10, 2017 <<https://en.yabiladi.com/articles/details/58325/1965-when-mehdi-barka-warned.html>> (accessed November 7, 2019).

<sup>39</sup> See Mohammed Jaabouk, "History: 1965, when the Mossad helped Morocco murder Ben Barka," trans. Latifa Babas, *Yabiladi*, October 25, 2017 <<https://en.yabiladi.com/articles/details/58726/history-1965-when-mossad-helped.html>> (accessed November 7, 2019); and Ronen Bergman, *Rise and Kill First: The Secret History of Israel's Targeted Assassinations*, (New York: Penguin Random House, 2018), 92-94.

build the sand berm wall that separates Moroccan held territory from the Free Zone.<sup>40</sup> This theory, however, is difficult to corroborate and may be an attempt to delegitimize Israel, Morocco, and the relationship between the two countries.

The Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty that was signed in March 1979 was a watershed moment for Israel in their foreign relations: Israel now had an official, signed peace treaty with the leading country in the Arab world. However, this treaty might not have gotten off the ground if not for the role that Morocco played at its outset. Months of behind the scenes diplomacy and meetings involving Egyptian officials, Israeli officials including Moshe Dayan (the Israeli Foreign Minister), and King Hassan himself resulted in Egyptian President Anwar Sadat saying that he would go to the Knesset in Jerusalem.<sup>41</sup> President Sadat's visit to Jerusalem began the overt series of events that culminated in the signing of the peace treaty. After Israel and Egypt signed their historic treaty, Morocco did not cut off diplomatic relations with Egypt even though the overwhelming majority of Arab states and the Arab League did.

In March 1986, King Hassan addressed the Arab League with his belief that peace with Israel should be explored based on the 1981 Fez Plan.<sup>42</sup> A few months later in July 1986, Shimon Peres flew to Morocco. This was the first public mention of a relationship between the two countries.<sup>43</sup> From Peres' perspective, this trip was critical for support as his term as Prime Minister was coming to an end. It also allowed him to say that moderation on behalf of Israel

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<sup>40</sup> Hannah McNeish, "Western Sahara's struggle for freedom cut off by a wall," *Al Jazeera*, June 5, 2015 <<https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2015/05/western-sahara-struggle-freedom-cut-wall-150528065625790.html>> (accessed November 7, 2019).

<sup>41</sup> Mark Tessler, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2009), 507-509.

<sup>42</sup> "Fez Plan- English Text," *Economic Cooperation Foundation* <[https://ecf.org.il/media\\_items/549](https://ecf.org.il/media_items/549)> (accessed November 7, 2019).

<sup>43</sup> Tessler, 667-669.

would be met with moderation on behalf of moderate Arab leaders.<sup>44</sup> From King Hassan's perspective, this visit portrayed Morocco as a viable intermediary in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The meeting did not result in any tangible breakthrough other than showing that Israeli and Moroccan leaders could have constructive public dialogue.

As a result of the meeting, Syria announced that they were severing ties with Morocco.<sup>45</sup> Despite the backlash from some, this further cemented the relationship between Israel and Morocco, which continued to burgeon into the 1990s. Much of this relationship can be attributed to the friendship of Shimon Peres and King Hassan, as evidenced by archival letters between Peres and King Hassan as well as pictures of the two.<sup>46</sup> Perhaps, there was no further shining moment of Peres' friendship with King Hassan than September 1, 1994, when Peres, as Foreign Minister, announced that Morocco and Israel would open reciprocal trade offices in Tel Aviv and Rabat. Peres stated:

“The government of Morocco and the government of Israel have agreed to open liaison offices in Morocco and in Israel at the same time. It is a low-key representation, but an event of great importance. Let's remember that for many good years our relations with Morocco – our formal relations – were not existing. So the King has always shown his support for peace. And then again, until now, most of the agreements that we did have were with our immediate neighboring countries. This is for the first time an Arab country that doesn't have neither the memory of wars, nor the proximity of land and this is a beginning to build really a new Middle East... We are going over from a divided, backward region, to an open region, to a united region with its eyes to the future.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 667.

<sup>45</sup> Judith Miller, “Peres and Hassan in Talks; Syria Breaks Moroccan Ties,” *The New York Times*, July 23, 1986 <<https://www.nytimes.com/1986/07/23/world/peres-and-hassan-in-talks-syria-breaks-moroccan-ties.html>> (accessed November 7, 2019).

<sup>46</sup> “Remembering Shimon Peres on the first anniversary of his passing,” *Israel State Archives*, <<https://www.archives.gov.il/en/chapter/remembering-shimon-peres-first-anniversary-passing/>> (accessed November 7, 2019).

<sup>47</sup> “Israel-Diplomatic Relations Improve with Morocco,” *AP Archive*, September 1, 1994 <<http://www.aparchive.com/metadata/Israel-Diplomatic-Relations-Improve-With-Morocco/321d5a29552909a155b61b2853c9ca31?query=Morocco+and+Israel&current=5&orderBy=Relevance&hits=534&referrer=search&search=%2fsearch%3fstard%3d%26endd%3d%26allFilters%3d%26query%3dMorocco%2band%2bIsrael%26advsearchStartDateFilter%3d%26advsearchEndDateFilter%3d%26searchFilterHdSDFormat%3dAll%26searchFilterDigitized%3dAll%26searchFiltercolorFormat%3dAll>>

These trade offices acted as de facto embassies.<sup>48</sup> With optimism high due to the signing of the Oslo Accords, some thought these trade offices would result in formal embassies at a point in the not-so-distant future.

The end of the 1990s saw two changes in the Israel-Morocco relationship. The first was the death of King Hassan in 1999 and the ascension of his son, Mohammed VI, to the throne.<sup>49</sup> The second was the closing of the Moroccan trade office in Tel Aviv and the forced closure of the Israeli trade office in Rabat at the beginning of the Second Intifada in 2000 as Morocco protested Israel's treatment of the Palestinians. This move was likely due to King Mohammed VI's reluctance in his first year of power to go against the Arab League, as opposed to actual outrage.

Despite the public stance that the Arab world was against Israel during the Second Intifada, King Mohammed VI maintained a diplomatic channel with Israel. This was predominately used as a backchannel to calm tensions between the Israelis and the Palestinians and to see if there was a way by which to end the conflict. Of course, there were other motives for this channel, namely Morocco's continued desire to be looked at as moderate by the West. Morocco wanted to secure the support of France, Canada, South America, and the United States for Morocco's position on Western Sahara.<sup>50</sup> In an attempt to gain the support of these countries and regions, members of the Moroccan Jewish community were appointed to high ranking

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%26searchFilteraspectratioFormat%3dAll&allFilters=&productType=IncludedProducts&page=1&b=c9ca31> (accessed November 7, 2019).

<sup>48</sup> See Michael Parks, "Morocco Becomes 2nd Arab Nation to Have Formal Relations With Israel: Diplomacy: Twenty years of contacts culminate in agreement on low-level ties with liaison offices. Expanded trade and tourism are predicted," *Los Angeles Times*, September 2, 1994 <<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1994-09-02-mn-33867-story.html>> (accessed November 7, 2019); and Tessler, 767-769.

<sup>49</sup> Segev, 55.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

positions in the King's cabinet including Andre Azoulay as an adviser for economic and financial affairs, and Serge Berdugo as a roving ambassador.<sup>51</sup>

Officially, Morocco follows the Arab League's acceptance that the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 is the way by which peace will be established between the Israelis and Palestinians. A 2003 visit to Morocco by Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom seemed to reignite public relations between the two countries.<sup>52</sup> In 2007, Israel announced that while the country does not believe the Arab Peace Initiative to be the basis for negotiation, there are some positives in the plan.<sup>53</sup>

In recent years, the Israel-Morocco relationship has continued to grow. Israeli tourists have fewer restrictions in visiting the country than they do in other Arab countries. Economic cooperation is still taking place, as is security cooperation due to both countries constant battles against terror threats. Diplomatic visits have continued as well.<sup>54</sup> While the optic of the King meeting with the Israeli premier may be damaging for the country, in 2016, Morocco attempted to restart the Israeli-Palestinian peace process by sending Sam Ben-Shitrit, a Jewish Moroccan who is close to King Mohammed VI, to Israel to meet with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.<sup>55</sup> In December 2019, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo was reportedly pushing

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> "Morocco Israel," *AP Archive*, September 2, 2003 <<http://www.aparchive.com/metadata/Morocco-Israel/3db3e9def549572ce8780c345c5abce5?query=Morocco+and+Israel&current=1&orderBy=Relevance&hits=534&referrer=search&search=%2fsearch%3fstard%3d%26end%3d%26allFilters%3d%26query%3dMorocco%2band%2bIsrael%26advsearchStartDateFilter%3d%26advsearchEndDateFilter%3d%26searchFilterHdSDFormat%3dAll%26searchFilterDigitized%3dAll%26searchFiltercolorFormat%3dAll%26searchFilteraspectratioFormat%3dAll&allFilters=&productType=IncludedProducts&page=1&b=5abce5>> (accessed November 7, 2019).

<sup>53</sup> Segev, 57.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Raoul Wootliff, "Morocco's king dispatches Jewish aide to push Israeli-Palestinian talks," *The Times of Israel*, February 15, 2016 <<https://www.timesofisrael.com/moroccos-king-dispatches-jewish-aide-to-push-israeli-palestinian-talks/>> (accessed November 7, 2019).

for Morocco to sign a non-belligerence agreement with Israel.<sup>56</sup> In March 2020, Israel was included in an anti-terror conference held in Marrakech, with the principle agenda of stopping al-Qaeda.<sup>57</sup>

### ***The Relationship Between Israel and Tunisia***

Records point to Jews living in Tunisia as far back as the second century. Just as they had in Morocco, the Jews lived relatively well in Tunisia, with their numbers growing to approximately 100,000 by the 1940s.<sup>58</sup> During World War II, the Jews of Tunisia were spared the horrors that their brethren were experiencing in Europe. Similar to the community in Morocco, the leaders of Tunisia had mercy on their Jewish subjects. Even though the Nazis occupied Tunisia from November 1942 – May 1943, they did not have enough time to begin sending Jews to death camps. The allies subsequently eradicated the Nazis from Tunisia in May 1943.<sup>59</sup>

As the decade progressed and Israel declared independence, there was growing anti-Jewish sentiment in the country.<sup>60</sup> At the time, Tunisia was a protectorate of France and, just like Morocco, was beginning its quest for independence. This setting laid the background for the beginning of the Israel-Tunisia relationship.

In 1951, Bahi Ladgham, a senior member of the Neo Destour political party, approached Israeli officials at the United Nations. The Neo Destour party housed Tunisian nationalist politicians and the party was seeking to end the French oversight of Tunisia. Ladgham was also a

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<sup>56</sup> TOI Staff and Agencies, “Israel said hoping for breakthrough in ties with Morocco in next few days,” *The Times of Israel*, December 5, 2019 <<https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-said-hoping-for-breakthrough-in-ties-with-morocco-in-next-few-days/>> (accessed March 15, 2020).

<sup>57</sup> Ahren, “Israel uses anti-terror conference in Morocco to rally world against Iran.”

<sup>58</sup> Nate Lavey, “Tunisian Jews Seek Place in New Order,” *Forward*, June 10, 2012 <<https://forward.com/news/157490/tunisian-jews-seek-place-in-new-order/>> (accessed April 3, 2020).

<sup>59</sup> Ochayon.

<sup>60</sup> Lavey.



close advisor and friend of Habib Bourguiba, the leader of the party and the future president of an independent Tunisia. In one of the initial meetings with Gideon Rafael, an adviser to the Israeli delegation, Ladgham expressed his desire for Israeli support on the issue of Tunisian independence.<sup>61</sup> Ladgham also assured Rafael that the Neo Destour party was not behind the anti-Jewish sentiment that was growing in the country, including riots that attacked the Jews of Tunis.<sup>62</sup>

Bourguiba himself was conflicted about Israel. In 1952, Bourguiba publicly advocated for some type of normalization with Israel in an interview with *Le Monde*.<sup>63</sup> While living in France in 1954, Bourguiba told the head of the London political bureau of the World Jewish Congress that he understood Jewish nationalism but as an Arab, he also understood the claims of colonialism that were being lobbed at the nascent Jewish state. However, one of his most important remarks was that as a matter of policy, he would not seek Israel's elimination but would instead seek to be a mediator in the Israel-Arab conflict.<sup>64</sup>

Under the premierships of David Ben-Gurion (May 1948-January 1954 and November 1955-June 1963) and Levi Eshkol (June 1963-February 1969), Israel had both open and back-channel relations with Tunisia.<sup>65</sup> When Moshe Sharett was Prime Minister (January 1954-November 1955), he favored an open policy by which to conduct relations with Tunisia (and Morocco). He reasoned that this was a way to subvert the Arab League boycott of the Jewish state.<sup>66</sup> In other words, if Israel had open relations with two Arab states, it would potentially

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<sup>61</sup> Michael Laskier, "Israel and the Maghreb at the Height of the Arab-Israeli Conflict: 1950s-1970s," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 4 (2) (June 2000): 96.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

influence members of the Arab League to think about doing the same. It would also set a precedent that Israel would establish relations with those countries that were reciprocal in fair treatment. Since Sharett was only in office for about two years, the policies of Ben-Gurion and Eshkol which followed were adopted by the Foreign Ministry and the state.

In the leadup to Tunisian independence in October 1956, there were various meetings between Israeli and Tunisian officials. Following Tunisian independence, Israel and Tunisia had a framework in place for joint economic cooperation and other development projects. These projects were lauded by the Israeli Foreign Ministry. However, the Suez Crisis of 1956 stalled these advancements. When Tunisia joined the Arab League in 1958, this progress was stopped.<sup>67</sup>

In the aftermath of Tunisia joining the Arab League, Bourguiba quietly allowed Jews to leave Tunisia via France for Israel. At the time, he publicly maintained an anti-Israel façade so as not to rock the Arab League too much. This changed by the mid-1960s. In a speech delivered in March 1965, Bourguiba challenged Arab leaders to recognize Israel in exchange for Israeli recognition of UN General Assembly Resolution 181 and UN General Assembly Resolution 194.<sup>68</sup> A month later, *Le Monde* reported the following, “‘The floor is now up to Israel...if I (Bourguiba) were a Palestinian leader, I would not hesitate and I would agree to meet the representatives of Tel Aviv.’ Bourguiba has taken a new step in the ‘peaceful escalation’ he has undertaken for two months, and which should lead, he thinks, to a negotiated settlement of the Palestinian problem.”<sup>69</sup> Some scholars say that Bourguiba was genuinely interested in

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> UN General Assembly Resolution 181 contained the “Partition Plan for Palestine.” UN General Assembly Resolution 194 called for the right of refugees to return to their homes. Laskier, 98.

<sup>69</sup> JBB, “Mr. Bourguiba: If I were a Palestinian leader, I would agree to meet with the representatives of Israel,” trans., *Le Monde*, April 23, 1965 <[https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1965/04/23/m-bourguiba-si-j-etais-un-leader-palestinien-j-accepterais-de-rencontrer-les-representants-d-israel\\_2181661\\_1819218.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1965/04/23/m-bourguiba-si-j-etais-un-leader-palestinien-j-accepterais-de-rencontrer-les-representants-d-israel_2181661_1819218.html)> (accessed March 30, 2020).

establishing relations with Israel as he viewed said relations to be beneficial for Tunisia. Others say that Bourguiba was primarily motivated to establish relations with Israel because of his pure dislike for Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser. This latter point was a key driver in Israel's policy concerning Tunisia.

Nasser was a legendary figure in the Arab world since his rise to prominence in the early 1950s as part of the Free Officers Revolution of 1952. His scintillating speeches galvanized the Arab street and he became a vocal proponent of Arab nationalism. While Tunisia was attracted to Bourguiba, he was never as popular with the street as Nasser. Nevertheless, Bourguiba did not hesitate to publicly deviate from Nasser's stated position on matters relating to Israel. This was evidenced by his remarks in 1965 which were made in Jericho,<sup>70</sup> the first city in ancient Canaan to fall to the Israelites. Could this have been potential symbolism of his belief that the Jews had a right to live in Israel and Israel was on the map to stay?

Israel believed that due to the disunity between Nasser and Bourguiba, Tunisia would come forth on its own and declare support for the State of Israel.<sup>71</sup> In establishing relations with Israel, Bourguiba possibly believed that he could curry favor with the West, which would paint Nasser, who was aligned with the Soviet Union, in a bad light. Since Nasser was publicly hellbent on Israel's destruction and Bourguiba was publicly not, a productive Israel-Tunisia relationship would help Israel in the international arena. In this manner, it would not look as if Israel were working that hard to establish the relationship. Rather, Tunisia would be establishing a relationship on its own volition as a result of beneficial policy for the country.

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<sup>70</sup> "Tunisian President Bourguiba's Speech in Jericho – English (1965)," *Economic Cooperation Foundation* <[https://ecf.org.il/media\\_items/1217](https://ecf.org.il/media_items/1217)> (accessed April 3, 2020).

<sup>71</sup> Laskier, 97.

Whatever the reason, Israel was very proactive in ensuring that this relationship continued to grow. In November 1965, the Mossad augmented Bourguiba's security detail on a trip to Liberia. The Foreign Ministry promoted Bourguiba for the 1966 Nobel Peace Prize. Secret meetings were held between Israeli and Tunisian diplomats in France, with the World Jewish Congress playing a role.<sup>72</sup>

In the aftermath of the 1967 Six Day War, the Arab League held its fourth summit in Khartoum, Sudan. The summit is famous for the Khartoum Resolution which states, "no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, no negotiations with it..."<sup>73</sup> Bourguiba, who blamed Nasser for starting the war due to Egypt's refusal to recognize Israel,<sup>74</sup> boycotted the summit.<sup>75</sup> In October 1976, Bourguiba again claimed that the Arab States and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) should accept UN General Assembly Resolution 181.<sup>76</sup>

Egypt's overtures to Israel in 1977 shifted the balance of power in the Arab League. Upon signing its 1979 peace treaty with Israel, Egypt was suspended from the Arab League. As such, the Arab League headquarters shifted from Cairo to Tunis. A few years later, after the PLO was kicked out of Beirut by the Israel Defense Forces in response to relentless attacks on Israel from South Lebanon,<sup>77</sup> Bourguiba allowed for the PLO to set up their headquarters in Tunis.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 98.

<sup>73</sup> Arab League Summit – Khartoum 1967 – English Text, *Economic Cooperation Foundation* <[https://ecf.org.il/media\\_items/513](https://ecf.org.il/media_items/513)> (accessed April 5, 2020).

<sup>74</sup> "President of Tunisia Reiterates Call to Arabs to End State of War with Israel," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, August 28, 1967 <<https://www.jta.org/1967/08/28/archive/president-of-tunisia-reiterates-call-to-arabs-to-end-state-of-war-with-israel>> (accessed April 1, 2020).

<sup>75</sup> "Arab Ice-Breaker?," *The New York Times*, June 22, 1973 <<https://www.nytimes.com/1973/06/22/archives/arab-icebreaker.html>> (accessed April 1, 2020).

<sup>76</sup> Laskier, 100.

<sup>77</sup> The area became known as "Fatah Land" due to Fatah's, the leading faction of the PLO (and the party of its former leader Yasser Arafat), overwhelming presence in the southern part of the country. It became a de facto state within a state. Nitsana Darshan-Leitner and Samuel M. Katz, *Harpoon: Inside the Covert War Against Terrorism's Money Masters* (New York, Boston: Hachette Books, 2017), 144.

<sup>78</sup> Laskier, 100.

If relations between the two countries under Bourguiba's leadership were not seriously damaged by those moves, they were almost certainly damaged by an Israeli military action in October 1985, codenamed Operation Wooden Leg. A week earlier on Yom Kippur, the holiest day on the Jewish calendar, three Israeli tourists in Cyprus were killed by PLO terrorists. Following the terror attack, there was a sense among Israelis that there needed to be some type of retaliation. As such, the PLO headquarters in Tunis were chosen for an Israeli Air Force operation. The operation, the furthest undertaken from Israeli soil since the successful 1976 hostage rescue operation in Entebbe, Uganda, resulted in over 60 dead, many of whom were members of the PLO.<sup>79</sup> The international outcry was strong, especially from the United States.<sup>80</sup> However, aside from UN Security Council Resolution 573 condemning the attack<sup>81</sup> and some anti-Semitic activity in Tunisia, including the shooting attack on a synagogue in Djerba which resulted in three dead,<sup>82</sup> there was no further escalation.

The rise of Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali to power as the second President of Tunisia in 1987 ended Bourguiba's time as Tunisia's leader and began a new era of Israel-Tunisia relations. A 1988 Israeli raid in Tunis that ended with the death of Khalil al-Wazir (known by his nom de guerre Abu Jihad), the PLO's second in command, did not elicit much global protest aside from the formality of statements and UN Security Council Resolution 611.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Frank J. Prial, "Tunisia's Leader Bitter at the U.S.," *The New York Times*, October 3, 1985 <<https://www.nytimes.com/1985/10/03/world/tunisia-s-leader-bitter-at-the-us.html>> (accessed November 7, 2019).

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 573, October 4, 1985 <<http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/573>> (accessed April 5, 2020).

<sup>82</sup> Michal Margalit, "Thirty years later, Hattab family loses another member to anti-Semitism," *Ynet*, January 12, 2015 <<https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4614387,00.html>> (accessed March 30, 2020).

<sup>83</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 611, April 25, 1988 <[https://undocs.org/S/RES/611\(1988\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/611(1988))> (accessed April 5, 2020).

Following the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, Tunisia was one of the first Arab countries to make diplomatic overtures to Israel. Diplomatic contact continued through the 1990s, including a meeting between Israeli Foreign Minister Ehud Barak and Tunisian Foreign Minister Habib Ben Yahia in 1996, where the two countries agreed to begin open diplomatic relations.<sup>84</sup> Israel and Tunisia opened reciprocal interest sections in Tunis and Tel Aviv later that year.<sup>85</sup> While the representative of the Tunisian office was recalled in 1997 due to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's policies regarding the Middle East, a new representative was sent to Israel when Ehud Barak was elected prime minister in 1999.<sup>86</sup>

At the beginning of the Second Intifada, Tunisia cut official relations with Israel.<sup>87</sup> Low-level contact remained and Israel respected President Ben Ali as he protected the Jewish community in Tunisia. However, the 2011 Arab Spring led to Ben Ali's ouster as president. In a 2012 draft of the new Tunisian Constitution, any normalization with Israel was deemed a crime.<sup>88</sup> While this is not in the official 2014 Constitution, Tunisia's relationship with Israel has not improved. Since then, many Tunisian Jews have left for Israel as the security situation has

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<sup>84</sup> "USA: Israel and Tunisia Agree to Resume Diplomatic Relations," *AP Archive*, January 22, 1996 <<http://www.aparchive.com/metadata/USA-ISRAEL-AND-TUNISIA-AGREE-TO-RESUME-DIPLOMATIC-RELATIONS/043ec8a094832bae2bd0fc183ce7086c?query=Tunisia+and+Israel&current=7&orderBy=Relevance&hits=476&referrer=search&search=%2fsearch%3fstartd%3d%26endd%3d%26allFilters%3d%26query%3dTunisia%2band%2bIsrael%26advsearchStartDateFilter%3d%26advsearchEndDateFilter%3d%26searchFilterHdSDFormat%3dAll%26searchFilterDigitized%3dAll%26searchFiltercolorFormat%3dAll%26searchFilteraspratioFormat%3dAll&allFilters=&productType=IncludedProducts&page=1&b=e7086c>> (accessed November 7, 2019).

<sup>85</sup> Laskier, 100.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> "Israel-Tunisia Relations," *Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, October 22, 2000 <<http://www.israel.org/MFA/PressRoom/2000/Pages/Israel-Tunisia%20Relations.aspx>> (accessed April 3, 2020).

<sup>88</sup> "Draft of the Constitution of the Republic of Tunisia," August 14, 2012, p. 16 <[http://constitutionnet.org/sites/default/files/draft\\_constitution-english.pdf](http://constitutionnet.org/sites/default/files/draft_constitution-english.pdf)> (accessed April 5, 2020).

deteriorated.<sup>89</sup> In October 2019, the new Tunisian president, Kais Saied, said that connections with Israel will be regarded as “high treason.”<sup>90</sup>

However, the situation is not completely bleak for relations between the Jewish state and Tunisia. In November 2018, a Jewish businessman, Rene Trabelsi, was appointed Minister of Tourism for Tunisia. Trabelsi has numerous connections to Israel, from visiting the country to hosting Israelis visiting Tunisia to supporting peace with Israel.<sup>91</sup> There are also other rewarming of ties between Israeli and Tunisian politicians.<sup>92</sup> As the Jewish community continues to be an active component of Tunisian society, their relation to both their home country and their homeland could be critical to furthering ties between the two states in the future.

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<sup>89</sup> Daniella Cheslow, “Tunisia’s last Jewish community dreams of a move to Israel ‘en masse,’” *The Guardian*, June 23, 2016 <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jun/23/tunisia-last-jewish-community-djerba-israel>> (accessed November 7, 2019).

<sup>90</sup> TOI Staff and AFP, “Tunisia’s new president regards any ties with Israel as ‘high treason,’” *The Times of Israel*, October 16, 2019 <<https://www.timesofisrael.com/new-tunisian-president-regards-any-ties-with-israel-as-high-treason/>> (accessed April 3, 2020).

<sup>91</sup> Adina Friedman, “Lessons From Tunisia on the Jewish Bridge to the Arab World,” *The Jerusalem Post*, March 15, 2019 <<https://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Lessons-from-Tunisia-on-the-Jewish-bridge-to-the-Arab-world-583534>> (accessed November 7, 2019).

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*



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## **Part Two: Israel and the Gulf**

### ***The Relationship Between Israel and Saudi Arabia***

The story of Jews in the land that became Saudi Arabia, as well as in the other Gulf countries to be discussed, is much shorter than the story of Jews in Morocco and Tunisia. Some sources point to Jewish history in the land 3,000 years ago, during the time of the First Temple. There were also bouts of Jewish history in the Hejaz in the sixth and seventh centuries, at the time of the Prophet Mohammed when Islam was growing in the region. Benjamin of Tudela, a rabbi from Spain, visited the Middle East during 1165-1173 and noted various Jewish

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<sup>93</sup> *Google Maps* <<https://www.google.com/maps/@24.7496074,46.8164223,5.21z>> (accessed April 5, 2020).



communities that today would be in Saudi Arabia.<sup>94</sup> The Yemenite Jewish community in Najran came under the rule of Saudi Arabia when the Saudis took over the city from Yemen in 1934. By 1949, the Jews of Najran had fled back to Yemen.<sup>95</sup>

The formation of modern-day Saudi Arabia is indirectly tied to the establishment of the State of Israel. The first Saudi state was born in 1744. An alliance between Muhammad ibn Saud and Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahab produced the framework for the future Saudi state to be run by the Saud family under the religious pretext of Wahabism. After the Saud family embarked on a series of conquests throughout the Arabian Peninsula, Muhammad Ali Pasha, the Ottoman viceroy of Egypt, believed that the Saud family posed a threat to regional peace. An Egyptian force defeated the first Saudi state in 1818 and forced the Saudis to re-establish their rule in Najd, the center of the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>96</sup> Their capital became Riyadh.<sup>97</sup>

As the second Saudi state was growing in Najd during the mid-to-late 1800s, the Hashemite family was building its influence in the Hejaz, the westernmost part of the Arabian Peninsula. The Hashemites trace their lineage to the Prophet Muhammad's great-grandfather, Hashim ibn Abd Manaf. Hussein bin Ali, the leader of the Hashemites, had early contacts with the Ottoman Empire. In the wake of the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, Hussein became the Sharif of Mecca and established an independent kingdom in the Hejaz.

At the outset of World War I, Sharif Hussein supported the Ottomans in their battle against the Western powers. However, after he became disenfranchised with the Ottomans, he

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<sup>94</sup> Jessica Steinberg, "In Saudi Arabia, Jewish sites with ancient resonance beckon," *The Times of Israel*, August 4, 2016 <<https://www.timesofisrael.com/in-saudi-arabia-jewish-sites-with-ancient-resonance-beckon/>> (accessed March 30, 2020).

<sup>95</sup> Mohammed Hatem, "In One Saudi Town, Gunfire All Day Brings Yemen War Near Home," *Herald Democrat*, December 23, 2015 <<https://www.heralddemocrat.com/article/20151223/NEWS/312239976>> (accessed March 30, 2020).

<sup>96</sup> James Wynbrandt, *A Brief History of Saudi Arabia*, 2nd ed. (New York: Facts on File, 2010), 117-143.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 143-163.

agreed to support the British war effort in exchange for British recognition of his rule as king of the Arabs. The ambiguity of the Hussein-McMahon correspondence, the documentation that “promised” Sharif Hussein this future rule, eventually landed the British in hot water.<sup>98</sup> The Balfour Declaration of 1917 declared British support for, “a national home of the Jewish people” in the Land of Palestine (historically the Land of Israel).<sup>99</sup> This agreement posed a contradiction to the Hussein-McMahon correspondence (as did the earlier Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, which divided the Middle East into British and French mandates).

By March 1924, the British had withdrawn their support of Sharif Hussein in favor of Abdulaziz ibn Abdul Rahman ibn Faisal ibn Turki ibn Abdullah ibn Muhammad al Saud (Ibn Saud), his direct enemy and King of Najd. Ibn Saud then conquered the Kingdom of Hejaz, uniting Hejaz and Najd (and conquering the holy cities of Mecca and Medina), which led to the formation of Saudi Arabia (literally, the Arabia of the Saudis) in 1932. As a way to make amends for the lack of initial British support for Sharif Hussein, the British named one of his sons, Abdullah, King of Transjordan in 1921, an area that encompassed 78% of Mandatory Palestine. One of Sharif Hussein’s other sons, Faisal, was named the King of Syria for approximately five months in 1920 before being overrun by the French. The British then offered him the Kingship of Iraq, which he accepted in 1921.<sup>100</sup>

After the establishment of Saudi Arabia, Wahabi clerics were given control of the education and legal systems. The Kingdom’s primary source of income at its founding was charging Muslims a fee for embarking on the *Hajj*, the religious trip to Mecca. However, Saudi Arabia’s economic fortune began to change in the 1930s. Oil had been found in nearby areas and

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 164-186.

<sup>99</sup> “Balfour Declaration 1917,” <[https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/balfour.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/balfour.asp)> (accessed March 17, 2020).

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 164-186.

Ibn Saud contracted the search for oil in his land to the Oil Company of Southern California. The Quincy Agreement, which solidified the relationship between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, secured American reliance on Saudi oil for the foreseeable future. As such, the Kingdom saw a massive flow of cash. With the new influx of cash, Ibn Saud began to modernize elements of his kingdom.<sup>101</sup>

After Ibn Saud died in 1953, his son, Saud, succeeded him and proceeded to almost lead the Kingdom into bankruptcy. Due to fears of Saud's relationship with Egypt's Nasser and his irreverent behavior, the Saudi family council removed Saud and appointed his brother, Faisal, king in 1964. Faisal became one of the most respected monarchs in the Middle East and continued his father's quest for modernization by building hospitals, schools, and water infrastructure. Furthermore, the Saudis took controlling interest of ARAMCO and began to run their oil fields. The introduction of television, however, was Faisal's undoing as the hardline Wahabi clerics saw this as the work of the devil. Faisal was ultimately killed by a deranged nephew, who was against the introduction of television, in 1975.<sup>102</sup>

Upon the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, Saudi Arabia sent fighters to join their Arab brethren in the war against the new state. Saudi involvement in the 1967 Six Day War was limited to a few units designed to augment Jordanian forces. The 1973 Yom Kippur/Ramadan War was a turning for Saudi Arabia's actions in the Middle East with respect to Israel. While the Saudis supported both Egyptian and Syrian forces,<sup>103</sup> the U.S. sided with Israel.

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<sup>101</sup> "Biography: The Saudi Royal Family," broadcast on A&E Television Networks, CBS News Productions, Inc. and Ron Marans Communications, Inc., 2009 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zeo-OVYUXMs>> (accessed November 10, 2019).

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> "Saudi Arabian Military Activity Against Israel," *Carnegie Mellon University: University Libraries Digital Collections*, May 1978 <<http://digitalcollections.library.cmu.edu/awweb/awarchive?type=file&item=475577>> (accessed April 4, 2020).

As a matter of policy, King Faisal had insisted that he was not anti-Semitic but merely anti-Israel. When the U.S. announced airlifts to Israel, Faisal viewed this as a breach of trust between the Americans and the Saudis. In the aftermath of the war, Faisal decided to use oil as a weapon against the West. He launched the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) oil embargo.<sup>104</sup> While the relationship was damaged in the short-term between Saudi Arabia and the West, the embargo had no real long-term impact.

The 1979 Grand Mosque Seizure in Mecca, the Soviet takeover of Afghanistan, and the Iranian Revolution all had a deep impact on Saudi Arabia, especially concerning the outlook on the royal family's wealth. King Fahd's ascension to power in 1982 did nothing to stem the uncertainty that was brewing within the Kingdom. Saudi Arabia faced an employment crisis in the late 1980s. Many of those unemployed took their grievances out on the royal family, especially when foreign troops landed on Saudi soil to fight Saddam Hussein's Iraq in 1991 during the Gulf War. To placate the religious conservatives within his country, Fahd allowed them to run many elements of society, thereby limiting women's rights and the ability of foreigners to enter the country.<sup>105</sup> Radical Islam began to make an appearance on Saudi soil, first with the killing of Americans at the Saudi Arabian National Guard headquarters in Riyadh in 1995<sup>106</sup> and the Khobar Towers bombings a year later, culminating in the attacks of September 11, 2001. The U.S. and the rest of the world began to scrupulously watch their interactions with Saudi Arabia.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> "Biography: The Saudi Royal Family."

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Jerome W. Mapp, "OPM-SANG recalls tragic day as bombing anniversary recognized," *U.S. Army*, November 21, 2019

<[https://www.army.mil/article/230215/opm\\_sang\\_recalls\\_tragic\\_day\\_as\\_bombing\\_anniversary\\_recognized](https://www.army.mil/article/230215/opm_sang_recalls_tragic_day_as_bombing_anniversary_recognized)> (accessed March 30, 2020).

<sup>107</sup> "Biography: The Saudi Royal Family."

Relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia were virtually nonexistent until 1981. In the aftermath of the Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty in 1979, some Arab countries began to think that the time for war with Israel was over. In the early 1980s, Crown Prince Fahd released an eight-point plan (known as the Fez Plan)<sup>108</sup> he had developed, designed to establish a Palestinian state alongside a Jewish one.<sup>109</sup> While many Israelis and supporters of Israel saw this plan as nothing more than propaganda, mainly because the plan did not mention Israel by name, to some extent, this was a unique development.<sup>110</sup> It symbolized that there was at least willingness to address that the future Palestinian state would have to exist alongside the other state already established.

Ironically, it was also at this time that the Israeli government and the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), launched a campaign to stop the sale of Airborne Warning and Control Systems (AWACS) to Saudi Arabia by the United States. It was widely viewed that this sale would dramatically alter the military balance of power in the Middle East and allow an enemy of Israel to gain a military advantage over it, thereby causing an existential threat. The sale went through despite vigorous opposition.<sup>111</sup> In an element of a silver lining, which did little to mitigate fears of a regional arms race at the time, the United States reaffirmed its commitment to Israel's security and established the policy of ensuring that Israel has a qualitative military edge relative to other Middle Eastern countries.

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<sup>108</sup> Tessler, 609.

<sup>109</sup> Henry Tanner, "Fez Plan Called Victory for the Arab Moderates," *The New York Times*, September 11, 1982 <<https://www.nytimes.com/1982/09/11/world/fez-plan-called-victory-for-the-arab-moderates.html>> (accessed November 7, 2019).

<sup>110</sup> Tessler, 537.

<sup>111</sup> Arnon Gutfeld, "The 1981 AWACS Deal: AIPAC and Israel Challenge Reagan," *The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies*, November 8, 2018 <<https://besacenter.org/mideast-security-and-policy-studies/reagan-saudi-awacs-aipac/>> (accessed November 7, 2019).

During the Lebanon War of 1982, Saudi Arabia did not seek a quid pro quo for the PLO's exit from Lebanon.<sup>112</sup> While the Saudis did support the Arab League plan for resolving the situation in Lebanon, which called for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 509<sup>113</sup>, their lack of demands on the PLO front gave some credence to the notion that maybe, Israel had a right to act in self-defense. Saudi involvement in the 1980s Fez Plan and the Kingdom's decision to broadcast King Hassan's speech about his 1986 meeting with Shimon Peres live in the country<sup>114</sup> showed further movement towards normalization of relations.

The Oslo years of the 1990s brought great change to the Israeli-Saudi relationship. Saudi Arabia ended its boycotts of Israel, allowing business relations between Israelis and Saudis to grow.<sup>115</sup> Late in 1994, Sheikh Abd el-Aziz ibn Baaz, the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, issued a fatwa invoking the Quran to support Saudi Arabia normalizing relations with Israel.<sup>116</sup> The onset of the Second Intifada halted these developments and the growing relationship seemed to come to a hiatus.

As the Second Intifada was raging in the Palestinian Territories, Iran was furthering its nuclear program. In 2002, a dissident Iranian group living in exile revealed that Iran had built two nuclear reactors.<sup>117</sup> This revelation was discomfoting to the international community and ultimately led to a path of negotiation between the West and Iran, culminating in the Iran nuclear deal, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), that was signed in July 2015. For Israel

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<sup>112</sup> Tessler, 588.

<sup>113</sup> The resolution stated that the Security Council "Demands that Israel withdraw all its military forces forthwith and unconditionally to the internationally recognized boundaries of Lebanon. UN Security Council Resolution 509, June 6, 1982 <[https://undocs.org/S/RES/509\(1982\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/509(1982))> (accessed April 5, 2020).

<sup>114</sup> Tessler, 667.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 767-768.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 769.

<sup>117</sup> "A History of Iran's Nuclear Program," *Iran Watch*, August 9, 2016 <<https://www.iranwatch.org/our-publications/weapon-program-background-report/history-irans-nuclear-program#2>> (accessed November 9, 2019).

and Saudi Arabia, this path of negotiation, and the threat of a nuclear Iran, represented a grave danger.

Since its revolution in 1979, the Islamic Republic has been at the center of malevolent action in the Middle East. Its sponsorship of Hezbollah in Lebanon introduced the world to suicide bombings. The group committed various attacks against Western militaries during the Lebanese Civil War. Iran's financial and weapons support for Hamas has contributed to continued attacks on Israelis. While officially denying any connection, the Houthi Rebel Movement in Yemen, which has been continuously linked to Iran, has attacked Saudi Arabia numerous times.<sup>118</sup> The September 2019 attack on Saudi oil fields showed how volatile this situation can be.

As serious negotiations began between the Western powers and Iran under President Barack Obama in March 2013, Saudi Arabia felt that the U.S., its greatest ally in the West, had effectively abandoned it. Soon after, it was reported that the security services of Israel and Saudi Arabia were working together to plan a potential attack on the nuclear sites of the Islamic Republic.<sup>119</sup> This move demonstrated the Saudi fear of Iran but it is unclear how close these plans were to being implemented. What is known is that the Obama administration adopted a policy of closely monitoring Israeli defense activity to be apprised of any strike without the authorization of the U.S.<sup>120</sup> Therefore, Israel and Saudi Arabia most likely realized they might

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<sup>118</sup> Adam Taylor, "Why Iran is getting the blame for an attack on Saudi Arabia claimed by Yemen's Houthis," *The Washington Post*, September 16, 2019 <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2019/09/16/why-iran-is-getting-blame-an-attack-saudi-arabia-claimed-by-yemens-houthis/?noredirect=on>> (accessed November 8, 2019).

<sup>119</sup> "Sunday Times: Israel, Saudi Arabia Cooperating to Plan Possible Iran Attack," *Haaretz*, November 17, 2013 <<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-saudis-now-allies-on-iran-1.5291205>> (accessed November 8, 2019).

<sup>120</sup> Ronen Bergman and Mark Mazzetti, "The Secret History of the Push to Strike Iran," *The New York Times Magazine*, September 4, 2019 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/04/magazine/iran-strike-israel-america.html>> (accessed November 8, 2019).

lose the element of surprise. This left them with two options. First, they could hold off on a military strike and give diplomacy a chance. Second, they could wait until Obama's term was up, hoping that diplomacy would, at the very least, stall the Iranian nuclear plan. Then they could act accordingly.

Two months before the signing of the JCPOA, news sources began reporting that Saudi Arabia had recently turned down an Israeli offer through American diplomats to supply the Kingdom with Iron Dome missile defense systems.<sup>121</sup> Saudi Arabia had begun a military intervention into Yemen a couple of months earlier after Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, the President of Yemen, was overthrown by the Houthi Rebels. Saudi Arabia had had trouble with the Houthi Rebels before, leading to battles between the group and Saudi soldiers on the Saudi-Yemen border in the Rub al-Khali desert. As such, Saudi Arabia was in no mood to allow an Iranian backed Houthi led government to be established on their southern border. While Saudi Arabia turned down the Iron Dome technology, this move symbolized yet another step in greater security cooperation between Israel and Saudi Arabia.

In 2016, an anonymous Saudi defense analyst who goes by the Twitter handle "Mujtahid," released information regarding Saudi purchases of Israeli drones through South Africa. Israel would dismantle the drones and send them to South Africa. South Africa would then send the parts to Saudi Arabia, where the drones would be reassembled.<sup>122</sup> A month after the release of this information, a retired Saudi general, Dr. Anwar Eshki, traveled to Israel, as the head of a delegation of academics and businessmen. The stated purpose of the visit was to

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<sup>121</sup> TOI Staff and AP, "Saudi Arabia 'rejects Israeli offer to supply Iron Dome,'" *The Times of Israel*, May 23, 2015 <<https://www.timesofisrael.com/saudi-arabia-rejected-israeli-offer-of-iron-dome/>> (accessed November 8, 2019).

<sup>122</sup> JTA, "Saudi Arabia 'buying Israeli drones' via South Africa," *Jewish News*, March 31, 2016 <<https://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/saudi-arabia-buying-israeli-drones-via-south-africa/>> (accessed November 8, 2019).



advance the Arab Peace Initiative.<sup>123</sup> However, many analysts viewed this visit as a symbol that Saudi Arabia stands with Israel in its conflict with Iran. This visit was a tacit acceptance of Israel's right to exist and in a more practical sense, a visit by a former Saudi military official to possibly meet with Israeli military officials regarding mutual threats. In 2017, Israeli Energy Minister Yuval Steinitz publicly acknowledged that Israel has had contacts with Saudi Arabia over Iran,<sup>124</sup> a claim that was corroborated by Lieutenant General Gadi Eizenkot, the Chief of Staff of the Israel Defense Forces.<sup>125</sup> In February 2020, a delegation of Jewish leaders from the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations traveled to Saudi Arabia to discuss threats facing the region.<sup>126</sup>

The budding relationship between the two countries is not limited to the current threat of Iran. Business relations between the two countries have existed under the radar for some years. Israeli security experts have been recruited by Saudi Arabia to assist the Kingdom's security services in tracking down terrorists and potential threats to their rule.<sup>127</sup> Furthermore, The

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<sup>123</sup> TOI Staff, "Former Saudi general visits Jerusalem, meets Israeli officials," *The Times of Israel*, July 23, 2016 <<https://www.timesofisrael.com/former-saudi-general-visits-jerusalem-meets-israeli-officials/>> (accessed November 8, 2019).

<sup>124</sup> Independent Bureau, "Meet the new friend of Israel: Saudi Arabia," *The Independent*, November 20, 2017 <<http://theindependent.in/meet-the-new-friend-of-israel-saudi-arabia/>> (accessed November 8, 2019).

<sup>125</sup> Moshe Yaalon and Leehe Friedman, "Israel and the Arab States: A Historic Opportunity to Normalize Relations?" *Foreign Affairs*, January 26, 2018 <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/israel/2018-01-26/israel-and-arab-states>> (accessed November 8, 2019).

<sup>126</sup> Ron Kampeas, "Delegation from umbrella US Jewish group visited Saudi Arabia," *The Jerusalem Post*, February 14, 2020 <<https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/delegation-from-umbrella-us-jewish-group-visited-saudi-arabia-617577>> (accessed April 3, 2020).

<sup>127</sup> See Jonathan Ferziger and Peter Waldman, "How Do Israel's Tech Firms Do Business in Saudi Arabia? Very Quietly," *Bloomberg Businessweek*, February 2, 2017 <<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2017-02-02/how-do-israel-s-tech-firms-do-business-in-saudi-arabia-very-quietly>> (accessed November 8, 2019); and TheTower.org Staff, "Secret Israeli Business Deals With Gulf States May Herald Public Ties," *The Tower*, February 3, 2017 <<http://www.thetower.org/4523-secret-israeli-business-deals-with-gulf-states-may-herald-public-ties/>> (accessed November 8, 2019).

Muslim World League’s 2018 statement regarding the Holocaust<sup>128</sup> and subsequent invitation of a Jewish delegation to Saudi Arabia<sup>129</sup> affirmed the desire of the Kingdom to normalize relations with Israel. In September 2019, Israel congratulated Saudi Arabia on its 89<sup>th</sup> national day.<sup>130</sup> A week later, the Saudi Ambassador to the U.S., Reema Bandar al Saud, sent Rosh Hashanah greetings to the Jewish American community.<sup>131</sup> In January 2020, Mohammad al-Issa, the head of the Muslim World League, joined the American Jewish Committee in leading a delegation of 62 Muslims (including religious leaders) from 25 countries and leaders from other religions for a tour of the Auschwitz Concentration Camp in Poland.<sup>132</sup>

Normalization would require commonality extending past a mutual uneasiness of Iran. As can be evidenced by the aforementioned actions, both countries seem to be on that track.

### ***The Relationship Between Israel and the United Arab Emirates***

Before the UAE was born, the land was known to many as “*al-Shamal*,” or the north, in reference to its geographic location relative to Oman. In fact, the area in which the future UAE would be established was not looked at as particularly relevant until relatively recent history due to Oman’s prominence in shipping. Many merchants and traders simply passed through on their

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<sup>128</sup> The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Press Release, January 25, 2018, “Breaking News: Statement on Holocaust Remembrance from Head of Saudi-Based Muslim World League,” <<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/press-room/view/statement-on-holocaust-remembrance-from-head-of-saudi-based-muslim-world-le>> (accessed November 8, 2019).

<sup>129</sup> “In historic first, Muslim World League invited Jewish delegation to Saudi Arabia,” *i24 News*, May 3, 2019 <<https://www.i24news.tv/en/news/international/middle-east/1556899452-in-historic-first-muslim-world-league-invites-jewish-delegation-to-saudi-arabia>> (accessed November 8, 2019).

<sup>130</sup> Raphael Ahren, “Israel congratulates Saudi Arabia on its 89th national day,” *The Times of Israel*, September 23, 2019 <<https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-congratulates-saudi-arabia-on-its-89th-national-day/>> (accessed November 8, 2019).

<sup>131</sup> TOI Staff, “In first, Saudi envoy in Washington sends Rosh Hashanah greeting to US Jews,” *The Times of Israel*, October 2, 2019 <<https://www.timesofisrael.com/in-first-saudi-envoy-in-washington-sends-rosh-hashanah-greeting-to-us-jews/>> (accessed November 8, 2019).

<sup>132</sup> Yaakov Schwartz, “This must never happen again, says Saudi cleric as Muslim group tours Auschwitz,” *The Times of Israel*, January 24, 2020 <<https://www.timesofisrael.com/this-must-never-happen-again-says-saudi-cleric-as-muslim-group-tours-auschwitz/>> (accessed March 26, 2020).

way to Muscat or one of the other ports lining the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman.<sup>133</sup> While there is some evidence that there may have been a small Jewish community in the region that became Ras al-Khaimah, there was not a larger, prolonged community due to the lack of prominence for the area.

The movement towards the formation of today's UAE began in the 1800s. The British had strategic interests in securing an alliance with the various ruling families in the area and the ruling families reciprocated, with the two sides signing agreements noting their truce. The territories became known as the Trucial States. The agreements stated that Britain would protect the territories if the new states consulted with the British before engaging with any foreign country and did not allow for foreign governments to enter into similar agreements.<sup>134</sup> These agreements held in place until the UAE was formed in 1971.

Before the Emirati economy centered on oil, pearling and fishing were the primary drivers of the Trucial State economies.<sup>135</sup> However, the Great Depression and the rise of Japanese pearling diminished the pearling industry in the Trucial States. The economies of these states were severely hampered and while many of their neighbors discovered oil in the 1930s, it was not until the 1950s when the states found commercial quantities of oil that they could export.<sup>136</sup>

The 1960s saw both anti-colonial sentiment and Arab nationalism in the Trucial States. As such, the British began to lessen their influence in the region, culminating with their ultimate withdrawal in 1971. Meetings among the seven Trucial States, Bahrain, and Qatar (and, even

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<sup>133</sup> Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, *The United Arab Emirates: Power, Politics, and Policymaking* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 19.

<sup>134</sup> "History," *Embassy of the United Arab Emirates, Washington, D.C.* <<https://www.uae-embassy.org/about-uae/history>> (accessed November 8, 2019).

<sup>135</sup> Ulrichsen, 26.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 31-35.

though independent, Kuwait at some points) ensued. The basis for the meetings was to determine whether these small territories should join together to create a larger state and if so, what the governing structure should be. Disagreement among the different leaders resulted in Bahrain and Qatar declaring their independence alone. At this point, the six Trucial States of Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Ajman, Fujairah, Sharjah, and Umm Al Quwain joined together to form the United Arab Emirates, declaring their independence on December 2, 1971. Ras Al Khaimah joined the union three months later.<sup>137</sup> Over the next 40 years, the UAE grew into a modern country. Today, the UAE is an economic powerhouse and possesses the world's seventh-largest oil resources.<sup>138</sup>

While some sources say the relationship between Israel and the UAE has gone back at least 20 years to 1999 mainly due to security matters,<sup>139</sup> relations between the two countries are mostly unclear between 1971-2009. Despite the British influence, there was most likely no contact with Israel in the emirates before 1971 as there was no official Jewish community in the region. Today, Israel and the UAE do not have official relations. However, since 2009, Israel has become much closer to the United Arab Emirates due to the threat posed by Iran. And, while Israeli citizens have not been allowed to enter the country using Israeli passports, Israeli military officials, intelligence operatives, and security contractors have been frequent guests of the Emirates.<sup>140</sup>

In 2010, it is widely believed that the Mossad assassinated Mahmoud al-Mabhouh, the leader of Hamas's Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Martyrs Brigade, in Dubai. Al-Mabhouh had long been on Israel's radar and the Mossad took painstaking caution to ensure that he was killed without a

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 50-54.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>139</sup> "UAE, Israel had secret relations for 20 years," *Middle East Monitor*, June 10, 2019 <<https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20190610-uae-israel-had-secret-relations-for-20-years/>> (accessed November 8, 2019).

<sup>140</sup> Darshan-Leitner and Katz, 166.

trace. Mossad agents were able to subdue al-Mabhouh in his room at the Al Bustan Rotana Hotel and administer some type of lethal poison to make it look as if he had died from internal bodily causes. The operation was deemed a success and none of the more than two dozen Israeli operatives who took part, using disguises and foreign passports, were caught in Dubai. However, when al-Mabhouh, traveling on Hamas business, did not report back, suspicion began to arise. When Hamas learned that he had “died,” suspicion immediately pointed to an Israeli plot. Hamas contacted the Dubai police, who were able to deduce through painstaking measures that al-Mabhouh was killed, most probably by Mossad agents. The main reasons for this assumption were that certain passports had been used to enter Dubai multiple times in the last year and, after reviewing the CCTV footage, the Dubai police recognized that the disguises used by the spies were in fact disguises. Subsequent diplomatic spats with the countries whose passports were used ensued.<sup>141</sup>

Despite the incident and the embarrassment it caused for both countries, a series of in-person meetings points to the positive direction relations between the two countries are heading. In 2012, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu discretely met with the UAE Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed bin Sultan al Nahyan and the UAE Ambassador to the United States Yousef Al Otaiba during the United Nations General Assembly.<sup>142</sup> There has also been a series of behind the scenes contact between Israel and the UAE with regard to Iran.

In June 2017, Ambassador Al Otaiba’s email was hacked. Many believe the hack to have been orchestrated by Qatar, an incident that contributed to the beginning of the boycott of Qatar the same month by the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt, and other countries. The hacked

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<sup>141</sup> Bergman, *Rise and Kill First: The Secret History of Israel’s Targeted Assassinations*, 610-620.

<sup>142</sup> Barak Ravid, “Exclusive: Netanyahu Secretly Met With UAE Foreign Minister in 2012 in New York,” *Haaretz*, July 25, 2017 <<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/netanyahu-secretly-met-with-uae-foreign-minister-in-2012-in-new-york-1.5432342>> (accessed November 8, 2019).

emails revealed cooperation between the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Israel, and the American based pro-Israel think tank, the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, on combatting Iran.<sup>143</sup> A month later, the UAE mediated a meeting between Israeli agents and Khalid Haftar, the head of the Libyan National Army, to negotiate aid to the group during the Second Libyan Civil War.<sup>144</sup> In March 2018, Netanyahu spontaneously met with Al Otaiba and Bharani Ambassador to the U.S. Sheikh Abdullah bin Rashen bin Abdullah al Khalifa at a Washington, D.C. restaurant.<sup>145</sup>

Since 2015, Israel has had a diplomatic mission to the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) in Abu Dhabi. This move visibly shows the open development of bilateral relations between Israel and the UAE. In fact the Chief of the Dubai Police Department, Lieutenant General Dahi Khalfan Tamim, said, “We know that many Israelis come here with non-Israeli passports, and we treat them the way we treat everyone else. We protect their lives just as we protect the lives of others, and we don’t concern ourselves with their religion.”<sup>146</sup> This ethos was proven again by the June/July 2019 UN environment meeting in Abu Dhabi which Foreign Minister Israel Katz attended.<sup>147</sup> It was doubled down during an October 2019 report that the UAE is recruiting former Israel Defense Forces veterans to bolster the Emirates’ cyber services.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Zaid Jilani and Ryan Grim, “Hacked Emails Show Top UAE Diplomat Coordinating with Pro-Israel Think Tank Against Iran,” *The Intercept*, June 3, 2017 <<https://theintercept.com/2017/06/03/hacked-emails-show-top-uae-diplomat-coordinating-with-pro-israel-neocon-think-tank-against-iran/>> (accessed November 8, 2019).

<sup>144</sup> “Libya: Is Haftar Receiving Israeli Weaponry?” *The North African Post*, July 25, 2017 <<http://northafricapost.com/18986-libya-haftar-receiving-israeli-weaponry.html>> (accessed November 8, 2019)

<sup>145</sup> Josh Lederman, “Dinner diplomacy revealed: Netanyahu’s genial encounter with UAE, Bahrain envoys,” *The Times of Israel*, May 12, 2018 <<https://www.timesofisrael.com/dinner-diplomacy-netanyahus-unusual-encounter-with-uae-envoy/>> (accessed November 8, 2019).

<sup>146</sup> Ulrichsen, 117-118.

<sup>147</sup> Keinon.

<sup>148</sup> TOI Staff, “UAE-based intelligence firm said recruiting IDF veterans from elite cyber unit,” *The Times of Israel*, October 18, 2019 <<https://www.timesofisrael.com/uae-based-intelligence-firm-said-recruiting-idf-veterans-from-elite-cyber-unit/>> (accessed November 8, 2019).

Aside from the security contacts and official visits, sports and cultural exchange have also brought Israel and the UAE together. At first, the UAE followed the Arab League stance and refused Israeli participation in certain events, including a famous incident when American tennis star Andy Roddick publicly withdrew from the 2009 Dubai Tennis Championship to protest the UAE's decision not to grant Israeli tennis player Shaher Pe'er a visa to participate.<sup>149</sup> In recent years, the UAE has allowed Israel to be recognized during international competition and for Hatikvah to be played on Emirati soil.<sup>150</sup> The UAE will host Expo 2020 and will not only allow for Israel to have a booth, but it will also allow for Israelis to attend the event. Furthermore, it was reported in November that the UAE will most likely grant access to the country for Israeli tourists on Israeli passports in the aftermath of the exhibition.<sup>151</sup>

### ***The Relationship Between Israel and Oman***

The history of Jews in Oman is somewhat scattered and not well documented, pointing to small, non-contiguous communities if any. Today, there is no open Jewish community in Oman. Despite the lack of Jewish presence in the country, one of the presumed sites of the tomb of the biblical character Job is located near Salalah in the town of Jabal.

Oman's geographic position has historically enabled it to be a leader in sea trade. Sitting at the edge of the Arabian Peninsula, it juts out into the Strait of Hormuz, the only access point for Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Qatar to the Gulf of Oman, and the only access point for the rest

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<sup>149</sup> After being threatened that future events in the emirates could be revoked, the UAE granted Israeli Andy Ram a visa to participate in the men's tournament. Associated Press, "WTA fines Dubai; Roddick withdraws," *ESPN*, February 20, 2009 <<https://www.espn.com/sports/tennis/news/story?id=3922734>> (accessed March 31, 2020).

<sup>150</sup> TOI Staff and Agencies, "In first, 'Hatikva' anthem played at UAE contest as Israeli judoka wins gold," *The Times of Israel*, October 28, 2018 <<https://www.timesofisrael.com/in-first-hatikva-anthem-played-at-uae-contest-after-israeli-judoka-wins-gold/>> (accessed March 26, 2020).

<sup>151</sup> TOI Staff, "UAE said readying to open doors to Israeli tourists, starting with 2020 Expo."

of the world to the Persian Gulf. It's northernmost point, the exclave of Khasab, is only 21 miles from the Iranian mainland.

Oman entered global prominence in the 1500s when the Portuguese established a base in Muscat to protect their shipping to the Far East. Civil war and various outside attempts to take over the region followed until the 1740s, when Ahmad ibn Said Al Bu Said, a local governor, was able to drive the Persians out of Oman and solidify the rule of the country. In 1749, he was elected imam and became the originator of the Al Said dynasty.<sup>152</sup>

In its prime, the Omani Empire stretched from the island of Zanzibar off the coast of modern-day Tanzania to Gwadar on the coast of modern-day Pakistan. However, following the rise of the Al Said dynasty, Oman was not immune to dispute. Under the leadership of Sayyid Hamad bin Said (1784-1792), Oman was divided into two parts: Muscat (the traders on the coast) and Oman (the tribes further away from the coast). This split had long-term ramifications that were not mended until Sultan Qaboos came to power in 1970.

Throughout the 1800s to the 1900s, Oman maintained strong relationships with the British Empire and the United States. While there was a defense arrangement between the British and Oman, Oman was never a protectorate of the British and did not succumb to British influence in the same way as some of its neighbors. Following World War I, Oman began a period of decline, culminating in Sultan Said III bin Taimur's policy of isolationism. In 1970, Qaboos bin Said overthrew his father in a bloodless coup and began to modernize the country he had just taken over.

The Sultanate's ties with Israel can be traced back to the days after Sultan Qaboos took power from his father in 1970. At the time, Sultan Qaboos was facing an uprising from the

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<sup>152</sup> Carol J. Rhipenburg, *Oman: Political Development in a Changing World* (Westport and London: Praeger, 1998), 30-33.



Dhofar region of the country. The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, also known as South Yemen, led a Marxist insurgency backed by the Soviet Union into Oman. Due to Sultan Said's policy of isolationism, the country was not prepared to fight the insurgents. Sultan Qaboos sought help in stopping this threatening force. Britain, Iran, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Jordan, Egypt, and Pakistan all assisted through soldiers and their involvement was somewhat known.<sup>153</sup> What was not widely known was that Israel also assisted through covert means. Israel helped the Omani military planners through advice and counsel, as well as through arms shipments.<sup>154</sup>

Three developments at the end of the 1960s paved the way for Israel to seek involvement with Oman. First, in 1968, the British announced they would be leaving the Gulf region within the next three years due to the cost of remaining a strong presence in the region. Second, the 1969 Nixon Doctrine stated that the U.S. would support its allies but would not fight wars for them. Third, as a derivative of the Nixon Doctrine and as a result of its astonishing success in the Six Day War, the U.S. was relying on Israel (along with Iran and Saudi Arabia) to maintain the balance of power in the region.

Israel's willingness to help a newly minted Sultan Qaboos as Oman was battling Marxist rebels in the Dhofar region can be looked at as both a pragmatic decision and a decision designed to curry favor with the new leader. From the pragmatic element, it is quite plausible that Israel wanted to show the U.S. it would help moderate leaders, as well as protect its regional interests. Israel likely did not want the Soviet-backed rebels in Dhofar to make their way to Muscat. Had they done so, there would be yet another Arab capital backed by the Soviets that could prove to be hostile to Israel as Egypt and Syria were. Israeli decision-makers possibly reasoned that if

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>154</sup> Podeh.

they could help sway Oman to the U.S. sphere of influence, then Oman and Israel could form an alliance that would begin to shift the perception of Israel among the Arab world.

If one chooses to ignore the pragmatic view, one can also say that Israel might simply have wanted to do something for the Sultan so the Sultan would “owe” Israel in the future. Oman did not espouse the vitriol of Israel that its neighbors did. This paid dividends for Israel at the end of the 1970s when Israel was negotiating, and eventually signed, its peace treaty with Egypt. While many Arab states were openly uncomfortable with the prospect of normalized relations between the two countries, Oman was one of two countries that did not cut off its diplomatic relations with Egypt,<sup>155</sup> even though the Arab League suspended Egypt and relocated its headquarters from Cairo to Tunis. This episode proved Oman’s ability to act as a mediator between the Arab states and Israel, something which has become useful in recent years.

Throughout the 1980s, the Sultan had regular meetings and contact with the Mossad, namely through an agent named Nachik Navot. Among the issues discussed were the Soviet Union’s influence throughout the region, the Iranian Revolution and its aftermath, and the status of the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians.<sup>156</sup>

The 1990s saw a new phase in the Israel-Oman relationship. After Saddam Hussein’s Iraq invaded Kuwait, a fellow Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) country, Oman attempted to stay neutral. Iraq then began firing scud missiles into Israel, believing that Israel would fight back and that the resulting conflict would lead to Arab states taking Iraq’s side, forgetting that his country had invaded Kuwait. The plan backfired spectacularly on Saddam as the U.S. built a coalition of many Arab states who then drove Iraq out of Kuwait, while Israel did not retaliate due to a U.S.

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<sup>155</sup> As stated earlier, Morocco was the other country that did not cut off relations with Egypt after it signed its peace treaty with Israel. Riphenburg, 216.

<sup>156</sup> Podeh.

request. At this point, with the Soviet Union in steep decline, Oman knew the importance of the United States as the only superpower in the world. Despite the U.S.-Israel relationship, Oman was not going to stand on principle and let the foreign policy of the U.S. dictate Omani foreign policy.<sup>157</sup>

The Madrid Conference of 1991, the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, and the signing of the Israel-Jordan Peace Treaty in 1994 signaled to many that Israel and the Palestinians, as well as its Arab neighbors, were beginning to normalize relationships. As such, Oman wanted to partake in the overt normalization. Israel supported Oman's 1994 bid to be on the UN Security Council,<sup>158</sup> which ultimately proved successful.<sup>159</sup> In February 1994, there was a secret meeting at an undisclosed location between Yossi Beilin, Israel's Deputy Foreign Minister, and Omani officials. A couple of months later in April, Israel was invited to a conference in Oman regarding water in the region and how it would be shared between Israel and the Palestinians. At this conference, there were meetings between Beilin and Omani Foreign Minister Yusuf ibn Alawi.<sup>160</sup> These meetings paved the road for the overt normalization of ties at the end of 1994.

Israel and Oman's relationship reached new heights in the wake of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's visit to Sultan Qaboos in Muscat in December 1994. This meeting was groundbreaking as it was officially the first meeting between an Israeli prime minister and an Arab Gulf ruler.<sup>161</sup> Furthermore, many important issues for the two countries were discussed, such as water. Despite the initial backlash from some states, meetings between Israel and Oman

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<sup>157</sup> Rippenburg, 225.

<sup>158</sup> Tessler, 767.

<sup>159</sup> Rippenbug, 209.

<sup>160</sup> Podeh.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

continued both behind the scenes and in Washington, D.C. In the aftermath of Rabin's assassination in November 1995, Alawi represented Oman at the funeral in Israel.<sup>162</sup>

In January 1996, the two countries established a formal trade relationship. As such, trade offices were opened in Muscat and Tel Aviv. Shimon Peres, who was now the Prime Minister, visited the Sultan in Salalah later that year. After years of meetings between the two countries regarding the water shortage in the Middle East, Israel and Oman built the Middle East Desalination Research Center in 1997. This project was funded by the United States, European Union, and Japan in addition to Israel and Oman. Meetings between the countries continued throughout 2000.<sup>163</sup> However, the beginning of the Second Intifada prompted Oman to shutter its trade office in Tel Aviv and close the Israeli office in Oman.<sup>164</sup>

Relations between the two countries, as was the case with Israel and many of the Gulf countries with whom Israel established relationships during the 1990s, were "publicly" damaged. Regarding Israel and Oman, meetings continued under the guise of technological cooperation. This is yet another example of Oman's role as an equal arbiter in the Middle East. However, there was not a public meeting between an Israeli diplomat and an Omani diplomat until Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni met with Foreign Minister Alawi at the Doha Forum in 2008.<sup>165</sup>

Both Israel and Oman have been wary of Iran's attempts to harness nuclear energy. While Oman and Iran used to have a strong relationship, the relationship between the two countries declined in the aftermath of the 1979 Revolution.<sup>166</sup> Even though Oman may not be as

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> AFP and TOI Staff, "Mossad chief declares Israel renewing Oman ties; Foreign Ministry won't comment," *The Times of Israel*, July 2, 2019 <<https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-renewing-oman-ties-says-mossad-chief/>> (accessed November 8, 2019).

<sup>165</sup> Podeh.

<sup>166</sup> Riphenburg, 196-198.

concerned with Iran as other Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, or Bahrain, Iran's quest for power and influence in the region still affects Oman and has led the country to be vigilant against such conquest.

Israel did not know that Oman was hosting negotiations between the United States and Iran about the Iranian nuclear program in 2012-2013. According to a well-informed Israeli source, Israel discovered that these negotiations were taking place when an Omani decision-maker reached out to an Israeli counterpart to ask what Israel thought of the negotiations. Apparently Oman was surprised to hear that Israel was not informed by the U.S. about the negotiations. The Omani official who contacted Israel most likely thought that Israel would know about these negotiations as they concerned Israel's security and the U.S., Israel's closest ally, would disclose the information in the name of security. Israel quickly corroborated that these negotiations were taking place.

In February 2018, Alawi made an official trip to the West Bank. While on this trip, he visited the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. Officially, this visit was defined as a religious pilgrimage to Islam's third holiest site. However, for Alawi to access the Temple Mount, he and his entourage would have had to pass through Israeli checkpoints from the Palestinian Authority (PA) controlled West Bank to Israel. What is almost as significant as Alawi's visit to the Temple Mount is what he did not do while in the West Bank: condemn Israeli actions (as many Arab leaders do), insist on a Palestinian state with 1967 borders, demand a right of return for Palestinian refugees, or condemn the U.S. decision to move its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Amatzia Baram, "Opinion: Why the Sultan of Oman Invited Netanyahu," *Haaretz*, November 14, 2018 <<https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-why-the-sultan-of-oman-invited-netanyahu-1.6653502>> (accessed November 8, 2019).

When Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made a surprise visit to Oman in October 2018, this was seen as an attempt to jumpstart a new page in the Israel-Oman relationship. There had been secret negotiations occurring behind the scenes for quite some time in the leadup to this visit. What is groundbreaking here is not just that Netanyahu went to the Sultanate but that the Sultan himself invited the Israeli Prime Minister after PA President Mahmoud Abbas had been in the Sultanate days earlier.<sup>168</sup> The Israeli traveling party included the Prime Minister's wife Sara Netanyahu, the Director of Mossad Yossi Cohen, the National Security Advisor Meir Ben-Shabat, the Director-General of the Foreign Ministry Yoav Rotem, the Prime Minister's Chief of Staff Yoav Horowitz, and the Military Secretary Brigadier General Avi Balot.<sup>169</sup> Transportation Minister Israel Katz's visit to Oman a couple of weeks later as part of an international transportation conference further showed this new leaf in the relationship.<sup>170</sup>

In February 2019, Netanyahu met with Alawi at the Warsaw Conference. Alawi reportedly told Netanyahu, "People in the Middle East have suffered a lot because they have stuck to the past. Now we say, this is a new era, for the future."<sup>171</sup> In July 2019, Director Cohen announced that Israel and Oman would be renewing ties. While the Israeli Foreign Ministry declined to comment on this matter<sup>172</sup> many analysts believe that Israel and Oman will continue to strengthen their relationship in the coming years.

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Tzvi Lev, "Watch: Netanyahu makes secret trip overseas," *Arutz Sheva*, October 26, 2018 <<http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/253833>> (accessed November 8, 2019).

<sup>170</sup> Cornwell.

<sup>171</sup> "Netanyahu meets Omani foreign minister, hints other Arab states warming to Israel."

<sup>172</sup> It is unclear whether the refusal to comment was due to the veracity of the report or due to a reported power struggle between the Foreign Ministry and the Mossad over which agency would be responsible for the relationship with Oman and other Gulf States. AFP and TOI Staff, "Mossad chief declares Israel renewing Oman ties; Foreign Ministry won't comment."

## *The Relationship Between Israel and Bahrain*

Bahrain, an archipelago of 33 small islands, is located to the east of Saudi Arabia, to the southwest of Iran, and to the north of Qatar. Due to its geographic location, Bahrain has served as a trading center in the Gulf. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the British noticed that Bahrain could provide a useful conduit to its territory in India and brought Bahrain in as a protectorate. Bahrain gained its independence from Britain in 1971.

As oil was becoming more important to the Middle East, the United States entered the fray. The Standard Oil Company of California discovered oil in Bahrain in 1932 and was soon joined by Texaco and BAPCO in searching for more.<sup>173</sup> Oil then became an important driver of the Bahraini economy.

On the foreign policy front, Bahrain has had to combat two foreign entities claiming control to its land. Iran (and Persia) has historically claimed that all of Bahrain is part of its territory based on Bahrain's location as within the Persian Empire's territory in ancient times. In fact, when Bahrain began its oil-producing relationship with the United States in the 1930s, Iran was furious because it believed that Bahrain had no right to sell "Iranian" oil without Iranian consent. Iranian insistence that Bahrain is a component of greater Iran has come up numerous times and from 1906-1971, Iran reserved two seats in its parliament for its "14<sup>th</sup> province". The second territorial dispute comes from Qatar. The Hawar Islands are owned by Bahrain but are just off the west coast of Qatar. On and off, Qatar has laid claim to the islands,<sup>174</sup> with the case being formally resolved in 2001.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Miriam Joyce, "Bahrain from the Twentieth Century to the Arab Spring," (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 2.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 112.

Bahrain is perhaps the Gulf country with the most prominent relationship with Israel. Bahrain's opening of ties with Israel comes in conjunction with its self-declared religious freedom declaration and other opportunities for peaceful coexistence among religions. According to Talmudic references, there were Jews in the area that became Bahrain at least 1,500 years ago. The modern community, with Jews that trace their origins to Iraq, Iran, and India, reached a peak of around 600 prior to Israel's establishment.<sup>176</sup> However, Bahrain's relationship with Israel has not always been so smooth.

In 1946, the U.S. Consul in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia visited Bahrain. During a conversation between the consul and Sheikh Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa I, Sheikh Salman claimed that Palestine had been occupied by Arabs for 3,020 years.<sup>177</sup> While this conversation was in the context of the perceived American and British takeover of Arab lands, and while the Sheikh's numbers may have been exaggerated, the point is clear: Bahrain was against the establishment of a Jewish state in the Land of Israel. The subsequent United Nations vote to partition the area into a Jewish state and an Arab state unleashed a mob that targeted Jewish homes and businesses in Bahrain, killing one.<sup>178</sup>

To this point, relations between the Muslims and Jews in Bahrain had been relatively good (a Jew even served on the Manama Municipal Council). Some of the Jews in Bahrain were quite distressed that they were being falsely accused of supporting the Zionist entity and claimed that Sheikh Salman was doing all he could to keep the community safe.<sup>179</sup> In May 1948, as the

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<sup>176</sup> "Bahrain," August, 2018 <<https://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/about/communities/BH>> (accessed March 31, 2020).

<sup>177</sup> Joyce, 6.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 8.



British were preparing to leave Mandatory Palestine, many Bahraini Muslims hid members of the Jewish community so the Jews would remain safe amidst the violence that was ensuing.<sup>180</sup>

After the establishment of the State of Israel, Bahrain adhered to the Arab League Boycott of Israel.<sup>181</sup> The Suez Crisis of 1956, when Israel, France, and Great Britain seized control of the Sinai Peninsula, sparked some low-level riots in Bahrain directed against British (and Americans who were mistaken for British) nationals in the country. The Six Day War of 1967 sparked a similar sentiment in Bahrain mainly due to the false rumors that Britain and the United States supported Israel during the war. Sheikh Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa (the son of Sheikh Salman) was able to break up the demonstrations against the British and restore order before things got out of hand.<sup>182</sup> While Bahrain did not participate in the 1973 Yom Kippur/Ramadan War, it readied a division of the Bahrain Defense Force to support Saudi Arabia in case Saudi Arabia required more manpower in its war efforts.<sup>183</sup>

An interesting development occurred during the war which could have foreshadowed the relationship between Israel and Bahrain. During the war, Emir Isa (Sheikh Isa's title had changed after Bahrain declared independence) had asked for MIDEASTFOR, the U.S. force stationed in Bahrain, to leave due to American resupply efforts of the Israel Defense Forces. However, after the war, Emir Isa spoke with the American chargé d'affaires in Manama and changed his decision. He explained that Iraq had threatened to bomb Bahrain as the result of Bahrain hosting the U.S. Navy force.<sup>184</sup> Since the U.S. was assisting Israel and Bahrain was assisting the U.S., Iraq viewed this as tantamount to assisting Israel. The fact that Bahrain stood up to Iraq and did

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<sup>180</sup> "Bahrain."

<sup>181</sup> Joyce, 30.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 54.

not want the war to affect its relationship with the United States signaled that Bahrain may have been willing to break ranks with Arab states concerning Israel.

However, this decision came with a cost. In June 1974, despite the displeasure of numerous members of the Bahraini ruling family, Emir Isa permitted the PLO to open an office in Bahrain. According to sources, a Bahraini official told Robert Tesh, the British Ambassador to Bahrain, that Bahrain had, “to fall in line with the rest of the Arab world.”<sup>185</sup> In other words, had Bahrain outright rejected the PLO, this would have been increasingly problematic for the country. Strike one had been the rejection of Iraq’s demand to kick MIDEASTFOR out in the wake of the 1973 War. Strike two had been Bahrain’s continued supply of oil to MIDEASTFOR despite the OPEC Oil Embargo and Bahrain’s rejection of Kuwait’s lucrative financial offer in exchange for kicking MIDEASTFOR out.<sup>186</sup> Rejecting the PLO would have been strike three and could have had lasting damage for the country.

Bahrain’s continued ambivalence towards the Palestinians was shown during an October 1976 Labor Law, which limited the amount of work available to them and other nationalities Bahrain was wary of, including Pakistanis, Indians, and Iranians.<sup>187</sup> After Egypt signed its groundbreaking peace treaty with Israel in 1979, Bahrain, while officially outraged, was much softer in its criticism of the agreement. Bahrain’s Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammad bin Mubarak Al Khalifa insisted that Europe and the United States had to work together to end the Arab-Israeli conflict.<sup>188</sup> Later in the year, Colonel Muammar al-Gaddafi, the leader of Libya, visited Bahrain. During this visit, both Libya and Bahrain expressed their rejection of the Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty and their support for the PLO. However, some Bahraini diplomats were

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 55-58

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 84.

deeply offended by how the Libyan delegation handled themselves and the Bahraini officials might not have had serious conviction in their declared support of the PLO.<sup>189</sup>

In 1980, Bahrain continued to express a strong desire for Washington to be involved in resolving the issue regarding Israel and the Palestinians. While on an official visit to England in 1980, Foreign Minister Al Khalifa said that Bahrain wanted to be part of a moderate Middle East.<sup>190</sup> On the surface, this comment had everything to do with ensuring that moderates were the decision-makers in regard to the Israeli-Palestinian situation. This comment could also have referred to the events that had taken place in Iran that were threatening the order of the region.

Bahrain, which had been fending off Iranian territorial claims for decades, was deeply worried about the 1979 revolution and sought help in its defense. In 1981, Bahrain, along with Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar established the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The impetus for the GCC was to combat Iranian influence in the region, as well as the spread of communism.<sup>191</sup> Believing that unity would help these countries advance their interests, they issued a charter which stated their desire, "...to effect coordination, cooperation and integration between them in all fields..."<sup>192</sup>

Bahrain received a brief reprieve from their fears of an Iranian invasion as Iran became embroiled in the Iran-Iraq War from 1980-1988. After the war, Iraq was ready to show they were a dominant power and invaded Kuwait with relative ease.<sup>193</sup> The fact that the GCC had been

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>192</sup> Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, "The Cooperation Council – Charter, The Supreme Council – Rules of Procedure, The Ministerial Council – Rules of Procedure, The Commission for the Settlement of Disputes – Rules of Procedure," May 25, 1981 <<https://www.gcc-sg.org/en-us/AboutGCC/Pages/Primarylaw.aspx>> (accessed November 8, 2019).

<sup>193</sup> Joyce, 107.

unable to prevent an invasion of one of its member-states showed all the member-states that they still needed to rely on outside sources for security.

The first official Israeli visit to Bahrain occurred in 1994, as the thawing of relationships between Israel and other Gulf states was occurring in the wake of the 1993 Oslo Accords. Among the issues discussed included environmental concerns. The relationship between the two countries was relatively quiet in comparison to that of Israel and other countries thereafter and did not outwardly improve due to the failed peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians and the outset of the Second Intifada. While Bahrain spoke negatively about Israel on the world stage, including in a speech by the Deputy Permanent Representative of the Bahrain Mission to the United Nations Mohammed Saleh in 2002,<sup>194</sup> King Hamad ibn Isa Al Khalifa maintained a good relationship with the small Jewish community in his country. Whether he did this as a possible backchannel to Israel or just because he was concerned for the wellbeing of his subjects is unknown.

In 2007 at an American Jewish Committee Meeting, Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa, the Bahraini Foreign Minister, said that Palestinian refugees should return to Palestine, not to Israel.<sup>195</sup> This was one of the first times, if not the first time, that an Arab leader had called for Palestinians to abandon the idea of the “right of return” to Israel. There was a meeting between Al Khalifa and Tzipi Livni, the Israeli Foreign Minister, at the 2007 United Nations General Assembly but at the time, it was unclear if anything substantial came from it. In 2008, King Hamad appointed Houda Ezra Ebrahim Nonoo, a Jewish woman, to serve as the Bahraini Ambassador to the United States, a possible move to curry favor with the U.S. and Israel.

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>195</sup> Barak Ravid, “WikiLeaks: Bahrain FM Planned to Meet Israeli Officials in Support of Peace Process,” *Haaretz*, February 20, 2011 <<https://www.haaretz.com/1.5125102>> (accessed November 8, 2019).

A 2009 op-ed by Bahraini Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa appeared in *The Washington Post*. The op-ed urged all sides to think constructively about solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Two elements of the piece are particularly striking. The first is when Prince Salman wrote, “This crisis is not a zero-sum game. For one side to win, the other does not have to lose.”<sup>196</sup> Contrary to many opinions from the Arab world, this would imply that Israel is not necessarily the complete aggressor. Logic would hold that if resolving the conflict is not a zero-sum game, then Israel could gain the security and peace it so desperately seeks while the Palestinians can gain the complete autonomy they believe Israel to be denying them.

The second unique element of the piece is when Prince Salman wrote, “Our biggest mistake has been to assume that you can simply switch peace on like a lightbulb...This is where we as Arabs have not done enough to communicate directly with the people of Israel.”<sup>197</sup> From this quote, one can derive that the Crown Prince was dissatisfied with the perceived state of affairs between Israel and the Arabs. He seemed to fault those who engage in peace negotiations or promote peace negotiations without fleshing out the complete picture. In other words, the Israelis and Palestinians should not be held at fault for not having a comprehensive peace due in part to the fact that the groundwork for such peace has not been arranged. He also seemed to be saying that Israel is not at fault for their strict stance on security because there has been no indication that the Arabs want peace with the Jewish state. It would seem that he was advocating a more overt connection.

A 2011 release of cables on WikiLeaks disclosed elements of the behind the scenes relationship between Israel and Bahrain. The documents revealed off the record meetings and

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<sup>196</sup> Shaikh Salman bin Hamad al-Khalifa, “The Arab Peace Initiative for Israel and the Palestinians,” *The Washington Post*, July 16, 2009 <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/07/16/AR2009071602737.html>> (accessed November 8, 2019).

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

communications between Israeli and Bahraini diplomats including discussions between Bharani Ambassador Saeed Mohammed Al Faihani, an advisor to Foreign Minister Al Khalifa, and an Israeli journalist from *Haaretz* and that the Ambassador was working with the Bahraini Foreign Ministry to secure an interview.<sup>198</sup> This interview did not take place but the development that it almost did was quite impressive. It was also revealed that during a 2005 meeting with William Monroe, the United States Ambassador to Bahrain, King Hamad ordered his Information Minister to stop referring to Israel as the “enemy” or “Zionist entity.” Additionally, he spoke about Bahrain’s intelligence ties to Mossad.<sup>199</sup> In September 2017, King Hamad announced that he opposed the Arab League Boycott of Israel and was planning on allowing Bahrainis to freely visit Israel.<sup>200</sup> In response to Israeli action in Syria in May 2018, Foreign Minister Al Khalifa tweeted that Israel has the right to defend itself.<sup>201</sup>

The June 2019 economic summit in Bahrain, known as the Peace to Prosperity Workshop, has led to new opportunities regarding the relationship between Israel and Bahrain. Bahrain invited six Israeli media outlets to the summit and granted them media credentials. Furthermore, the Bahraini Synagogue opened for morning prayers.<sup>202</sup> However, arguably the most important element of the entire summit was an interview by Raphael Ahren of *The Times of Israel* with Foreign Minister Al Khalifa, during which the Foreign Minister said, “Israel is a

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<sup>198</sup> Ravid.

<sup>199</sup> Yossi Melman, “Haaretz Wikileaks Exclusive: Bahrain King Boasted of Intelligence Ties With Israel,” *Haaretz*, April 8, 2011 <<https://www.haaretz.com/1.5148676>> (accessed April 5, 2020).

<sup>200</sup> Dov Lieber, “Bahrain’s king opposes Arab boycott of Israel, Jewish leader says,” *The Times of Israel*, September 18, 2017 <<https://www.timesofisrael.com/bahrain-king-opposes-arab-boycott-of-israel-jewish-leader-says/>> (accessed November 8, 2019).

<sup>201</sup> The Associated Press, “Arab Gulf Country of Bahrain: Israel has ‘Right’ to Defend Itself Against Iran,” *Haaretz*, May 10, 2018 <<https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/bahrain-defends-israel-right-to-defend-itself-against-iran-1.6075271>> (accessed November 8, 2019).

<sup>202</sup> Raphael Ahren, “Behind the scenes of the first morning minyan in Manama in over 70 years,” *The Times of Israel*, June 28, 2019 <<https://www.timesofisrael.com/behind-the-scenes-of-the-first-morning-minyan-in-manama-in-over-70-years/>> (accessed November 8, 2019).

county. Israel is a country in the region, in the Middle East, the State of Israel...and it's there to stay, of course."<sup>203</sup> This was followed by a meeting between Foreign Minister Al Khalifa and Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz the next month in the United States.<sup>204</sup> Other developments have taken place since, which have continued the trend of the two countries building a closer relationship.

### **Part Three: Some Key Similarities and Differences Between Israel's Relationships in the Maghreb and the Gulf**

There are many points of comparison for the countries and regions discussed in the paper – too many to include here! This section will discuss some of the main similarities and differences in Israel's relationships between the Maghreb and the Gulf. When Israel established relations with Morocco and Tunisia, it was done covertly. The reason for this silence was most likely due to the need for the leaders of the Arab countries to display solidarity with the Arabs who were affected by Israel's birth: the Arab states who failed to defeat Israel and the Palestinians who were displaced due to the fighting. However, the leaders of Morocco and Tunisia, namely King Hassan (less so) and Habib Bourguiba (more so), were wary of Nasser's Arab nationalism. As such, they may also have believed it was pragmatic and important to establish relations with Israel, despite it being a Jewish state.

As Israel began reestablishing relations with the Gulf states, these countries maintained a similar façade so as not to upset the regional order. Nevertheless, in speeches and op-eds from Bahraini leadership, Bahrain most likely believes in the pragmatic element of establishing a relationship with Israel, just as Morocco and Tunisia did. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Oman may

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<sup>203</sup> Ahren, "Bahrain's FM Tells ToI he hopes 'to visit Israel, when it's all open, peaceful.'"

<sup>204</sup> Raphael Ahren and Alexander Fulbright, "Israel, Bahrain foreign ministers talk Iran in groundbreaking public meeting," *The Times of Israel*, July 18, 2019 <<https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-bahrain-foreign-ministers-talk-iran-in-groundbreaking-public-meet/>> (accessed April 5, 2020).

be quieter about their friendship with Israel but they are slowly becoming more open about it. While the Gulf states care about the Palestinians, they do not care about the Palestinians at the exclusion of advancing their own regional interests.

The Jewish communities in Morocco and Tunisia, which extend back hundreds of years, have been influential in their countries' relationships with Israel. These communities could have exerted influence on their rulers to be more lenient in dealing with the Jewish state. As stated previously, there have been high-ranking Jewish members of the Moroccan government including Andre Azoulay as an advisor for economic and financial affairs, Serge Berdugo as a roving ambassador, and Sam Ben-Shitrit as a negotiator to restart the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. In Tunisia, Rene Trabelsi serves in an official capacity as the Minister of Tourism.

The Jewish communities of Bahrain and the UAE are relatively new in comparison. While the Bahraini Jewish community is now very small, it is quite influential in the country. Houda Ezra Ebrahim Nonoo served in the Majlis al-shura (Bahraini upper legislation) and as the Bahraini Ambassador to the United States from 2008-2013,<sup>205</sup> and Nancy Khedouri serves in the Majlis al-shura today.<sup>206</sup> The UAE has a mainly expatriate Jewish community (numbers vary). In 2019, Rabbi Yehuda Sarna was appointed the first Chief Rabbi of the UAE.<sup>207</sup> Bahrain and the UAE may look at the economic benefits of allowing Jews to work and thrive in their countries. This could be a slow diplomatic approach to beginning trade relationships with Israel. Saudi Arabia and Oman have not had the same connection to the Jewish community that the other four

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<sup>205</sup> "Bahrain."

<sup>206</sup> "H.E. Nancy Dinah Elly Khedouri," *Kingdom of Bahrain: Shura Council*, July 2, 2019 <<https://www.shura.bh/en/Council/MPs/2011MP70/Pages/CV.aspx>> (accessed April 4, 2020).

<sup>207</sup> "NYU chaplain to become first chief rabbi in the Emirates," *Jewish News Syndicate*, May 15, 2019 <<https://www.jns.org/nyu-chaplain-to-become-first-chief-rabbi-in-the-emirates/>> (accessed April 4, 2020).



countries analyzed in the paper have. Therefore, their outreach to Israel is not influenced in the same way by the Jewish community.

A key difference between the relationships of Israel to the Maghreb and the Gulf includes the needs of why the relationships began. It seems that Morocco and Tunisia established relations with Israel due to the pragmatic needs of running a state. Concerning the Gulf, the start of the original normalization was due to the aftermath of the Oslo Accords. After these relations were frayed in the early 2000s, the reemergence of the relationships has been due to mutual trepidation of Iran.

King Hamad may flaunt close ties with Israel, or a willingness to have close ties with Israel, to spite the mullahs in Iran in a similar way to Bourguiba's détente with Israel to spite Nasser. While less likely due to Qatar's outreach to the American Jewish community, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain may be reaching out to Israel to confront the growing axis of Qatar, Iran, and Turkey. One could argue that these threats are greater than any posed by Egypt and its allies when Morocco and Tunisia reached out to Israel. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Egypt, and other Arab countries broke off relations with Qatar in June 2017 for a variety of reasons, among them alleged Qatari support for terror and the hacking of UAE Ambassador Al Otaiba's email. Turkey's "zero problem" approach to foreign policy, maintaining a stance that it has zero problems with any of its neighbors, has led to it becoming a regional force. Iran, as the hegemony seeking Islamic Republic, is also a force. Qatar is a wealthy state and joining an alliance with Turkey and Iran would pose a threat to the moderate Arab states. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain may be reaching out to Israel to counter the tide of regional change. If they upset the Turkish leadership, the mullahs in Iran, or Qatar, so be it. Oman is separate due to its desire to be the regional mediator. It needs to maintain ties with all states to be effective.

Another difference in the relationships is the way they are trending. Since the Arab Spring, Israel's relationships with the Gulf states have been increasing. On the contrary, Israel's relationship with Tunisia (less so with Morocco) has been deteriorating, as evidenced by Tunisia's 2012 draft constitution in which it bans all cooperation with Israel. An anonymous source said that while Morocco officially does not have relations with Israel, it is increasingly open about working with Israel in the international arena. This may ultimately move the two countries to formalized relations, similar to the way Israel and the Gulf states seem to be moving.

#### **Part Four: Ways Forward for Israel and the Maghreb**

##### ***Business***

The U.S. established a Free-Trade Agreement with Morocco in 2006, its only such agreement with any state in Africa.<sup>208</sup> The new Tunisian leadership should look at this agreement and aspire to achieve such status with the U.S. Where does Israel fit into this picture? The U.S. and Israel have had a Free-Trade Agreement since 1985. It is clear that the U.S. awards "favored" states free-trade status. While the new Tunisian president Kais Saied has said that any connection to Israel will be regarded as "high treason," this is only a disservice to his nation. A business relationship with Israel could help Tunisia advance economically. In fact, there is a longstanding tradition where Tunisian Jews, many of whom are Israeli, return to the Ghriba Synagogue on the Jewish holiday of Lag B'Omer. Morocco, which does not espouse anti-Israel rhetoric in the way that Tunisia does, allows for Israelis to travel to the country with Israeli passports. Rene Trabelsi, the Tunisian Minister of Tourism, should work with his country to tone down its anti-Israel rhetoric. Morocco has recognized the value of Israeli tourism in the

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<sup>208</sup> *U.S. Trade Policy Primer: Frequently Asked Questions*, Congressional Research Service document R45148, January 29, 2019, p. 33.

country<sup>209</sup> just as the UAE has recognized the value of Israeli businesspeople in the emirates – imagine if the Jewish minister of Tourism worked with his government to encourage Israeli tourism and business!

### ***Security***

Including Israel in the March anti-terrorism conference in Marrakech shows that Morocco still believes Israel to be a strategic ally. While it might not agree in principle on all policies, the decision-makers in Morocco understand that Israel has much it can offer the Moroccans by way of security. It was reported in February 2020 that Morocco purchased three Israeli reconnaissance drones via France.<sup>210</sup> As global politics shift dramatically to the left and the right, it is in Morocco’s strategic interest as a moderate nation to have other moderate nations on its side. Continuing Morocco’s security relationship with Israel is a wise policy moving forward.

### ***Diplomacy***

It was reported in 2017 that King Mohammed VI canceled his participation in an upcoming West African conference to avoid Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.<sup>211</sup> This double standard of Israel not getting due respect while having to be subservient to other countries is not new but for these relationships to grow, this asymmetry needs to end. While some may disagree with the policies of Israel, it is still a democratic state and deserves the respect as such. Morocco should treat Israel like any other state in the region and offer it full relations. Yes, the

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<sup>209</sup> “Safaa Kasraoui, “Over 50,000 Israeli Tourists Visit Morocco Every Year,” *Morocco World News*, June 19, 2019 <<https://www.morocoworldnews.com/2019/06/276254/israeli-tourists-morocco-jews/>> (accessed April 3, 2020).

<sup>210</sup> TOI Staff, “Netanyahu sought deal with US, Morocco to allow normalization of ties – report,” *The Times of Israel*, February 4, 2020 <<https://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-sought-deal-with-us-morocco-to-allow-normalization-of-ties-report/>> (accessed April 3, 2020).

<sup>211</sup> TOI Staff and Agencies, “Israel said hoping for breakthrough in ties with Morocco in next few days.”

relationship is trending this way and this author believes there will be a breakthrough in the not-so-distant future. But why should there not be a breakthrough now?

Tunisia needs a complete revamp of its entire outlook on the Jewish state. Israel is not going anywhere. Morocco realized this and is making strides in the relationship. The Gulf states discussed in this paper have realized this and are reaching new heights in their friendship. Tunisia under Bourguiba realized this and had a smooth relationship with Israel for decades. To take the next step forward in the region, Tunisia needs to accept that Israel exists and begin the process of reengagement. If Tunisia does not trust Morocco as a fair example, it can look to the Gulf to see what happens when countries begin to interact positively with Israel. Not doing so will only continue to hurt Tunisia.

#### **Part Five: Ways Forward for Israel and the Gulf States**

##### ***Diversify Gulf Economies Away From Oil***

It is no secret that the Gulf countries need to find ways to move their economies forward from oil and diversify their economic portfolios. The Saudis know this is an issue, which is why they included diversifying the economy as one of the goals of Saudi Vision 2030. The UAE, Oman, and Bahrain also face the prospect of diminishing oil.<sup>212</sup> Israel, known to many as the “Start-Up Nation,” would be a perfect fit to help these countries think creatively about moving their economies away from oil. The U.S. has Free-Trade Agreements with Israel, Bahrain (since 2006) and Oman (since 2009).<sup>213</sup> U.S. involvement in the move away from oil could help to enrich other areas of the Gulf economies while bringing Israel closer to these states.

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<sup>212</sup> Rippenburg, 123.

<sup>213</sup> “U.S. Trade Policy Primer: Frequently Asked Questions,” p. 33.

## ***Transportation***

As Transportation Minister, Israel Katz was in Oman for a transportation conference in November 2018. At this conference, he unveiled a plan called “Tracks for Regional Peace.” This plan calls for a railway that would connect the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf through Israel, Jordan, and regional rail networks in the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>214</sup> With its neutrality leading the way, Oman should be actively recruiting Arab states to make sure this happens. A Middle East that is accessible by train would have the ancillary benefit of increased tourism and business throughout the region.

## ***Climate Change***

In the Gulf, Bahrain is arguably the country most affected by climate change due to its makeup of 33 islands, some of which could be in trouble as sea levels continue to rise.<sup>215</sup> Among UN diplomats, Israel is known for its work with island nations in combating climate problems. In fact, many island nations in the Caribbean and the Pacific believe that Israel is one of a handful of countries that takes their climate problems seriously. A joint venture between Israel and Bahrain to solve climate issues related to rising sea levels could open up the possibility of other climate solutions. If other Gulf countries want to get involved, they can have the political cover of doing so under the premise that they are following United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 13: “Climate Action.”

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<sup>214</sup> “Tracks for regional peace – regional land bridge and hub initiative,” *Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, August 5, 2019 <<https://mfa.gov.il/MFA/VideoLibrary/Pages/Tracks-for-regional-peace-5-August-2019.aspx>> (accessed April 4, 2020).

<sup>215</sup> Bernd Debusmann, Jr., “Bahrain ‘severely threatened’ by climate change, says government,” *Arabian Business*, October 18, 2018 <<https://www.arabianbusiness.com/culture-society/406451-bahrain-severely-threatened-by-climate-change-says-government>> (accessed November 8, 2019).

## ***Water***

Water cooperation is an area where Israel and Oman have worked together in the past. After the Second Intifada began and Arab states shuttered relations with Israel, Oman maintained its water relationship with Israel. Water is a problem that affects all countries in the Middle East, and many around the world, regardless of geopolitical alliance. Therefore, Israel and Oman could build on this water relationship to help drought stricken areas around the world. As with climate change, other Gulf countries can get involved under the premise of United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 6: “Clean Water and Sanitation.”

## ***Humanitarian Assistance***

Humanitarian assistance is a vehicle by which Israel and its Gulf friends can work together in a non-political venue. During the 2019 General Assembly, Saudi Arabia hosted an exhibit at the United Nations Headquarters in New York City showcasing the work of the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center. As evidenced by its exhibit, Saudi Arabia has many resources which it donates to humanitarian situations. Israel prides itself on its response to humanitarian disasters, such as the 2010 earthquake in Haiti or the 2015 earthquake in Nepal. What if Saudi Arabia and Israel worked together to respond to humanitarian disasters? Saudi Arabia could supply the majority of the money, Israel the person power. This would be a truly revolutionary enterprise and it would help to bring both countries closer in an off the beaten path method. Other Gulf countries would be welcome to join in supplying money or person power.

## *Outer Space*

In September 2019, the UAE sent its first astronaut to outer space. Aboard the same mission was Jessica Meir,<sup>216</sup> an American astronaut whose father is Israeli. In 2019, Israel became the seventh space agency to have a spacecraft orbit the moon and came very close to landing it on the surface of the moon.<sup>217</sup> As the world looks to develop outer space, Israel and the UAE could work together to become a joint space power. Other Gulf nations would be welcome to fund and participate in this endeavor.

## *Security*

In the early part of the 1990s, Bahrain probably realized it needed Israel on its side when the GCC could not combat Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.<sup>218</sup> In analyzing the situation, for Bahrain, a security relationship with Israel was not the issue: the issue was what would happen to Bahrain if Iran decided to again claim Bahrain as a province? The GCC could not stop Iraq, a smaller country than Iran. How could it stop Iran if it decided to invade the smallest GCC member? A security relationship with Israel, a small country that has had to withstand numerous threats from much larger nations, would have been a solid, pragmatic policy decision.

The UAE understands this pragmatic security situation as well. There is a rumor that the 2010 al-Mabhouh assassination was meant to go public. While the Israeli intelligence services have had embarrassing incidents, these services are known for their professionalism and cunning. One source did not deny what is believed by some: that Israeli contractors working in the UAE

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<sup>216</sup> Kenneth Chang, "Hazzaa al-Mansoori, First U.A.E. Astronaut, Launches to Space Station," *The New York Times*, September 25, 2019 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/25/science/emirati-astronaut-uae-international-space-station.html>> (accessed November 8, 2019).

<sup>217</sup> Kenneth Chang, "Moon Landing by Israel's Beresheet Spacecraft Ends in Crash," *The New York Times*, April 11, 2019 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/11/science/israel-moon-landing-beresheet.html>> (accessed April 4, 2020).

<sup>218</sup> Joyce, 107.

installed the cameras in the Al Bustan Rotana Hotel in Dubai. For the alleged Israeli agents who took part in the assassination to expose themselves by not taking into account the cameras throughout the hotel would be almost unheard of – unless they meant to get caught. There is some credence to the idea that even though not a single agent was arrested by the UAE,<sup>219</sup> these agents meant to get caught on camera. If they did get caught on camera, and it was widely believed that Israel was behind the assassination, then Hamas operatives, and other terrorists who commit actions against Israel and/or Jews, would know that Israel would use all means necessary to track them down.

What role does the UAE play in this? The journalist Thomas Friedman has said, “Dubai is about nurturing Arab dignity through success not suicide. As a result, its people want to embrace the future, not blow it up.”<sup>220</sup> One could argue that this statement proves true for the whole UAE and helps to augment its relationship with the United States, as evidenced by President Trump’s speech at the 74<sup>th</sup> United Nations General Assembly when he stated, “Thankfully, there is a growing recognition in the wider Middle East that the countries of the region share common interests in battling extremism and unleashing economic opportunity.”<sup>221</sup> As such, the UAE does not want shady characters roaming around its territory – it wants tourists, business people, and academics. A country that is a terror haven or one with a criminal bent is a way to guarantee that these people will not show up. Is it possible that the UAE “let” the

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<sup>219</sup> Amira Agarib, “Suspects in Mabhouh killing hiding in Israel,” *Khaleej Times*, March 2, 2010 <<https://www.khaleejtimes.com/nation/general/suspects-in-mabhouh-killing-hiding-in-israel>> (accessed March 31, 2020).

<sup>220</sup> Thomas L. Friedman, “Dubai and Dunces,” *The New York Times*, March 15, 2006 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/15/opinion/dubai-and-dunces.html>> (accessed March 31, 2020).

<sup>221</sup> Donald Trump, “Remarks by President Trump to the 74<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly,” (speech, United Nations Headquarters, New York, New York, September 24, 2019) <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-74th-session-united-nations-general-assembly/>> (accessed April 1, 2020).



assumed Israeli agents escape arrest following the al-Mabhouh assassination? Perhaps. Either way, this event showed that Israel can help secure the UAE both in the physical security space as well as in cybersecurity and make it a safer place for residents and foreigners. A safe UAE can show the rest of the Arab world what “nurturing Arab dignity through success” is all about. This idea helps to create a safer region.

### ***Diplomacy***

In September 2019, Israel tweeted congratulations to Saudi Arabia on the occasion of its 89<sup>th</sup> National Day.<sup>222</sup> That same week, at the Saudi Arabia hosted exhibit at the United Nations Headquarters showcasing the work of the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center, there was a map showcasing the areas in which the center works. The State of Israel was nowhere to be found on the map: it was blotted out for Palestine. While the Saudis feel the need to acknowledge the Palestinians, even though numerous sources admitted that the Saudis and the rest of the Gulf Arabs do not feel connected to them, Israel may feel challenged. If Israel feels that it is being undermined, the situation will remain status quo. As arguably the leader of the Arab world, the Saudis have a real opportunity to work with both sides to create a viable solution to move forward. The first brave step includes recognizing that Israel is a permanent fixture on the map.

It is quite logical to think that even though Israel has peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan, recognition is why Israel feels so comfortable in its relationship with Bahrain. After all, Foreign Minister Al Khalifa publicly stated that he acknowledges Israel’s right to exist and that it is not going anywhere, while Egypt’s and Jordan’s internal politics may frighten Israel’s leadership. A source said that the most important element of Foreign Minister Al Khalifa’s

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<sup>222</sup> Ahren, “Israel congratulates Saudi Arabia on its 89th national day.”

statement is that nothing in Bahrain occurs without the consent of King Hamad. The overwhelmingly positive response from Israel to this statement should show Bahrain that it is on the right path. During the 2019 United Nations General Assembly, the author of this capstone had an impromptu conversation with a Bahraini diplomat. After explaining what the purpose of this project was, the diplomat stated, “We want to get to know our neighbors. We want our Jewish neighbors to feel comfortable with us.” Bahrain should continue its open friendship with Israel and illustrate to other nations that Israel is a necessary part of the Middle East.

In January, it was announced that Foreign Minister Al Khalifa, is being reassigned in April 2020 to a new role as Adviser of Diplomatic Affairs for King Hamad.<sup>223</sup> Many analysts believed this reassignment to be inevitable: the more Al Khalifa spoke out in support of Israel, the more Bahrain looked to be out in front of the other Gulf countries, not in stride with them. This author would posit that public support was not necessarily a bad thing as it moved the Gulf countries past yesterday’s positions and into the future. On that note, is it possible that Al Khalifa’s reassignment was a move designed purely because of his ties with Israel? What if Al Khalifa was reassigned from the role of Foreign Minister to Adviser of Diplomatic Affairs so he could advise the King on relations with Israel? One source told this author that Bahrain is Saudi Arabia’s “trial balloon.” If this works for Bahrain, then Saudi Arabia may be likely to operate a policy of relations with Israel. This may be an unlikely theory but in the Middle East, a development of this sort is not out of the question.

However, this charge comes with an inherent risk: the challenge will be for the Saudi leaders to build this type of relationship with Israel without losing the support of their people.

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<sup>223</sup> Raphael Ahren, “Why is Bahrain’s Israel-friendly foreign minister being given the boot?” *The Times of Israel*, January 15, 2020 <<https://www.timesofisrael.com/why-is-bahrains-israel-friendly-foreign-minister-being-given-the-boot/>> (accessed April 1, 2020).

The hardliners in Saudi Arabia could spin a relationship with Israel in so many negative ways that the Saudi leadership might choose to keep quiet on this potential avenue to protect their throne. If this is the case, potential movement towards a more open Israel-Saudi relationship may be stunted.

Part of diplomacy involves including Israel in international forums. Israel's Mission to IRENA in Abu Dhabi, participation in the 2018 transportation conference in Oman, and future participation at the Expo 2020 in Dubai (and journalists' inclusion in the July 2019 Peace to Prosperity workshop in Bahrain), symbolize that Israel is gaining legitimate traction in the Arab world as another country that should be included in the global conversation. An Israeli diplomat disclosed that despite the requirement to turn the individual's passport over to the Emirati authorities upon arrival in Abu Dhabi, the individual and the individual's team were treated like VIPs during their time in the emirate. While Dubai was more closed to this individual, security was never an issue. Including Israel in more international gatherings will help to solidify Israel's social standing among the nations of the Middle East. As proven by the U.S. role in the Peace to Prosperity workshop, the U.S. will grant rewards to moderate states. The honor of hosting the workshop, designed to set the table for the Trump administration peace plan for the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, can be seen as a reward for Bahrain taking the courageous step of opening its relationship with Israel. The UAE could be in line for similar rewards if it continues to include Israel in events on its soil.

Oman's neutrality in the Muslim world is well known: the country is essentially the Middle East version of Switzerland. The majority of Omanis follow a sect of Islam known as Ibadism, which is different than Sunni or Shia. Their geographic location also makes them a

prime go-between for Iran and the West. Oman has an interest in calming the tensions between Iran and the West because any Western conflict with Iran has a risk of spilling over into Oman.

Iran has had an interest in Oman since the 1970s, when the Shah sent troops to help the newly minted Sultan Qaboos quell the rebels in Dhofar. While not as close today, Iran still views Oman as an impartial mediator. One of the few areas where Israel and Iran probably agree is regarding Oman's neutrality. It is in Israel's (and the other Gulf states') strong strategic interest to build up Oman's neutrality as Oman may be able to help solve conflicts that endanger the Jewish state and threaten the stability of the Middle East. To that end, PA President Mahmoud Abbas had visited the Sultanate days before Prime Minister Netanyahu in October 2018. Foreign Minister Alawi maintains ties to the PA government in Ramallah and has traveled to the area. What do these visits mean? On the surface, these visits show Oman's proactive nature in trying to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. A deeper look though shows how Oman is asserting itself into the role of impartial arbiter and that Israel trusts the country to do so. If these moves go according to plan, Oman's role as a mediator could help the PA regain popularity from Hamas and form some type of peace with Israel, thereby lessening an Iranian proxy. If Israel and the Gulf states promote Oman as a mediator, then there will be more pressure on Iran to stop its malevolent behavior and reengage productively with the international community.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

In his speech at the 74<sup>th</sup> UN General Assembly, Foreign Minister Katz said, "Israel has a clear policy to advance ties, and normalization with the Arab Gulf States. We have no conflict with the Gulf states...I hope that this cooperation will lead to the signing of peace agreements between our countries, as we did with Egypt and Jordan."<sup>224</sup> Foreign Minister Katz is not alone:

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<sup>224</sup> Israel Katz, "FM Katz addresses the General Assembly of the UN at the 74<sup>th</sup> Session," (speech, United Nations Headquarters, New York, New York, September 26, 2019)

many Israeli government officials will indicate that there is a strong desire for these burgeoning relationships with the Gulf states to become public, just as ties with Morocco and Tunisia became known as they developed. The first reason is obvious: Israel wants to be accepted as a country in the Middle East, just as every other country in the Middle East is accepted as a country. The potential impact of the Trump administration's "Deal of the Century" peace plan on these burgeoning relationships should not be lost. To varying degrees, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Oman, and Bahrain expressed support for the plan,<sup>225</sup> with the latter three countries sending official representation to the plan's unveiling. While the support varies among each country, the fact that these countries did not outright slam the plan is important.<sup>226</sup> These reactions should help Israel to grow the working relationships with its Arab neighbors for the benefit of both the Arabs and the Israelis.

The second reason why Israeli decision-makers are eager for this new chapter to become public is squarely due to the threat posed by the Islamic Republic of Iran. The inability of consecutive U.S. presidents, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama to Donald Trump, to stop Iran's hegemonic ambitions and its pursuit of nuclear weapons has concerned Israel and the Gulf states mentioned in this piece. At the time of this writing, Iran had control or influence in not only Tehran, but also in Damascus (Syria), Beirut (Lebanon), and Sana'a (Yemen), and has their eyes on Baghdad (Iraq) to complete a land bridge that would extend Iranian influence to the Mediterranean Sea. Since the rise of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in 1979, Iran has threatened

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<<https://mfa.gov.il/MFA/PressRoom/2019/Pages/FM-Katz-addresses-the-General-Assembly-of-the-UN-at-the-74th-Session-27-September-2019.aspx>> (accessed April 1, 2020).

<sup>225</sup> "Seth J. Frantzman, "Gulf states vs Iran and Arab League on 'Deal of Century,'" *The Jerusalem Post*, February 3, 2020 <<https://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Gulf-states-between-Iran-and-Arab-League-on-Deal-of-Century-616240>> (accessed March 29, 2020).

<sup>226</sup> It should be noted that Morocco also expressed support for the deal. Arutz Sheva Staff, "Morocco 'appreciates' Trump Admin's efforts with 'Deal of the Century,'" *Arutz Sheva*, January 29, 2020 <<http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/275305>> (accessed March 29, 2020).

to destroy Israel, the little Satan and then the United States, the Great Satan. Israeli leaders from across the political spectrum (and in Israel, that is an incredibly wide spectrum) are united in their belief that something needs to be done to contain Iran and prevent an existential threat from arising. Thousands of years of Jewish history have made their mark: when someone says they want to destroy the Jewish people, the Jewish people should take those words seriously and do all they can to prevent it from happening.

One source said that some Israeli decision-makers are against the normalization of ties with certain Gulf states. They believe that if ties are to be normalized, then the Gulf states need to come out and openly support Israel. This stance seems to be in the minority of Israeli officials due to the moves that the Gulf states are making to advance ties between them and Israel. Just as the UAE announced that it will most likely allow for Israelis to have unfettered access to the country from 2020 on, look for Bahrain and Oman to follow suit within the next 5-10 years and for Israel to begin reciprocally accepting tourists. The Saudi family still has to placate the religious extremists within the country. However, Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman has proven to make some radical decisions within the Kingdom. It would not be a surprise if Israelis were able to travel to Saudi Arabia on humanitarian missions (as a proposed addition to Saudi Vision 2030) and Saudi citizens to Israel for cultural exchange programs. Outside of the four Gulf countries discussed in this capstone, other Arab countries may begin to follow their lead.<sup>227</sup>

In his August 2019 speech to the UN Security Council, Israeli Ambassador Danny Danon declared to the Arab states, “Israel is not the problem. In fact, Israel is part of the solution.”<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Qatar is going to allow Israelis to visit the country to watch the World Cup in 2022. Zachary Keyser, “Qatar World Cup official to ESPN: Israelis can attend the 2022 tournament,” *The Jerusalem Post*, December 31, 2019 <<https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/qatar-world-cup-official-to-espn-israelis-can-attend-the-2022-tournament-612655>> (accessed April 5, 2020).

<sup>228</sup> “(Part I) Maintenance of International Peace and Security – Security Council, 8600<sup>th</sup> meeting.”

Here is the truth: the Arab states should *want* Israel as an integral part of the future of the region. A strong Israel means a strong Middle East. Historically, Morocco and Tunisia recognized this fact in the aftermath of the rebirth of the Jewish state. Currently, as evidenced by their growing relationships with Israel, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, and Bahrain are recognizing this fact now.