



Israel and the United Arab Emirates: Opportunities on Hold

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Dr. Moran Zaga

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The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is well known for its economic power and moderate Islam, and for its increasing involvement in regional developments throughout the Middle East, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The UAE adheres to the official policy of the Arab League towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and accordingly calls for the implementation of a two-state solution in the spirit of the Arab Peace Initiative. In light of this, the current political, strategic, security and economic cooperation between Israel and the UAE are ad-hoc, often taking place under the radar or under international sponsorship. Nevertheless, Israel and the UAE share multiple interests, including the opposition to Iran, the battle against terror, the possibility of opening trade routes between them and from the Mediterranean to the Gulf, and cooperation on civil issues such as tourism, medicine, research and environment. In order for the two countries to fulfill this potential, Israel must make progress towards reaching peace with the Palestinians.

A. Introduction

The UAE is considered a rising regional power. In addition to its economic and political stability, the UAE increased its foreign policy activity in recent years by leading processes in the Arab world, including in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The UAE was founded in 1971 as an independent federal state. Its socio-political structure derives from a number of tribal coalitions, relatively homogeneous in their ethnic and religious affiliation. Most of the Emiratis are Arab Sunni Muslims who adhere to the Maliki School of Islamic jurisprudence. From the early 19th century until the establishment of the UAE, the region was subject to the rule of the British Empire, yet local leaders were able to enjoy a substantial sovereignty in managing local affairs. Britain had a meaningful role in shaping the political system of the UAE and demarcating its borders (internal and external) based on the regional tribal loyalties. The UAE was established as the only Arab federal state, consisting of seven emirates: Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm al-Quwain, Ras al-Khaimah and Fujairah. Despite their relatively homogeneous characteristics, the seven emirates differ in their political, economic and religious nature, as well as in their degree of cultural openness to the West.

Among the seven emirates, Abu Dhabi and Dubai are considered the most influential both politically and economically. In the last two decades, the two emirates had invested in shaping themselves as global centers, an effort which is manifested in their cultural, educational and diplomatic arenas. They regularly host international events and attract

* Dr. Moran Zaga is a research fellow at the Mitvim Institute and the Ezri Center at Haifa University. Her research concerns Geopolitical and social processes in the Gulf states. This study was written as part of the "Israel-Arab Relations: The Unfulfilled Potential" project of the Mitvim Institute.

tourists from all over the world. The third most important emirate, Sharjah, has enjoyed in recent years an increased amount of influence, both locally and globally, and is establishing itself as a significant cultural and political center as well. Despite the divergences between the internal political units, the UAE is addressed in this paper as one integral unit, since the emirates who are the most influential among the seven represent the overall governing policy and quite accurately reflect the general attitude of the state.

According to UN and World Bank¹ figures, the population of the UAE is estimated at 9.2 million, of whom more than 80 percent are foreign nationals residing in the country for labor purposes. These foreign residents hold almost all types of jobs, with the exception of highly senior positions in the government and in security institutions, and their outstanding numbers affect the social and cultural composition of the country.² The birth rate in the UAE is considered rather low compared to other Arab countries, and is estimated at 1.77.³

1. The UAE and the regional system

The UAE expresses its national perception in Article 6 of its constitution, according to which the state is part of a larger political unit – the Arab world: "The people that make up the union are one, while also being a part of the larger Arab nation".⁴ Based on this approach, the UAE is an active member within the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and is trying to promote broad regional initiatives, such as humanitarian assistance to crisis struck zones in the Arab world.⁵ Its membership in these forums dictates, to a large extent, the UAE's foreign policy in general, and its policy towards Israel in particular. Yet, its political and economic resilience allows the UAE a relative flexibility in independent decision-making regarding its foreign affairs.

One of the salient features of the UAE is its moderate approach to Islam, endorsing the religion as a non-political cultural component. Its religious tolerance is expressed in a high level of equal opportunities for women and a permissive attitude towards foreign residents and visitors within its borders. This religious-political approach in the state level is also reflected in its foreign policy, which opposes Islamic fundamentalism and promotes the fight against terror organizations (both Sunnis and Shiites). The political dispute between the UAE and its neighbors, Iran and Qatar, derives largely from this worldview.⁶

During the wave of protests also known as the Arab Spring, the UAE boycotted the Qatar-based Al-Jazeera channel, accusing Qatar of supporting radical movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood. In June 2017, another crisis erupted between Qatar and the UAE over the former's stance on Iran. This last crisis has led to a complete severing of ties between the UAE and Qatar, and to antagonistic statements by public figures and government officials indicating an escalation between the sides.⁷ The UAE's policy towards Iran is one of political and ideological dispute, which grew stronger in recent years following the emergence of a new balance of power in the region. The UAE, which is threatened by Iran's hegemony and is in a territorial dispute with Iran over islands in the Persian Gulf, objects Iran's development

¹ UN Data, [United Arab Emirates](#); World Bank Data, [United Arab Emirates](#).

² Moran Zaga, "[Who is \(Not\) Afraid of the Demographic Balance?](#)", *The Forum for Regional Thinking*, 20 February 2017.

³ The World Bank, [World Development Indicators](#).

⁴ The Cabinet of the United Arab Emirates, [UAE's Constitution](#).

⁵ "[Foreign Aid Strategy 2017-2021](#)", *United Arab Emirates Government*, 26 April 2018.

⁶ William Rugh, "The Foreign Policy of the United Arab Emirates," *Middle East Journal* 50(1), 1996, pp. 57-70.

⁷ Gulf News Report, "[Our Patience Has Limits, Says UAE Minister](#)," *Gulf News*, 28 May 2017.

of weapons of mass destruction in the region.⁸ Moreover, the involvement of Iran and the UAE in the war in Yemen has placed both countries on different sides of the barricade. Despite its attempts to avoid an outright confrontation with Iran, the UAE has been taking various steps to protest Iran's policy. For example, in 2017 the UAE's Federal Court gave a 10-year prison verdict to an Iranian businessman who it accused of being involved in Iran's nuclear program.⁹ These moves express the rising tension between the Gulf states on the issue of security and political Islam, and they testify to various political intrigues that exist beneath the surface.¹⁰

The UAE is considered the second largest economy in the Arab world, after Saudi Arabia, and the country's per capita gross domestic product (in terms of Purchasing Power Parity¹¹) is in the top ten of international ranking.¹² The UAE's economy relies heavily on oil exports. However, the economic strategy of the country tends to develop additional growth channels and in recent years, it has succeeded in reducing its dependence on oil to about a third of its gross national product. The country has positioned itself as a leading international business center and as an important trading hub between the West and the East. Another growing field of economy in the UAE is tourism, which also affects the cultural environment in the country.¹³ The economic prowess of the UAE is an important factor in consolidating its political status in regional and global terms. The UAE invests its efforts and resources in expanding its diplomatic relations, and often acts as a mediator in third-party disputes.¹⁴ Its foreign activism during the last decade indicates its desire to stand out in the regional arena. Some of these endeavors include: humanitarian aid programs, active participation in the fighting in Yemen, the joint initiative with Saudi Arabia and Bahrain to boycott Qatar, and its political involvement in Egypt,¹⁵ Libya¹⁶ and Gaza.¹⁷

2. The UAE and Israel

The UAE was established 23 years after Israel's independence and after the local and regional changes that have taken place in the wake of the Six-Day War of 1967. The UAE never took part in the wars against Israel, but its policy and attitude towards the Israeli state were largely influenced by the balance of power at the time of its establishment.

The geopolitical conditions of both the UAE and Israel are an important factor in understanding the nature of the relationship between the two countries. The UAE is geographically distant from Israel, located on the southern shore of the Gulf. The possibility to a direct and immediate conflict between the two countries is unlikely in the foreseen future.

⁸ Taimur Khan, "[UAE is Committed to Keeping Middle East Free of Nuclear Weapons](#)," *The National*, 12 October 2013.

⁹ Rasha Moran, "[Abu Dhabi Federal Appeal Court Convicts Iranian Businessman for Supporting Iran's Nuclear Programme](#)," *Emirates News Agency*, 26 April 2017.

¹⁰ Moran Zaga, "A Divided Union: The Gulf States and the Roots of the Qatar Crisis", *Near East: The Middle East Magazine*, 11 June 2017

¹¹ This index enables international comparisons between currencies and GDP, GDP per capita, growth, etc.

¹² Yitzhak Gal, "The Gulf Market: A Fast-Growing Economic Giant", 20 December 2009.

¹³ Dubai ranks 6th among the world's 10 most visited cities, according to [Euromonitor's](#) 2017 rating.

¹⁴ For example, the UAE served as a mediator in the peace process between Eritrea and Ethiopia, signed in July 2015 after a decade of war between the parties: "[The UAE is Scrambling to Control Ports in Africa](#)," *The Economist*, 19 July 2018

¹⁵ "[Ahmed Shafiq: Egyptian ex-PM Withdraws from Election](#)," *BBC News*, 7 January 2018.

¹⁶ "[UN report: UAE Violates Libya Arms Embargo](#)," *Al-Jazeera*, 14 June 2017.

¹⁷ Adnan Abu Amer, "[Dahlan Muscles his Way into Gaza with UAE Money](#)," *Al-Monitor*, 7 August 2017.

While the UAE is a monarchy and all its citizens are Sunni Arabs, Israel is a democracy, comprised of a diverse population that includes also a minority of Sunni Arabs.

The relations between Israel and the UAE are often affected by their positions in the political axes of power. In the international arena, the UAE and Israel are considered as pro-American states. The US maintains close ties with the UAE, and these ties rely on a strategic alliance based on shared diplomatic, security and economic interests.¹⁸ However, in terms of regional policy, Israel and the UAE have often stood in opposing positions. Since its establishment, the UAE has been endorsing the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council's (GCC) decisions regarding Israel. Being a member of the Arab League, the UAE refused to recognize the legitimacy of the State of Israel,¹⁹ and officially prohibited the entry of Israelis into its territory in accordance with the general boycott of Israel by the Arab League.²⁰ However, being a member of the GCC somewhat moderated its hawkish approach, as the Gulf states consider Israel as a regional player that should be acknowledged.

Since the establishment of the GCC in 1981, its member states have adopted a clear position against Israel's policy towards the Palestinians, while seeking a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.²¹ In addition to the numerous condemnations made by the UAE against Israel's policy on the Palestinian issue, the UAE has historically supported various regional peace initiatives and frequently mentions its support for the 2002 Arab peace initiative (initiated by Saudi Arabia). The Gulf states, including the UAE, consider the resolution of the conflict as a source for regional stability and as a way to eliminate radical movements operating in the region. The UAE and the rest of the GCC member states perceive the two-state solution as the key to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.²²

Israel's policies and actions in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip are a central cause for UAE's opposition to Israel, which has so far rejected every chance for formal bilateral diplomatic relations between the two countries. Indeed, unlike its neighbors Qatar or Oman, the UAE never officially opened an Israeli consulate. Despite adopting the general rhetoric of the Arab states, on the practical level, the UAE presents a relatively flexible and independent approach towards Israel, which is manifested in its willingness to maintain low profile relations.²³ Among other things, this approach includes: granting an entry visa to Israelis holding foreign passports (and to holders of an Israeli passport through a local sponsorship), receiving Israeli government officials visiting its territory, maintaining diplomatic and security ties at the multilateral level (and attempting to keep them covert), mutual trade carried out "under the radar" and more. Despite the UAE's support of the Arab League's boycott of Israel, it does not enforce absolute restrictions on the trade with Israel and does not prevent developing further ties with the Israeli state.²⁴ In 1994, the UAE (together with the rest of the GCC member states) removed the restrictions resulting from

¹⁸ For further reading about the US-UAE relations: Kenneth Katzman, "[The United Arab Emirates \(UAE\): Issues for U.S. Policy](#)," *Congressional Research Service*, 22 June 2018.

¹⁹ See Appendix: Federal Law No. 15/1972 of the United Arab Emirates concerning the Boycott of Israel, September 3, 1972.

²⁰ Dubai Online, [Dubai Visas and Immigration](#).

²¹ Rugh, *ibid*.

²² Uzi Rabi and Chelsi Mueller, "The Gulf Arab States and Israel since 1967: From 'No Negotiation' to Tacit Cooperation," *British Journal of Middle East Studies* 44(4), 2017, pp. 576-592.

²³ Adam Entous, "[Donald Trump's New World Order](#)," *The New Yorker*, 18 June 2018.

²⁴ "[Arab League Boycott of Israel: CRS Report for Congress](#)," *Congressional Research Service*, 3 July 2008.

the Arab League's boycott on Israel, which banned any business engagements with Israeli companies and with foreign companies that are affiliated with them.²⁵

As a rule, the UAE accepts non-Israeli Jews in its territory, since it makes a distinction between religious differences and its political disagreements surrounding Israeli politics. Palestinians living in Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA) both maintain relations with the UAE at various levels, but entering the UAE is usually easier for Palestinians under the PA's jurisdiction, and according to this, quite a few of them work in the UAE. The Israeli law does not prohibit the entry of UAE nationals to its territory, however, it requires the Israeli government's approval.²⁶

Historically, the extent of the cooperation between the UAE and the State of Israel and its public, changed over time and between sectors. A salient case of such fluctuation was following the assassination of senior Hamas figure Mahmoud al-Mabhouh in a hotel in Dubai in January 2010.²⁷ Shortly after the incident, the relations between the two countries deteriorated when the Dubai chief of police accused the Israeli Mossad for being involved. Israel did not confirm nor deny these accusations, but various Israeli sources insinuated this involvement.²⁸ Following this event, the UAE started taking a series of steps aimed to curb official and non-official relations between the two countries. In November of that year, Deputy Minister Gila Gamliel was denied entry to the UAE when she wished to attend the Davos International Economic Forum.²⁹ In addition, a UAE decision was taken to prohibit the entry of Israelis holding dual passports³⁰ and even the entry of non-Israelis possessing passports that contained Israel's border control stamps. Over time, this policy began to dissolve and such prohibitions were almost completely removed.³¹

The UAE's aspiration to integrate into world politics and economy³² and to host conferences, conventions, and international cultural and sports events, poses dilemmas upon the country with regard to its ties with Israel. On the one hand, the UAE is facing some Arab criticism for allowing Israelis into its territory. On the other hand, the international pressure against boycotting Israel's participation in these UAE based international events, and consequently the UAE's fear of losing legitimacy for hosting them, forces the country to accept the presence of Israelis in such occasions, while still posing some restrictions. So far, it appears that the UAE prefers to avoid hosting Israelis in international events where there is no concern of being criticized by the international community for doing so.

The purpose of this article is to describe and analyze the nature of the relationship between Israel and the UAE, while focusing on existing and possible future collaborations, and to assess the impact of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the prospects for cooperation between the two countries. It reviews possible political, military, security, civic and economic

²⁵ ["Arab League Boycott: Statement by Gulf States on Arab Boycott,"](#) *Jewish Virtual Library*, 1 October 1994.

²⁶ [List of Countries Requiring Visas,](#) *Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 14 February 2017.

²⁷ Avi Issacharoff, ["The Assassination of Mahmoud al-Mabhouh – Twenty-Two Minutes' Assassination,"](#) *Haaretz*, 19 February 2010.

²⁸ Shimon Ifergan and Mishka Ben David, ["The Mabhouh Assassination was a Success,"](#) *Mako-Docu Keshet*, 11 November 2015.

²⁹ Roni Sofer, ["After the assassination: Dubai has banned Gamliel from entering the conference,"](#) *Ynet*, 2 November 2010.

³⁰ ["Dubai Police Chief Bars All Suspected Israelis Entering UAE,"](#) *The Guardian*, 1 March 2010.

³¹ Embassy of the United Arab Emirates Washington DC, [FAQs: Passports and Visas](#); UK Government, [Foreign travel advice: United Arab Emirates](#).

³² The Cabinet of the United Arab Emirates, [National Agenda](#).

channels of cooperation between the countries. The article puts an emphasis on the UAE's approach towards Israel, due to the Israeli desire to maintain and expand cooperation with the UAE, as opposed to the challenges posed by the UAE. The data relies on official and unofficial sources, as well as on relevant media articles, interviews and conversations with various stakeholders in both Israel and the UAE.

B. The Potential for Cooperation between Israel and the UAE

Despite their geographical distance, and the political and ideological gap between them, Israel and the UAE share common interests that can be a source for broader cooperation. The two countries share common political and security objectives, both regionally and globally, and common interests in terms of trade relations, technology, resources and knowledge, as well as coping with environmental challenges.

1. Political and security objectives

Israel's main interest in strengthening ties with the UAE lies in its desire to gain increased legitimacy in the Middle East. Israel's hostile environment makes it ever so important to have potential allies, and the UAE appears to be a country that can advance this goal. The UAE's interest in enhancing its ties with Israel lies in its aspiration to become a significant regional player. The UAE is considered as a moderate Arab-Muslim country, therefore its approach towards advancing relations with Israel is more pragmatic than ideological. Furthermore, the UAE enjoys a high level of political, social and economic stability,³³ which is a rather outstanding trait in the Middle East and that allows it to engage in long-term planning and processes.³⁴ Political stability is an important consideration in advancing peace processes and normalization, therefore Israel has a clear interest in strengthening its ties with countries such as the UAE. To date, the UAE did not lead any Israeli-Palestinian peace initiatives, but rather joined and supported existing ones. The Palestinian leader who will succeed Mahmoud Abbas could lead to a more active involvement of the UAE in promoting the peace process (especially if it were to be Muhammad Dahlan, who is highly supported by the UAE). The regional strategic alliance between the UAE, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Bahrain is central for Israel's interests in the region. Having stronger ties between Israel and any of these countries will contribute to promoting broad regional processes.

The political interests shared by the UAE and Israel currently evolve around two main challenges: Iran's nuclear program and Islamic radicalism. Both Israel and the UAE object to Iran's nuclear armament and the nuclear deal with Iran.³⁵ In 2013, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu referred to the nuclear deal as "a regional threat" that also applies to the Arab states, and as an opportunity for new cooperation, saying: "Israel welcomes contacts with the wider Arab world. It is our hope that common interests and challenges will help create a future of peace".³⁶ Some argue that the UAE and other Gulf states preferred not to take an active part in a direct dispute with Iran, and to watch Israel fight its own diplomatic battle. In any case, it is clear that the Iranian threat can act as a platform for cooperation between the two countries, which ideally can result in further diplomatic relations, intelligence cooperation and even joint military action in the extreme case of a violent conflict.

³³ The Fund for Peace, [Fragile States index – Global Data](#).

³⁴ The Cabinet of the United Arab Emirates, [UAE Vision](#).

³⁵ Rabi and Mueller, *ibid*.

³⁶ The Embassy of Israel to the United States, [PM Netanyahu's Speech at the UN](#), 10 January 2013.

The threat posed by terrorist organizations and general radicalism trends also acts as an alternative platform for ideological struggle and operational cooperation. Movements like the Muslim Brotherhood and its offshoots, are considered as a political threat to the stability of the UAE and a security threat to both the UAE and Israel.³⁷ In June 2017, the UAE together with other countries, announced the severing of relations with Qatar following its support of terror organizations and figures. The conflict with Qatar also revolves around the UAE's objection to the position of Qatar's Al-Jazeera TV channel during the coverage of the Arab Spring and the 2008-9 war in Gaza (known as "Operation Cast Lead").³⁸ This in itself is an indication of the shared interests and the similar worldviews of Israel and the UAE.

2. Economic objectives

The UAE is an important economic actor in the Middle East, largely because of its successful Jebel Ali seaport, considered to be the largest and most important in the region.³⁹ The state's economy is based mostly on imports. In 2016, the volume of imports from various countries to the UAE was estimated at 700 billion NIS.⁴⁰ Strengthening the ties between the UAE and Israel will help to establish new trade routes for Israeli products to the East and for UAE exports to the West and to the Mediterranean Basin. In addition to the inherent potential in opening new trade routes to other parts of the world, the two countries can benefit from direct trade between them.

Looking at the significant comparative advantages of the two countries, Israel's technological expertise and UAE's energy resources can set a platform for joint projects that will benefit the commercial interests of both sides. However, other sectors offer only a small economic size in the competitive market with other countries. Moreover, during the last decade, the UAE has begun to develop its manufacturing capacity in its own territory, and it is well likely that Israel will gradually expand its import market to the UAE. The high rate of development of the UAE in infrastructure, construction, real estate and various types of projects offer an abundance of opportunities for foreign investors and international companies. A possibility for participation in such projects by Israeli companies may make a significant contribution to the Israeli economy.

3. Civil objectives

The potential cooperation between the two countries may also possess some civil attributes. The holy sites for Islam in Israel hold the potential for promoting religious tourism from Muslim countries in times of peace, including the UAE. Religion is an inseparable part of Israel's and the UAE's daily life and politics, and both countries have adopted norms of religious tolerance. Should there be cooperation in the sector of religious tourism, both countries can strengthen their unique culture of religious tolerance through inter-religious dialogues and additional opportunities for encounters between Jews and Muslims.⁴¹ It

³⁷ Yoel Guzansky, "The Gulf States, Israel and Hamas," Anat Kurz, Udi Dekel and Benedetta Berti (eds.), *The Crisis in the Gaza Strip: Response to the Challenge* (Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, 2018).

³⁸ Katzman, *ibid.*

³⁹ Jebel Ali Port in Dubai is considered the busiest seaport in the Middle East, significantly apart from the other ports in the region according to the World Shipping Council Index: [Top 50 World Containers Ports](#), World Shipping Council website.

⁴⁰ From the International Trade Data for 2016, [Central Bureau of Statistics website](#), United Arab Emirates.

⁴¹ In December 2017, a delegation of clerics from Bahrain visited Israel, which reinforced the possibility of a religious connection with other Gulf states: "[The king called for the end of the Arab boycott and the delegation from Bahrain arrived for a rare visit to Israel.](#)" *Walla!*, 11 December 2017.

should be noted, however, that increasing tourism between the countries would have more of a symbolic benefit rather than an economic one, due to the relatively small populations of both countries.

Another sector in which there is potential for bilateral cooperation is the medical industry. Israel's advanced medical experts, facilities and knowledge could appeal to the UAE, which is investing its efforts to improve its medical services. Mutual exchange of knowledge, research, technology and manpower can be a common interest for both countries – Israel, can enjoy the UAE's resources, and the UAE can enjoy the expertise that Israel has accumulated throughout the years. The technological and advancement ambitions that the two countries are demonstrating can also be leveraged to environmental issues. The harsh physical conditions in the UAE have pushed the country in search of advanced technological solutions in order to cope with the shortage of fresh water, desertification and extremely high temperatures – all of which are well known to Israel. Both countries have established large desalination plants and continue to develop creative solutions for utilizing solar energy and environmentally aware construction. Both countries are gradually shifting to the use of alternative and renewable energies, and both aspire to be a model for scientific progress on a global scale in this sense. The most prominent example of this aspiration is the environmental friendly city of Al-Masdar, which Abu Dhabi is building on the principles of zero-waste and zero-carbon.⁴²

Another promising channel is academic collaboration between research institutions and scholars, which are entirely disconnected at the moment. The UAE is investing in higher education and promoting academic collaboration worldwide, a trend that can be demonstrated in the amount of international academic branches based in it.⁴³ Fruitful cooperation between researchers and scientists from Israel and the UAE, as well as with other scholars and international institutions located in the UAE, will contribute to the advancement of common knowledge, especially in areas of study that are unique to the region. A significant contribution could be achieved by mutual access to archives and databases, which is currently denied from both sides.

To conclude, Israel and the UAE share common interests in expanding their cooperation in various spheres. The most salient basis for collaboration lies within the political-security sphere, where it can contribute to the resilience of Israel and the UAE in the region, and towards facing the Iranian threat together. The Israeli interests in strengthening its ties with the UAE derive from the latter's growing integration into the global economy and international politics. Being a moderate, tolerant and pragmatic state, the UAE is a convenient and positive partner for Israel in a region that is mostly hostile to it. Israel will likely seek wider recognition and normalization with the UAE. The Emirati interest, on the other hand, focuses on Israel's scientific advantages, as well as its advanced military technologies and industries. Moreover, normalization with Israel can open new trading routes for the UAE and will most likely contribute to the general stabilization of the region. However, it can generally be said that Israel has a larger interest than the UAE in maintaining these relations. The prominent economic and political advantages of the UAE are a source of attraction for many countries and companies from around the world and are of great interest for Israel too. However, Israel faces stiff competition with other countries when trying to accomplish this wealth of opportunities.

⁴² [Masdar Initiative website](#).

⁴³ Some examples of international extensions of academic institutions at the UAE include: New York University, Middlesex University, the Sorbonne-Paris University, and Harvard Medical School.

C. Existing Cooperation between Israel and the UAE

Israel and the UAE maintain contacts at various levels, mainly in the economic and security spheres, though less in the political and civil spheres. The limited cooperation that does exist in these spheres is carried out mostly through multilateral forums. In many areas, including those of the academia, media, tourism, aviation and culture, there is almost no publicly available information about ongoing collaboration between the countries neither in the past nor in the present.

1. Political cooperation

There are no official diplomatic relations between Israel and the UAE. Occasionally, meetings are held between officials of the two countries, but the public is usually not aware of them. For example, a secret meeting between Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and the UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan took place in September 2012 during the UN General Assembly in New York, and was only reported several years later by *Haaretz*.⁴⁴ This meeting took place in light of the common interest of both countries to thwart Iran's nuclear plans. Another example of direct and confidential meetings between senior officials is the visit of the former Director General of Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dore Gold in the UAE in November 2015, in order to discuss the opening of the Israeli mission's office to the UN's International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA).⁴⁵ Although the main theme of the visit was dedicated to a cooperation of agencies under an international umbrella, it opened the door for direct, albeit secret, channel between the countries.

At the multilateral level, Israel and the UAE jointly take part in various activities, but the UAE keeps a low profile regarding them. The state-controlled media in the UAE conveys an ambiguous policy regarding relations with Israel. For example, the official news agencies in the UAE refrained from reporting on the opening of the Israeli mission to IRENA in Abu Dhabi in early 2016. However, the opening of the agency was extensively covered by the Israeli and global media which eventually led to negative reactions in the Emirati media. Maryam Khalifa al-Falasi, head of communication and media at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the UAE, issued an official statement clarifying that IRENA is an international and independent agency, having its own norms and laws, and that the opening of the Israeli mission does not reflect a change in the UAE's position towards Israel or in the relations between the two countries.⁴⁶ Establishing IRENA in Abu Dhabi served as a platform for Israeli officials to visit the UAE. The most senior Israeli representatives who took part in the conferences and meetings of the agency were Infrastructure Minister Uzi Landau (2010), Minister of National Infrastructure, Energy and Water Silvan Shalom (2014) and Minister of Energy Yuval Steinitz (2016).⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Barak Ravid, "[Exclusive: Netanyahu Secretly Met With UAE Foreign Minister in 2012 in New York](#)," *Haaretz*, 25 July 2017.

⁴⁵ Barak Ravid, "[Political Achievement: Israel to First Open an Official Representation in Abu Dhabi](#)", *Haaretz*, 27 November 2015.

⁴⁶ Maryam Al Falasi, "[UAE: Any Agreement Between IRENA and Israel Does Not Represent any Change in UAE Position](#)," *UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs & International Cooperation*, 27 November 2015.

⁴⁷ Barak Ravid, "[Political Achievement: Israel to First Open an Official Representation in Abu Dhabi](#)", *Haaretz*, 27 November 2015.

Israeli officials are normally allowed to participate in international conferences and conventions held in the UAE. Thus, in 2003, a large Israeli delegation of approximately 80 persons were on a non-stop flight from Israel to the UAE (officially, it was the only direct flight between the two countries) to participate in an international conference of the International Monetary Fund held in Dubai. The participants in this delegation were former Minister Meir Sheerit, Governor of the Bank of Israel David Klein, and some businesspeople.⁴⁸ Another example is the official visit of the Israeli ambassador to the UN, Danny Danon, to the UAE in November 2016, as part of his position as chairman of the UN Legal Committee.⁴⁹

2. Security cooperation

The absence of overt relations between the two countries characterize also the cooperation in security matters. Usually, information about security collaboration between Israel and the UAE is classified. However, from various publications in the Israeli and international media, it can be understood that cooperation between the two countries takes place, mainly through participation in multilateral military exercises and exchange of intelligence and military equipment.⁵⁰ UAE's interest in Israeli drones and other security products was mentioned in various reports throughout the years.⁵¹ A specific shared military interest exists when it comes to air forces. The media reported that the Israeli and UAE air forces participated together in at least three multinational military exercises, under the sponsorship of a third-party.⁵² The Emirati aspiration to develop its air force led to unprecedented relationship with Israel, when in July 2018, a military delegation from the UAE reportedly arrived in Israel to examine the F-35 aircrafts that Israel had purchased from the US.⁵³

3. Economic cooperation

Business cooperation between Israel and the UAE is generally more advanced compared to the other types of cooperation mentioned earlier. However, much of the transactions between the countries remain covert. The business sector is a platform for meetings between ordinary people, who, unlike officials, can keep a low profile and have unmediated interaction. In addition, business associates have the freedom to interact independently despite the lack of official diplomatic relations between their countries. Most of the business cooperation takes place in the UAE. Israeli businesspeople enter the country – whether with Israeli or foreign passports – after being sponsored by local Emiratis. The economic cooperation includes the exchange of good, as well as business deals between companies that implement projects in Israel and the UAE. Israeli companies, which are involved in projects that are carried out in the UAE, are usually doing so through companies registered in third countries.

⁴⁸ Alona Koren, "[On Monday, the Israeli delegation will leave for the International Monetary Fund convention in Dubai](#)," *News1*, 18 September 2003.

⁴⁹ Udi Segal, "[The surprising visit of the Israeli ambassador to the UN: Danon was received in Dubai](#)," *Mako - News 2*, 3 November 2016.

⁵⁰ Aluf Benn, "[Israel Selling Military Wares to Mideast Countries, Britain Says](#)," *Haaretz*, 11 June 2013.

⁵¹ Taimur Khan, "[UAE a step closer to buying US Predator drones](#)," *The National*, 28 January 2015; Linda Gradstein, "[US Lawmakers Pushing for Drone Sales to Jordan and UAE](#)," *The Media Line*, 18 April 2017.

⁵² Gili Cohen, "[The Air Force holds a joint exercise with the United Arab Emirates, the United States and Italy in Greece](#)," *Haaretz*, 27 March 2017.

⁵³ "[Exclusive: Israel Hosted UAE Military Delegation to Review F-35s, Sources Say](#)," *i24News*, 4 July 2018.

The commercial relationship focuses on exports from Israel, rather than on imports from the UAE. The types of goods currently exported from Israel to the UAE include medical equipment, telecommunications, raw materials, defense products, machinery and engineering, consulting and agricultural and food related products.⁵⁴ Goods exported from Israel to the UAE are sent through a third country and the products do not carry any Hebrew labels or trade signs in order to keep the country of origin as covert as possible. Conversations held with Israeli companies making business in the UAE reveal that the Emirati business people appreciate the cooperation with the Israelis and Jews in general, but are nevertheless concerned about it. Some of the tenders in the UAE explicitly mention a ban on trade with Israel, but in many cases it is not enforced in practice. Existing trade relations encounter difficulties at every stage: registration, shipping, and transfer of funds; however, the volume of trade shows that both sides have learned to overcome these technical obstacles.

Occasionally, the media also reports on business cooperation in various other sectors such as shipping, security, the diamond industry, energy and hotels. Here are some examples (1) AGT international, owned by the Israeli businessman Mati Kochavi, was contracted by the Abu Dhabi government to install electronic fences, sensor systems and cameras to monitor borders and secure oil and natural gas fields (2008).⁵⁵ The Swiss-based AGT company, which provides Israeli technologies and employs Israeli engineers, contracted with two local UAE companies in order to be able to work there as an external company.⁵⁶ The deal is worth 3 billion USD, according to the Emirati newspaper *al-Ittihad*⁵⁷ and 6 billion USD according to Bloomberg;⁵⁸ (2) The opening of diamond stores in Dubai by the Israeli Lev Leviev Group (2008);⁵⁹ (3) joint projects between Israeli businessman Yitzhak Tshuva and government officials from the UAE, including the construction of a Plaza Hotel owned by Tshuva in the UAE and joint investments in other countries (2008-9);⁶⁰ (4) Business cooperation between the Israeli Ofer Brothers Group and the UAE in the shipping sector (2009);⁶¹ (5) Negotiations between Israeli businessman Beny Steinmetz and UAE government officials regarding energy and hotel projects (2009).⁶²

Following the assassination of al-Mabhouh in January 2010, the scope of economic ties between the two countries reduced for a number of years, and those that were maintained were kept under extreme secrecy and discretion. For this reason, the quality and scope of these collaborations is unknown in the period between 2010 and 2015. In 2016, the AGT Company relaunched its business in the UAE. It installed a national surveillance system (the

⁵⁴ Based on information on trade with Arab countries received from consulting firms; Hagar Shezaf, "[Israel Eyes Improved Ties with Gulf States after 'Foothold' Gained in UAE](#)," *Middle East Eye*, 18 January 2016.

⁵⁵ Sami Abd al-Rauf and 'Abd al-Rahim Askar, "[Mohammed bin Zayed: The Security Strategy Reacts to the Comprehensive Development Requirements](#)," *Al-Ittihad*, 5 March 2008; Giorgio Cafiero and Andrea Petrelli, "[What's All This Talk about a Gulf-Israel Alliance?](#)" *Fair Observer*, 22 May 2017.

⁵⁶ Nissar Hoath, "[Security Expo Closes with Mega Contracts](#)," *Emirates* 24/7, 5 March 2008.

⁵⁷ Abd al-Rauf and 'Abd al-Rahim Askar, *ibid*.

⁵⁸ Jonathan Ferzinger and Peter Waldman, "[How Do Israel's Tech Firms Do Business in Saudi Arabia? Very Quietly](#)," *Bloomberg Businessweek*, 2 February 2017.

⁵⁹ Golan Hazani, Shay Pauzner and Naama Sikuler, "From Tshuva to Leviev: The Israelis Who Have Done Business with the Principality of Dubai," *Calcalist*, 28 November 2009.

⁶⁰ Golan Hazani, "[Tshuva is looking for business in Dubai](#)," *Calcalist*, 21 April 2008.

⁶¹ Hazani, Pauzner and Sikuler, *ibid*.

⁶² *Ibid*.

Falcon Eye system), and there were rumors about Kochavi's private jet flying several times between Tel Aviv and Abu Dhabi (2016).⁶³

4. Civil cooperation

Civil cooperation between Israel and the UAE is very limited in scope. There is almost no information on cooperation involving academia, research, tourism, culture, healthcare, communications, and aviation. There are some collaborations between citizens of the two countries sponsored by multilateral NGOs (such as Doctors Without Borders and Rotary) and various UN agencies, but it is difficult to assess how significant their scope is.

A prominent exception of this limited field of cooperation can be traced to sports. The UAE's growing desire to host international sporting events poses a dilemma for the state with regard to Israel's participation. Until 2010, the UAE refused to allow Israeli athletes to enter its territory, but due to the international community's pressure and the likelihood of losing legitimacy to host international competitions, the UAE allowed their participation under certain conditions and while maintaining a low media profile. Thus, for example, in February 2010, Israeli tennis player Shahar Pe'er received permission to participate in the International Tennis Tournament in Dubai, after she was refused to enter the same tournament a year earlier.⁶⁴ Pe'er's rare visit to the UAE received extensive media coverage, which undermined the Emirati desire to keep a low profile. In light of this, the UAE decided to remove the ban on Israeli athletes in the case of international competitions, under the condition that they do not bear any national symbols during their visit.

Thus, since October 2015, the Israeli judo team was allowed to participate in the annual international Judo competition held in Abu Dhabi. The Chairman of Israel's Judo Association Moshe Ponti told *Haaretz* about the preparations to the competition: "I have made every effort to make this historic opportunity to compete for the first time in the UAE happen. I have been through intensive correspondence and conversations with the relevant authorities in order to compete in Abu Dhabi. The granting of visas was a condition for not involving the Israeli and international media, which was a very difficult task in and of itself".⁶⁵ The pragmatic policy of the UAE towards the participation of Israeli athletes in international competitions held in its territory is not indicative of any cooperation between the countries in local sports competitions, but only in international competitions.

In May 2018, a cycling group sponsored by the UAE participated in the Giro d'Italia International Cycling Competition, the first phase of which was held in Israel. The UAE team officially participated bearing their state symbols.⁶⁶ International sports organizations play a significant role in shaping the relations between the countries and indicating a trend of openness. In July 2018, the International Judo Association banned the UAE from hosting future international judo tournaments following the restrictions imposed on Israeli athletes.⁶⁷ This announcement had led to UAE's decision to allow the participation of Israeli athletes, this time while presenting their national symbols. Indeed, on October 2018, the Israeli

⁶³ Rori Donaghy, "[Falcon Eye: The Israeli-installed Mass Civil Surveillance System of Abu Dhabi](#)," *Middle East Eye*, 28 February 2015.

⁶⁴ Miki Sade, "[Pe'er's coach: Shahar made Israel proud](#)", *Ynet*, 15 February 2010.

⁶⁵ Uri Talshir, "[Judo Team Competes in Abu Dhabi without the Israeli Flag](#)," *Haaretz*, 29 October 2015.

⁶⁶ Shlomo Weiss, "Towards a Leap: All Preparations for the Giro d'Italia in Jerusalem are complete", *Walla!*, 4 May 2018.

⁶⁷ Alexander Fulbright, "[UAE, Tunisia Stripped of Judo Events for Discriminating against Israeli Athletes](#)," *The Times of Israel*, 20 July 2018.

national anthem was played for the first time in Abu Dhabi at the Judo Grand Slam competition, following the winning of Sagi Muki of a gold medal.⁶⁸

D. The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict and its Impact on Israel-UAE Relations

The UAE demonstrates solidarity with the national aspirations of the Palestinians. Both the Palestinians and the UAE are members of the Arab League and other regional forums. The UAE has an embassy in the PA, and about 100,000 Palestinians live and work in the UAE. The hawkish approach of the UAE to radical Islam led to a distinction between its relations with the Fatah and its relations with Hamas, which is affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood. While the UAE openly and unequivocally identifies itself with the Palestinian struggle for an independent state,⁶⁹ its ties with Hamas and government officials in the Gaza Strip are limited. In 2009, during the war in Gaza, the UAE allowed a Hamas demonstration on its territory, under the condition that it would be consistent with the UAE's hostile attitude towards the Muslim Brotherhood.⁷⁰ The event symbolized a clash between two worldviews: one that views Israel as responsible for the situation of the Palestinians and another that opposes Islamist groups. Since approximately 2015, the UAE has been increasing its economic and political support for Mohammed Dahlan as the next Palestinian leader. This has been seen by some as an attempt to induce moderate and pragmatic politics in Gaza, and to balance Qatar's support for more radical groups.⁷¹ The UAE coordinates this sort of involvement with Egypt, which also has an interest in curbing extremist groups in Gaza. It is evident that the growing involvement of the UAE in internal Palestinian politics raises its overall interest in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The UAE's media outlets, most of which are controlled by the state, deal extensively with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and most references they make to Israel relate to settlements, restrictions on Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, and Israeli claims over East Jerusalem and the al-Aqsa Mosque/Temple Mount.⁷² Media outlets in the UAE are rather influential in shaping public opinion regarding Israel and the UAE. They mostly reflect a negative image of Israel and focus on Israel's allegedly provocative actions against the Palestinians and the Arab world. For example, the so-called "Jerusalem dress" worn by Israeli Minister Miri Regev at the international ceremony in Cannes in May 2017, was perceived by the UAE's public as a provocative action of a government official, offending Muslims in general and Palestinians in particular.⁷³ Another example is the attitude of the media towards Israel's actions in al-Aqsa and their implications.⁷⁴

The most prominent example is Trump's announcement of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel in late 2017, which was critically covered by media outlets and officially denounced by the Emirati foreign minister.⁷⁵ Although it was the US that was being criticized, the media

⁶⁸ ["Israeli national anthem played in Abu Dhabi as Sagi Muki clinches gold,"](#) *i24NEWS-AFP*, 28 October 2018.

⁶⁹ Lana Zaki Nusseibeh, ["The Question of Palestine,"](#) *Permanent Mission of the United Arab Emirates to the United Nations*, 24 November 2014.

⁷⁰ Katzman, *ibid.*

⁷¹ Mahasen Asseraf, ["The Emirati Money in Gaza at the expense of Qatar,"](#) *Ida'at*, 6 September 2017.

⁷² Examples of statements on the Palestinian issue can be found on [The Emirati News Agency](#) website.

⁷³ Nasouh Nazzal, ["Israeli Minister Appear with a Dress Emblazoned with the Image of Al Aqsa Mosque,"](#) *Gulf News*, 23 May 2017.

⁷⁴ ["The Emirates and Jordan want to completely and immediately open the al-Aqsa mosque,"](#) *Al-Ittihad*, 22 July 2017; ["Israel sends more Troops to West Bank Amid Escalating Tensions,"](#) *The National*, 22 July 2017.

⁷⁵ ["UAE Condemns US Decision to Recognise Jerusalem as Capital of Israel,"](#) *United Arab Emirates Ministry of Foreign Affairs & International Cooperation*, 7 December 2017.

coverage also included a negative report on Israel's policy towards Jerusalem. However, at a convention of Arab leaders following this declaration, Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan considered ways of renewing negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.⁷⁶ Despite its harsh criticism of Israel, the UAE advances a pragmatic policy and seeks a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as reflected in its repeated declarations and increasing efforts in recent years.⁷⁷ The UAE's hidden criticism on the PA's passive position towards the peace process led in the last few years to a positive change in the general image of Israel in the UAE's media. This trend can also be related to the unofficial rapprochement between the countries.

In a speech delivered by the former UAE Ambassador to the UN Lana Nusseibeh in 2014, she declared that "the increasing unrest and grave security concerns, the deteriorating humanitarian and social conditions in the Palestinian territories, resulting from Israel's aggressive policy against Palestinians particularly in East Jerusalem, continue to negatively affect the situation on the ground."⁷⁸ Lana herself is from the Palestinian Nusseibeh family, and her father, Zaki, who for many years was a close adviser to the president of the UAE, is now a government minister there, despite his Palestinian origins.⁷⁹ Lana's personal affiliation and background, which includes an academic degree in Israel and Diaspora studies from SOAS University in London, explains her interest in the Israeli-Palestinian issue and the narrative she represented in her position as the UAE ambassador to the UN.⁸⁰ In the same speech, Nusseibeh demonstrated how sensitive is the issue of the holy sites of Islam, when she criticized the behavior of the Israeli security forces and the settlers at the al-Aqsa Mosque, which she claims lead to increased tension and violence in the PA.

Nusseibeh also criticized what she described as Israel's violent and unjust behavior towards Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which she said includes war crimes. However, the key sentence in her speech claimed that "Israel's security will be achieved when it fulfills its obligations as an occupying power, and demonstrates its political will to achieve true lasting peace in the region and cooperates in achieving a two-state solution based on pre-1967 borders".⁸¹ This speech reflects the general attitude of the UAE towards Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which was also expressed in the statements of the UAE's President and the Emir of Abu Dhabi Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan in November 2013: "Today, we in the UAE are renewing our solidarity and our support for the Palestinian people in their just and legitimate struggle to end the Israeli occupation in their homeland and to fully recognize their national rights together with all other nations of the world".⁸²

The issue of "normalizing relations with Israel in exchange for a Palestinian state" was also raised at a secret meeting held between Netanyahu and Abdullah bin Zayed in New York in 2012, when the UAE's foreign minister made clear to the Israeli prime minister that his country would not "warm up" its relations with Israel as long as there was no significant progress in peace negotiations with the Palestinians.

⁷⁶ ["H.H. Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed attends Arab Meeting on Jerusalem"](#), *United Arab Emirates Ministry of Foreign Affairs & International Cooperation*, 26 February 2018.

⁷⁷ ["UAE Reaffirms its Support to Push the Middle East Peace Process Forward"](#), *United Arab Emirates Ministry of Foreign Affairs & International Cooperation*, 20 October 2017.

⁷⁸ Lana Zaki Nusseibeh, ["The Question of Palestine"](#), *Permanent Mission of the United Arab Emirates to the United Nations*, 24 November 2014.

⁷⁹ The Cabinet of the United Arab Emirates, [Cabinet Members](#).

⁸⁰ ["SOAS Alumna First Female Representative of UAE to UN"](#), *SOAS University of London*, 29 October 2013.

⁸¹ Nusseibeh, *ibid.*

⁸² ["Khalifa Pledges Solidarity with Palestinians"](#), *The National*, 25 November 2013.

Not only governmental figures link the Palestinian cause with UAE's relations with Israel. Sultan Sooud al-Qassemi, a prominent Emirati commentator, published in 2008 an opinion column in *Haaretz* entitled "Welcoming Our Old Neighbors".⁸³ In the article, he described and praised the long history of Jews and Arabs in the region, while explicitly using the term "Jews" rather than "Israelis", and wrote about the injustice done by the Arab countries when they turned their backs on Jews who were born and lived there before their emigration. Al-Qassemi expressed his desire to see the Arab countries welcoming them back and even granting them citizenship. Nevertheless, al-Qassemi's statements over the years were often critical of Israel's policy towards the Palestinians. In March 2017, for example, he posted in his Twitter account that Israel has been "stealing Palestinian land since 1948".⁸⁴

Learning from these governmental and non-governmental approaches towards Israel, it can be concluded that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict poses a key barrier in the relations between the UAE and Israel, which ultimately affects the scope of cooperation between the countries and the nature of their existing ties. Attesting to this claim is the proactive proposal that was reportedly made by the Gulf states (including the UAE) in May 2017, to improve their diplomatic relations with Israel in exchange to the renewal of the peace process with the Palestinians and the freezing of settlements construction.⁸⁵ The proposal included concrete steps that the Arab states would be willing to take, such as easing the granting of visas to Israelis interested in visiting the Gulf (mainly referring to athletes and businessmen), and expanding trade opportunities. This announcement was considered as an exceptional and courageous step in the political climate of the Middle East, indicating great potential for establishing official relations between Israel and the UAE and expanding their cooperation. However, such cooperation cannot be implemented without an Israeli-Palestinian agreement or at least significant progress towards it.

As long as there is no progress in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, bilateral cooperation between Israel and the UAE will face many obstacles and will probably maintain a low profile. Under the current circumstances, overt and official ties with Israel are expected to provoke criticism within the UAE and in the Arab World. The removal of the "conflict barrier" will likely expand cooperation between the countries in all channels and turn existing ties from holding a discrete nature to becoming open and overt. Then, there will no longer be a need to absorb the costs involved in transferring the through a third country while removing Israeli labels and trade signs.⁸⁶ Israeli businessmen will be able to visit the UAE more easily, bureaucratic barriers will be lifted, and trading companies in both countries will be able to promote business overtly. Furthermore, cooperation between both civil societies is expected to improve, and to enjoy a sense of legitimacy in both countries. There is much potential for cooperation between Israel and the UAE to evolve and expand.

E. Conclusions

⁸³ Sultan Al Qassemi, "[Welcoming Our Long-gone Neighbors](#)," *Haaretz*, 16 May 2008.

⁸⁴ [Sultan Al-Qassemi](#), *Twitter*, March 2017.

⁸⁵ Barak Ravid, "[The Gulf States Offer: Normalization with Israel in Return for a Partial Construction Freeze in the Settlements](#)," *Haaretz*, 16 May 2017; Jay Solomon, Gordon Lubold and Rory Jones, "[Gulf States Offer Better Relations If Israel Makes New Bid for Peace](#)," *The Wall Street Journal*, 15 May 2017.

⁸⁶ An indication of the trade potential can be found in the fact that exports from Jordan to the UAE were evaluated at about 1 billion NIS in 2016; see: International Trade Data for 2016, [Central Bureau of Statistics website](#), United Arab Emirates.

Today, the potential for cooperation between Israel and the UAE is far from being fulfilled. Israel is still a sort of enclave in the Middle East, and in order to enjoy the many opportunities waiting for it in the region it must be able to expand its regional ties. A significant integration of Israel into the Middle East is essential for strengthening its political, security and economic standing, as well as for maintaining regional stability. This paper demonstrates how Israel's relations with the UAE serve as a source for optimism, even under current circumstances.

The relations between Israel and the UAE are characterized by a gap between the formal and the practical levels. On the one hand, the UAE adopts a pro-Palestinian policy and is committed to the Arab League decisions that condition normalizing ties with Israel on the fulfillment of the Arab Peace Initiative's conditions. On the other hand, the UAE allows unofficial cooperation with Israel at various levels and sectors. In some cases, the UAE even enables formal collaboration under multilateral settings. Indeed, most of the existing cooperation between Israel and UAE takes place at the multilateral level, which enables the countries to cooperate without having to formalize their bilateral relations. Bilateral cooperation is limited in scope and is almost exclusively economic. Such cooperation is typically covert, and does not include Israeli trade signs, mainly because the UAE does not recognize Israel and seeks to avoid criticism, both its domestic public and by the Arab/Muslim world. Consequently, the UAE would rather cooperate with other countries, even in areas where Israel has a better offering. Nevertheless, in regards to security technologies, the UAE does show interest in Israeli products and does not prevent indirect trade that has been occurring for years between the two countries, and that still has significant potential of growth.

Common and conflicting interests influence the relations between Israel and the UAE. Both countries view Iran's growing regional influence as a strategic threat and oppose its nuclear armament. In addition, Israel and the UAE partnered in the efforts to eradicate regional organizations they view as radical (such as Hezbollah, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Hamas) by participating in multinational military exercises and clandestine political relations.⁸⁷ However, there is an ideological and political gap in the way they view the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The UAE fiercely criticizes Israel's control of the occupied Palestinian territories and its policy towards the Palestinians, which it perceives as unjust. Therefore, the UAE is reluctant to expand its overt and official cooperation with Israel. However, the cooperation that does already exist between the two countries indicates the potential and the desire to maintain relations. Therefore, it is worth examining whether relations between Israel and the UAE can further expand, even given the current political setting.

In recent years, there seems to be an increase in shared interests between Israel and the Gulf states, leading to an increasing number of Arab states, including the UAE, that express a desire to improve relations with Israel. The UAE expressed more than once its readiness for a rapprochement with Israel towards normalizing the relations between the countries. Yet, at the same time, the UAE stressed that the Palestinian issue is a key obstacle to achieve that goal. Israel should publicly respond to this, and agree to engage in meaningful negotiations with the Palestinians as part of a regional "package deal".

In conclusion, cooperation between Israel and the UAE, or between their publics, is currently a result of mainly ad-hoc opportunities that serve both sides' interests. Such cooperation may be expanded as long as it remains covert. Should Israel wish to move towards official

⁸⁷ Adam Entous, "[Donald Trump's New World Order](#)," *The New Yorker*, 18 June 2018.

relations with the UAE, it must adopt a broad regional approach, which includes a positive attitude to peace initiatives and readiness to make real progress towards Israeli-Palestinian conflict resolution.