

**IBN HALDUN UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCES AND
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

MASTER THESIS

**ANALYZING THE DIPLOMATIC RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN THE ARAB GULF STATES AND ISRAEL
(2020-2021): A CASE STUDY OF THE UAE, QATAR
AND SAUDI ARABIA**

NUR SAKINAH JANNATI BINTI RAHIMIN AFFANDI

**THESIS SUPERVISOR
PROF. TALHA KÖSE**

ISTANBUL, 2023

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by

NUR SAKINAH JANNATI BINTI RAHIMIN AFFANDI

**A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in
Political Science and International Relations**

**THESIS SUPERVISOR
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ISTANBUL, 2023

APPROVAL PAGE

This is to certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts Political Science and International Relations.

Thesis Jury Members

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Opinion

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This is to confirm that this thesis complies with all the standards set by the School of Graduate Studies of Ibn Haldun University.

Date of Submission

Seal/Signature

ACADEMIC HONESTY ATTESTATION

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

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ÖZ

ARAP KÖRFEZ ÜLKELERİ İLE İSRAİL ARASINDAKİ DİPLOMATİK
İLİŞKİYİ ANALİZ ETMEK (2020-2021): BAE, KATAR VE SUUDİ ARABİSTAN
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2020'de BAE, İsrail ile diplomatik ilişkilerini normalleştiren ilk Arap Körfez Devleti olarak bölgede tarihe imza attı. Ardından Bahreyn, Fas ve Sudan gibi birçok Arap ülkesi de aynı yolu izleyerek İsrail ile diplomatik ilişkilerini normalleştirdi. Arap ülkelerin İsrail'e karşı birleşik cephe gösterdiği bu eğilim, Arap İsrail savaşı sırasında olanların göreceli olarak tam tersidir. Ancak bu yeni ittifak oluşumunun tam olarak sebebi nedir? Bu soruyu cevaplamak için, çeşitli uluslararası ilişkiler bilim adamları, bir ittifakın kurulmasının nedenini açıklamak için çeşitli teoriler ortaya attılar. Bu makalenin araştırma sorusu "Onlarca yıl süren düşmanlık ve soğuk ilişkilerden sonra; neden Körfez İşbirliği Konseyi'ndeki bazı ülkeler İsrail ile ilişkilerini normalleştirme kararı alırken diğerleri almıyor?" dur. Bu makale, araştırma sorularını analiz etmek için nitel araştırmaları benimseyecektir. Körfez Arap ülkelerinde ikamet eden akademisyenler ve entelektüeller, Arap Körfezi kurumlarına bağlı kişiler ve Arap Körfezi uzmanlarıyla açık uçlu görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Bu yeni ittifak oluşumunun esas olarak her bir Arap Körfez ülkesinin ittifaktan elde edeceği kâr tarafından motive edildiğini savunuyorum. Bu görüş, çalışmada anlatılan daha ayrıntılı olarak açıklayacağım Schweller'in Çıkar Dengesi Teorisi ile uyumludur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Arap-Körfez, Çıkar Denge, İsrail, Neo-realizm, Realizm.

ABSTRACT

ANALYZING THE DIPLOMATIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ARAB GULF STATES AND ISRAEL (2020-2021): A CASE STUDY OF THE UAE, QATAR AND SAUDI ARABIA

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In 2020, regional history was proclaimed when the UAE became the first Arab Gulf State to normalize its diplomatic relations with Israel. After that, several Arab countries like Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan followed suit and normalized their diplomatic relations with Israel. This trend is the opposite of what happened during the Arab-Israeli war, whereby the Arab countries had presented a united front against Israel. However, what exactly is the reason for this new alliance formation? To answer this question, various scholars of international relations have come out with several theories to explain why an alliance was formed. The research question of this paper is, “After decades-long animosity and cold relations, why do some countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council decide to normalize their ties with Israel while others did not?”. This paper will adopt qualitative studies to analyze the research questions. Open-ended interviews were conducted with scholars and intellectuals residing in the Arab Gulf States, individuals who are affiliated with Arab Gulf institutions, and Arab Gulf experts. I argue that this new alliance formation is mainly motivated by the profit that each Arab Gulf state would gain from the alliance. This aligns with Schweller’s Balance of Interest Theory, which I will explain further in this study.

Keywords: Arab-Gulf , Balance of Interest, Israel, Neo-Realism, Realism.

DEDICATION

To the strong women in my life, Mama and Cituk, who have taught me all there is to know about life, faith, and forgiveness.

And not to forget, my cat Toasty who has cheered me up with her cuteness at times when life has taken its toll upon me.



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Nur Sakinah Jannati
Istanbul, 2023

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LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AGSIW	Arab Gulf State Institute in Washington DC
ACW	Arab Center Washington
ACRPS	Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies
COVID-19	CoronaVirus Disease of 2019
CBO	Central Boycott Office
GCC	Gulf Security Council
ISI	Import Substitution Industrilization
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IRGC	Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Corps
JCPOA	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
KFCRIS	King Faisal for Research and Islamic Studies Center
LSE	London School of Economics
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MEDRC	Middle East Center for Water Desalanation Research
OxGAPS	Oxford Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
PIJ	Palestine Islamic Jihad
P.A	Palestinian Authority
PSE	Peninsula Shield Force
UAE	United Arab Emirates
US	United States

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Research Question

What exactly drove states to form alliances? Furthermore, what was the factor that drove them apart? For decades, these have been some of the questions that numerous international relations and political science scholars have been attempting to answer. According to Walt (1987), one must understand the origin of alliances, as failure to do so would be fatal. Walt gave the example of what happened during World War Two when the leaders in Japan were reassured that by forming an alliance with both Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, they could balance the power of the United States against their power expansion within the Far East region. As widely known, their calculations were proven to be wrong, as the formation of the Axis would eventually prompt the United States to fight more aggressively against the expansion of Japan and solidify their alliance with both Great Britain and the Soviet Union.

Traditionally, the balance of power theory has been widely accepted in explaining a state's behaviour in forming alliances within the international system. The theory proposed that in the international system, most states would often prevent any state from holding an overwhelming power that could dominate the whole global system. The logic of the balance of power theory was mainly derived from the anarchical state of the international system that forced the states to come together to ensure their survival.

On the other hand, the Balance of threat theory argues that states did not, in fact, Balance in response to the distribution of capabilities. But instead, they often balance against the calculations of threats, most notably when they collectively consider a state or a coalition to be threatening to their survival. Walt (1987) identified four

preconditions in assessing threats: aggregate power, geographic proximity, offensive capabilities, and perceived aggressiveness or intentions.

Meanwhile, the omni-balancing theory posits that internal threats towards the leadership play a central role in explaining states' behaviour, even in alliance formation. David (1991) argues that the balance of power theory must be revised to explain alliance formation in third-world countries. In this case, the leaders of third-world countries would choose to form specific alliances to help them face the threats at the national level to ensure their survival and rule in their respective states.

The research question I aim to answer in this paper is, "After decades of animosity and cold relations, why did some countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council decide to normalize their ties with Israel while others did not?"

The Abraham Accords agreement marked an unprecedented period in history when some of the GCC countries, such as the UAE and Bahrain, declared their normalization of diplomatic ties with Israel openly. While the UAE and Bahrain have been slowly moving into the formation of a formal alliance with Israel, other countries such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait are still hesitating in jumping into the bandwagon. I believe that this new trend in the Gulf region is a highly complex phenomenon that needs to be studied. In this case, each Gulf country has its respective motivation and reason for recalculating its diplomatic ties with Israel.

1.2. Background and Significance of Research

The diplomatic relations between the Arab Gulf states and Israel could be described as cold and non-existent for several decades. There was evident tension between Israel and the Arab Gulf states, primarily through a traumatic series of events that led to the controversial establishment of the Israeli state and the Arab-Israeli wars. However, after the Arab Spring, there has been a significant shift in relations between the Arab Gulf states and Israel. The Abraham Accords mark a historic chapter in regional history after the UAE became the first Persian Gulf Country to normalize its ties with Israel formally. Aside from the UAE, Arab countries like Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan have followed suit and normalized their diplomatic relations with Israel. Saudi Arabia has

yet to recognize Israel as a state, but there have been many rumours about backdoor diplomacy between them.

To the confusion of many people (Especially the Islamists), the Arab Gulf states have been actively pursuing and mending their ties with Israel after the Arab Spring. On May 10, 2021, an outbreak of violence happened in Palestine after the Israeli government forced the evacuation of Palestinians from their homes in Sheikh Jarrah. The incident caused a huge uproar, which led to various protests around the world demanding better treatment of the Palestinians. Despite the commotion, Arab Gulf leaders have been relatively passive and silent about the attack. This trend is somewhat the opposite of the response of Arab leaders during the Arab-Israeli war.

There has yet to be any comprehensive research on the Arab Gulf's new alignment with Israel ever since the Abraham Accords Agreement was signed, and this paper aims to fill in the research gap by applying several theories in international relations to analyze the Arab Gulf state's alignment with Israel. A strong focus will be put on the Balance of Interest theory, which Randall Schweller developed to understand alliance formation. I hope that this paper will be able to make a small contribution to the academic realm and help others understand the dynamic that lies behind the growing alliances between the Arab Gulf States and Israel. This study would retune the focus on the motivation that lies behind states forming alliances with each other. Why do they choose to align with each other? Will they bandwagon with a rising power? Or choose to balance against the biggest threat?

The Middle East is a highly complex region which encompasses complex and dynamic identities of the Arab Muslim countries. While all the Arab Muslim countries are located under the Islam umbrella, they are drastically different from each other, shaped by their respective long histories and religious sectarian differences. As stated by Mabon (2016), various studies and applications of realist approaches to the Middle East region often adopt a singular position, which contradicts the true complexity and underappreciates the role of identity in the region. I wish to fill this research gap by also shedding light on the importance of the role of Arab Gulf political identity in shaping most of their foreign political decisions, especially concerning their diplomatic ties with Israel.

1.3. Problem Statement

Throughout history, various scholars in the field of International Relations have attempted to understand the dynamic that lies behind alliance formation. What exactly drives states together and drives them apart? Numerous theories have emerged to answer this question and to understand the nature of alliance formation. The Balance of Power theory has been generally regarded as the law of nature in understanding international relations and politics. The theory attempts to shift the focus onto the security issue in understanding states' behaviour in the international realm. However, numerous scholars have pointed out the weakness and gaps within the theory in understanding the political trend after the Cold War's end.

Stephen Walt also tried to introduce a new perspective through his Balance of Threat theory by claiming that balance is much more common than bandwagoning. In this case, states would balance against threats rather than power, as the balance of power theorists claimed previously. The theory gave a new outlook on the issue of the calculation of threat. However, it failed to explain the underlying reasons for profit-driven alliances. The Balance of Interest theory is still a much-understudied approach in international relations. I believe that the theory offers a very conclusive and comprehensive approach to understanding foreign policy formation in the Gulf region.

1.4. Variables

The independent variable of my research is the benefits gained from the alliance. Benefits or profits in this context could be in the form of economic benefits, cultural benefits and gains, and security calculations. Through their newly formed alliance with Israel, the Gulf states have managed to gain an unprecedented number of profits. They have developed numerous trade and bilateral collaborations with Israel that benefit them in the long run. In addition, the Gulf states have also managed to increase their reputational standing in the Western world by portraying themselves as a more open-minded modern destination. Most importantly, an alliance with Israel would also be profitable for their geographic security calculations.

- **Independent Variable:** Benefits gained from the alliance.
- **Dependent Variable:** Tendency of Arab Gulf States to ally with Israel.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Brief Political Background of the GCC States

The Arab-Israeli conflict and its resolution have always been multifaceted, encompassing military, diplomatic, political, and economic components. The regional dynamics within the Middle Eastern region encompassed inter-state wars until the mid-1970s and a combination of the cold war and the cold peace in the 1980s. In the 1990s, multi-track discussions were held between Israel, members of the Palestinian national movement, and most Arab governments (Shaham, 2004).

As Shaham (2004) mentioned, the Gulf area's political context is centred around three large oil powers: Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia. In comparison to the other regional giants, Iran and Iraq, the smaller GCC members have always been at a strategic disadvantage. While Saudi Arabia was considered the weakest country compared to both Iran and Iraq, the other GCC countries generally preferred to flock to Saudi Arabia as an ally. Although Saudi Arabia was regarded as the oldest and largest Gulf country, it would never match Iran and Iraq's large population and military power (Rosman-Stollman, 2004).

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) was established in the year 1981 between Saudi Arabia, and the weaker GCC states with the aim of coordinating the governmental policies of its member countries in order to create a more holistic security framework to safeguard the stability of the Gulf region. According to Al-Makhawi (1990), the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) emerged during the time of the Iran-Iraq war and the dangerous spread of Shiite propaganda from Iran after the Iranian Revolution of 1979, which was directed at the Gulf states. As stated by Byman et al. (1999), the weak Arab Gulf states also faced regional challenges from the other Arab countries. The Arab world has always been envious of the wealth of the Gulf states and has often placed

tremendous pressure on them to support the Palestinian cause and the other Arab countries financially.

Even though it was not the initial aim of the GCC to form economic cooperation and integration, it had become the central front on which the GCC would operate in the future. The GCC established the Economic Agreement of June 1981, which stipulated the GCC countries' regional objective, the coordination of industrial development policy, and the formation of free trade and common markets within the region. However, according to Shaham (2004), the GCC still needed help to match the European levels of economic integration due to fundamental economic disparities, security constraints on border processes, and political disagreements. Nevertheless, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) remains the primary political and regulatory cooperation platform.

Aside from that, the GCC states also reacted to the threat of Iran and Iraq by participating in the Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) (Shaham, 2004). The economic strength of the GCC, most notably Saudi Arabia, through their oil revenue, has allowed them to play a vital role in both the Arab League and the OIC. As mentioned by Shaham (2004), both organizations serve primarily as vehicles for developing a shared agenda with Iraq and Iran on a larger scale and a means of ideological and political containment of the threat emanating from them. They also guarantee internal legitimacy by enhancing the GCC's affiliation with Pan-Arab and Pan-Islamic identities and ideas. Nevertheless, as the 1990-1991 Gulf War demonstrated, neither organization could provide much cohesion or promise of military help (Rosman-Stollman, 2004). After the Gulf War, very few Arab countries aided the militarily weak Gulf states. In this case, the Western forces were proven to be a safer and better ally.

As reassurance of their military deficiency, the GCC states have always kept a close strategic defence alliance with the US. For the last seven decades, the Saudi American partnership has been founded on a simple principle: Riyadh utilizes its strength to secure a steady supply of moderately priced oil while Washington defends it from foreign threats. Riyadh has consistently aligned with the US on the most critical global issues (Shaham, 2004). It financially supported anti-communist movements in the area

and internationally throughout the Cold War. After the Iranian Revolution 1979, Saudi's regional significance to the US has undoubtedly soared. As Shaham (2004) pointed out, the main complications within US-Arab relations have always been the Arab-Israeli conflict. The US has persistently offered their unwavering support for Israel ever since their establishment.

As Rosman-Stollman (2004) stated, Gulf oil has always held great importance for the Western world. Political stability within the Gulf region would ensure a steady oil supply to the Western world with reasonable prices. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait opened the doors for America's military involvement in the Middle East. Throughout the years, the US has firmly set their foothold within the Gulf region. The US has air and naval military access and bases in all Gulf states. The presence of the US within the Gulf states has also brought negative implications, one that the GCC leaders would be willing to risk ensuring their security. Nevertheless, the American invasion of Iraq in 2003 has undoubtedly made the Gulf leaders wary of being too close to the US.

Rosman-Stollman (2004) also mentioned that the weak GCC states also acknowledged that they could attain benefits and profits through the normalization with Israel. Before receiving their independence in 1971, the Gulf states did not actively associate themselves with the political context in the Middle East. As also stated by Abadi (1996), the Gulf states had merely adhered to the rest of the Arab League by voting for anti-Israeli policies. They acknowledged their economic duties towards the Palestinians.

The oil revenue within the GCC states had drastically changed the demographics of the states (Rosman-Stollman, 2004). The locals within the GCC have actively refused to work with Western oil companies in their countries because of the degrading nature of the work. So as a result, the Gulf states relied heavily on expatriate workers, constituting a more significant number than the local population. The expatriate population includes people from different nationalities. Before the Iraq invasion of Kuwait, the country became the home of a large population of Palestinian expatriates, nearing 400,000 people. However, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait dramatically changed the notion that lies behind Arab solidarity as most of the Arab countries stood by silently while the events unfolded.

Making things even worse, some countries, like the official Palestinian government under Arafat's leadership, had openly declared their support for Iraq. This changed how the Gulf viewed the Palestinians and led to great resentment against the Palestinian expatriate within their countries. Thousands of Palestinians were ousted from Kuwait shortly after the incident, and Palestinian work permits were limited. As stated by Metz (1994), almost two-thirds of the foreign populations within Kuwait fled during the occupation, and most were not allowed to return. The large population of Palestinians would then become victims of public and private sources of hostility because of the public support given to Iraq by the Palestinians who resided outside the country. This incident strengthens the anti-Palestinian tendency and opens the doors for warmer diplomatic relations with Israel.

2.2. The Arab Boycott of Israel

The economic conceptions that shape Arab-Israeli relations have always moved hand in hand with the political trend. One of the longest economic sanctions ever placed against a state, the Arab Boycott of Israel, is an example of Arab economic warfare against Israel. However, throughout the years, the implementation of the economic sanctions has undoubtedly eroded through several attempts at the peace-building process. The Arab League was founded in 1944 and comprised 22 different Middle Eastern and African countries and institutions. The members of the Arab League are Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, the Palestinian Authority, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. As stated by Feiler (1998), the Arab Boycott of Israel began in October 1945, after the end of the second meeting of the Arab League Council. The organization has endorsed an official boycott of Israeli firms and Israeli-made items. The boycott is mainly managed by the Arab League's Central Boycott Office, which is located in Damascus (Weiss, 2017).

The boycott movement called for all member states to withhold and prohibit any forms of economic or business transactions with Israel. Shortly after that, the Unified Law on the Boycott of Israel was established, which outlined three tiers of the boycott movement (Sharon, 2003). The first tier is the primary boycott which bans any citizens of the Arab League member from participating in any form of direct transaction with

any citizens of Israel or the Israeli government. The second tier is the secondary boycott, which is subjected to any entity that does business with Israel. The Central Boycott Office (CBO) in Damascus maintains a blacklist of these entities. The third tier applies to a foreign company with links to Israel, as no business is allowed between them.

The boycott is not enforced collectively by the Arab League, nor are boycott restrictions enforceable on member states. Nevertheless, the regulations have served as a model for different laws enacted by different member countries. The League proposes that member countries get certificates of origin on all items purchased from suppliers to guarantee that they comply with all boycott criteria (Weiss, 2017). Generally, member countries appear to be enforcing the boycott sporadically. While some Arab League members have limited commercial ties with Israel, the Arab League does not openly or publicly specify which nations implement or do not implement the boycott. Some Arab League member nations have contended that the boycott may only be revoked by the Arab League, as it is the formal organization implementing it. Even so, the boycott is considered an individual and private matter of the state, and each Arab League member is separately responsible for adhering to the boycott. Thus, the enforcement and boycott implementation method varies to the state (Weiss, 2017).

According to Sharon (2003), the policies of the Arab Boycott of Israel limit their access to the exports of foreign markets and raw materials. This posed a direct challenge to the Israeli economy as they rely highly on raw material exports due to their limited natural resources. As stated by Feiler (1998), the primary boycott sought to economically isolate Israel from its nearest market (the Arab neighbours), causing the prices of its exports and imports to skyrocket owing to transportation and insurance expenses.

Throughout the period of the year of 1960s and 1970s, Asian Muslim countries joined the boycott movement, and the movement gained momentum to be more robust. The boycott received the strong support of Asian countries such as Malaysia, Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. As a result, Israel has been collectively banned from gaining access to the majority of the Asian economic market. A comprehensive screening

procedure was subjected upon any companies who wished to enter the Arab states market to ensure that they held no direct relations with Israel (Sharon, 2003).

The peak of the Arab Boycott, however, was during the oil embargo in 1973. The oil embargo had utilized the most visible facet of Arab economic power. There was a massive expansion of investment coming into Gulf countries due to the increase of high oil revenue within the country. As a result, there was a larger opportunity for the Arab countries to effectively enforced both secondary and tertiary boycotts (Feiler, 1998).

In the beginning, the Arab boycott demonstrated great success, effectively marginalizing the Israeli economy. However, shortly after that, the movement began showing signs of erosion, mostly due to the difficulty of collectively enforcing the boycott. Each member of the Arab League was subjected to their own sovereignty, and as a result, it was almost impossible to monitor the implementation of the boycott in each country. For example, several countries like Algeria, Morocco, Sudan and Tunisia did not implement the secondary and tertiary boycott (Shaham, 2009).

Israel responded to the boycott by effectively ignoring it. Israel has built a strong state economy through the large wave of immigration, investing in agriculture, participating in import substitution industrialization (ISI), and receiving transfer payments from Germany and contributions from the Jewish Diaspora (Rivlin & Spivak, 2008). The boycott was never fully implemented in all of the Arab League countries. For instance, despite the enforcement of the boycott, we can still find many Israeli products in various Arab countries. Most of the products were still smuggled through countries such as Cyprus, Greece and Western Europe. As highlighted by Feiler (1998), Israeli exporters also have found several methods to effectively export their products without them being traced back to their country. They did so by falsifying the certificates of origin of the products and by working through straw companies.

As mentioned in an article published by the Jerusalem Post, the head of InfoProd, a consulting firm for foreign and Israeli companies, the Arab boycott can now only be considered as a mere 'lip service' (The Jerusalem Post, 2006). The same opinion was shared by some anonymous Arab officials. For example, according to Ezzat (2002),

one public official once commented to an Egyptian newspaper, Al-Ahram, that while it is easy to declare in public documents that they would boycott Israeli products, it is difficult for them to carry out the boycott in most Arab states.

Nevertheless, the strategy was no longer proven to be sustainable in the 1960s because of the high rise of Israeli foreign debt. The complex effects of the boycott were felt even more strongly throughout the 1970s as the oil shock intensified inflation, and the trade deficits grew even more (Kanovsky, 1997). As stated by Shaham (2009), in 1977, the "Anti-Boycott Laws" was passed by the US Congress, which implemented to activities of US personnel in foreign trade and commerce. Effectively, the laws banned any compliance with any deals or documents that endorsed any boycott that we did not support. The new laws passed by the US have been proven effective in dramatically reducing the compliance of American companies with the boycott.

According to Wiess (2017), it is widely acknowledged by members of the Arab League that US pressure has played a role in affecting the implementation of the boycott. The growing presence of US pressure has slowed down the implementation of the Arab boycott. As stated by Shaham (2009), the year 1990 posed a direct challenge to the Arab boycott due to the Gulf War, which led to the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq. On September 11, 1990, President George H. W Bush declared the 'New World Order' thus, ending the Cold War and the beginning of the US military predominance in the Middle East.

Shortly after that, Egypt, the Palestinian Authority and Jordan agreed to a peace deal with Israel, ending their compliance with the Arab boycott. In the year 1994, all members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) announced that they would only endorse the primary boycott and abolish the implementation of secondary and tertiary boycotts. While in 1996, it was announced that the member of the GCC states would abolish all levels of the implementation of the boycott for the betterment of peace and development within the Middle East (Weiss, 2017).

The implementation of both secondary and tertiary boycotts also decreased over time. According to Fershtman and Gandal (1998), Asian countries started to export cars to Israel after the relaxation of boycott implementation throughout the late 1980s until

the 1990s. After the relaxation of the boycott, there was a 12% increase in the Israeli car market, which led to 790 dollars worth of price increase per car.

Nevertheless, despite its setbacks, the boycott movement still relatively received strong support from the public as it has a strong symbolic importance. According to Shaham (2009), there are three ways in which the public understands the Arab boycott. Firstly, it is in terms of strategic leverage which the boycott was seen as a method of bargaining in addressing the Palestinian occupation. As such, they believe that the boycott should remain effective as long as no solution for the Palestinian issue is found. Secondly, they are in terms of defensive measures, which are mainly motivated by the fear of Israel's strong regional influence. This perspective believes that without the boycott, Israel would achieve economic dominance in the region. Thirdly is the moral obligation argument in which support for the Palestinians is seen as a moral and religious obligation of the Muslims.

Despite the relaxation of the boycott, the Arab boycott issue remains to be a sensitive issue for the Arab public. Most of the citizens of the Arab countries refused to declare any support for the normalization as long as the Palestinian issue remains unresolved.

2.3. Arab Gulf States Growing Ties and Interests with Israel

What has been clear throughout the years is that there is a shift in the Arab Gulf States' perception of Israel from an enemy to a potential partner that could bring significant benefits to them. The Arab Gulf monarchy families no longer see Israel as a major threat to their power. Iran's expanding influence in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and, more lately, Yemen has exacerbated GCC governments' suspicions about the Islamic Republic's objectives and capabilities since the late twentieth century. The persistent mistrust allows Israel to position itself as a prospective partner to the GCC states in confronting Iran's nuclear, cyber, proxy, and missile programs (Ferziger & Bahgat, 2020). Obama's past reconciliation efforts with Iran in the JCPOA agreement also fuelled the Gulf States' fear, even after Trump and Biden took over the leadership. In this case, the lingering mistrust allows Israel to position itself as a prospective partner to the GCC states in confronting Iran's nuclear, cyber, proxy, and missile programs.

Israel's also presented itself as an attractive potential partner with their recent development in military power and technological capabilities. Israel currently possesses the Middle East's strongest military and nuclear capabilities (Bahgat, 2007). Aside from conventional military weapons, Israel is one of the most sophisticated countries in the world in the cyber realm, thanks to their significant private sector investment in technology. These capabilities are equivalent to China's, Russia's, the United Kingdom's, and the United States. In addition to that, Israel also has become a significant manufacturer and exporter of unmanned aerial vehicles (Ravid, 2019). Aside from its military capabilities, Israel is also a dominant leader in several commercial technologies, particularly irrigation and water management (Smart Water Magazine, 2020). This presented an attractive prospect for GCC countries that often deal with the issue of water scarcity.

Amid the COVID-19 outbreak, numerous Gulf states have come out to Israel to offer aid in combatting the virus. According to the UAE Ambassador to the United Nations, Lana Nusseibeh, the common threat has demonstrated that there is "a lot of space for cooperation" with Israel on medical research (Harkov, 2020). Israel has also developed their medical tourism sector, which has become a secret place to treat prominent patients from the GCC. Hospitals such as Sheba and Assuta has become important centre for the Israeli development of medical tourism (Ferziger & Bahgat, 2020).

Another important growing sector between Israel and the Arab Gulf States countries is the weapon trading sector. For years, Israeli corporations have been present in GCC countries, but their presence has been largely veiled. The Israeli government discloses minimal statistics on commerce with the Gulf, with \$1 billion in exports recorded in 2016, the most recent year for which figures are available (Ferziger & Bahgat, 2020). While Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have long been customers of Israel's arms sector, the transactions are usually hidden and classified.

2.4. Alternative Explanation: Balance of Power, Balance of Threat, Omni-balancing and Balance of Interest Theory

As stated by Waltz (1985), security is the highest end of all states in forming alliances in an anarchic state. He believes the state's primary concern is not to maximize power

but to ensure its security and survival in the anarchic international system. In such instances, their behaviour is primarily influenced by their concerns or worries about survival. In this regard, the international system is mainly shaped by the state's security concerns, which are characterized by the distribution of power (Mabon, 2016).

In an anarchic order of the world, self-help is the main principle that shapes all the actions of the states. The balance of power theory gave us an assumption about states' behaviour. The theory assumes that states are unitary actors seeking their own preservation at the minimum and striving for universal domination at the maximum. Waltz (1985) also pointed out the criticism that was posed against the balance of power theory; in particular, it was the lack of focus of the theory in explaining the states' policies. However, Waltz argued that a theory cannot answer questions about matters that lie outside of the level of generality. In this instance, a theory cannot fully explain a state's foreign policy in depth; instead, it can only make assumptions regarding the motives and interests of the states in question.

According to Waltz, states will tend to ally against the most powerful state in the region. The fear of other states will be every alliance's primary motivation. What Waltz stated could briefly explain the complex shift in alliance within the Arab Gulf states region. Iran, being a long-time archenemy of Saudi Arabia, has ignited fear and suspicion of Iran's growing regional influence.

According to Ghariani (2020), the consequences of the Iranian nuclear deal and their rising influence within the region have largely motivated the Sunni Arab states to reach out to Israel as a potential new ally. There have also been talks about Biden's administration possibly renewing the JCPOA agreement, which posed a major concern for the Gulf states and Israel.

As mentioned by Friedman (2021), much of Saudi Arabia's relations with Israel are marked by the US's new look east policy, which aims to reduce their involvement in the Middle East. This fear further intensified after the Iranian attack on Riyadh's oil facilities in Biqayq and Khurais in September 2019, which received a minimal response from the US (Omran, 2019).

From Waltz's perspective, this could directly explain the Arab Gulf state's sudden rapprochement of ties with Israel. Saudi Arabia is willing to mend their ties with Israel to balance the power of Iran. The Security Dilemma also led most of the Gulf countries to attempt to find the means to gain power in the region in order to secure the best defence and maintain its security in the region. According to Guzansky (2015), lately, most GCC states have begun to see eye to eye with Israel, most notably on the issue of the threat of radical Islamist terrorism within the Middle East and, most importantly, the rising threat of Iran.

In his work *'The Origin of Alliances'*, Stephen Walt (1987) tried to depart from the conventional Balance of Power theory by introducing a new perspective. Walt developed the balance of threat theory, which claimed that the recognition of threats mainly drives state alliances. States would align to balance against similar threats. The level of threats could be measured through the distribution of power, geographic proximity, offensive capabilities, and perceived intentions.

The distribution of power or aggregate power could be simplified as the state's total resources (Walt, 1987). In this case, states who have a substantial population, industrial & military capabilities and technological prowess posed the biggest threat. This means that states possessing more total resources would pose a greater threat to others. According to Walt (1987), it has been one of the US's grand strategies to prevent any other potential state from possessing a grander industrial resource than them.

Aside from that, geographical proximity is also an essential measurement of threat. According to Walt (1984), nearby states presented a larger threat than states far away. This is because, with distance, their ability to project power is lower. Walt (1987) gave the example of former US president Reagan's justification for US intervention in Central America. President Reagan justified America's intervention because Central America was nearer to the US, which posed a more significant concern to them.

Thirdly, states with offensive solid power would also pose a bigger threat than states with lesser offensive capabilities. Offensive capabilities can more accurately be described as military capabilities. Countries with larger and better-equipped military

forces will be considered a threat to the sovereignty of others. This will increase their ability to threaten other states' sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Lastly, states with aggressive intentions will also be viewed as a threat. As an example, Walt used the case of Nazi Germany in World War Two. At that time, Nazi Germany faced significant opposition through the alliance formation of others because of their aggressive ambitions.

Ghariani (2020) mentioned that Iran's military capabilities and growing prominence have sparked an unparalleled arms race in the Gulf countries. In this context, the US has been the leading provider of advanced military hardware to the Gulf states. However, the US still maintained their commitment to ensuring the military superiority of Israel. However, why are the Arab Gulf states only balancing against Iran instead of Israel? If one were to analyze the aggregate power of the region, it would be clear to say that Israel held one of the most significant power and threats in the region. There is no denying that Iran also poses a significant threat to the other GCC states and could strongly affect the political stability within the Gulf region. However, it is also widely known that Israel has the region's most robust military capabilities.

As mentioned by Brimelow (2021), if we look at it on paper, the Iranian military will have more advantages than Israel. Iran's large population of 84 million people has given them an advantage regarding the active-duty force. This is much larger than Israel's 9 million population. However, the international sanctions imposed against them this has prevented Iran from gaining access to the finest military equipment. Brimelow (2021) also reiterated that the Iranian T-72s, T-54 and T-55 tank force is much more inferior to the Israeli Defence Force's Merkav Mark IV, which is equipped with modern electronics such as the Trophy Active Protection System. In addition, despite the large Iranian and modern Navy, the Israeli Navy is still much more advanced with modern weapons, warships, and submarines with air-independent propulsion systems. The US and European suppliers have continuously provided Israel with access to the latest technologically advanced military weapons. With Israel's strong alliance with the US and its indispensable military power, the logic would be that the Arab Gulf states would quickly fear Israel and balance against it.

I believe the same could be said about Israel's geographic proximity and aggressive intentions. On the map, Israel is near enough to the Gulf states to be considered a threat. In addition to that, Israel has also been applying very aggressive internal policies towards the Palestinians. Despite receiving condemnation from the international community, Israel is still pursuing continuous expansion in the Palestinian territory. It could be said that Israel has an ongoing aggressive ambition to pursue expansion.

However, why are the Arab Gulf states only balancing against Iran instead of Israel? Despite Iran's undeniable strength and influence, Israel still held the region's most significant power and threat. Throughout the years, Israel has not only managed to establish one of the best defence and military systems in the world, but it has also become one of the leading economic superpowers within the region despite its challenges. As is evident here, there is a gap in Waltz's hypothesis.

As David (1991) stated, omni-balancing accepts much of the realist and neo-realist underpinnings. However, the significant difference lies in the assumption of internal threats. Most realists only focus on the calculation of external threats and capabilities. Omni-balancing tried to broaden this notion by focusing on internal threat calculations. The state leaders would most likely support outside powers that would protect them from internal and external threats. In the context of the development of diplomatic relations between Arab Gulf states and Israel, some might argue that the alignment is a personal decision of the Arab Gulf leaders to secure their power in their respective countries as they faced continuous threats from the Muslim Brotherhood movement. Grabowski (2016) mentioned that after the Arab Spring, the Muslim Brotherhood posed a detrimental threat to most Gulf monarch families. Qatar's strong support for the Muslim Brotherhood has enhanced its popularity and regional status, which is much more popular than Wahhabism. In this context, Saudi Arabia might see Qatar and the Muslim Brotherhood ideology as a considerable threat to their status as regional leaders.

However, it was widely agreed that the Arab Spring was a failed movement. Despite the initial idealism and euphoria that came together with the movement, most countries that revolted ended up in utter chaos. The movement was unsuccessful in fulfilling the

people's many demands to establish a stable democratic system with good governance (Amour, 2018). There was also a significant decline in the Muslim Brotherhood movement's influence after the revolution's failure. The Muslim Brotherhood failed to establish a stable influence and governance in Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia.

In this case, I argue that it would be incorrect to consider the threat of the Muslim Brotherhood movement to the Gulf States as the main driving force for their alliance formation with Israel. The influence of the Muslim Brotherhood movement has undoubtedly weakened dramatically after the Arab Spring to be even considered a major threat to the Gulf states. Nevertheless, despite the waning influence of the Muslim Brotherhood movement, why do the GCC countries continuously persist in mending ties with Israel?

In his work entitled *"Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back in"*, Schweller distinguished the difference between bandwagoning and balancing state behaviour. According to Schweller (1994), people frequently believe that bandwagoning and balancing are polar opposite behaviours motivated by a similar desire for greater security. Schweller addressed the complexity of state behaviour by pointing out that states might have different reasons to balance or bandwagon that lie outside the mere desire to achieve greater security. Schweller defines balancing as the act of self-preservation and protection of existing values. In comparison, he defines bandwagoning as a self-extension behaviour to attain values that they covet. In this case, balancing is done to avoid losses and bandwagoning is done for gain.

Schweller addressed the intricacies of bandwagoning behaviour by categorizing it into four types. The first type is jackal bandwagoning, whose main goal is profit gain. Jackal bandwagoning is often done by lesser aggressors who wish to share the spoils of victory with the unlimited-aims revisionist powers. Schweller also pointed out an important point when he stated that aside from attaining additional territory, one of the main motivations for jackal bandwagoning is gaining security from lions.

The second type of bandwagoning is piling on bandwagoning, which happens when the war's outcome has already been decided. In this case, states will often bandwagon with the victor to share the spoils. According to Schweller (1994), this usually happens

near the end of the wars. Aside from that, piling on bandwagoning also might be done by states who fear that a victor might punish them if they refused to pile on. Schweller uses Turkey during World War Two as an example, in which they initially wanted to remain neutral throughout the war but were coerced by the Allies to declare war against Japan and Germany.

The third type of bandwagoning is the wave of future bandwagoning. In this case of bandwagoning, states may bandwagon with stronger countries because they believe they will represent the 'wave of the future' (Schweller, 1994). This type of bandwagon is often endorsed through charismatic leadership, dynamic ideologies, propaganda campaigns and demonstrations of strength on the battlefield. For example, Schweller uses the case of what happened during the Cold War period. At that time, numerous underdeveloped weak third-world countries were attracted to the ideology of communism and believed it would be the new wave of the future.

The fourth type of bandwagon is the contagion or domino effect. This bandwagon posits that when a huge change or a revolution happens, a domino effect would usually happen through external force, spreading rather quickly to other countries and regions. For example, during the Cold War, the US often expressed their concern that the communist ideology would spread like wildfire to other countries in the world (Schweller, 1994).

According to Schweller (1994), the balance of threat and balance of power theory fails to shed light on alliances driven by profit and opportunities for gain. The balance of Interest theory argues that the state will bandwagon for profit rather than security. Rather than restricting the explanation behind states' behaviour narrowly by claiming that states would merely value what they already have than what they covet, the balance of interest theory further expanded this assumption by claiming that states might have various ranges of interests. Some states value what they desire more than what they have, some are satisfied with what they have, some value their possessions only slightly more than what they covet, and some states consider what they have as inadequate but do not have any desire to outdo others.

Schweller divided the balance of interest theory into two different levels, which are the unit level and the systemic level. Unit level refers to the costs that states are willing to pay to defend and extend their values. On the other hand, the systemic level refers to the strength of both the status quo and the revisionist states.

To clearly explain his theory, at the unit level, he divided the states into four types of animals: lions, lambs, jackals, and wolves. The lions are depicted as a security maximizer who wanted to maintain their status quo. In application, Schweller described the Great Powers as satisfied lions. Their interests would be maintaining the existing status quo to preserve their privileged position in the international system (Schweller, 1994).

The lamb is the second type of animal in the Balance of Interest theory. The lambs are usually weak countries that would choose to bandwagon with others. They are the weakest states in the system, possess relatively small military capabilities, and suffer from poor state-society relations (Schweller, 1994). As an example, Schweller gave the example of small countries that chose to bandwagon with Nazi Germany in World War Two. These countries include Czechoslovakia, Austria, Yugoslavia and France, who decided to bandwagon with the Nazis out of fear for their security.

The Jackals are the third animal mentioned in the Balance of Threat theory. In this case, the Jackals are the opportunistic states that would most likely trail the Lions when they were close to triumph. The jackals would likewise be willing to pay a hefty price to defend their ideals and belongings.

Lastly are the predatory wolves who value what they covet far more than what they possess. The wolves are usually states willing to take great measures and risks just to improve their pre-existing conditions in the international system simply. They would not be afraid to adopt extreme and reckless measures. A good example of the wolves would be Hitler and the Nazis. After the end of World War One, Germany reached their lowest point in history, and Hitler presented them with a new hope for a better future. As a result, they were not afraid to take risks and extreme measures.

On the systemic level, the balance of interest argues that the distribution of capabilities plays no role in determining the stability of the system. Meanwhile, the goals and the means to which those capabilities are much more important (Schweller, 1994). In this case, the stability of the system is determined by the balance of the revisionist and conservative states. If the status quo states are more powerful than the revisionist power, then the system would be most stable. However, the system would undergo changes when a revisionist state or a new coalition power is stronger than the status quo. Schweller (1994) describes status quo powers as security maximizers who value self-preservation and the protection of the values that they have. On the other hand, revisionist states are described as power maximizers who would be willing to employ military force to disrupt and change the existing status quo. The revisionist powers are willing to take great measures because they simply value what they covet more than what they already have.

To apply Schweller's method and theory in the Gulf context, Iran could be described as the Lion in the region. After the 1979 Islamic revolution, Iran has managed to maintain its status as one of the leading superpowers in the region. Lions are described as security maximizers and want to maintain their status quo. This applies perfectly to Iran's case, whereby they are seen to be attempting to maintain their status quo and maximize their security through the development of nuclear weapons.

On the other hand, Israel could be described as the Wolves in the region. For decades-long, Israel had been isolated in the Middle East region. There was significant tension between Israel and the other Arab states in the past. However, Israel is now attempting to change this status quo in the region and solidify their influence in the region. Like the wolves, Israel has predatory behaviour and is willing to take great risks to get what it wants, even if it means aligning with its long-time enemies.

Saudi Arabia has a similar resemblance to the Jackals. As Jones & Guzansky (2020) mentioned, the change of leadership in Saudi Arabia has accelerated a new exploration of diplomatic relations with Israel. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman has shown his increased interest in mending ties with Israel compared to his father, King Abdullah. Like the jackals, Saudi Arabia is an opportunistic country looking for ways to extend their values and trail behind the wolves. The UAE and Bahrain also bear

similarities as the opportunistic jackals who will hop on the bandwagon with the predicted victor, which is, in this case, Israel.

Lastly, Oman could be described as the lambs. Oman has maintained good relations with their neighbouring countries and attempting to stay out of the conflict in the Middle East. Like the lambs, Oman tried to distance itself from the spotlight and the conflict surrounding the region for several years. They usually preferred to take the middle ground in every conflict and would appease other countries to stay out of the blood bath. Like the characteristics of the lambs, Oman usually tries to act as the 'peacemaker' for the regional conflict in the Middle East.

Looking at this case, the primary motivation for a state to ally with each other is not only because of security nor similar culture or ideology. As Schweller implied in his article, states will pile on the winning coalition to share the spoils of wars. In this case, what is happening with Arab Gulf Countries piling onto the predicted winner, Israel? The main drive behind every alignment is the interests and profits the specific countries would gain. As stated by Hobbes, human beings will look for methods to increase their means of wealth, interest, and power (Gilpin, 1998). The Arab Gulf states only seek the means and ways to protect and increase their regional influence. Even if that means it comes at the expense of betraying their Muslim brothers and sisters in Palestine.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

This study would adopt a Qualitative methodology to analyze the research question and problem. According to Gerring & Christenson (2017), qualitative analysis is the informal analysis of a non-comparable observation. This is relatively different from quantitative research, which involves the formal analysis of matrix-based observations. As stated by Halperin & Heath (2012), different types of interviews can be conducted by a researcher, and each type provides different ways to collect data. Interview data can be collected through face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, online interviews, and focus groups. In individual face-to-face interviews, the interviewer will face the respondent directly and have the opportunity to do a more in-depth analysis of the topic. Online interviews, on the other hand, can be helpful for platforms to explore topics that are much more sensitive, as they can remove any interviewer bias (Halperin & Heath, 2012). Online interviews will be a valuable platform to reach respondents who live geographically far from us.

For my research, I conducted open-ended interview sessions with intellectuals or Gulf experts who live in Gulf countries. I also interviewed scholars affiliated with Gulf institutions to gain a more in-depth understanding of the new alliance between the GCC states and Israel. The interview was conducted in a semi-structured form in which I combined both structured and semi-structured questions. This way, I hope to gain a deeper insight into the interviewer's experiences and establish more reliable data. I conducted my interviews both online and face-to-face. Since most of my respondents live geographically far away and in different countries, it was more convenient to conduct the interview online.

I also analyzed the speeches of Arab Gulf Leaders, their new foreign policy after the normalization period, the content of the Abraham Accords peace agreement, and its impact on the Palestinian movement. This study also applied process tracing methodology to test the causal relationship between the variables present in the alliance formation between Israel and the Arab Gulf States. I will apply the theory testing variant to test the mechanism of the evidence and understand the causal relationship between the variables.

As stated by Halperin and Heath (2012), triangulation is when a researcher uses multiple sources of data collection. This will help us to see the topic from multiple angles. In my research, I will use the triangulation method to increase the reliability of my data. I will combine the data I collected through my interview session with the data I gained from the speeches of Arab Gulf Leaders, their new foreign policy after the normalization period, and the content of the Abraham Accords peace Agreement. This way, I aim to increase the validity and reliability of my research.

3.2. Target Population and Sampling

My target population for my research is scholars or intellectuals residing in different Arab Gulf states. In addition, I also interviewed Gulf experts in the US who are affiliated with Gulf state institutions and have previous experience living in Gulf countries. Those with previous experience living in Gulf states would better understand the political situation there. I have managed to collect respondents who are currently or have previously worked in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman. I have tried reaching out to scholars in Bahrain and Kuwait but was unable to find any respondents from both countries.

Aside from that, I also consulted and interviewed scholars and Gulf experts from the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington DC, The Arab Centre in Washington DC, the Chatam Institute and the Gulf State Analytics. The total amount of my respondents is 16 people.

Table 3.1. List of Respondents

	Name	Short Bio
1)	Prof.Hassan Houchang Yari	Head of the Department of Political Science in Sultan Qaboos University in Oman
2)	Dr. M. Cuneyt Yenigun	Associate Professor at Sultan Qaboos University in Oman
3)	Dr Mogielnicki	Dr Robert Mogielnicki is a senior resident scholar at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, DC. He leads the Next Gen Gulf series examining technology trends in Gulf Arab states. Dr Mogielnicki is also a political economy specialist in the Middle East and North Africa.
4)	Dr Yerevan Saeed	Dr Saeed is a research associate at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, DC. He is also a political analyst that conducted research on security, political and energy issues in the Middle East, with a strong focus on Iraq, Turkey, Iran, the Gulf, and the Levant.
5)	Dr Abdulwahhab al-Qassab	Dr Abdulwahhab Al-Qassab is an Associate Researcher at the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies (ACRPS) in Doha, Qatar, and a Visiting Fellow at ACW. At ACRPS, Dr Abdulwahhab al-Qassab coordinates the Strategic Program and oversees several projects, including Armament in the Arab world, Energy and Oil in the Arabian Gulf, and Water Resources in the Arab World.
6)	Dr Imad K. Harb	Dr Imad K. Harb is the Director of Research and Analysis at Arab Center Washington DC. He is also the Founder and Director of Quest for Middle East Analysis, a research and consulting firm. He also served as Senior Analyst at the Abu Dhabi, UAE-based Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research and taught political science and international relations at the University of Utah and San Francisco State University.

Table 3.1. (cont.)

7)	Dr Robert Mason	Dr. Robert Mason is a Fellow at the Sectarianism, Proxies and De-sectarianisation project at Lancaster University and a Non-Resident Fellow at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington.
8)	Dr Scott Walker	Dr Scott Walker is an Associate Professor of International Relations in the Department of Government and Society at the United Arab Emirates University. His research interests include democratization, human rights, and American Foreign Policy. He has published in such journals as Human Rights Quarterly, Journal of Human Rights, International Interactions, Conflict Management and Peace Science, and Electoral Studies.
9)	Mr Giorgio Cafiero	Giorgio Cafiero is the CEO and founder of Gulf State Analytics, a geopolitical risk consultancy based in Washington, DC. His research interests include geopolitical and security trends in the Arabian Peninsula and the broader Middle East. Mr Cafiero is a regular contributor to several publications, including Al-Monitor, The National Interest, and LobeLog.
10)	Professor Dr Abdullah Baabood	Dr Abdullah Baabood is a scholar from Oman with wide regional and international experience. Dr Baabood graduated in business studies and international relations and holds a Master's in Business Studies (MBA), a Master's in International Relations (MA), and a Doctorate (PhD) in International Political Economy from the University of Cambridge. He previously held the positions of Director of the Gulf Studies Programme and the Gulf Studies Center at Qatar University and was the Director of the Gulf Research Center at the University of Cambridge, UK. As of now, he is the Chair of the State of Qatar for Islamic Area Studies and a Visiting Professor at the School of International Liberal Studies, Waseda University.

Table 3.1. (cont.)

11)	Dr. Neil Quilliam	Dr Neil Quilliam is a foreign affairs specialist with extensive experience consulting with government officials and corporate clients on geopolitics and energy in the Middle East. He previously worked as a senior Energy Adviser to the UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Today, he is a Senior Associate Fellow at the King Faisal for Research and Islamic Studies Center. He is also an Associate Fellow at Chatham House.
12)	Dr Kristian Coates Ulrichsen	Dr Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, PhD, is a Baker Institute fellow for the Middle East. Working across the disciplines of political science, international relations and international political economy, his research examines the changing position of Persian Gulf states in the global order, as well as the emergence of longer-term, nonmilitary challenges to regional security. Previously, he worked as a senior Gulf analyst at the Gulf Centre for Strategic Studies between 2006 and 2008 and as co-director of the Kuwait Program on Development, Governance and Globalization in the Gulf States at the London School of Economics (LSE) from 2008 until 2013.
13)	Adel Hamaizia	Adel Hamaizia is an independent consultant advising governments and the private sector on and across the GCC and North Africa with a focus on political risk, economic development, and public diplomacy issues. Adel is Committee Vice-Chairman of the Oxford Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies Forum (OxGAPS), where he is the Co-Editor of OxGAPS' thematic-quarterly, "Gulf Affairs". He is a researcher at the University of Oxford, where he focuses on the Political Economy of the Middle East and where he teaches Middle East Politics. Adel is also an associate fellow at Chatham House and an associate at Global Partners Governance.

Table 3.1. (cont.)

14)	Professor Mahjoob Zweiri	Dr Mahjoob Zweiri is the Director of the Gulf Studies Center and Associate Professor in Contemporary Politics of the Middle East at Qatar University. Before joining Qatar University in 2010, Dr Zweiri was a senior researcher in Middle East Politics and Iran at the Center for Strategic Studies, University of Jordan. He was also a visiting professor at the School of Government & International Affairs at Durham University.
15)	Dr. Abdelkarim Amengay	Dr Abdelkarim Amengay is an assistant professor at Doha Institute for Graduate Studies. He holds a PhD in political science from Sciences Po Paris and the University of Ottawa. He joined the Politics and International Relations program in August 2020, where he teaches comparative politics, democratic governance and democratization theories, and readings in politics. Abdelkarim's research interests include but are not limited to, political behaviour, party politics, and populism in Western countries and the MENA region.
16)	Dr Jim Krane	Jim Krane, PhD, is the Wallace S. Wilson Fellow for Energy Studies at Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy in Houston. He specializes in energy geopolitics, with a focus on oil-exporting countries and the challenges they face from energy subsidies, internal demand and climate change. He teaches classes on energy policy and geopolitics at Rice University. Krane spent nearly 20 years as a journalist, six of them in the Middle East. He was a long-time correspondent for the Associated Press based in Dubai, Baghdad and New York and has written for myriad other publications, including the Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, Financial Times and the Economist Intelligence Unit.

3.3. Data Collection Procedures

As previously stated, I conducted my interviews both face-to-face and online. Out of 16 respondents, I only conducted one face-to-face interview session. The other 14 interviews were conducted online via Zoom meetings and Google Meet. One interview was conducted via email. All my interviews were recorded for documentation purposes. Before I started my interview process, I sent each respondent a written consent form, which outlined all my research procedures and potential risks. I asked all respondents six to eight open-ended questions, respectively, and the interview lasted over 30 to 60 minutes.

3.4. Ethical Concerns

According to Wiles (2013), the researcher must observe several guidelines before conducting research. The researcher must obtain the respondents' consent, either through written or oral consent. Aside from that, the researcher must also analyze the capacity of the respondents to see whether they genuinely qualify and can give their consent. Some groups of people, such as children, intellectually impaired people, or people with mental or physical illness, might lack the capacity to truly understand and consent to the research conducted. It is also crucial for the researcher to maintain the confidentiality of the respondents' personal information so that no harm is done to them. Concerning confidentiality, the researcher can practice anonymity to protect the respondents' identities. Lastly, the researcher must also analyze all potential risks the respondents could face during or after the research.

Before conducting the interview, I explained to my respondents the aim of my research to all interviewees so that all respondents could understand the research's direction and aim. The Palestinian issue is still considered sensitive, so the respondents might face some risk and backlash if they share some controversial opinions and views. This might lead to some psychological or political distress for some interviewees. The interviewees were given the option to be anonymous to protect the confidentiality of their personal information. This was done to minimize the number of risks. I also prepared a written consent form for each respondent to ensure that they voluntarily decided to participate in the research and understood that they could withdraw

anytime. Each respondent also has the opportunity to either give verbal consent or written consent by signing the written consent form that I gave to them. I also asked for their permission before recording the interview sessions and let them know that I would not share the recording without their consent.



CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Themes in the Dynamics of Arab Gulf-Israeli Relations

There are four main themes that were raised by the respondents about the new dynamics that existed in the new formalized diplomatic relationship between the Arab Gulf States and Israel. All four themes could serve as causal explanations for the alliance formation between the GCC and Israel.

4.1.1. The Iranian Threat

As noted by a Professor of Political Science at Sultan Qaboos University in Oman, the Iranian government poses a detrimental threat to Israel and the GCC countries. The supreme leader of Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini, has openly stated that Iran does not recognize the legitimacy of Israel as a state and has invested its resources to contribute to the destruction of Israel. This includes the creation of Hezbollah and arming and financing Hamas and Islamic jihadist groups within the Middle Eastern region. The proximity of Iran to the GCC countries, especially the UAE, has made the Iranian threat more than real. Aside from that, the respondent also mentioned that the Islamic Republic often prides itself on the control it possesses within Arab capitals such as Yemen, Baghdad, Beirut, and Damascus, Syria. In this respect, it is difficult for the small GCC countries to maintain their security within the region as they are constantly threatened. The threat from Iran has made the GCC states and Israel conclude that they must unite to balance against the Iranian threat (Professor of Political Science at Sultan Qaboos University, Personal interview, March 9, 2022).

Another respondent, a Committee Vice-Chairman of the Oxford Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies Forum (OxGAPS), also asserted the importance of the Iranian threat as the key driver in shaping politics in the Gulf region. According to the respondent,

the UAE has a unique political context as it combines seven emirates, each with its competing objectives. While Abu Dhabi focuses more on oil, the focal point of Dubai lies more on business, Iranian investment, Iranian trade, and Iranian cultural influence. Many Emiratis are of Iranian origin, and Iran continues to play an essential role in shaping the foreign behaviour of the UAE. He also underlined that the Iranian threat goes beyond just the possible rebirth of the JCPOA. A lot of the threat from Iran mainly came from Iran's aggressive regional behaviour and their support for regional proxies. In this context, psychological perception, recognition of a common enemy, history, and geography matter in determining foreign behaviour (Committee Vice-Chairman of OxGAPS, Personal interview, April 28, 2022). From Israel's perspective, Iran is also the only competitive nuclear power in the region. As quoted by the respondent,

And for them, even if there was 1%, 2% or 0.01% chance that Iran might ever attack Israel, then that's 0.1% is too much. (Committee Vice-Chairman of OxGAPS, Personal interview, April 28, 2022).

The same point was mentioned by an Associate researcher at the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies (ACRPS) in Doha, Qatar when asked about the Iranian threat. He says the Iranian threat is fundamental in every corner of the Gulf region. This is due to their ability to infiltrate security in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen (Associate researcher for ACRPS, Personal interview, April 16, 2022). The Iranian threat also posed a significant danger to Riyadh as Iran does not recognize the legitimacy of King Salman politically or religiously (Professor of Political Science at Sultan Qaboos University, Personal interview, March 9, 2022). With this regard, the Islamic Republic of Iran has repeatedly stated that it believes that Riyadh is not fit to become the leader and caretaker of the holy sites of Muslims.

One of the respondents, an Associate Professor of Political Science at the Doha Institute, stressed the fact that Bahrain is the only Arab country that has a vast Shiite population with a ruling Sunni royal family. Most people often forget this fact. Since the year 1980's, various political groups in Bahrain have been linked to Iran. Iran often presented itself as the protector of the Shiite community within the Middle Eastern region, especially in Bahrain (Associate Professor of Political Science at Doha Institute, Personal interview, April 17, 2022). This, again, posed a direct threat to the ruling family in Bahrain. The CEO of Gulf State Analytics also pointed the same point

when he said that the Iranian threat is a much larger issue for Bahrain in comparison to the UAE. This concern goes back to the early 1980s when there was a coup attempt in Bahrain which Iran backed. Iran also sometimes issues rhetoric that claims Bahrain is a part of Iran (CEO of Gulf State Analytics, Personal interview, March 30, 2022).

When assessing the situation, the Director of the Gulf Studies Centre at Qatar University stated that there are two perspectives in analyzing the Iranian threat. The first view holds that the Iranian threat has prompted the Gulf states to lean towards Israel to ensure their regional security. The second view holds that the Abraham Accords were not formed because of Iran. It was said the UAE had communicated with Iran before the accords to ensure that the agreement would not threaten Iranian security in the region (Director of the Gulf Studies Centre in Qatar University, Personal interview, April 24, 2022).

According to a Non-Resident Fellow of the Arab Gulf State Institute in Washington, DC (AGSIW), the Iranian threat could not be considered the sole reason that prompted all the Gulf states to align with Israel. In retrospect, it is not a formal alliance, and small states such as the UAE, Oman and Qatar prefer to operate with many options at their disposal and to balance with regional and international powers to create opportunities to stabilize their neighbourhood and carve out important niches through activities such as mediation. Both Saudi Arabia and the UAE are engaged in diplomacy with Iran, so they are pursuing several different avenues simultaneously (Non-Resident Fellow of AGSIW, Personal Interview, March 13, 2022).

4.1.2. The Loss of American Security Within the Region

Another theme that is also important in discussing the new alliance formation between the GCC states and Israel is the influence of American foreign policy in shaping the politics within the Gulf region. Ever since the Kuwait invasion; the US has maintained its role as the security guarantor in the Middle East. The GCC states have always maintained a close bond with the US, and in return, the US would ensure the security of the GCC states from any outside threat, which mainly came from Iran.

According to a respondent who is the Research director of the Arab Center in Washington, DC, the US has two viewpoints on the rivalry between the GCC states and Iran. First and foremost, the US desired the safety and security of their long-term partners, the GCC states. They also do not want Iran to interfere with their sale of armaments to the GCC. The second position is that, despite everything, they are still not ready to commit entirely to an alliance with the Gulf states to confront Iran. Most notably, after the COVID-19 pandemic, the US has focused more on addressing domestic political issues than foreign policy issues. Against this backdrop, the US believes that by offering some incentives, it will be able to slow down parts of Iran's foreign behaviour. However, any future talks on rebuilding the JCPOA would still be very challenging, as Iran has undoubtedly lost trust in the US after what happened under Trump's administration. On the other hand, the GCC states that if the US is not fully dedicated to their partnership, it must seek a new alternative to secure its regional security (Research director of the Arab Centre in Washington DC, March 18, 2022).

The US has also been providing and offering strong incentives for the Arab countries to normalize their ties with Israel officially. For example, outside the Gulf region, Morocco has attained the recognition of Western Sahara after their full normalization with Israel (Fellow for Energy Studies at Baker Institute, Personal Interview, April 14, 2022). As also highlighted by the Chair of the State of Qatar for Islamic Area Studies, the Gulf states believe that Israel could open the doors so that they could enhance their cooperation with the US (Chair of the State of Qatar for Islamic Area Studies, Personal interview, May 23, 2022). In this case, geostrategic calculations are more important in shaping the foreign policies of the Gulf states. The withdrawal of the US from the Middle East has created a power vacuum for security in the region.

As stated by an Associate Professor of Political Science at Sultan Qaboos University, US foreign policy has always played a crucial role in determining politics in the MENA region. The US has always maintained a very close relationship with Israel, and we could see the US-Israeli bond blossom even further after former US President Donald Trump came into power. During Trump's administration, individuals like Jared Kushner had a powerful influence on the administration in forming the Abraham Accords agreement. Under Biden's tenure ship, the close bond between the US and Israel would continue. However, it would not be as close as it was under Trump's

leadership (Associate Professor of Political Science at Sultan Qaboos University, Personal interview, March 15, 2022). The chair of the State of Qatar also mentioned the same point for Islamic Area Studies, in which he stated that it is likely that Biden would continue to resume the existing foreign policies towards Israel.

Even though Biden's administration might not be necessary with some policies adopted by Israel, they do not see how they could contain it. As quoted by the Chair of the State of Qatar for Islamic Area Studies,

I think the support for Israel within the United States is bipartisan, so all parties are fully supportive of Israel. It wouldn't make much difference whether it was a Trump or Biden administration. Obviously, they see this as, the United States is not necessarily happy with some of the Israeli policies in the region, but they don't see that they can contain it for other reasons, including, of course, the internal support for the state of Israel and the strong lobbies of the Jewish lobby and Israeli lobbies in Israel. And so, although they can be critical of the state of Israel, they see that the future of the state of Israel is to actually have good relations with its neighbors. And they are always trying to support that and have the Arab state accept Israel or normalizing with it. It makes any administration, whether it is Republican or Democrat, very happy to see that happening. (Chair of the State of Qatar for Islamic Area Studies, Personal interview, May 23, 2022).

Furthermore, most of the GCC states were under the impression that they could no longer rely on the US as a dependable or credible security provider in the region (Senior et al. at King Faisal for Research and Islamic Studies Center (KFCRIS), Personal interview, April 25, 2022). According to him, the perception that the US can no longer be relied upon has effectively pushed the GCC states towards Israel. Another respondent mentioned the same thing, the Committee Vice-Chairman of OxGAPS, in which he stated that the US, for the past few years, has been slowly retreating and lessening its footprints from the Middle East, which made Gulf regional players feel the need to coordinate a more assertive foreign policy (Committee Vice-Chairman of OxGAPS, Personal interview, April 28, 2022).

In this regard, Israel provides an alternative solution for the Arab Gulf countries to counter the Iranian threat. As also mentioned by the Baker Institute fellow for the Middle East, throughout the year 2013 up until 2015, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Israel realized that they had much more in common with each other (Baker Institute fellow for the Middle East, Personal interview, March 21, 2022). This realization has contributed significantly to the formation of this new alliance.

One of the respondents shared the same view as a Research Associate at AGSIW. As indicated by him, the US is trying to counter the rise of China as a new hegemonic power in the world. As a result, they decided to focus less on developing their ties with their GCC partners. The Gulf states believe they must deepen their ties with Israel because the US will not protect them. In response to the new regional trend, the UAE and other GCC countries believed they could no longer rely on external powers to protect them against external aggression. So, to protect themselves from external threats, the Gulf wishes to develop its local security system. As quoted by him,

During Trump's administration, the US placed sanctions against Iran to exert maximum pressure on them to stop their development of nuclear power. The move was proven ineffective as the IRGC still holds a very strong influence within the region, most notably in Yemen and Iraq (Research associate at AGSIW, Personal interview, April 8, 2022). There have been major talks on the possibility of Biden reviving the JCPOA nuclear deal agreement with Iran, which terrifies the GCC and Israel. Both parties shared the same concern that the revival of the JCPOA could lead to the withdrawal of the US within the region, which could possibly increase Iranian influence. The possible removal of the sanctions from Iran would make them more powerful. Once the sanction is removed, Iran can export oil and thus gain more revenue to fund and sponsor proxy groups within the Middle East region (Research Associate at AGSIW, Personal Interview, April 8, 2022). In a grander geopolitical context, the GCC have the perception that the US is slowly retreating from the Middle East and thus would be less committed to the security of its regional allies. Again, in this context, the Gulf countries believe that it would be in their best interest to find other countries in the neighbourhood in which they could collaborate and advance their mutual interests (CEO and founder of Gulf State Analytics, Personal interview, March 30, 2022).

As stated by an assistant professor at the Doha Institute, the majority of GCC states, particularly the UAE and Saudi Arabia, are dissatisfied with the US's ongoing foreign policy toward Iran. Most believe that Biden's government isn't doing enough to limit Iranian influence in the region. (Assistant Professor of Political Science at Doha Institute, Personal interview, April 17, 2022).

4.1.3. Economic and Cultural Benefits From Alliance Formation

According to one of the respondents, a political economy specialist of the Middle East and North Africa region in AGSIW, the economic context is critical in shaping the diplomatic relationship between the GCC states and Israel. Between 2017 and 2019, all diplomatic ties were tense and low in the Gulf region due to the declaration of the Qatar boycott. However, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has halted the tension within the Gulf region as all countries were forced to look inward to address the urgent economic turns (Political economy specialist at AGSIW, Personal interview, March 17, 2022). In this regard, the respondent said he believes the Abraham Accords peace agreement and normalization with Israel came when the GCC states sought to reassess their former policies and re-establish ties. Moreover, one of the few partnerships left to be explored within the region is with Israel. Nevertheless, one crucial question remains: How many new deals formed after the normalization have materialized into genuine investments and commercial deals?

What we looked at the Institute quite closely and are still trying to track is to what degree these announcements, these memoranda of understanding, and these joint investment pledges were part of the initial media buzz and excitement, and how much of that has materialized into genuine investments or commercial deals. (Political economy specialist at AGSIW, Personal interview, March 17, 2022)

The normalization deals, however, would most likely benefit Israel more than the UAE and Bahrain. This is because the peace agreement gave Israel a gateway to the broader region and an entrance to the larger Gulf market. Israel has been estranged from the broader region for a long time (Research Associate at AGSIW, Personal Interview, April 8, 2022). So, the normalization deal is a positive step for them to build a better diplomatic bond with their neighbours. Bahrain presented us with a rather different context than the UAE because of its small size and reliance on investment in ICT infrastructure and Fintech (Political et al. at AGSIW, Personal Interview, March 17, 2022). Due to this reason, any form of small investment by Israeli entrepreneurs and Fintech companies would make a tremendous difference in the Bahraini economy. Bahrain would substantially benefit from the new alliance's formation, given its small population. This impact is different from what one would usually see in a larger economy like the UAE.

The UAE and Israeli business council is expecting the trade between both parties to reach up to 2 billion dollars in the year 2022, which is a solid increase from 250 million dollars' worth of annual trade before the Abraham Accords Agreement (Committee Vice-Chairman of OxGAPS, Personal Interview, April 28, 2022). In addition to that, it is also expected to have a second-order impact on the Abraham Accords agreement. This includes the rise of American interest and engagement in the UAE.

A research associate at the Arab Gulf Institute in Washington, DC, also highlighted that the Emirati's new formalized diplomatic relationship ran at a much deeper strategic level that could even be extended to joint space cooperation, intelligence, military, and technology. The benefits of the new GCC diplomatic bond with Israel now outweigh the benefits of confronting them. The GCC states realized Israel was not going anywhere, so it was best for them to formalize their bond so that both parties could benefit from the alliance. Despite its small size, Israel has managed to position itself as a strategic and attractive partner within the region that could produce efficiently.

One of the respondents also stressed the difference between the UAE's foreign policy elites and economic elites. Most economic elites in the country believe that the new formalized economic bond between the UAE and Israel would serve everyone's interests, including the Palestinians. They believed that the alliance would help the Arab economy in addition to helping the Palestinians (Director of Research and Analysis at Arab Center Washington DC, March 18, 2022).

Another essential matter to look at is the economic diversification efforts that most Gulf states have worked on for the past decade. Finding other economic alternatives aside from relying entirely on oil revenue has been at the top of the GCC state's agenda. In this case, Israel seems to be an attractive partner due to their success in various industries such as the high-tech industry, pharmaceutical industry, water management and desalination, research and development, and most importantly, the defence export industry (Baker Institute fellow for the Middle East, Personal interview, March 21, 2022). In this case, successful economic diversification will create good, high, paying jobs for the local citizens in the Gulf region. The Gulf region, particularly the UAE, is unique because of its high reliance on foreign migrant workers with low-paying wages.

Most local citizens refused to work on construction projects because they often viewed the work as disgraceful. Future collaborations with Israel would offer the GCC states successful diversification, leading to various creations of good, high-paying jobs for the nationals.

As mentioned by a political economy specialist at AGSIW, the exploration of water management and water security is vital for the Gulf states to counter the issue of climate change. Aside from that, the issue of finalization of the assets in the Gulf and the look for new potential investors to invest in privatizations and other investment instruments in the Gulf sovereign wealth fund are also at the centre of the potential economic outlook after the normalization period (Political et al. at AGSIW, Personal Interview, March 17, 2022). In an attempt to explore other non-oil economic opportunities, Israel is also an attractive partner to be used as a conduit for other investors spread out across the globe.

Another critical issue that the GCC states are currently facing is food security. Two of the respondents highlighted the fact that the GCC countries are unable to produce their agriculture and food stocks. They relied heavily on other countries to import their food throughout the years. The natural geographical conditions of the Gulf countries made it almost impossible for them to produce their own agriculture. Thus, the new normalization with Israel would allow them to explore other options to diversify their economy. Israel has been a relatively successful case in the region due to its high economic standing and the development of various technological industries that seem attractive to the Gulf countries.

Furthermore, most Gulf countries wanted to be viewed as growing tech hubs and the leading tech order. In this case, again, Israel offered numerous opportunities as it is at the forefront of the tech boom in the Middle East. Another interesting thing that a political economy specialist at AGSIW mentioned is the talks on the possible formation of the trading triangle between Dubai, Israel, and Mumbai for the trading of precious metals, stones, diamonds, and gold.

One of the respondents highlighted the issue that might come together with the economic diversification efforts, especially in maintaining the same high standards of living. As quoted by him,

So how will the new economy maintain the same standard of living? At the same time, how will that state be able to provide this, considering this is a very crucial point, considering that if the political systems remain the same, how can a new economy be developed? In other words, how do you develop a new industrial base, for instance, without developing a new industrial class? And the new industrial class is not going to be silent. It's going to ask for and demand political rights. It's going to demand to have a voice in how political decisions are made because it is heavily involved in the economy. (Director of Research and Analysis at Arab Center Washington DC, March 18, 2022).

The expansion of the tourism industry in the Gulf region is also at the forefront of the economic benefits of the normalization of ties with Israel. As stated by the CEO and founder of Gulf State Analytics, the GCC states often view tourism as one of the pillars of their economic diversification agenda. After the declaration of the Abraham Accords agreement, thousands of new tourists came to the UAE from Israel. This number is not insignificant because of the damage that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the UAE tourism sector (CEO and founder of Gulf State Analytics, Personal interview, March 30, 2022). An associate professor at the UAE University also mentioned that his students in the UAE had expressed their openness to visiting Israel after the normalization agreement (Associate Professor of International Relations at the UAE University, Personal Interview, April 14, 2022).

As a Senior Associate Fellow at King Faisal for Research and Islamic Studies pointed out, Bahrain does not possess the same financial muscle domestically and geographically as the UAE. In comparison to the rest of the GCC states, Bahrain felt most threatened by Iran and is thus more dependent on its regional environment and neighbours. When the regional impact of the Abraham Accords agreement was analyzed, Bahrain would gain the most bilateral benefits from the normalization. Most of the Israelis often pointed out that the Bahrainis were the most open-minded and welcoming of their new bond with Israel, as they believed it could serve their national interests (Senior et al. at KFCRIS, Personal interview, April 25, 2022).

According to a political economy specialist at AGSIW, Israel might not offer a massive supply of tourists like China. However, the reputational reward that came from it

should not be disregarded. The reputational reward in this context will open the potential supply of tourists to a much larger global sample (Political et al. at AGSIW, Personal Interview, March 17, 2022). For instance, Jewish communities with connections to Israelis based in Europe and the US would be more open to visiting the Gulf region in the near future. After the Abraham Accords agreement, there has been a significant shift in the global perception of the Gulf region.

The region used to be considered mysterious, scary, and unsafe to travel to, especially by the West. However, the normalization has softened the rigid stereotype the West often puts against Middle Eastern countries. The same point was mentioned by an Associate Professor of International Relations at UAE University, who stated that the UAE wanted to be viewed as a more friendly destination for international business and tourism. The normalization's cultural impact should not be understated, as it will attract big cultural events such as the Expo 2020 in the UAE, which managed to attract a large number of people worldwide. This could improve the soft power image of the UAE by presenting itself as a more moderate country (Associate Professor of International Relations at UAE University, Personal interview, April 14, 2022).

Other collaborations, as stated by him, have also come to fruition. For example, I-24 Israeli satellite television began airing in the UAE in 2021, when the Al-Jazeera Qatari channel had yet to be aired in the country. Collaborations in education may become increasingly widespread shortly. The respondent highlighted that some Israeli universities have begun approaching the UAE university, expressing an interest in future collaborations (Associate Professor of International Relations in UAE University, Personal Interview, April 14, 2022).

One of the respondents also claimed that the GCC states wished to buy more influence and political clout in the US through the Abraham Accords. There is very strong bipartisan support in America's political system for the Abraham Accords, and most mainstream Democrats and Republicans believe that normalization would be a good step as it serves the interests of the US. Thus, the UAE and Bahrain believe they could improve their image and reputation in Washington, DC (CEO and founder of Gulf State Analytics, Personal interview, March 30, 2022).

According to a Non-Resident Fellow at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, the rapprochement between Israel and the GCC states reflected the trend of developing a range of international relations to support their respective visions and strategies, such as diversification, accessing new markets, and tourism. However, most importantly, the decision that was made was based upon a vital element of security and defence amid US calls since the Obama administration that prompted the GCC states to act more independently. This includes acquiring the Israeli Iron Dome missile defence technology via the US (Non-Resident Fellow at AGSIW, Personal Interview, March 13, 2022).

The Director of the Gulf Studies Center at Qatar University believes that the Gulf rapprochement of ties with Israel was done for several soft security and cyber security issues requiring collaboration with Israel. The UAE had recently gained Israeli support for protecting their skies and spheres from drones. However, according to the respondent, it is essential to note here that Israel would not be willing to give everything to the Gulf states despite the rapprochement, and they would be very selective in what they are willing to give (Director of Gulf Studies Center at Qatar University, Personal interview, April 24, 2022).

Despite several attempts to diversify the economy, the efforts had minimal impact due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which halted the economic progress of almost every country. Israel might only be able to provide a few profits to the Gulf countries, despite the initial hope at the beginning of the accords. For example, Israel has yet to be able to give much to both Egypt and Jordan after the peace agreement was signed with both parties (Director of the Gulf Studies Center at Qatar University, Personal interview, April 24, 2022).

However, according to several respondents, it would be inaccurate to claim that economic benefits are the main driver in the sudden normalization of Israel. As quoted by one of the respondents,

Obviously, economic benefits are important, especially as the Gulf states are now moving more towards diversification and a more sustainable economy. And they need some economic support. So that is, you know, obviously beneficial for them. But, as I said, they could have gotten this from anywhere. You know, they could have gotten it from Malaysia or from other countries that they could deal with. And so, I believe that strategic calculations

are much more important. (Chair of the State of Qatar for Islamic Area Studies, Personal interview, May 23, 2022).

The same opinion was shared by another two respondents, in which they both claimed that while the economic benefits and outcome are, in fact, necessary, it is only the results that came from the normalization agreement. Moreover, it is not the primary driver in the Gulf's key decision to normalize ties with Israel.

4.1.4. Internal Threats and Threats From Islamic Groups Within the Region

When asked about the impact of the Arab Spring revolution, one of the respondents said that the revolution has created a threat within each Gulf country. The fall of President Mubarak in Egypt and President Ben Ali in Tunisia sent a solid message to the Gulf countries. Both Tunisia and Egypt have been close allies of the GCC states, and the GCC has previously invested heavily in them. According to the Chair of the State of Qatar for Islamic Area Studies, the Muslim Brotherhood movement used to be a very good ally of the GCC states to counter leftist ideas such as communism, Arab nationalism, Nasserism, and so on. However, this relationship deteriorated after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, and the Brotherhood pledged its support to Iraq. After the incident, there was a split in the brotherhood movement between the Gulf Brotherhood and the main body of the Muslim Brotherhood (Chair of the State of Qatar for Islamic Area Studies, Personal interview, May 23, 2022). The GCC states are not against the Brotherhood per se but against any movement that supports democracy. So, when the Muslim Brotherhood movement stood with the Arab Spring revolution, it posed a significant threat to the Gulf autocratic leaders. The leaders of the Gulf states viewed the Brotherhood as more threatening because its ideology was more ingrained in Gulf society, and it was built on Islamic teachings.

Because the Brotherhood stood with the Arab Spring, they saw that as a major threat, even more so than other ideologies because the Muslim Brotherhood is indigenous because it's based on Islam and it's closer to Gulf society. While other ideologies were a little bit foreign, the Brotherhood was more ingrained in society. So, they saw that as the major threat to their stability, to their security. And therefore, they saw the Brotherhood as the arch enemy now. So while they see Iran as a security challenge and rival, not all countries obviously agree on this, but for some of them, the Muslim Brotherhood is seen as a real arch enemy that they need to contain because of its widespread ideology and because, you know, it has an appeal with some people because it stood with the Arab Spring. (Chair of the State of Qatar for Islamic Area Studies, Personal interview, May 23, 2022).

According to the Director of the Gulf Studies Center, the Arab uprising had created a new dynamic within the Middle Eastern region, which includes the Gulf. The dynamics caused a lot of concern among Gulf states, as they wished to maintain the existing status quo before the uprising. All Gulf countries viewed the revolution as a threat that must be stopped in any capacity (Director of the Gulf Studies Center at Qatar University, Personal interview, April 24, 2022).

As mentioned by the Director of Research and Analysis at the Arab Center Washington DC, the Arab Spring Revolution is a huge wake-up call for all the Arab masses and leaders across the Middle East and North African region. It would be an understatement to say that almost all the Arab leaders considered the revolution a threat to their security. As a response, the GCC states tried to kill any movement towards political change within their region. The UAE and Saudi Arabia have spearheaded the counter-revolution movement across the Middle East. The respondent also highlighted that Israel is pretty much pleased and satisfied with the current status quo within the region, even with Assad's leadership in Syria, even though they claimed otherwise. Because the alternative to that would be democratic leadership, this would focus on the Arab masses, who still believe in protecting the Palestinian cause. There have also been rumours that Israel is supplying spy software to the Arab regimes to spy on their people (Director of Research and Analysis at the Arab Center Washington, DC, March 18, 2022).

According to the CEO and founder of Gulf State Analytics, the UAE and Bahrain have entered the normalization deal for many other reasons unrelated to Iran. This is because the leadership in Abu Dhabi perceives the Muslim Brotherhood movement and other Sunni Islamist groups as a grave threat to their regime. The UAE has a vision based on authoritarian stability for the Arab world. It wishes to return to the pre-Arab Spring period (CEO and founder of Gulf State Analytics, Personal interview, March 30, 2022). In order to curb the democratic-building efforts by the Islamist groups within the region, the GCC states have taken several actions, such as supporting General Haftar in Libya and the Egyptian coup in 2013. Aside from that, Israel also does not want Islamist groups to take over Arab countries. Israel's personal preference would be a western aligned dictatorship that withheld non-confrontational policies towards Israel.

The ruling al-Khalifa family in Bahrain is often described as being repressive against the large Shiite population living in the country. During the early eruption of the Arab Spring, Bahrain was one of the countries that faced internal revolts from its people. Bahrain reacted by requesting intervention from the GCC mutual defence pact to put an end to the rebellion. They alleged that Tehran was behind the demonstrations, posing a direct threat to Bahrain and the rest of the Gulf Cooperation Council. As a result, the GCC's military branch, the Peninsula Shield Force (PSF), was mobilized for the first time in its history. More than a thousand Saudi soldiers and 600 Emiratis entered Bahrain to stop the revolution. In comparison to the rest of the GCC countries, the presence of internal threats is more prominent within Bahrain.

The Wallace S. Wilson Fellow for Energy Studies highlighted that support for anti-government groups had posed a genuine concern to the Gulf governments, most notably after the Arab Spring. To add to the concern, most of the opposition rebel groups in the region, such as Hezbollah and the Houthis in Yemen, often receive solid Iranian support. Moreover, an alliance with Israel would help the Arab regimes control the spread of Islamist groups by purchasing various surveillance technologies to keep tabs on them and repress them. According to the respondent, most Arab regimes became concerned with regime security after the Arab Spring. As a result, they often look at every policy through the lens of regime security (Fellow for Energy Studies at Baker Institute, Personal Interview, April 14, 2022).

The same point was mentioned by the Fellow at the Sectarianism, Proxies, and De-sectarianization Project at Lancaster University, as quoted by him:

Certainly, the Arab Spring facilitated new activism in some GCC state foreign policies, particularly between Qatar on the one hand and Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the UAE on the other. Some of the points of antagonism were carried forward into the Qatar crisis. I think the dynamics a decade later in the normalization process with Israel were somewhat different, but still played into increasing some GCC state reach through the Abraham Accords and through the Quad (UAE et al. and the US) in the Indo-Pacific to maximize state power and influence. That is a constant and developing theme. And certainly, surveillance technology is attractive to these states, especially in a period of heightened threat perception/competition, but the US provides the most cutting-edge weapons. These personal/state benefits contribute to monarchical stability and security. (Fellow at the Sectarianism, Proxies and De-sectarianisation project at Lancaster University, Personal Interview, March 13, 2022).

As also pointed out by the Baker Institute fellow for the Middle East, after the outbreak of the Arab Spring revolution, the UAE and Saudi Arabia were utterly convinced that

the revolution was a threat to the status quo of the Middle East and the winner of the revolution was the Islamist groups. The destabilizing characteristics of Islamist groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, are a direct threat to the autocratic control of the rulers in the Gulf region. Israel also shared the same concerns about Islamist groups as they faced the same challenge from Hamas. The events of the Arab Spring have reframed the perception of regional threat within the Gulf region. The two biggest threats after the Arab Spring were Iran and the destabilizing Islamist groups within the region (Baker et al. for the Middle East, Personal interview, March 21, 2022).

However, a few respondents, such as the Associate Professor at Sultan Qaboos University and the Committee Vice-Chairman of OxGAPS, underscored their beliefs that the internal threat does not explain the Gulf's sudden shift of alliance towards Israel. According to the Associate Professor at Sultan Qaboos University, the general quality of life for the local citizens within the Gulf states is very good. Moreover, if the people felt like their needs were being fulfilled in terms of politics, society and economy, we should not expect major changes to happen within the government. He also stressed the significant difference between the Gulf countries and the Middle Eastern region (Associate Professor of Sultan Qaboos University, Personal interview, March 15, 2022).

As mentioned by the Committee Vice-Chairman of OxGAPS, when assessing the internal threats from Islamic groups in the region, we must differentiate between the different GCC states. While some countries are definitely on high alert due to the threat of the Muslim Brotherhood movement and other Islamic political waves, the threat is not the same for all countries in the Middle East. The threat of Islamist groups in the region is a correlation, not a causal, explaining the UAE and Bahrain's sudden normalization with Israel (Committee Vice-Chairman of OxGAPS, April 28, 2022).

4.2. Future Prospects of Arab Gulf-Israeli Diplomatic Relations (Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait and Oman)

4.2.1. Saudi Arabia

According to the Chair of the State of Qatar for Islamic Area Studies, the Gulf normalization of ties with Israel happened with careful calculations by Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia. The full normalization of the UAE and Bahrain would not have happened if there had been a strong rejection from Saudi Arabia (Chair of the State of Qatar for Islamic Area Studies, Personal interview, May 23, 2022). The same opinion was shared by an Associate Professor of Political Science at the Doha Institute, in which he stated that Bahrain's decision to join the Abraham Accords agreement was mainly due to the pressure that was advocated by both Saudi Arabia and the UAE (Associate et al. in Doha Institute, Personal interview, April 17, 2022).

One of the core reasons Saudi Arabia has yet to join the agreement is because of the strong public opinion that the locals have regarding the Palestinian issue. Despite the younger generation being more open in accepting Israel in the region, the older generations did not share the same sentiments (Associate researcher for ACRPS, Personal interview, April 16, 2022). Saudi Arabia has a long history of antagonism against Israel that dates back to the Arab-Israeli war. As illustrated by the Senior Associate Fellow at King Faisal for Research and Islamic Studies Center (KFCRIS), there are two groups in Saudi society regarding the Palestinian issue. The first group is the more traditional older generation, which believes nothing can be achieved until Palestine becomes independent. The second group of people are the younger generations, who believe that the country has already given so much to the Palestinian cause and are tired of the non-ending conflict that has persisted throughout the decade (Senior et al. at King Faisal for Research and Islamic Studies Center (KFCRIS), Personal interview, April 25, 2022).

Saudi Arabia has a different set of domestic and international calculations than Bahrain and the UAE. It has a larger population, is already undergoing political consolidation under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, and is the centre of Islam. This makes overt cooperation more difficult to explore. Remember, normalization with Israel was a policy pursued right at the end of the Trump administration and has not been extended by the Biden administration. Since Saudi – US relations have become more difficult over the past years, the kingdom is also exploring defence-related projects/agreements with other actors such as Russia and China.

(Fellow at the Sectarianism, Proxies, and De-sectarianization Project at Lancaster University, Personal Interview, March 13, 2022).

However, according to the Director of the Gulf Studies Center, we might expect to see a full normalization once Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman assumes leadership in the country. Despite wishing to join the normalization process with the UAE and Bahrain, the Saudi leadership realized that the move would require significant preparations for the public. In this case, the next move for Saudi Arabia would depend mainly on what happened to the UAE and Bahrain (Director of the Gulf Studies Centre at Qatar University, Personal interview, April 24, 2022).

For the past few years, there have been several attempts by Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman to modernize the country and adopt a more open foreign policy (Associate Professor of International Relations at UAE University, Personal interview, April 14, 2022). Nevertheless, despite the wish of Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman to capitalize on the opportunity and join the normalization, he was forced to hold out because of the opposition of King Abdullah. As stated by a political economy specialist at AGSIW, in comparison to his son, King Abdullah has a greater affinity for the Palestinian cause due to his long history of fighting for the cause (Political economy specialist at AGSIW, Personal interview, March 17, 2022).

For Israel, the biggest prize to win in the region would be full normalization with Saudi Arabia (Senior et al. at King Faisal for Research and Islamic Studies Center (KFCRIS), Personal interview, April 25, 2022). A full rapprochement with Saudi Arabia would provide Israel with a degree of legitimacy that it has been seeking ever since its controversial establishment. Saudi Arabia has also maintained their leadership role as the custodians of the two holy mosques, so it would be challenging for them to enter the peace accords without having their legitimacy questioned by other Arab countries. The move is still precarious as it could threaten their hold on Islamic soft power.

I'd like to say that Saudi Arabia's a completely different beast. So, to them they have the Islamic soft power. Do you want to compromise the Islamic soft power? Soft power capital at the expense of Western political capital? (Committee Vice-Chairman of OxGAPS, Personal interview, April 28, 2022).

As a result, Saudi Arabia has been more careful to keep its collaborations with Israel under the rug through backchannel diplomacy. It would take time for the public in Saudi Arabia to be prepared to fully accept normalization fully. By joining the normalization, the UAE and Bahrain can help pave the way and prepare the public opening for the other Arab countries to join the accords in the near future (Research associate at AGSIW, Personal interview, April 8, 2022).

However, not all respondents are optimistic that Saudi Arabia will be reapproaching their ties with Israel after King Abdullah's leadership ends. When asked about the prospects of Saudi Israeli relations, the CEO of Gulf State Analytics said that he believes that Saudi will not be normalizing their diplomatic relations even after Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman assumed the throne.

I don't think that Mohammed bin Salman necessarily wants to deal with the domestic risks of such domestic fallout from this issue. Also, internationally, Saudi Arabia plays a leadership role throughout the wider Arab and Islamic world. The king of Saudi Arabia is officially the custodian of the two holy mosques, which is the Saudi, which has been the Saudi monarch's official title since the 1980s. If Saudi Arabia were to abandon the Palestinian cause and enter the Abraham Accords, that could undermine the legitimacy of Saudi Arabia's leadership role throughout the wider Islamic world. There are challenges to Saudi Arabia's leadership role in the Islamic world that come from Iran and Turkey. So, I think the Saudi leadership would be nervous about how these other countries could use that issue to further challenge the legitimacy of Saudi Arabia's leadership position in the wider Islamic world. (CEO and founder of Gulf State Analytics, Personal interview, March 30, 2022).

4.2.2. Qatar

Qatar has also maintained diplomatic cooperation with Israel throughout the years. However, the relationship's main basis was primarily to support the Gaza Strip (Chair of the State of Qatar for Islamic Area Studies, Personal interview, May 23, 2022).

Aside from that, the leadership in Qatar has always maintained some degree of support for the Arab Spring revolution and the Muslim Brotherhood movement. So, they would most likely lose their credibility within the region if they wished to proceed with the normalization with Israel. One respondent mentioned that Qatar do not have any desire or goal to move into normalization with Israel until the Palestinian question is solved (Senior et al. at King Faisal for Research and Islamic Studies Center (KFCRIS), Personal interview, April 25, 2022).

A similar point was highlighted by the Fellow at the Sectarianism, Proxies and De-sectarianisation project at Lancaster University:

Qatar has traditionally supported Islamist actors, so normalization with Israel would not sit comfortably with Doha unless it was accompanied by a significant change in Israel's policy vis-a-vis the Palestinians. However, Doha has been one of the few to overtly engage Israel and Palestine in the past to improve conditions in Gaza. (Fellow at the Sectarianism, Proxies and De-sectarianisation project at Lancaster University, Personal Interview, March 13, 2022).

According to another respondent, Qatar is the most financially secure Gulf country compared to the other Gulf countries. This is due to their large natural gas reserves, one of the largest in the world. Qatar also has a relatively small local population of over 313 thousand people which made it easier for them to distribute the natural resources revenue and provide financial aid for the people. It is also vital for Qatar to maintain good relations with Iran as they share a large natural gas field in the North Dome with Iran (Associate Professor of International Relations in UAE University, Personal interview, April 14, 2022).

One of the respondents highlighted the security aspect of Qatar's decision not to join the normalization with Israel. According to him, Qatar sees Saudi Arabia and the UAE as a more significant threat than Iran. Qatar also wishes to maintain a good relationship with Iran in the near future, and the move would be highly unpopular. Qatar has always maintained its position as a significant regional player by maintaining a good bond with Iran and advocating for Palestinian rights. Qatar has consistently provided huge financial aid to the Palestinians throughout the years. A move to normalize with Israel would threaten the legitimacy of Qatar as a regional player. It would reduce its soft power worldwide (Associate et al. at Doha Institute, Personal Interview, April 17, 2022).

In addition to that, Qatar has also served as a diplomatic bridge between Gaza-based Hamas and the Israeli government. Qatar has retained a working relationship with Hamas throughout the years, as the Hamas leadership is now primarily based in Doha, Qatar.

I think in Qatar, there is a lot of sympathy for the Palestinians, and that applies to government officials, elites, as well as just sort of average country citizens. Qatar believes that it is important for their country, as well as other Arab countries, to stand up for Palestinian rights.

They believe it's important for the Qatari leadership and the leadership of other Arab countries to raise the Palestinian issue in international institutions such as the United Nations and among others. The Qataris have a lot of soft power in the Arab world and beyond. Much of that soft power has to do with Qatar's foreign policy positions that support human rights and human dignity. For example, Al-Jazeera, which is the state-owned network that the country's governments set up and run, focuses a lot on the Palestinian cause. And that's that is a part of Qatar's soft power influence. (CEO of Gulf State Analytics, Personal interview, March 30, 2022).

4.2.3. Kuwait

While other countries have maintained some secret diplomatic processes with Israel, Kuwait is the only exception. Compared to the other Gulf countries, Kuwait can be considered the most hostile towards Israel, primarily attributed to its populist political atmosphere. Any Kuwaiti leaders who propose the normalization with Israel would face major political backlash in the parliament, media and the public (Baker et al. for the Middle East, March 21, 2022). Kuwait is the only country in the Gulf region with no open or known relationship with Israel.

Obviously, Kuwait cannot do it, at least not for the time being. I don't see that because of the very nature of its own domestic politics and the strength of the parliament. (Chair of the State of Qatar for Islamic Area Studies, Personal interview, May 23, 2022).

The same point was pointed out by another respondent, in which he highlighted the rigid nature of the Kuwaiti political system. Kuwait has been a strong supporter of the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002. As compared to any other country within the region, Kuwait is the most democratized country, with very opinionated politicians in the parliament. Regardless of their different tribal affiliation and young and old generations, most of them held powerful pro-Palestinian sentiments (CEO of Gulf State Analytics, Personal interview, March 30, 2022). After the end of the Gulf War, Kuwait tried to avoid any form of regional conflict. Due to this reason, it is improbable for Kuwait to join the normalization anytime soon. Kuwait currently shares a border with Iraq which has very high Iranian influence. Thus, they must maintain good ties with Iran, and joining the normalization would be highly unpopular for their geostrategic calculations (Associate et al. at Doha Institute, Personal Interview, April 17, 2022).

4.2.4. Oman

According to a Professor in the Department of Economics and Political Science at Sultan Qaboos University, the achievement of the late Sultan Qaboos in Oman had been remarkable. Throughout his leadership, he has managed to rebuild Oman and restructure Omani politics in the international arena. Despite being a new leader in Oman, Sultan Haitham is no stranger to Omani politics. In fact, the new sultan was previously groomed by the late Sultan Qaboos to lead and worked with the previous sultan for many years before he came into power (Professor of Political Science at Sultan Qaboos University, Personal interview, March 9, 2022). Due to this, most respondents agreed that we should not expect any major departure in Omani foreign policies under the leadership of the new sultan.

Compared to the other Gulf countries, Oman has the most extended history of diplomatic ties with Israel. Former Omani Sultan Qaboos maintained a neutral stance on regional politics throughout his leadership, differentiating Oman from the other Gulf countries. One of the respondents also highlighted that Oman could be considered the country most sensitive to Iranian needs (CEO of Gulf State Analytics, Personal interview, March 30, 2022). Oman has tried to maintain a neutral stance throughout the years and was careful not to upset any other countries in the region, especially Iran. Nonetheless, Omani diplomatic leadership with Israel has always been constrained because it was established for specific circumstances. Many respondents said no when asked whether we could expect full normalization between Oman and Israel very soon.

Also, we have a new government in Oman that's facing some very difficult economic situations. And there's a lot of unemployment. Anything like this could create big issues, big problems for the Omani government. The religious establishment is also very much against it. So, there is a public rejection, and there is a rejection from the religious establishment. So, there are also other economic and societal issues like employment and so on that could really threaten the government. So, I don't think they would go for it. Even if they had thought about it. (Chair of the State of Qatar for Islamic Area Studies, Personal interview, May 23, 2022).

The same opinion was shared by the Baker Institute fellow for the Middle East, in which he pointed out that Oman has always maintained pragmatic ties with Israel throughout the years. However, it is implausible for Oman to join the normalization as they feel that they do not need to upgrade their political and diplomatic ties with Israel (Baker Institute fellow for the Middle East, Personal interview, March 21, 2022). The

normalization is unlikely to happen in the near future unless the situation improves for the Palestinians.

4.3. The Palestinian Question

The Palestinian question has always been at the core of the diplomatic relationship between the GCC states and Israel. According to the Director of Research and Analysis at the Arab Center in Washington, DC, on assessing the situation, the issue here was never about normalization. In fact, unlike popular belief, the Arab states are more than ready to fully accept Israel within the region after the Arab Peace Initiative. However, their only concern is that the Palestinian question is being properly addressed and solved. The probability of Israel being accepted in the region would remain low if Palestinian issues were not resolved. For example, the respondent mentioned that hardly any Jordanian or Egyptian ever visited Israel, even after the peace deal was sealed. This demonstrated the people's support for the Palestinians despite any political development between them and Israel (Director of Research and Analysis at Arab Center Washington DC, Personal interview, March 18, 2022).

One of the respondents gave an example of what occurred during the Camp David agreement between Egypt and Israel. When the peace agreement was signed, one of the core issues that were discussed was the Palestinian issues. This illustrated the importance of Palestinian issues for the Arab world (Associate Professor of Political Science at Doha Institute, Personal Interview, April 17, 2022). Nonetheless, the Abraham Accords deal demonstrates how the Palestinian issue has gradually been side-lined through time. In retrospect, fewer countries are willing to give up their economic well-being to advance Palestinian rights (Fellow for Energy Studies at Baker Institute, Personal interview, April 14, 2022).

As a justification for the normalization, both the UAE and Bahrain simply argued that the accords would help with the peace-building process in Palestine as it would stop the annexation of the West Bank. However, all 16 respondents agreed that the accords did nothing to solve the Palestinian question or facilitate the peace-building process. This is evident after the 2021 altercation between the Palestinians and the Israeli government.

Although the Abraham Accords led to suspending the West Bank annexation plan, I doubt it will marshal a fundamental rethink of Israeli policy towards Palestine. Tensions continue to run high, with clashes in East Jerusalem in May 2021 over evictions in Sheikh Jarrah, followed by rocket attacks on Israel and airstrikes against Hamas and PIJ in Gaza. Israel was classified as an apartheid state by Amnesty International in 2022. Furthermore, Palestinians were hugely disappointed with this policy change from its MENA partners. (Fellow at the Sectarianism, Proxies and De-sectarianisation project at Lancaster University, Personal Interview, March 13, 2022)

According to several respondents the Abraham Accords did nothing to advance Palestinian rights, and Israel has not retained the wish to advance such goals. Even after the peace agreement was finalized, the UAE has not consistently pressured the Israeli government to solve the Palestinian problem (Senior Associate Fellow at the King Faisal for Research and Islamic Studies Center (KFCRIS), Personal Interview, April 25).

Despite the initial claims of the UAE that the accords would facilitate the peace-building process in Palestine and prevent future annexation of the West Bank, the peace accords have no mention of solving the Palestinian issue. As underlined by the Baker Institute fellow for the Middle East, the UAE was merely trying to sell the normalization to the sceptical public. While Saudi Arabia said they would agree to the normalization process after Israel withdrew from the occupied territory, the UAE tried to flip this move and change the debate. They simply believe that they could normalize their relations first and work on solving the Palestinian issue later (Baker Institute fellow for the Middle East, Personal interview, March 21, 2022).

As highlighted by a Professor of Political Science at Sultan Qaboos University, the Palestinian cause has lost the previous attraction it had. A form of fatigue existed among the Arab leaders in discussing the Palestinian issue since no resolution seemed to work throughout the years (Professor of Political Science at Sultan Qaboos University, Personal interview, March 9, 2022). In discussing the prospects for the Palestinians, one respondent said that,

The Palestinian leadership itself is not doing what's supposed to be done. The Palestinian Authority today is an old body. The Palestinians themselves have to act on changing the political leadership. Palestinian original rights to the land, Palestinian original rights to freedom, independence, and Jerusalem. The Palestinians themselves have to work on their leadership. They have to change the leadership because there hasn't been a renewal. The current P.A. is a bit like any other Arab country. Anyone who demonstrates against it is thrown in jail. The only way to resolve it is for them to unify. The separation between the West Bank and the

Gaza Strip is just simply a stupid thing. The Palestinians are giving Israel free reign to do whatever it wants because they are divided. And the Palestinians themselves have to elect a new leadership that can truly represent their aspirations. (Director of Research and Analysis at Arab Center Washington DC, Personal interview, March 18, 2022).

The same point was mentioned by the Director of the Gulf Studies Centre at Qatar University, in which he mentioned the importance for the Palestinians to be united and find one voice in countering the latest trend that came together with the normalization (Director of the Gulf Studies Centre in Qatar University, Personal interview, April 24, 2022).

As stated by the Chair of the State of Qatar for Islamic Area Studies, the majority of Arab countries have given up on the idea of defeating Israel. On the contrary, they are now entertaining the idea of establishing peace and forming full collaborations with Israel. However, the Abraham Accords would embolden the aggressive conduct of Israel even more in the near future as they believe that there are consequences for their actions. Even as they continue to violate international laws and human rights laws, they could still continue to form good bonds with their neighbouring states.

There are voices within Israel, saying why should we give up, given anything we can get the Arab countries to deal with us, and we can have normalization one after the other. Why should we give the Palestinians land, their rights, etc.? It made them even stronger in their views. And the Palestinians, in their struggle, have lost some of their backing to support them. (Chair of the State of Qatar for Islamic Area Studies, Personal Interview, May 23, 2022).

4.4. The Content and the Impact of the Abraham Accords Peace Agreement

The Abraham Accords were signed on September 15, 2020, by the UAE and Bahrain. Shortly after that, Sudan and Morocco followed suit and signed the agreement. The peace agreement mentioned key issues, such as the full establishment of peace between both parties and the establishment of embassies to conduct official diplomatic relations. Aside from that, the Accords also stressed maintaining peace and stability in the Middle East as a whole to end and terminate terrorist activities within the region (Abraham et al., 2020).

Most importantly, the accords highlighted future cooperation and collaborations between the UAE and Israel (Abraham et al., 2020). This includes the spheres of:

- i. Finance and Investment
- ii. Civil Aviation
- iii. Visas and Consular Services
- iv. Innovation, Trade and Economic Relations
- v. Healthcare
- vi. Science, Technology and Peaceful Uses of Outer-Space
- vii. Tourism, Culture and Sport
- viii. Energy
- ix. Environment
- x. Education
- xi. Maritime Arrangements
- xii. Telecommunications and Post-Agriculture and Food Security
- xiii. Water
- xiv. Legal Cooperation

Moreover, the Abraham Accords also mentioned establishing mutual understanding and coexistence between all parties. This is mainly to ensure peace at all levels of the group within society, establishing peace dialogues and academic and youth conferences. One of the critical things that the accords highlighted was establishing a ‘Strategic Agenda for the Middle East’. The agenda envisioned expanding all regional diplomatic, trade, stability, and other cooperation to advance regional security and stability, expand economic opportunities, promote peace, and inaugurate joint and development programs (Abraham et al., 2020). According to Yossef (2021), the peace treaty explicitly aimed to establish development by cooperation in health, agriculture, tourism, energy, environment, and innovation.

However, one of the key criticisms that was posed against the Accords was their failure to address the Palestinian issue. This trend is relatively different, especially when it is compared to the previous Camp David Accords and the Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty. As mentioned by Benziman (2021), even though the Israeli-Egyptian conflict was centred around the issue of the Sinai Peninsula, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat tried to engage in extensive negotiations with Israel on the Palestinian issue. Sadat insisted he would not sign the Camp David Accords without including the Palestinian component in the peace treaty. The same could be said regarding the Israeli-Jordanian

peace treaty, which the peace treaty was only finalized after Israel signed the Oslo Accords with the Palestinians.

The Palestinian question has been a key issue that has shaped regional politics for decades long. While the Abraham Accords ambitiously expressed potential future collaborations and peace development between Israel and the Arab states, it failed to address responsibility from the Israeli counterparts for their continuous violence against the Palestinians and their persistent violation of human rights. It is thus impossible to holistically establish peace within the Middle East without fully solving the Palestinian question.

In his speech during the Abraham Accords signing ceremony at the White House, UAE foreign minister Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan made sure to briefly address the Palestinian issue by saying, “I also thank the Prime Minister of the State of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, for halting the annexation of the Palestinian territories, a decision that reinforces our shared will to achieve a better future for generations to come”. While the speech ensured that the peace agreement would stop all annexation of the West Bank territory in Palestine, no ensuing such acts would happen in the following years.

CHAPTER V

CRITICAL ANALYSIS AND APPLICATION OF THE BALANCE OF INTEREST THEORY AT THE UNIT LEVEL

5.1. The Lions

As Schweller (1994) mentioned, the lions are depicted as states willing to pay a high price to protect what they already have. They are the status quo powers, security maximizers, and defensive positionalists. I believe that in the case of the Middle East, Iran could be depicted as the lion.

Iran was marked as the first Shia Republic in modern history. As Amirpur (2008) mentioned, the most significant difference between pan-Shiism and Sunni Islam is the hierarchically organized clergy. The clergy is recognized as the highest non-governmental authority in Iran. Iran is ruled by the principle of the Islamic jurist (velayat e-faqih), which grants power to the clerics to guide the people and the government directly. McInnis (2017) states Iran's supreme leader also assumes the commander in chief of all military and security forces. Most importantly, Khamenei supervises 'The general policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran' to ensure it is aligned with the Iranian constitution. In this regard, the Supreme Leader held exceptional power within the government to control the foreign policies of the country.

Aside from the supreme leader, the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Corps is also highly influential. The IRGC was established shortly after the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Its central role is to defend the Iranian revolution from any foreign or domestic threat. According to McInnis (2017), the IRGC ensures Tehran's international influence by forming an essential network of political alliances, paramilitary, proxies, and groups known as the Resistance Network. As mentioned by Seliktar and Rezaei (2021), the IRGC has made it clear that the idea of the Islamic Revolution is not bounded

exclusively to Iran, and they aim to spread the Islamic revolution to other countries. Aside from that, soft measures have also been utilized by Iran to spread its ideologies. This includes political activism, propaganda, and education on Khoimeinism. Iranian cultural centres have also become widely known throughout the Middle East. Former supreme leader of Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini, was also widely known as a staunch anti-monarchist and abhorred the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the ideology of Wahhabism.

Iran often portrayed itself as the leader of pan-Islamic revolutionary ideals in the Middle East. During the Cold War, they used the slogan 'neither east nor west' to summarize their ideals as anti-monarchy, anti-western and anti-Israel (Cerioli, 2018). The revolution in 1979 envisioned spreading its principles to other Muslim countries governed by ostensibly undemocratic regimes. Iran sees itself as a global light for revolutions, presenting itself as a successful "Islamic awakening" model to others (Cerioli, 2018). Iran intends to spread the ideas of their revolution to other parts of the world, which is apparent throughout its foreign policies and written constitution. Iranian constitution states that they aim to ensure the continuation of their revolution at home and abroad. This is done to ensure the path for forming a single-world community.

Iran could be considered one of the Middle East's most influential and important regional powers. Ever since the Islamic Revolution in 1979, Iran has managed to secure itself as one of the main hegemonic powers in its region. The country's population exceeds 80 million people, the largest country within its region. Iran also played a key role in the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and is the fifth largest oil producer in the world. Iran has built a strong centralized state with a sizeable armed force for the past decade. The oil revenue has also allowed Iranian citizens to have a comfortable state of living with a good education.

The Islamic Revolution in 1979 dramatically changed the course of regional politics. The revolution has turned Iran into a dangerous regional hegemonic power in the Middle East which threatens the power of the other Arab monarch leaders, most notably the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Even since the revolution, it has been one of the key goals of the Arab Gulf countries to limit the hegemonic power of Iran. This

goal was almost realized under former US President Donald Trump's leadership when the US withdrew from the JCPOA agreement and placed maximum economic sanctions against Iran to exert maximum pressure on them to stop the development of their nuclear power. However, this changed under Biden's administration, in which the US could be seen relaxing most of Trump's previous rigid policies against Iran. Some respondents argued that one of the main reasons the Arab countries chose to shift their alliance with Israel is the loss of American security within the region.

For years after the Kuwait invasion, America has always been the strong security guarantor of the region. Losing the security under the American umbrella terrifies the Arab states. The possibility of the US revisiting the nuclear agreement with Iran threatens the Gulf states. Based on the data collected through the interview, it is more than clear that the Iranian factor has played a significant role in shaping regional politics in the Gulf region. As an example of the lions, Schweller (1994) described it as the satisfied Great Powers which rule and manage the international system. The lions were also described as responsible for deterring the revisionist state from maintaining their self-preservation within the system. I believe that this bears a similar resemblance to Iran, which became the leading hegemonic power after the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

Throughout the past decade, Iran has maintained its strong influence in various ways, such as actively participating in the regional conflict in Yemen, Syria, and Iraq. Its active participation in the various proxy wars in the Middle East is one of its ways of maintaining and preserving its prestige and status within the region. Iran has also actively supported Hezbollah, Hamas, and other revolutionary Islamist groups in the Middle East.

5.2. The Lambs

Schweller (1994) described the lambs as countries that would pay a low cost to extend and defend the values that they possess. The lambs are depicted as weak countries with few capabilities that might suffer from poor state relations. The lambs might choose to bandwagon with the stronger states to appease the threats that they faced. However, they can also choose not to participate in any form of alliance to distance themselves

from the conflict. According to Schweller (1994), this is known as policy distancing, and there are four reasons why they might choose to take this measure. Firstly, the lambs might hope that the aggressor would soon fulfil their appetite for power and expansion as they distance themselves from the conflict. Secondly, they might choose to unite against the aggressor as the coalition gains strength. Thirdly, the status quo might hope that the revisionist coalition would break as they fought over the spoils of the war. Lastly, the lamb states might prefer to be consumed last because they hope that the domestic politics of the expansionist state will fall apart due to their expansionist policies. I believe that in the case of the Gulf region, Oman, Qatar, and Kuwait could be considered lambs in the region.

5.2.1. Oman

Oman has always adopted a very careful approach to regional politics ever since it was under the leadership of the late Sultan Qaboos in the 1970s. As Rabi (2021) highlighted, Oman has presented itself as a moderate Arab country where tolerance is based on its national ethos and the Ibadi sect of Islam. Omani regional behaviour could be described as low-profile and neutral throughout the decade, especially when dealing with the Arab-Israeli conflict. When Egypt signed the Camp David peace treaty with Israel in 1979, Oman was one of the three Arab League countries that chose not to take any official diplomatic action against Egypt. Despite cutting diplomatic ties with Israel after the second Intifada in 2000, hidden diplomatic relations would continue between both parties in the following years. Israel also made some official diplomatic visits to Oman in 1994, 1996, and 2018, respectively, by former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. According to Ghariani (2022), Oman also played a key role in the Middle East water Desalination project, known as the Middle East Centre for Water Desalination Research (MEDRC).

Due to their neutrality and careful nature, Oman has always maintained good relations with Iran and Saudi Arabia. One of the respondents also pointed out that out of all the Gulf states, Oman is the one most sensitive to Iran's needs.

Oman's close bond with Iran could be traced back to the early 1970s when Iran aided Sultan Qaboos in stopping the Dhofar insurgency. Even after the Islamic Revolution

of 1979, the good bonds of both states remain as it is. When the JCPOA agreement in 2015 was in its initial stage, the earliest negotiations took place in Oman. In retrospect, joining the normalization with Israel would not be wise for Oman should they wish to continue their friendly bond with Iran.

While some respondents are optimistic that Oman would join the Abraham Accords in the following years, some argue that Oman would not be normalizing their relations with Israel. For example, one respondent argues that Oman's newly formed leadership under Sultan Haitham faces numerous economic and unemployment challenges. Even though joining the accords might be desirable for investment, tourism and trade, the step would be highly unpopular for most of the public and the Ibadi religious establishment. Despite optimistic hopes from Israel that Oman would be the third Arab Gulf country to normalize, Oman refuted the statement. In a statement released by Omani Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr al-Busaidi, he said,

"As I mentioned, we will not be the third Gulf state to normalize relations, but we support the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. We do, and we respect the sovereign decisions of governments, just as we expect other countries to respect our sovereign decisions."

5.2.2. Qatar

According to Yaari (2021), Qatar's foreign policy is shaped by many things, especially its small size, population, and geographic location, which is located between two rival powers, Saudi Arabia and Iran. Between 1972 and 1995, Qatar's foreign policy was mainly based on its patronage of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. However, this changed dramatically under the leadership of Hamad Bin Khalifa al-Thani, who tried to advocate for a more pragmatic, flexible, and independent foreign policy, no longer following Riyadh's footsteps. To break free from Saudi Arabia's patronage, Qatar began building better ties with the US by allowing the building of a large American military base on its territory. In return, the American defence system provided comprehensive protection for the country.

Nevertheless, most importantly, Al-Thani began establishing Qatari soft power through two main elements: Qatar's wealth and economic capacity (oil and gas) and the Al-Jazeera television network (Yaari, 2021). Qatar's foreign policy is unlike the rest of its neighbours, as specific ideologies do not drive it. As a result, it is easier for them to construct a more flexible and pragmatic foreign policy in response to the regional trend. Qatar has also been mediating in the region, maintaining good bonds with Turkey, Iran, and the US. Qatar maximized its economic advantages by using it as the primary tool to seek regional influence. Qatar also provided a degree of support for the Arab Spring revolution. For example, Qatar interfered in local disputes within the region by providing monetary aid for groups which overthrew Gaddafi in Libya and fought against the current Syrian government. In addition, Qatar has also transferred an extensive amount of monetary aid to Morsi's previous government in Egypt (Yaari, 2021). Out of all the Gulf states, both Qatar and Oman have always maintained friendly ties with Iran. Qatar shares the largest gas field in the world with Iran, the North Dome Gas Field, which requires them to develop a good geopolitical strategy for Iran.

Nevertheless, there has always been tension between Qatar and Saudi Arabia, mainly due to their support for the Muslim Brotherhood movement and their detachment from Riyadh's foreign policy. As a result, the Qatar blockade occurred in 2017, which led Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt to implement an air, land and sea embargo on Qatar and break all official diplomatic ties (Krieg, 2019). The Qatar blockade was eventually lifted in January 2021, which came together with the normalization trend with Israel. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic also forced most of the Gulf states to reassess their existing foreign policy to collectively face the challenges each of them faces due to the pandemic.

However, according to Razi (2021), the cancellation of the blockade did not altogether remove the tension between Qatar and the rest of the GCC states, as some of the foreign policy of Qatar remains as it was, especially when it comes to their support for the Muslim Brotherhood and good bond with Iran. Qatar's independent foreign policy was evident from the late 90s when it became one of the earliest Arab states with Oman to establish direct trade relations with Israel in 1996. Their decision to do so led to great condemnation from the rest of the Gulf states at that time. In the year 2000, the events

of the second Intifada occurred, which led Qatar and Oman to halt all forms of diplomatic activities. The incident did not wholly stop all diplomatic ties, however, as most of the ties continue to be made under the table, far from the public eye.

Concerning the Palestinian issue, Qatar has always strongly insisted complete withdrawal of Israeli forces from the occupied territories and expressed strong support for the Palestinians. After the Gulf War in 1991, Qatar departed from the conventional Arab foreign policy when it expressed its interest in reassessing the Arab boycott if Israel stopped all settlement construction (Yaari, 2021). Following the finalization of the Oslo 2 agreement in 1995, Qatar officially developed commercial ties with Israel and direct recognition of Israel as a state. Israel and Qatar would form several cooperation and diplomatic bonds in the continuing years.

However, all ensuing diplomatic bonds between Qatar and Israel would halt after the eruption of the Second Intifada. In response to the events, Qatar shut down the Israeli trade office in Doha and slowed down all forms of diplomatic ties with Israel. Nevertheless, the Second Intifada did not wholly stop all ties between Israel and Qatar, as Qatar maintained a degree of communication. In 2005, Israel pulled out its forces from the Gaza Strip, and as a result, the Israeli trade office reopened in Doha.

Most of Qatar's diplomatic relations with Israel continued to be centred around Qatari soft power in advocating for the rights of the Palestinians and transferring aid to the Gaza Strip. As Yaari (2021) mentioned, from 2012 until 2018, Qatar transferred over 1.1 billion dollars worth of humanitarian aid to Gaza. The consequences of the 2014 warfare in Gaza have led to great ruin for the Palestinians, which requires great reconstructive efforts. While at that time, the rest of the Arab states have cut most of their economic aid to the Palestinians., Qatar remains consistent in transferring humanitarian aid. Qatar donated over a billion dollars in an effort to rebuild the Gaza Strip. Following the May 2019 conflict between Israel and Gaza, which led to many casualties, the mediation process was led by both Qatar and Egypt with the help of the UN. At the end of the mediation process, Qatar pledged 480 million dollars worth of humanitarian aid to the Palestinians to help them rebuild their lives after the war.

Qatar's consistency and dedication to helping the Palestinian cause could be attributed to several factors. Firstly, it expresses moral and ideological commitment to their fellow Palestinian brothers and sisters. Most of the Muslim public still retains great sympathy for the Palestinian cause and sees helping them as an obligation for them as Muslims. In addition, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, normally the traditional mediator, have been slowly retreating from interfering in the Palestinian issue. The impact of the Arab Spring has forced them to recalculate their foreign policy decisions and focus more on national and domestic political issues (Yaari, 2021). This allowed Qatar to act as an important regional mediator between Israel and the Palestinian leadership.

Qatar also became a mediating hub for Hamas and Israel to discuss their terms of negotiations. Following the events of the Abraham Accords, Qatar has avoided giving any official condemnation towards the Arab states who chose to normalize with Israel. Qatar has reiterated that it would still stick to the original plan of the Arab Peace Initiative led by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 2002, which put up the condition of a comprehensive settlement with the Palestinians in return for complete normalization. As mentioned previously, most respondents believed that Qatar would not be joining the Abraham Accords in the near future. Different to the rest of the Arab countries, Qatar has always tried to maintain an independent foreign policy that is shaped a lot by the regional soft power within the region. Qatar is still sensitive to Iranian needs within the region and would not want to concern them by normalizing their diplomatic relations with Israel.

Similar to the characteristics of the lambs, as pointed out by Schweller (1994), Qatar is a country that does not seem to have any irredentist aims. They have adopted an independent foreign policy and have chosen not to align strongly with specific parties. Qatar has also been attempting to maintain good bonds with their neighbours, which includes the infamous Iran. Their wealth has allowed them to isolate themselves and play the role of the mediator between Hamas and the Israeli government.

5.2.3. Kuwait

Kuwait also has some similar traits to what Schweller described as the lambs. Kuwait has a relatively different history than its other Arab Gulf counterparts. Before the

Kuwait invasion, a large population of Palestinians resided in Kuwait, reaching up to 450,000 people. However, Yasser Arafat's decision not to side with Kuwait during the Kuwait invasion negatively affected the Palestinian population, forcing them to be exiled. Despite the incident, Kuwait's ruling family, the National Assembly (Parliament) and the civil society groups in the country have supported the Palestinian issue (Rabi, 2021).

When asked about the future prospects of diplomatic relations between Kuwait and Israel, almost all respondents said that Kuwait would not be joining the normalization soon. Most of this could be attributed to their active and opinionated political setting preventing future collaborations with Israel. Within the Gulf region, Kuwait could be described as the most democratic country, with an active National Assembly parliament. When the Abraham Accords agreement was announced, over 41 civil society organizations expressed their resentment of the accords and persuaded the National Assembly to pass a law criminalizing normalization with Israel (Rabi, 2021).

Due to the nature of the Kuwaiti political setting, they are unlikely to pursue any future relations with Israel. Aside from that, Kuwait also has been playing it safe since the Kuwait Invasion to be careful not to exasperate Iran since they share a close border with Iraq.

I argue that, in this case, both Oman and Kuwait bear great resemblance with what Schweller depicted as the lambs. Like the lambs, both Oman and Kuwait had been distancing themselves from the conflict. Oman has successfully positioned itself as the 'Switzerland' of the Middle East by maintaining good bonds with all neighbouring states to protect their interest. In comparison, Kuwait has also refused to partake in any possible collaborations with Israel, not to anger the country's public and the opinionated political officials. Both countries could be considered as weaker than their other Gulf counterparts.

5.3. The Jackals

Schweller (1994) described the jackals as states who would pay a great cost to defend what they possess and even a higher cost to extend their values. Other characteristics

of the jackals are opportunistic and risk-averse, as they are considered dissatisfied powers in the region. They would also most likely trail behind the wolves or the lions as they are nearing victory. In the context of the Gulf region, I believe that the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain could be described as the Jackals.

5.3.1. Saudi Arabia

Their different Islamic ideologies mark much of Saudi Arabia's Theo-political rivalry with Iran. According to DeLong Bas (2009), Wahhabism is a revival movement founded by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab in central Arabia. Some people often use Salafism and Wahhabism interchangeably, but these two ideologies have some analytical differences. Conge & Okruhlik (2009) state that Salafism and Wahhabism differ in their message, political, and ideological ends. In Saudi Arabia, Wahhabism denotes the exclusive relationship between the ruling family and the ulema they appoint in the government. The modern Wahhabi orthodoxy today is significantly different from the original teachings of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab.

In Iran, the ulema enjoyed more flexibility in making *ijtihad* and interpreting Islamic teachings according to the modern context. However, the context is significantly different in Saudi Arabia. In Saudi Arabia, Islam is often portrayed as exclusive, bounded, orthodox and state-centric (Conge & Okruhlik, 2009). Most importantly, there is only one religious truth and interpretation of the text.

According to Cerioli (2018), Saudi Arabia is frequently referred to as the "heart" of the Muslim world and naturally promotes itself as the Muslim world's leader. In addition, Saudi also regards itself as the regional leader and would be willing to provide financial assistance for those who follow its leadership generously. As Osiewicz (2016) mentioned, Saudi tries to maintain control and power by controlling the decision-making process in Muslim international organizations. This includes the Arab League, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Maintaining the status quo is crucial to protecting Saudi's regional leadership and political and economic systems. Any instabilities within the Middle East are regarded

as a threat to Saudi because of their main desire to emerge as the hegemonic power. This is also why Saudi was against the idea of the Arab Spring when it first emerged in 2010. Unlike Iran, which maintains a hostile relationship with the US, Saudi Arabia is known to be a very close ally of the US. Both Saudi and the US share similar geostrategic interests and threats, which became the primary basis for their alliance. Saudi Arabia maintains a stable and attractive oil market for the West, while the United States provides adequate security and military backing (Cerioli, 2018).

The diplomatic relationship between Saudi Arabia and Israel has been kept under the rug throughout the years. However, the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia has undergone significant changes under the lead of Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman. For the past few years, the crown prince had carried out a series of adventurous internal reforms and foreign policy changes to modernize the country and diversify the economy. Out of the 16 respondents, over 15 agreed that Saudi Arabia would most likely join the Abraham Accords once Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman assumed power as the new king. While his father, King Abdullah, still retains solid sentiments for the Palestinian cause, the crown prince came from a different generation that sees Saudi's national interest should be put first before the Palestinian issue. A few respondents also noted that Saudi Arabia has been one of the key figures pressuring Bahrain to join the accords.

As stated by Yaari (2021), a meeting was held between Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman and journalist Barak Ravid in April 2018, and it was said that the crown prince expressed his disdain towards the Palestinian leadership for missing out on the opportunities to establish proper peace for the past decade. Moreover, within the same month, the crown prince stated his approval of Israel's and the Jews' rights to exist and establish a state of their own in an interview he conducted with The Atlantic magazine. The statement that he released came as a considerable shock, as this was the first time that the Arab leadership ever posed public criticism towards the Palestinians. In addition, Saudi Arabia has seemed to ease most of their rigid foreign policies towards Israel for the past few years. For example, Saudi recently approved Air India to fly into their airspace to enter Israel, and various meetings were held between Jews and Saudi officials recently (Yaari, 2021). The recent trend could be attributed to several factors, especially the rise of the Iranian threat and the expansion of rebel

activities throughout the Middle Eastern region that prompted Israel and Saudi Arabia to acknowledge that they have much more in common.

Despite Saudi's strong desire to officially normalize their ties with Israel, they are forced to hold back that ambition for the time being due to the fear of the strong reaction of the public and the disapproval of King Abdullah. I believe that the traits of the jackals are somewhat similar to Saudis, which were described as ambitious, risk-averse and opportunistic. Like the jackals, Saudis also could be described as a dissatisfied power who would pay a high cost to extend their values. After the Islamic Revolution of 1979 in Iran, Saudi Arabia engaged in a series of Theo-political rivalries with Iran in the region to promote their respective ideologies. While Iran has presented itself as the protector of the Shiite community, Saudi Arabia prides itself as the leader of the Muslim Sunnis and the caretaker of the two holy mosques. Aside from that, Riyadh also has been promoting its Wahhabism ideology in the region.

5.3.2. The United Arab Emirates

The United Arab Emirates was first founded in 1971 as an independent federal state. It is consisted of over seven Emirates, which include: Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm al-Quwain, Ras al-Khaimah, and Fujairah. Despite being under the same federation, all seven emirates differed in their openness to the West and political, economic, and religious context (Zaga, 2018). Of the seven emirates, Abu Dhabi and Dubai could be considered the most influential in the federation, establishing themselves as major global centres.

The UAE has always been a close and important ally of the US. Like most of the Gulf states, the UAE has been enjoying considerable wealth through its oil revenue. The political context of the UAE is unique compared to its other Gulf counterparts, as 90% of its population encompasses expatriates, and only 10% population of the country are local citizens. According to Mulki & Erel (2020), this made the UAE an essential ally of the US, as it has little public opinion regarding political matters in the country due to its small number of local citizens.

Despite its small size, the UAE has been highly active in leaving its footprints in the region through its active and pragmatic foreign policies. For example, the UAE has offered support for the Assad regime following the events of the Arab Spring. It also strongly supported Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi when he was still vying for power in 2013. Aside from that, the UAE also declared their support for Khalifa Haftar's illegitimate Libyan National Army forces in Libya (Mulki & Ereli, 2020).

There has been several bilateral cooperation between the UAE and Israel even before the Abraham Accords was finalized, especially in the field of cybersecurity and intelligence tool. According to reports released in 2015, UAE has repeatedly expressed interest in Israeli drones and security products (Khan, 2015). Barakat (2020) stated that over 3 billion worth of modern intelligence tool cooperation was made between Israel and the UAE in 2019. Even though most information on their security cooperation was often classified and kept under the table, several publications on the cooperation could be found in Israeli media. UAE's interest in Israeli intelligence technology could mainly be attributed to the impact of the Arab Spring on the autocratic leaders in the Gulf who wishes to maintain control of their people. After the accords were finalized, a great number of other cooperation were announced in trade, economy, technology, and healthcare.

Israel has presented itself as a very attractive collaborative partner to the UAE due to their great success in the water desalination industry, research and development, pharmaceutical industry, and the defence system. As mentioned previously by one of the respondents, the success of Israel in these various industries has turned them into a very appealing partner, especially for the Emiratis who wish to expand their high-tech defence system. In addition, the UAE also has been using Israel as a conduit to other investors worldwide, as Israel has a lot of different connections to other business linkages. Another particularly interesting thing one of the respondents mentioned is the establishment of the trading triangle with Dubai, Israel and Mumbai in trading precious metals, stones, and diamonds.

Moreover, by normalizing their diplomatic relations with Israel, the UAE also can solidify their soft power in the Western world as they could present themselves as a more open-minded Arab country. Previously, another respondent, highlighted that the

accords had turned the UAE into a more friendly destination for the West, especially for business, trade, and other cultural events.

Similar to the traits of the jackals, as highlighted by Schweller (1994), the UAE could be described as an opportunistic country that would trail behind the winning states. As it is apparent throughout this paper, the new alliance formation with Israel has opened numerous doors of opportunities for the UAE. When the Arab Peace initiative was planned out in 2002, all of the Gulf countries, which includes the UAE, were adamant that the only way for Israel to be accepted entirely in the region was through solving the Palestinian issue. However, slowly throughout the years, the Palestinian cause has been marginalized by the Arab leaders, which includes the UAE. Despite claiming that the Palestinian issue still held great importance for them, it is clear that the UAE has decided to put its national, security and economic interests forward before the Palestinian issue.

5.3.3. Bahrain

Bahrain is strategically located between the two hegemons, and it is frequently regarded as the main focal point of sectarian and geopolitical rivalry. As stated by Terrill (2011), the Arab Spring broke out in Bahrain due to the sectarian rift between the Sunnis and the Shiite majority. The government is led by Al-Khalifa, who is a Sunni. The Shiites are mainly underprivileged and are the main victims of police violence and social disparities (Joyce, 2012). The government responded to the uprising by instituting further violence against the protestors. The Bahraini kingdom also blamed the riots on Iran, claiming that Iran was the main propagator of the scheme to destabilize the kingdom. Bahrain responded by calling on the GCC mutual defence pact, requesting assistance to end the uprising. They claimed that the demonstrations were backed by Tehran, posing a direct threat to Bahrain and the rest of the Gulf Cooperation Council. As a result, The Peninsula Shield Force (PSF), the GCC's military branch, was activated for the first time. Over a thousand Saudi soldiers and 600 Emiratis have crossed Bahrain's borders. The international forces exacerbated the repression: the state imprisoned Shias, killed or tortured numerous opposition leaders and dissidents, burned Shia mosques and boycotted the fragile free press (Joyce, 2012).

Iran has publicly declared its support for the Arab revolution when it first erupted. Iran denotes that the Arab Spring had similar ideals to the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979. Most importantly, Iran saw the uprisings as an opportunity to increase their foothold and gain an advantage as a regional power (Cerioli, 2018). Bahrain responded by blaming Iran, claiming that Iran has an agenda for ideological projection. Iran vehemently denied any association with the conspiracy against the monarchy and was quick to condemn the PSF when it arrived in Bahrain. The GCC 'invaded Bahrain,' according to an Iranian official because they were 'frightened that the actual revolution was reaching its boundaries' (Fürtig, 2013). Saudi Arabia, particularly in Bahrain, saw the protests as a direct danger with potential regional spillover effects. Saudi Arabia feared that the fall of the Bahraini regime would empower the Shiites and increase Iranian influence (Rieger, 2013).

Much of Bahrain's foreign policy has always been shaped by and intertwined with Saudi Arabia's and the UAE's foreign policies. The Sunni leadership in Bahrain has maintained a close bond with Saudi Arabia. As a Shiite-majority country with a Sunni ruling family, Bahrain's regional behaviour is shaped by the Iranian threat and its close ties with Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

According to Telci (2020), throughout the years, Bahrain has been struggling economically in the politically volatile region of the Gulf. As a result, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Kuwait have collectively delivered a stimulus package worth up to 10 billion dollars to Bahrain. While addressing the Iranian threat is still a priority, Bahrain has more crucial economic and political matters.

Compared to the rest of the Gulf states, Bahrain does not share the same economic and financial muscle as most of its neighbours. This caused them to rely more on the regional political trend of their other neighbours and partners. As mentioned by one of the respondents, Dr Mogielnicki, the normalization with Israel has opened up numerous economic and investment opportunities for Bahrain. This is due to the country's small size and its focus on Fintech and ICT infrastructure investment. In this context, Israel's advanced development in the tech and Fintech industry can offer great economic investment incentives in Bahrain.

Regarding Bahrain, another respondent also mentioned the substantial bilateral benefits Bahrain could gain from the alignment. In fact, out of the rest of the Gulf states, most Israelis described the Bahrainis as the most open-minded and welcoming towards the new alignment. This is because they believed that the new alliance would be able to serve much of Bahraini's national interest in the coming years.

Again, I believe that Bahrain bears much resemblance to the traits of the jackals, as per discussed previously by Schweller. For the past few years, Bahrain has seen a significant shift in their geostrategic calculations, foreign policy, political economy, and national interests. The events of the Arab Spring directly threatened Bahraini political stability due to the sizeable Shiite population in the country. Taking into consideration all of these different dynamics, Bahrain has decided that the new alliance formation with Israel would be able to serve much of its political and national interests. By joining the accords, Bahrain has managed to maintain good bonds with both Saudi Arabia and the UAE, in addition to gaining numerous bilateral benefits from Israel. The normalization has allowed Bahrain to explore other technology investment opportunities aside from attracting substantial new potential investors in the country for their Fintech industry. Out of the rest of the Gulf states, Bahrain has been the one who profited the most from the new alliance formation with Israel.

5.4. The Wolves

Schweller (1994) described the Wolves as predatory states that value what they desire more than they already have. As a result, most of them are willing to take great measures or risks to improve the system's existing condition. They have little fear of loss and would be willing to pursue reckless political expansion for their interests. Schweller gave the example of Hitler during World War Two, in which Hitler supposedly told his commanders-in-chief that 'they did not have anything to lose, but everything to gain'.

As stated by Podeh (2021), in recent years, Israel has experienced a significant change in its foreign policies within the region. A new regional environment was created due to events such as the Second Lebanon War, military operations in the Gaza Strip, and, most importantly, the Arab Spring. While the new chaotic atmosphere has proven to

be challenging for the Arab states, the new trend is pretty much welcomed by Israel. The turbulence has opened numerous doors of opportunity for Israel to be accepted in the region.

Israeli covert relations with other neighbouring states in the region existed even during the British Mandate and before the controversial establishment of the Israeli state in 1948 (Podeh, 2021). At that time, hidden ties were formed between Zionist leaders and several prominent figures in the Arab and Palestinian areas. However, most of these ties were stopped after establishing the state of Israel, while some bonds continued, such as with the previous Jordanian king, King Abdullah. In addition to that, Israel has also maintained covert ties with other Arab leaders through various third parties.

As mentioned by Podeh (2021), since the 1950s, Israel has maintained covert ties with Morocco, opening a Mossad office there in 1963; it has provided support for the Kurds in their struggle against the Iraqi regime in Baghdad (1963-1975); it has aided royalist rebels in Yemen against the revolutionary regime backed by the Egyptian military (1962-1967); and aided rebels in southern Sudan (1969-1972) and the Maronites during Lebanon's civil war (1975-1976). Most of these ties were built based on their perceived shared interests.

In the following years, covert diplomatic relations with other states have been a prominent feature of Israeli foreign policy. Podeh (2021) described this phenomenon as the 'The Mistress Syndrome', with five distinct features. The first feature is the secret nature of diplomatic relations, which could also be described as the formation of 'quiet diplomacy'. Most of these ties were kept hidden due to the insistence of the Arab states, which feared the reaction of the Muslim public, who might accuse them of abandoning the Palestinian cause. These fears were solidly founded by events such as the 1951 assassination of Jordanian King Abdullah, the 1981 assassination of Egyptian former president Sadat, and the 1982 assassination of Lebanese president Bashir Gemayel, whose deaths were directly connected to their close ties with Israel.

The second feature of the Mistress Syndrome is the prevalence of shared enemies between the parties, which allows collaborating partners to recognize that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend". This perception often exists between pragmatic political

figures who are driven by a realistic political approach. They often work together if they recognized the same enemy in a state, leader, or ideology.

The third feature is the temporary nature of the ties that were formed. Most of the ties that were formed are based upon a specific temporary interest of both parties. The temporary nature of these ties usually would only last, depending on the perceived shared needs of the respective regimes. There are no permanent interests in the nature of this relationship, and the bond would often disappear once their interests change.

The fourth feature of the Mistress Syndrome is Israel's inclination to form cooperation with states instead of minorities or non-state actors. This inclination is motivated by a number of reasons. Firstly, this is because of the minimal influence that is often held by minorities in the region, which are viewed as posing a lesser benefit in comparison to states. Secondly, it is because of the logistic difficulties posed by minorities and non-state actors in executing an operation. Lastly, is a lack of organized mechanisms held by the minorities that could reduce the efficiency of the operation. In this context, cooperation formed with established states is seen as more beneficial for the Israeli government. They are seen as much more organized and effective with official armies, security, and intelligence services.

The fifth feature of the Mistress Syndrome, according to Podeh (2021), is how the covert ties are maintained by official elements that do not include the foreign ministry. The foreign ministry should have managed the ties due to several reasons. Firstly, it reduces the probability of having any classified information leaked to the public. Secondly, it is because of the inferior nature of the foreign ministry in Israel compared to the prime minister's office and the defence ministry. In this case, covert ties are often established and maintained by the security and intelligence officials in the country instead of the foreign ministry.

While the Mistress Syndrome form of diplomacy could protect both the Arab regime and the Israeli government, it also put Israel in a strange situation. It has created an array of contradictions in Israeli foreign policies. For example, although Israel has gained numerous allies, it could not make any of these bonds known to the public.

As stated by Benziman (2021), former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has managed to change the political discourse surrounding Israeli-Arab relations when it comes to the Palestinians issue. Netanyahu had created a new dynamic in the Middle East, and he made it possible for Israel to improve their bonds with the Arab states even without advancing the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. This was made possible due to several reasons. Firstly, the emerging conflict in the Arab world, especially after the Arab Spring, has made some of them no longer view Israel as the common enemy.

There was a new perception that there was an 'axis of evil' and the 'moderate axis' among the Arab states in the Middle East. The moderate axis in this context was seen as the Sunni states, which began to see Israel as a potential new ally to counter the threat emanating from Iran, Hezbollah, Daesh, etc. Secondly, this new dynamic was also made possible because of the newly shared interest that was developed among the Arab states and Israel. Thirdly, the divided leadership amongst the Palestinians also made it difficult for them to advance their interest within the international political system collectively.

Throughout the years, the Palestinian issue has lost its value and vital status in the Arab world. According to Benziman (2021), most of the Arab world has begun to feel a sense of fatigue that the conflict seems to have no solution and, as a result, considers the Palestinian issue as a burden for the Arab world. The interest of the Palestinians no longer held great importance for the Arab world, and the issue was 'like yesterday's news'.

In his famous speech at the UN General Assembly, Former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu boasted about growing Israeli partners worldwide and their robust intelligence services that help counter terrorism. In addition to that, he also prided himself on Israeli advanced progress in the field of agriculture, health, water recycling, cybersecurity, and artificial intelligence. Nevertheless, most importantly, Netanyahu mentioned Israel's growing partnership with other Arab countries. As quoted from his speech:

But now I am going to surprise you even more. You see, the biggest change in attitudes towards Israel is taking place elsewhere. It's taking place in the Arab world. Our peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan continue to be anchors of stability in the volatile Middle East. But I have to

tell you this: For the first time in my lifetime, many other states in the region recognize that Israel is not their enemy. They recognize that Israel is their ally. Our common enemies are Iran and ISIS. Our common goals are security, prosperity, and peace. I believe that in the years ahead, we will work together to achieve these goals openly. (Netanyahu, 2016)

As illustrated in his speech, Netanyahu claimed that the Arab states were more open to accepting Israel in 2016. Moreover, they have started acknowledging that they have much more common goals with each other rather than differences. Their common goals include recognizing Iran and ISIS as the common enemy to counter in the region.

In mid-2020, regional history was proclaimed when the UAE became the first Persian Gulf country to fully normalized all forms of diplomatic relations with Israel. Shortly after, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco also formed and normalized diplomatic ties with Israel. As most respondents mentioned, the Arab country's ties with Israel are not a new phenomenon. Slowly throughout the past decades, numerous collaborations have been formed between both parties, but most of them were kept under the table to avoid public backlash. The Abraham Accords, however, remain a shocking revelation for the global Muslim as the UAE had ambitiously come forward to make the first move to change the political dynamics within the Gulf region.

These new regional changes have proven that Israel is now changing their status from just a mere 'mistress' to a full partner fully recognized and acknowledged by its partners. These changes are driven by several reasons, such as the regional political change after the Arab Spring, the acceptance of the Arab regimes that Israel is not going anywhere anytime soon, and lastly is because their shared recognition of Iran as a threat.

I believe Israel could be considered the Wolves in the Middle East. Ever since the establishment of the state of Israel, Israel has been adopting very aggressive internal policies against the Palestinians. Despite being condemned by the international community, Israel has not taken any action to slow down their oppressive policies against the Palestinians. Similar to the wolves, the state of Israel values what they desire more than what they already possess. Despite being boycotted and isolated by the rest of its neighbours during its initial establishment, Israel continues to maintain its aggression towards the Palestinians. I believe that this is because they value what

they covet more than they already have. In this case, they covet the abolishment of the Palestinians from the country and the complete annexation of the West Bank. Throughout the years, Israel has taken many steps to improve their condition within the international system. This includes establishing extensive convert ties with numerous Arab countries to expand their regional self-interest.

In addition, Schweller (1994) also described the wolves as being 'uninhibited by the fear of loss; they are free to pursue reckless expansion'. This is again somewhat similar to the traits of Israel. Despite the public condemnation, no actions have yet to be taken by the rest of the world on what is happening towards the Palestinians. Unlawful annexation and propagation of violence towards the Palestinians continue to occur. Israel is free to pursue reckless expansion in the Palestinian territory.

While some might argue that Israeli's aggressive internal policies are a separate issue from its relations with the Arab Gulf states, I simply would argue otherwise. Israel's continuous violation of human rights and its propagation of an apartheid regime towards the Palestinians shows its true predatory nature within the international political system. Numerous right-wing politicians in Israel have been spreading much anti-Arab rhetoric throughout the country.

CHAPTER VI

APPLICATION OF BALANCE OF INTEREST THEORY AT THE SYSTEMIC LEVEL

According to Schweller (1994), at the systemic level, the balance of interest theory proposes that the distribution of capabilities does not determine the system's stability. Schweller argues that while power distribution is undoubtedly essential, the goals and how the capabilities were used are far more critical. States could use their power and capabilities to manage or destroy the international system. In this case, the balance of revisionist and conservative forces played a more prominent role in determining the system's stability.

The system would be stable when the status quo states are more stable than the revisionist states. However, the system undergoes changes when the revisionist coalition is more powerful than the status quo powers. Schweller (1994) defines status quo states as powers who would seek to protect the values that they already have and self-preservation. In this case, status quo powers are not power maximizers, but they are security maximizers.

In contradiction, revisionist states would value what they desire more than they already have. As a result, they might employ military expansion to change their status quo and extend their values. Dissatisfied states would often come together when they believed they could overcome the status quo power and expect their interest to be fulfilled through their expansionist aims. Schweller also described the revisionist power as the primary movers of alliance behaviour and the status quo states as mere reactors. Power competition would occur when revisionist states seek to pursue self-expansion in the region.

I believe the Middle Eastern region is experiencing a major shift in alliance formation and system change. Throughout the years, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic, the

Arab Gulf countries and Israel began to recognize their shared interest and similarities. Like the wolves, Israel has been pursuing self-expansion in Palestinian territory. While the Arab Gulf states also began to acknowledge that Israel would be a beneficial partner for them for several reasons. Israeli military solid power and advancement have allowed them to be an attractive partner to the rest of the Gulf states, which seek to maintain security within the international system after the loss of American security and counter the Iranian threat.

In addition to that, Israel's great progress in the field of water desalination, trade and economy, military industry, research, and development also gave excellent prospects for the rest of the Arab Gulf states who wish to diversify their economy outside of oil revenue. An alliance with Israel also would open numerous doors and opportunities for them to be accepted by the West, as they would be seen as a more open-minded state.

Normalization with Israel also would help them to expand their tourism industry. Even though Israel has a relatively small population and will not be able to contribute much to tourist flow, they have a much more significant connection to the rest of the Jewish diaspora that resides worldwide. Allying with Israel would increase the prestige and soft power of the Arab Gulf states, which wish to be more accepted by the West.

Israel also offers the Arab Gulf states the ability to establish much more stability within their respective countries, especially after the events of the Arab Spring Revolution that threatened most of the monarchs in the region. They were able to do so by selling various spying and intelligence surveillance tools and technology to the Gulf states so that they would be able to spy on their people and stop any possibility of the revolution spreading to their countries.

This perks of allying with Israel were reiterated by Netanyahu in his infamous speech at the UN General Assembly in 2016, in which he said:

"World leaders increasingly appreciate that Israel is a powerful country with one of the best intelligence services on earth. Because of our unmatched experience and proven capabilities in fighting terrorism, many of your governments seek our help in

keeping your country safe. Many also seek to benefit from Israel's ingenuity in agriculture, health, water, cyber and the fusion of big data, connectivity and artificial intelligence – that fusion that is changing our world in every way.

You might consider this: Israel leads the world in recycling wastewater. We recycle about 90% of our wastewater. Now, how remarkable is that? Well, given that the next country on the list only recycles about 20% of its wastewater, Israel is a global waterpower. So, if you have a thirsty world, and we do, there's no better ally than Israel.

How about cybersecurity? That's an issue that affects everyone. Israel accounts for one-tenth of one per cent of the world's population, yet last year we attracted some 20% of the global private investment in cybersecurity. I want you to digest that number. In cyber, Israel is punching a whopping 200 times above its weight. So, Israel is also a global cyber power. If hackers are targeting your banks, your planes, your power grids and just about everything else, Israel can offer indispensable help." (Netanyahu, 2016).

According to one of the respondents, each Arab country that has normalized diplomatic relations with Israel has done so because they realized that they could gain something from the alignment. The UAE mainly normalized to formalize the security and defence cooperation with Israel, to fasten the technology transfer to their country and to advance their military sales from the US to acquire the F-35. Outside the Gulf region, Morocco has normalized to attain the recognition of Western Sahara, and Sudan did it to take its name off the terrorism list (Baker Institute fellow for the Middle East, Personal interview, March 21, 2022).

CHAPTER VII

CALCULATIONS ON NEW ALLIANCE FORMATION WITH ISRAEL (A CASE STUDY OF THE UAE, SAUDI ARABIA, AND QATAR)

Based on my analysis, it could have concurred that three separate trends have been shown by the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar, respectively, regarding their approach to the new possible alliance formation with Israel.

The UAE has been the most ambitious of the three countries in approaching the new alliance. They have been the first Gulf country to announce a full normalization and entered a diplomatic alliance with Israel. This step was made for several reasons, but I believe it is in line with the balance of interest theory. Each country has political and national interest calculations cause them to reevaluate its foreign policy decision. In this case, the UAE has concluded that allying with Israel would open numerous opportunities for the Gulf states, increase their social standing in the West, offer multiple potential new collaboration opportunities in various fields, and solidify their geostrategic security calculations. Most notably, the UAE has concluded that the benefits outweigh the detriments that came together with the alliance.

Secondly, Saudi Arabia has presented us with a different trend whereby they have been more careful in approaching the potential new alliance. Riyadh has been relatively more careful than the UAE, which has been eager and ambitious to formalize the new alliance. Again, as stated previously in the above findings, this step is taken for several reasons, most notably to maintain Riyadh's high status as the guardian of the two holy cities of Islam. Saudi Arabia has also concluded that it would still enjoy the benefits of maintaining good diplomatic ties with Israel without fully entering the alliance.

It is no secret that Saudi Arabia has been engaging in numerous covert diplomatic talks with Israel. Numerous respondents have also highlighted that Riyadh has been one of

the leading countries supporting the other Arab country's entrance into the Abraham Accords agreement. So, it could be said that while Riyadh has been seriously considering signing the Abraham Accords agreement, they have yet to do so due to their geopolitical and security calculations. However, it is essential to note that Saudi Arabia has been showing some positive development in their alliance formation with Israel in recent years.

Of the three countries, Qatar has been attempting to maintain minimal diplomatic cooperation with Israel outside of supporting the Palestinian cause. Most respondents have underlined that Qatar has been one of the few Arab countries that have openly voiced some degree of support for the Arab Spring movement. Normalization with Israel would, in return, cause them to lose their credibility within the region. Several respondents also stressed that Qatar still has a very long way to go before they would consider any formal normalization with Israel. In addition to that, the financial security of Qatar has also allowed it to maintain a more flexible foreign policy within the region without having to depend on others. Concerning the political setting of Qatar, most Qataris and Qatar's political officials continue to maintain strong sympathy towards the Palestinian cause, which would prevent any formal normalization with Israel anytime soon.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

As is evident throughout this thesis, the Gulf's new alliance formation with Israel is a highly complex phenomenon that cannot be merely reduced to security issues and threat calculations. The new normalization trend came forward with the Gulf states' economic, national, and political interests, including some security dynamics. The balance of power, balance of interest, and omni-balancing theories have significantly contributed to international relations studies. I believe each theory offers us a unique perspective on understanding the new alliance formation between Israel and the Gulf states. However, I feel that the balance of interest theory is the best fit for describing the emerging Gulf-Israeli alliance trend.

Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar have presented different trends in approaching their new diplomatic bonds with Israel. Out of three countries, it could be said that the UAE has entered into an entire diplomatic alliance with Israel through the Abraham Accords agreement. Even though Saudi Arabia has undoubtedly softened their diplomatic approach and has shown positive progress in their diplomatic development with Israel, they have yet to enter into an entire diplomatic alliance with Israel. Lastly, Qatar has yet to show any positive progress towards full normalization with Israel and would likely maintain its position as the mediator in the region.

While the balance of power theory offered some critical insights into states' regional behaviour in forming alliances, it still needed to explain why some states decided to ally with the country with the highest power distribution within the region. After the Arab-Israeli war, Israel has been slowly building their strong influence and power in the Middle East. I believe it is inaccurate to only consider the distribution of power as the sole reason for alliance formation. Especially in the context of the Gulf states, multi-layered reasons and national interests were considered before the decision to formalize the relations with Israel was made.

The balance of threat theory also failed to explain why the Arab Gulf states only view Iran as the sole threat in the region instead of Israel. It is argued that while Iran is still a vital determining factor in influencing the foreign policy decision in the Middle East, their influence has been slowly waning throughout the years. As highlighted by some respondents, Iranian military power and prowess can be considered far inferior to Israel. The Abraham Accords agreement was signed in 2020 when former US President Donald Trump was still in power, and the Iranian sanction is still active. So, it is inaccurate to label the Iranian threat calculation as the main reason that drove the new alliance formation.

The omni-balancing theory offered an essential perspective on highlighting the role of internal politics in determining states' behaviour. While the Arab Spring Revolution did affect the political behaviour of the Gulf states to some extent, I believe it is still inaccurate to explain the political context within the Gulf region fully. Some respondents have argued that the political setting of the Arab Gulf countries is not similar to the North African countries. The Arab Revolution has led to an unprecedented impact on North African countries, forcing them to reevaluate their domestic political calculations. However, most of the Gulf countries are not as affected as to what happened in the revolution. Especially when it is applied in the context of the UAE. The majority of the local citizen in the country continues to be uninterested in the country's politics as they enjoy various economic benefits.

In retrospect, the Balance of Interest theory offers the most holistic explanation explaining the newly formed alliance between the Gulf states and Israel. Each country has political and national interest calculations cause them to reevaluate its foreign policy decision. Forming an alliance with Israel would open up numerous opportunities for the Gulf states, increase their social standing in the West, offer multiple potential new collaboration opportunities in various fields, and solidify their geostrategic security calculations.

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