

## The UAE and the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process

Dr. Moran Zaga\*

April 2021

**The Abraham Accords have stirred a contentious international debate over the UAE's support for the national aspirations of the Palestinians. The Palestinian leadership views the UAE's normalization of ties with Israel as a betrayal, the Israeli public regards it as proof of the issue's marginal importance, and the Emirati leadership claims the move is designed to bolster the status of the Palestinians and advance the Israeli-Palestinian-Israeli peace process. This paper examines the UAE's new policy on the Palestinian issue and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, based on developments in the initial months of the normalization with Israel, and points to potential opportunities. It also presents the shift in the role of the Palestinian issue in Israeli-UAE dynamics - from a bargaining chip to advance relations into a ticket for greater Emirati involvement in Israeli-Palestinian politics and influence in the Palestinian arena, despite the disruption of its ties with the Palestinian leadership.**

### A. Introduction

Since its founding, the United Arab Emirates have displayed solidarity with the national aspirations of the Palestinians, tied to their support for the establishment of a Palestinian state and call for a just solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative.<sup>1</sup> In October 2011, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed hosted Palestinian Authority (PA) leader Mahmoud Abbas, expressing Abu Dhabi's support for the establishment of a Palestinian state with its capital in Jerusalem<sup>2</sup>, yet the two have not met since. In 2017, President Khalifa bin Zayed declared that "despite the UN declaration of the right of peoples to self-determination, the Palestinian people are the only ones who are suffering from oppressive occupation that champions racism, repression and collective punishment [...] The Arab Peace Initiative has set out a final solution to the question, and the international community and the UN are required to oblige Israel to accept its long overdue comprehensive solutions and restore hope for the Palestinian people, to live its present free of fear and despair, and plan its future with hope and peace."<sup>3</sup> Addressing the UN General Assembly in 2014, UAE Ambassador Lana Nusseibeh, an Emirati of Palestinian origin, said "Israel's security will be achieved only when it fully complies with its obligations as an occupying power, demonstrates a genuine political will towards achieving a real peace in the region, and

---

\* Dr. Moran Zaga is an expert on the Gulf States and the borders of the Middle East. She is a lecturer and researcher at Haifa University and a policy fellow at the Mitvim Institute. This report is part of an initiative funded by the UK Government, but the views expressed do not necessarily reflect its views.

<sup>1</sup> ["UAE Reaffirms its Support to Push the Middle East Peace Process Forward,"](#) *Permanent Mission of the United Arab Emirates to the United Nations*, 18 October 2017.

<sup>2</sup> ["Mohammed bin Zayed confirms UAE support for efforts to establish an independent Palestinian state with its capital in Jerusalem,"](#) *Al-Ithihad*, 24 October 2011 (in Arabic).

<sup>3</sup> ["UAE calls on international community, UN to find solutions to Palestinian question,"](#) *United Arab Emirates Ministry of Foreign Affairs & International Cooperation*, 2 December 2017.

cooperates in achieving the two-state solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, in accordance with the Arab Peace Initiative.”<sup>4</sup>

Against the backdrop of these declarations and prior to the Abraham Accords, relations between Israel and the UAE were unprecedented in scope and openness. Nonetheless, the UAE’s leadership reiterated in no uncertain terms that these ties did not indicate a change in its official policy on Israel or its stance on a just solution to the Palestinian issue. Despite this position, the Abraham Accords did not include mention of the two-state solution, a promise to initiate negotiations with the Palestinians or any Israeli intention to act for the establishment of a Palestinian state. This subsequently raised the question of whether the UAE had abandoned its traditional stance on the issue. Were its historic and current support for the Palestinian issue mere lip service reflecting its real-politick approach? Or was the UAE offering what it describes as a new paradigm for resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian and Israeli-Arab conflict? These questions triggered the need for examining how the UAE is redefining its support for the Palestinians now that it has crossed the barrier of normalization with Israel, which was traditionally dependent on resolution of the Palestinian issue.

This article examines the UAE’s position regarding the Palestinian issue and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process since the signing of the Abraham Accords in several aspects: The freeze on annexation, the dialogue (or absence thereof) between the Emirati and Palestinian leadership, the declared Emirati position regarding the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, its attitude to the Palestinian issue within bilateral ties with Israel, and the UAE’s activities in the Palestinian arena. What emerges is a framework of complex interests, declarations, and actions, alongside opportunities and barriers. Importantly, the attempt to assess the UAE’s position on this issue is limited by the short time that has elapsed since the accords were signed. The shaping of new relationships in the region and the expected changes on the Israeli and Palestinian political map will enable a reassessment of the insights emerging from this document in order to present a clearer understanding down the line.

## B. Stopping Annexation

The Abraham Accords were signed in the background of Israel’s stated intention to annex West Bank territories. In a letter directed at the Israeli public, published by the widely circulated Yediot Ahronoth newspaper, the UAE’s Ambassador to the US Yousef Al Otaiba wrote that “annexation will certainly and immediately upend Israeli aspirations for improved security, economic and cultural ties with the Arab world and with UAE.”<sup>5</sup> Following the signing of the accords, Al Otaiba said, “We offered what we thought is a much better deal”, referring to normalization in return for halting annexation.<sup>6</sup> The UAE presented Israel’s decision to halt the annexation as an essential condition for normalization and portrayed this move as a diplomatic effort and achievement attained through pressure on the Israeli government for the sake of the Palestinian people.<sup>7</sup> The Emiratis were, and are still determined to deliver this message against the wide criticism by various media and public figures claiming that the Emirati leadership had used the annexation for image purposes when, in fact, Netanyahu had no intention to implement it. A series of senior Emiratis interviewed in the Israeli media stressed

---

<sup>4</sup> Lana Zaki Nusseibeh, “[The Question of Palestine](#),” *Permanent Mission of the United Arab Emirates to the United Nations*, 24 November 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Yousef Al Otaiba, “[Annexation will be a serious setback for better relations with the Arab world](#),” *Ynetnews*, 12 June 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Jamie Prentis, “[UAE ambassador to US: Abraham Accord 'broke taboo' that normalisation with Israel is impossible](#),” *The National*, 11 November 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Mohammed bin Zayed’s [Twitter page](#), 13 August 2020.

the importance of halting annexation and of the Israeli and US commitment to do so.<sup>8</sup> The UAE was thus setting a red line in its relationship with Israel regarding future annexation attempts.<sup>9</sup> The importance of this issue to the Emirati leadership also appears to have emerged at the White House signing ceremony of the Abraham Accords in September 2020. According to the Saudi news site *Elaph*, the Emirati Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Zayed did not attend the event in light of Netanyahu's comment that despite the temporary halt of annexation, he was committed to the annexation plan.<sup>10</sup>

These messages, directed to both the Palestinians and the international community, were meant to convey the UAE's decision to play an active role in the Israeli-Palestinian arena. The question of whether the UAE is sincerely interested in the Palestinian issue remains, but tying the normalization of relations with Israel to halting annexation of Palestinian territories signals a new phase in the UAE's approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Up to that point, the UAE was passive, supporting the Arab Peace Initiative from the sidelines. Now, it is leading a significant move and positioning itself as a proactive player in this arena, despite the tensions in its relations with the Palestinian leadership.

### C. Dialogue (or Lack Thereof) Between the UAE and Palestinian Leadership

In the past decade, ties between the Emirati and Palestinian leadership have been severed almost completely. Personal relations between Mahmoud Abbas and Emirati leaders are deeply hostile, as has become publicly evident since Mohammed Dahlan moved to the UAE in 2011. Dahlan, formerly a top Fatah official, is considered a bitter foe of Mahmoud Abbas', who perceived the UAE's willingness to grant him residence as an act of treason. Relations between the leaderships in Ramallah and Abu Dhabi have remained strained over the last ten years (2011-2021) not only because of Dahlan, but also due to the UAE's support of the Trump plan and its participation in the Bahrain Conference, which angered the Palestinians. Mahmoud Abbas often uses the term "treason" when speaking of the Emiratis. He described the Abraham Accords as "treason" against the Palestinian people and attacked them harshly.<sup>11</sup> The Palestinian Authority even recalled its ambassador to the UAE in response to the signing of the accords. Following Joe Biden's election as US President in November 2020, Abbas announced the return of the Palestinian ambassadors to the Emirates and Bahrain,<sup>12</sup> but relations between the two leaderships remain strained and hostile. This was further emphasized in March 2021 when the PA's minister of energy vetoed the UAE's observer status in the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum in an additional form of diplomatic protest.<sup>13</sup>

The rupture in relations between the UAE and the Palestinian leadership also comes into play through Abu Dhabi's relations with the Hamas government in Gaza. The Hamas leadership has condemned the Abraham Accords, calling them a "treacherous stab in the back".<sup>14</sup> Hamas-UAE hostility stems from two main factors – the ideological gap between the Islamist

<sup>8</sup> Noa Landau, "[Stopping Annexation was our Main Concern: Top UAE Official](#)," *Haaretz*, 16 August 2020; Barak Ravid, "[UAE Foreign Minister to Walla News: We wish to advance quickly, convinced there will be no annexation](#)," *Walla*, 14 August 2020 (in Hebrew)

<sup>9</sup> Itamar Eichner, "[Top UAE official: We have Israeli, U.S. 'assurances' annexation will not happen](#)," *Ynetnews*, 1 September 2020.

<sup>10</sup> "[Report: UAE crown prince skipped White House signing over PM's annexation stance](#)," *Times of Israel*, September 19 2020.

<sup>11</sup> "[Abbas calls UAE diplomatic move with Israel 'treason'](#)," *JNS*, 13 August 2020.

<sup>12</sup> "[Palestinians sending ambassadors back to UAE and Bahrain, official says](#)," *Reuters*, 18 November 2020.

<sup>13</sup> Amihai Stein, [Twitter page](#), 10 March 2021.

<sup>14</sup> "[Israel, UAE announce normalisation of relations with US help](#)," *Al-Jazeera*, 13 August 2020.

organization affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood and the UAE, which views the Muslim Brotherhood and other radical religious elements as a threat to regional stability. Secondly, the competition between the Emirates and Qatar deepens the UAE's conflict with Hamas, as Qatar has a significant foothold in Gaza.

The leadership of the Arab-Palestinian community in Israel is also considered hostile to the UAE. The Arab Joint List voted in the Knesset against the Abraham Accords, citing their disregard of the Palestinian problem.<sup>15</sup> Despite the political disconnect between the leaderships of both sides, the UAE expresses its loyalty to the Palestinian people and their cause, and distinguishes between the governmental leadership and the people.

The absence of dialogue between the Emirati and Palestinian leaderships deprives the UAE of significant influence in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and forces it to choose roundabout channels to exert influence. An example of such a channel is the support of the Abu Dhabi ruling family for Dahlan, reflecting three key Emirati attitudes and approaches toward the Palestinians. One is its desire for involvement in the Palestinian arena, another is its decision to align itself with pragmatic, secular elements in Palestinian politics, and the third is the above mentioned competition with neighboring Qatar that hosts the political wing of Hamas. In other words, UAE policy vis-à-vis the Palestinians should also be examined through the lens of relations between the Gulf States themselves and the covert and overt struggle for control and influence in various arenas in the Middle East.<sup>16</sup>

Alternative channels between the Emirati and Palestinian leaderships run through countries such as Jordan and Egypt, both considered close allies of the UAE, through which it can attain a limited measure of involvement. Israel has now joined this list of conduits for Emirati influence in the Palestinian arena.

### **C. Past and Present UAE Positions on the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process**

In the three months following the announcement of the plan to normalize relations with Israel, the Emirati leadership engaged intensively in public pronouncements regarding its commitment to Palestinian national aspirations. During the first visit by an official Israeli delegation to Abu Dhabi on August 31, 2020, Mohammed bin Zayed issued a statement declaring his commitment to the establishment of a Palestinian state with its capital in East Jerusalem and stressed; "Peace is a strategic choice, but not at the expense of the Palestinian cause."<sup>17</sup> The Emirati Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed voiced a similar message, telling Palestinian residents of the UAE in an online meeting, "I would like to promise the participants that the UAE believes peace is a strategic and vital choice for the region, and this choice will not come at the expense of our historic support for the Palestinian issue and the rights of our Palestinian brothers."<sup>18</sup> Ambassador Otaiba expressed a similar message at a conference of the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), saying Israel and the Emirates would have to conduct "tough talks" on the Palestinian issue, emphasizing his country's support for the

---

<sup>15</sup> Rapahel Ahren, "[Knesset approves UAE normalization 80-13; mainly Arab party is sole opposition](#)," *Times of Israel*, 15 October 2020.

<sup>16</sup> Moran Zaga, "[Competition between Saudi Arabia, UAE and Qatar in the Palestinian Arena](#)," *Mitvim Institute*, November 2019.

<sup>17</sup> "[UAE reassures Palestinians of its unwavering support](#)," *Arab Weekly*, 1 September 2020.

<sup>18</sup> Abdullah bin Zayed in [online meeting with Palestinian community](#), *UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation*, 1 September 2020 (in Arabic).

two-state solution.<sup>19</sup> At a UN Security Council debate, the UAE called to leverage the momentum of peace with Israel to renew negotiations with the Palestinians.<sup>20</sup> Various other government officials reiterated the same clear position.

The numerous declarations in this regard could attest to the importance that the Emirati leadership attributes to the Israeli-Palestinian issue. Concurrently, they could also point to concern over criticism of the agreement with Israel. Given the precedent it set among Arab and Muslim states by forging full diplomatic relations with Israel, the UAE invested heavily in public diplomacy vis-à-vis its own citizens, the Palestinian people, and the Arab world. According to Dr. Ebtesam al-Ketbi, President of the Emirates Policy Center, it is hardly surprising that the Palestinians oppose the Abraham Accords, but the move could actually serve the Palestinian position in the conflict with Israel in three contexts: (1) Introducing a new paradigm for peacemaking; (2) Adding new and unconventional players into the peace process, such as the Emirates, which would serve both the Israeli and the Palestinian interests; (3) changing Israeli public opinion regarding the Arab world and the manner in which Israel could benefit from peace agreements, thereby boosting support for negotiations with the Palestinians.<sup>21</sup>

The UAE has defined normalization as a paradigm shift regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Whereas normalization with Israel served in the past as a type of bargaining chip conditioned on progress in negotiations with the Palestinians, from now on Israel is a legitimate channel for direct dialogue with countries in the Arab world. Through this dialogue, the UAE can work to advance the peace process, not only through Egypt, Jordan, the US and the EU, but also through direct diplomatic channels with Israel. Nonetheless, this review finds that so far, there is a noticeable gap between declarations and actions, which could stem from the current political barriers and the UAE priorities in the region.

## E. UAE Involvement in the Palestinian Arena since the Abraham Accords

The channels the UAE implements in the Palestinian arena have not changed since the agreement with Israel, continuing through regional and international parties and providing economic and humanitarian support. However, during the first six months of official relations with Israel, the UAE has shifted the nature of its activity in this arena to a certain degree.

**Strengthening the diplomatic channel:** The Abraham Accords have served as a lever for the UAE leadership to intensify its voice and visibility in expressing solidarity and political support for the Palestinian issue. Since August 2020, it has often addressed the international community on the Palestinians and the peace process.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> [“The Abraham Accords: A New Middle East Horizon? | UAE Ambassador to the United States in a first appearance before the Israeli public,”](#) *Institute for National Security Studies*, 11 November 2020.

<sup>20</sup> [“UAE Underscores Need to Leverage Recent Peace Accord to Break Deadlock in Middle East Peace Process,”](#) *United Arab Emirates Ministry of Foreign Affairs & International Cooperation*, 28 October 2020.

<sup>21</sup> Ebtesam al-Ketbi, [“Emirati-Israeli peace agreement: Could it be a game-changer?”](#) *Emirates Policy Center*, 24 September 2020.

<sup>22</sup> [“UAE underscores its desire for just initiatives and cooperation with regional and international partners on finding a solution to the Palestinian issue,”](#) *UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and international Cooperation*, 3 December 2020 (in Arabic); Mina Aldroubi, [“Pompeo to visit occupied West Bank in first US trip to the settlement. UAE’s Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed affirms commitment to Palestinian peace process,”](#) *The National*, 18 November 2020; [“Gargash: Resolving Arab world’s issues requires common vision, unified stances in UN Security Council,”](#) *Emirates News Agency*, 19 January 2021.

**Spotlighting its humanitarian contribution:** In an unusual move that preceded the signing of the Abraham Accords, the UAE sent medical equipment to the Palestinians on two planes that landed at Israel's Ben-Gurion Airport. Naturally, the event generated great media attention, which grew once Mahmoud Abbas refused to accept the supplies.<sup>23</sup> The media serves as a key tool for the UAE to highlight its humanitarian aid to the Palestinians and others. Following the Abraham Accords, the UAE expanded its aid to the Palestinians to help them fight the Covid-19 pandemic with the transfer of 14 tons of medical equipment to Gaza.<sup>24</sup> It made sure to mention that the aid was provided through Dahlan's involvement, thereby using the aid to Gaza in order to boost his standing on the eve of possible Palestinian elections.<sup>25</sup> This move strengthened the UAE's standing vis-à-vis Qatar and bolstered the argument that it cares for the Palestinian people despite its disconnect from their leadership and the decision to sign the Abraham Accords with Israel. An opinion piece published on March 1, 2021 in the Arabic-language Emirati newspaper *Al Bayan* was dedicated to the UAE's humanitarian aid to the Palestinians in the past and present. The writer, *Al Bayan* Editor Muna Busmara, reviewed the shipments of medical equipment to the Palestinians during the coronavirus pandemic, the UAE's massive contributions to UNRWA until 2020, and other economic opportunities it granted the Palestinians.<sup>26</sup> Busmara appealed to the Palestinians as brothers, stressing the UAE's willingness to help them, thus the humanitarian channel as a diplomatic tool to warm relations is evident between the lines.

**Slashing UNRWA funding:** Along with humanitarian support, the UAE has helped the Palestinians in the past by transferring funds to UNRWA, the Red Crescent and NGOs in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. However, in February 2021, reports emerged that the UAE had slashed its funding for UNRWA from 50 million USD in 2019 to 1 million USD in 2020. The Emirati Minister for International Cooperation, Reem al-Hashimy said in response to the report that the UAE was examining donations to "more effective organizations", such as the international community and the Red Crescent.<sup>27</sup>

**Developing new economic channels:** A day after the signing of the Abraham Accords, the UAE Minister of Economy Abdulla bin Touq Al Marri said Palestinian areas would be included in the UAE's trade agreements with Israel.<sup>28</sup> This declaration, among others, indicates that the UAE intends to invest in development funding at the expense of its traditional funding for UNRWA.

**Rapprochement with the Palestinian community in the Emirates:** The estimated 200,000 Palestinians living in the UAE reacted to the Abraham Accords with mixed feelings.<sup>29</sup> Throughout the UAE's modern history, the government has invested heavily in maintaining social stability at home, but it is now preparing to head off potential Palestinian unrest. One initiative the government has adopted is the founding of an Emirati-Palestinian friendship club, launched in the presence of Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed, who expressed his affinity for the Palestinian people and said the Palestinian community in the Emirates has an important

<sup>23</sup> Moran Zaga, Elie Podeh, "[Israel is entangled in UAE-Palestinian rivalries – opinion](#)," *The Jerusalem Post*, 1 July 2020.

<sup>24</sup> "[Coronavirus: UAE delivers more than 14 tonnes of medical aid to Gaza](#)," *The National*, 16 December 2020.

<sup>25</sup> Khaled Abu Toameh, "[Abbas rival oversees UAE medical aid to Gaza](#)," *The Jerusalem Post*, 12 January 2021.

<sup>26</sup> Mona Busmara, "[The Emirates are historic supporters of the Palestinians](#)," *Al Bayan*, 1 March 2021. (in Arabic)

<sup>27</sup> "[UAE halts funding to UN Palestinian agency in 'reset' of aid programme](#)," *Reuters*, 8 February 2021.

<sup>28</sup> "[A conversation with H.E. Abdulla bin Touq Al Mari, UAE Minister of Economy](#)," *Atlantic Council*, 16 September 2020.

<sup>29</sup> Fatina Hamad, "[Palestinians Living in UAE Uncertain Over Peace Deal With Israel](#)," *The Media Line*, 16 August 2020.

role to play in the country's growth and development. He welcomed the establishment of the club and described it as "an important step reflecting the links of brotherhood between our states that contribute to communications and relations between the Emirati and Palestinian brothers."<sup>30</sup>

## F. The Palestinian Issue in Bilateral UAE-Israel Ties

Beyond public Emirati declarations of support for the two-state solution and commitment to the Palestinians after the Abraham Accords, the Palestinian issue also comes into play in the forging of direct ties and relations with Israel. Much can be learned from the UAE's response (or lack thereof) to issues such as settlement construction, purchasing of goods made in the settlements, cooperation and connection with right-wing factions, and Israeli military or humanitarian activities in Palestinian territory. Nonetheless, it is too soon to derive significant conclusions in this regard given the short time that has elapsed since relations were established.

The peace treaty between the UAE and Israel includes two mentions of commitment "to working together to realize a negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict", but does not impose any conditions on Israeli activities in the Palestinian areas.<sup>31</sup> Along with the positive relations and flourishing cooperation in the initial six months of the deal, the UAE has been implicitly critical of Israel over its activities in the West Bank. In December 2020, the Emirati media gave wide coverage to the shooting of a young Palestinian by Israeli soldiers, and in February 2021 it reported on the decision of the International Criminal Court in The Hague to investigate whether Israel had committed war crimes in the Palestinian territories.<sup>32</sup>

Regarding the purchase of goods made in the settlements, the UAE appears to be avoiding an official position on the issue. In December 2020, an agreement was signed between the Samaria Regional Council and FAM Holding, a UAE conglomerate, on exports of goods such as wine, tahini, honey and olive oil from the settlements. A delegation of the Yesha Council, the umbrella organization of Jewish settlements in the West Bank, was among the many Israeli delegations that visited the UAE since the agreement. Such cooperation, however, is limited to the private sector and UAE officials have yet to present clear positions on settlement-made goods, ties with the settlements and, in general, the settlement enterprise. Many details of the formal agreements signed between the two states remain unknown, and no information has been made public regarding the exclusion of settlements from these deals. Bahrain, for example, has already been forced to clarify that it would ban goods imported from the settlements in accordance with international law, and it is safe to assume that the developing cooperation between the sides will force the UAE to formulate similar policy, or at least to respond to initiatives connected with the territories.

The Al Aqsa Mosque issue has also been put to its first test in the trilateral relationship among Israel, the PA and the UAE since the agreement was signed, and it could develop into a significant point of friction in the future. The October 2020 incident in which senior Emirati representatives visited the Al Aqsa Mosque and encountered angry Palestinians who cursed them and shouted at them to get out inflamed tensions between the sides. The incident

<sup>30</sup> ["Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed to the Palestinian community in the country: The UAE will always be a safe custodian for you and your families," Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, 1 September 2020 \(in Arabic\).](#)

<sup>31</sup> ["The Abraham Accords Declaration," U.S. Department of State. Accessed on 28 February 2021.](#)

<sup>32</sup> ["Palestinian teenager fatally shot during clashes with Israeli army," The National, 5 December 2020;](#) ["ICC paves way for war crimes probe in Palestinian territories," The National, 6 February 2021.](#)

prompted Israel to beef up security for visitors from the Gulf. The coronavirus restrictions since the signing of the agreement have sidelined this important issue, but once tourism from the UAE and Bahrain opens up, the Temple Mount could once again generate tensions.

## **G. Summary and Looking Towards the Future**

The UAE is hardly indifferent to the widespread criticism of its attitude towards the Palestinian issue and is seeking to formulate and advance clear policy on the subject. However, it is already evident that contrary to prevailing public perceptions, the ties being forged between Israel and the UAE include a significant dimension of reference to the Palestinian issue. The UAE's position on this aspect is relevant to understanding the nature and quality of its future relationship with Israel. This review concludes that the issue no longer divides the two sides as it did in the past, but rather serves as a tool to leverage Emirati influence specifically in this arena and in the Arab world in general. The UAE is thus keen to expand its involvement in the Palestinian issue.

As it reformulates its policy, the UAE is working behind the scenes through regional and international diplomatic channels on advancing a return to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and on a mediating role for itself. However, no signs have emerged in the initial six months of official ties with Israel of Emirati attempts to promote Palestinian diplomatic interests, whether due to obstacles limiting its ability to cooperate with the Palestinian leadership or the priority given to the issue on the UAE's agenda.

The Emirati interest in engagement with the Palestinian arena is reflected not only in the diplomatic field, but also in the more active involvement in a variety of areas, such as the development of new economic channels, expansion of humanitarian assistance, and rapprochement with the Palestinian community in the UAE. The Biden Administration's intentions to restore humanitarian aid to the Palestinians could serve as an interface in developing joint Israeli-Emirati civil society projects.

The ties with Israel provide an opportunity for greater Emirati involvement both in the development of economic channels and in future mediation in the peace process or the conflict. By signing the Abraham Accords, the UAE has bought itself a seat at the table as well as an option to intensify its moves within Palestinian society through cooperation with Israel. The presence of the Emirati ambassador in Israel is important for deepening the country's links with senior Israeli and PA officials. Building personal relationships with Palestinian government officials and a greater understanding of regional politics on controversial issues such as East Jerusalem and Area C could have an impact on UAE decision making regarding the Israeli-Palestinian matter.

A change of Palestinian leadership could also offer future opportunities. An understanding of the obstacles and constraints facing the UAE in the Palestinian arena, both in terms of its disconnect with the current leadership and its controversial support of Dahlan, will result in a re-examination of its policy and perhaps in connecting with other parties in the PA power structure. The Emirati leadership can therefore be expected to seek to build bridges with the future Palestinian leadership that will assume power following possible elections in the PA or future leadership changes.

The new, overt diplomacy between Israel and the UAE could serve as a pressure point to advance Palestinian interests. Prior to the agreements, the Emiratis thought Israel failed to understand what it stands to gain from peace with the Arab world. Now, both the Israeli public



and leadership, which have warmly embraced relations with the Emirates, realize what they stand to lose from disruption of these ties. In the future, the UAE will be able to link the quality of its relations with Israel to its activity vis-à-vis the Palestinians on humanitarian, security and diplomatic issues.

Should the Israeli-Palestinian peace process resume, the UAE could play an important and constructive role. In addition to continued humanitarian aid for the Palestinian people, it could offer partnership in investment and the development of infrastructure for a future Palestinian state and encourage the growth of the Palestinian economy. As an economic and diplomatic hub in the Middle East and an emerging leader in the region, the UAE could initiate, support, and encourage the advancement of regional cooperation that includes not only Israel but the Palestinians, as well.