

Israel's efforts to improve status in the international system through the Abraham accords

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ABSTRACT

This study examines and explains how Israel's efforts to improve its status as a developing country in the Middle East and the international system through the Abraham Accords. The Abraham Accords is an agreement that is an attempt to normalize Israel's relations with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. The Abraham Accords opened up new opportunities for Israel, which is a new player and a developing country, to become a bigger and more important player in the Middle East. This research uses two theories, namely Defensive Neorealism Theory and Liberal Theory to support the explanations in this research, and uses a qualitative method with a descriptive approach to further understand how Israel and other Arab countries, such as the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain are trying to improve their status in the international system through the framework of this agreement. Through the idea of emerging economies and also how a country can raise its status profile in the international system, it can be seen that the Abraham Accords is one of Israel's ways to strengthen its status in the international system through its role as one of the developing countries. The Abraham Accords is also a way for Israel to put aside the issue of conflict between Israel and Palestine.

Keywords:

Abraham accords; international system; Israel

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INTRODUCTION

Israel is a country in the Middle East surrounded by the Mediterranean Sea, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Egypt, and the Sinai desert. In addition, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank are two territories of the Palestinian National Authority. With a population of 7.5 million people, Israel is the only country where Jews live (Jatmika, 2016).

Israel has become part of the global peace issue as it shows other countries' attention to the problems it faces in its territory. Israel emerged as an independent state in 1948 and changed its social, cultural, and religious relations with Arab countries in the Middle East.

Israel was able to become one of the countries that was able to become a strong economic player with rapid industrial growth. The country, also known as *Medinat Yisra'el* or *Dawlat Isrā'īl*, has a great influence in the Middle East region, with the help of investments from the US and Europe, greater attention to domestic research and development is one of the ways Israel is rapidly growing its economy. In addition, thriving tech companies and a healthy investment environment boost Israel's economy (Press, 2023). Nonetheless, Israel has always been at a geopolitical disadvantage due to the perception of Arab countries that view the predominantly Jewish state as foreign, as well as the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Despite differing views from other countries, in September 2020, Israel and two Arab countries, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, signed the Abraham Accords, normalizing their relationship (Guzansky & Marshall, 2020; Singer, 2021). The Abraham Accords is an agreement made by Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States on August 13, 2020. This agreement marked the first time an Arab country and Israel had standardized diplomatic relations, after Egypt in 1979 and Jordan in 1994. Bahrain is also involved in this agreement, having signed a normalization agreement with Israel in September 2020. The goals of the Abrahamic Accords are to promote peace and cooperation in the Middle East, halt Israel's annexation of the West Bank, and maintain a two-state solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (Baqai & Mehreen, 2021; Rahim & Yumitro, 2023). Israel's strategy of using the Abraham Accords to place stronger relations with Arab states above the stagnant peace process in the region. The Abraham Accords is an additional attempt by Israel to defend its position and gain recognition from other states, as it did with Egypt in 1979 and Jordan in 1994 (Rehman, 2020).

Due to their history of secret diplomacy, Israel and the United Arab Emirates have a strong foundation to begin treaty efforts (Ravid, 2020; Schiff & Kertcher, 2024). In addition, Israel and the United Arab Emirates have significant experience with bilateral and regional free trade areas, as well as open economies with low tariffs and limited non-tariff barriers (Egel et al., 2021). Israel and the United Arab Emirates regard the agreement as an attempt to boost economic growth in the Middle East. Expectations of economic growth in the Middle East will increase with the signing of the Abraham Accords, especially Israel-UAE bilateral trade of \$6.5 billion. This can be attributed to the removal of boycotts and the opening of free trade areas for various commodities, such as oil, precious metals, and defense; as well as services, such as pharmaceuticals, agricultural and water technology, financial technology, and digital health (Guzansky & Marshall, 2020).

The existence of the Abraham Accords and the fact that Israel is one of the *emerging economies* creates new intrigues that need to be examined further. Israel seeks to create space for progress in the Middle East by emphasizing issues of security and intelligence, economics and trade, as well as sociocultural and religious issues through dialogue between nations.

However, the Abraham Accords triggered increased tensions with the Palestinians, who saw it as a betrayal of their cause. One of the immediate implications was an increase in violence in the West Bank region. Data shows a 30% spike in violent incidents after the signing of the agreement, involving clashes between Palestinians and Israeli settlers and Israeli security authorities. Illegal settlement construction in the occupied territories has also intensified, with plans to build more than 1,000 new units in the West Bank announced by 2023, prompting protests from the international and Palestinian communities (Hearst, 2024). In addition, this agreement is considered to further strengthen Israel's position in the Middle East region by utilizing better economic and diplomatic relations with Arab countries such as the UAE and Bahrain. However, this is considered to override the main issue of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Palestinians feel increasingly isolated in peace negotiations,

while public opinion in Arab countries shows significant resistance to normalizing relations with Israel (Vakil & Quilliam, 2023).

The relevant theoretical framework for analyzing Israel's efforts to improve its status in the international system through the Abraham Accords is Defensive Neorealism. One of the schools of realism in international relations theory is the theory of Defensive Neorealism, derived from Kenneth Waltz's *Theory of International Politics* (1979), which argues that the anarchic structure of the international system encourages states to maintain moderate and isolationist policies to create security (Suryanti, 2021). In international relations, Defensive Neorealism theory focuses on analyzing how states behave in an international system that is considered competitive and anarchic. In this context, Defensive Neorealism theory explains that rather than increasing power or influence through aggression or expansion, states behave rationally in achieving their national interests (Malik, 2023). Defensive Neorealism focuses on how states seek security and stability through alliances and cooperation, and how national interests influence diplomatic decisions.

According to defensive neorealism, states should use moderate and isolationist security policies because states do not have a clear supranational power to govern them. The aim of this policy is not to assume power or hegemony over other states but to ensure national security. According to defensive neorealism, aggressive expansion, as emphasized by offensive neorealists, can change the tendency of states to follow the balance of power theory, reducing the importance of ensuring national security (Riliani et al., 2020).

In the context of the Abraham Accords, the theory of defensive neorealism can be applied to explain how countries like Israel and Arab countries that were previously in conflict can communicate and cooperate to achieve their national interests. In this case, these states act rationally in pursuing their national interests, but in a way that maintains security and stability, and not by expanding influence or power through aggression or expansion (Buzan, 1984; Noer, 2022). Defensive Neorealism can be used to understand how Israel and other Arab states, such as the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, seek to enhance their status in the international system through this treaty framework. Defensive Neorealism can also help understand how the national interests of Israel and other Arab states influence their decisions in developing closer diplomatic relations and cooperation.

Overall, the theory of defensive neorealism in the context of the Abraham Accords explains that states behave rationally in seeking their interests by maintaining security and stability, not by aggression or expanding their territory. In this case, formerly prominent states, such as Israel and the Arabs, can communicate and cooperate to achieve their national interests, and weaker states can build alliances and cooperation with states that have similar interests.

Another supporting theory in the context of the Abraham Accords and Emerging Economies is liberal. This theory views the spread of democracy as the main key to world peace and focuses on international cooperation as a way to overcome the problem of selfish state behavior. In the book *Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (1999), Robert Jackson and Georg Sorensen say that liberalism sees international relations as cooperative rather than conflictual as described by realism (Maarif, 2023). Liberalism argues that conflict and war will be avoided due to stronger cooperation and interdependence. From a liberal perspective, power politics and military alliances are not the best way to prevent war and conflict. In this theory, states and international organizations are considered actors who cooperate to achieve common interests, as well as to regulate their behavior in areas such as economics, politics, and social affairs. Restraint, moderation, compromise, and peace are the five main principles of liberalism, according to Stanley Hoffman (Bakry, 2017).

In the context of the Abraham Accords, liberal theory can be used to understand how cooperation between the United States, Israel, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates can help resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and improve regional stability. This theory can also help in understanding how emerging countries can participate in international cooperation and influence the foreign policies of other countries. Through liberal theory, this agreement can help improve regional security and stability by reducing conflict and increasing economic and political cooperation between Israel and the UAE. This agreement can also help improve Israel's national interests by opening access to larger economic markets and increasing foreign investment.

As such, based on the explanations and theories above, this study aims to identify how Israel's efforts to improve its status as an Emerging Economy through the Abraham Accords and its success in putting aside the issue of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

METHOD

The author uses a qualitative research method with a descriptive approach. The descriptive approach that the author uses aims to make descriptions, explanations, and images systematically and accurately related to the facts, properties, and relationships between the phenomena being analyzed. Meanwhile, the data needed in this research is secondary data or data arranged in indirect form. Such as documents or relevant literature related to the formulation of the problem under study. This descriptive approach technique is used to describe the direct impact of the Abraham Accords, such as the increase in foreign investment in Israel, the growth of Israel-UAE bilateral trade, and the change in diplomatic positions of Arab countries. Qualitative research aims to gain an understanding of certain phenomena. Qualitative research uses scientific methods to reveal a phenomenon by describing data and facts in words thoroughly about the research subject. This phenomenon can be anything experienced by the research subject, such as behavior, perception, motivation, action, and so on, which is comprehensively described in words that describe the situation as a whole. The data collected is processed with qualitative methods, and the analysis is inductive/qualitative (Fiantika et al., 2022).

The data collection technique used by the author in this research is through literature studies whose sources come from various literature related to the research, in the form of books, scientific journals, newspapers, media reports, and articles related to the object of research being studied (Firmansyah et al., 2021).

To explain how the Abraham Accords improved Israel's international status and how this relates to Palestinian tensions, *the following data analysis techniques were applied:*

Descriptive Analysis, This technique describes the direct impact of the Abraham Accords, such as increased foreign investment in Israel, growth in bilateral Israel-UAE trade, and changes in the diplomatic positions of Arab states.

Comparative Analysis, This analysis compares Israel's diplomatic and trade relations before and after the Abraham Accords to evaluate the extent to which the normalization of relations strengthened Israel's status. It also compares the number of UN resolutions related to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict supported by Arab countries before and after the Abraham Accords.

Theoretical Analysis, Using the theory of Defensive Neorealism and liberalism, it can be explained how Israel's steps through the Abraham Accords are a rational strategy to strengthen its international position while maintaining domestic stability.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Emergence of New Players in the System as Emerging Economies

Over the past fifty years, the dynamics of global interactions have undergone significant changes, driven primarily by powerful economic factors. Economic forces have shaped the politics and dynamics between countries in the international system. The conventional classification between developed and developing countries has proven inadequate to describe the diversity and complexity of countries around the world. In response, a new classification has emerged that identifies countries as emerging economies or emerging markets. This term refers to countries with lower income levels and industrial bases but large populations and high economic growth potential (Deng et al., 2018; Wang & Tse, 2020).

Despite their limitations, emerging economies have shown significant growth potential and attracted global attention as promising investment destinations. In general, the main characteristics of countries in this category include a young and growing population, abundant natural resources, and a rapidly growing middle class thanks to improved infrastructure (Deng et al., 2018; Wang & Tse, 2020). High economic growth, with collective growth reaching 5% in 2021, has made these countries an important motor in the global economy, outpacing the economic growth of developed countries (IMF, 2021).

Emerging economies play a crucial role in shaping and driving the global economy, creating new opportunities in international trade and investment. They are often important bridges in global supply chains, attracting multinational corporations with cheap labor and access to growing consumer markets (Wang & Tse, 2020). A clear example can be seen in the BRICS countries, outperformers (Woetzel et al., 2018), N-11s, and EAGLEs (BBVA Research, 2018) that have been recognized as key drivers of global economic growth.

With abundant human and natural resources, as well as dynamic populations, emerging economies continue to contribute in the form of trade, investment, and global economic development. Through the maximum utilization of their potential, these countries have the potential to continue leading the world's economic growth and make a significant contribution to realizing a more economically advanced world.

Increasing the Profile of the Country's Status in the International System

States play an important role in the international system through their interactions with each other, which ultimately determine their status and profile in the global community. Status, in the context of International Relations, is the collective perception of a state's position based on certain attributes. State status can be manifested in two interrelated dimensions: first, as a member of the international community based on sovereignty; and second, as a relative ranking in the international hierarchy (Paul et al., 2014). Hierarchies, although not formal, are perceived by state actors as indicators of their position in the international system. This hierarchy is determined by the authority of power, where states that are widely legitimized to act tend to be perceived as states with high hierarchical status.

In an attempt to raise their profile and status, states face several arguments about how their status can be increased or decreased. First, a state's position in the international system is influenced by its relative power and relationships with other states. Second, international status also reflects aspirations and an idealized image of a state's identity in an ideational view. States' values, beliefs, and ideological orientations play an important role in shaping their identity in the global arena.

Finally, material capabilities, including economic and military power, also play a key role in determining a state's international status. These capabilities provide a tangible foundation that supports a state's ability to influence global dynamics and its projection in

the international hierarchy. A state's status profile is not static; it is constantly changing in line with the dynamics and contestation in the international system. These changes reflect states' responses to the changing global environment and their efforts to maintain or enhance their position in the international community.

Abraham Accords and Increasing Economic Interaction between Israel and the United Arab Emirates

The signing of the Abraham Accords provides a range of economic benefits for Israel and the United Arab Emirates, both immediate and potential over the next few years. It allows Israel to engage more with the major economic powers in the Middle East in the areas of security, intelligence, economics, trade, and cross-national and interfaith dialogue (Guzansky & Feuer, 2021). This agreement is strategic for Israel as it builds strong cooperation with the United Arab Emirates, creating a win-win deal. Although bilateral trade between the two countries is just beginning, the greater economic potential is still not fully realized (Khan & Shahzad, 2021). Khan and Shahzad (2021) also emphasized the importance of economic integration through comprehensive free trade agreements to reduce trade tariffs, address investment barriers, and facilitate labor mobility with more efficient visa management.

Israel experienced immediate economic benefits after the signing of this agreement. Trade volumes between Israel and the United Arab Emirates increased significantly, with Israeli exports to the United Arab Emirates registering an increase of USD 241 million in the first eight months of 2021 (Guzansky & Feuer, 2021). This increase not only involved trade flows between the two but also increased coordination with other trade partners, giving Israel an advantage of up to 50%. One initiative that supports this cooperation is the Abraham Fund, which was initiated by Israel and the United States to promote economic development in the Gulf countries involved in this agreement. The Fund is supported by a funding commitment of 3 billion USD from Israel and the United States (Egel et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the removal of barriers to trade and investment creates favorable economic conditions for Israel. One example is the sale of the Israeli-owned gas field, Delek Drilling, to Mubadala Petroleum of the United Arab Emirates, which increased revenue streams to Israel and supported post-COVID-19 economic recovery efforts (Guzansky & Feuer, 2021). In addition, Israel and the United Arab Emirates signed a memorandum to build an oil pipeline to deliver UAE oil to pipelines in the Mediterranean Sea and Dead Sea (Ben-David, 2022). Healthy investment is also reflected in the cooperation agreement between Israel Aerospace and the United Arab Emirates Etihad Airlines (Goldstein, 2023). The direct impact of these measures on the Israeli and Gulf economies shows that Israel has created a favorable economic environment, facilitating negotiations and interactions, and bringing long-term economic benefits to the Middle East region.

Guzansky & Feuer (2021) indicate that the signing of this agreement has the potential to open up new opportunities in the region and increase the possibility of interaction with Asian countries outside the region. These potentials include increased employment that will be created by the flow of investment and economic cooperation between Israel and the Gulf States. Bilateral relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates are also expected to grow to USD 6.5 billion, with investments expected to reach USD 10 billion in the next 10 years (Egel et al., 2021). In terms of employment, estimates note that between 150,000 and 4,000,000 new jobs could be created, and the Middle East economy, especially in Israel, could see an increase of 1 trillion USD as a result of the Abraham Treaty (Maital & Barzani, 2021). In addition, Israel and the United Arab Emirates' efforts to integrate their financial markets

could lead to expectations of windfalls, where large flows of funds come in as bonuses and taxes in both countries.

Ultimately, religious diplomacy encouraged economic openness in the Middle East. The treaty is known as religious diplomacy because it uses the name "Abraham," which has communal significance in the religious history of the countries involved, including Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (Jeong, 2021; Khan & Shahzad, 2021). The economic integration introduced through the Abraham Accords was the first step towards broader regional integration and the pursuit of peace. Peace is necessary to create a stable economic environment in the region, which will also enhance Israel's role in the regional and international context. Nonetheless, to ensure sustainable economic growth in the Middle East, Egel (et al. 2021) notes that the role of the United States is important in ensuring the full implementation of the economic potential of this agreement, given the political and technical challenges associated with implementing free trade agreements in the region. To achieve maximum economic success and benefits, Israel must also improve its relationship with Saudi Arabia (Maital & Barzani, 2021).

Diversion of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict through the Abraham Accords

The Abraham Accords brought significant benefits to Israel. In addition to facilitating economy-enhancing interactions with the Gulf States, it also provides a pragmatic solution to the strained relations between Israel and the Arab world by shifting the focus away from the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Maital and Barzani (2021) explain that the Abraham Accords are beneficial for Israel because normalizing relations with the Gulf States does not require a direct peace agreement between Israel and Palestine. This impact can be seen in Israel's internal conditions after the signing of this agreement, such as the Israel-Hamas war which did not affect the outcome of the agreement. Economically, this agreement is pragmatic because normalizing relations with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain opens opportunities for Israel and the United States without having to deal directly with the most complicated regional conflict in the Middle East (Guzansky & Marshall, 2020).

Israel aims to achieve a normalization of relations that permanently abandons all Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts initiated by Saudi Arabia with the help of the Arab League in 2002 (Rehman, 2020). The Arab Peace Initiatives 2002 required Israel to face several challenges, including the full return of the territories occupied since 1967, including the Golan Heights by UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, equitably resolving the Palestinian refugee issue following UNSCR resolution 194 and recognizing East Jerusalem as the capital of an independent Palestinian state (Feierstein & Guzansky, 2022). The initiative forced Israel to sacrifice some of its territory, such as relinquishing the Golan Heights, as well as to address the Palestinian refugee issue, while in exchange, Arab states were promised recognition and normalization of relations with Israel (Lazin, 2023). In Israel's view, this peace initiative had its problems, particularly with the reliance on UNSCR 194 and the challenges of naturalization of refugees by host countries in resolving refugee-related issues.

This agreement changed Israel's peace approach with the Arab States in the context of the Palestinian issue from "*peace for land*" to "*peace for peace*", allowing for the normalization of relations almost unconditionally. Furthermore, this agreement changed the role of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in relations between Israel and the Arab world. Prioritization of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict decreased, while countering Iranian hegemony and exploiting economic opportunities became an alternative focus in Arab-Israeli relations (Murciano, 2020).

Netanyahu's "*peace for peace*" concept offers a deal to the Gulf States, especially the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, in which Israel postpones its West Bank annexation plans.

This is in line with Israel's pressing interests. The Netanyahu government had previously planned to announce the annexation of 30% of the West Bank, but this plan was opposed by the Trump administration at the time. In the context of the upcoming elections, Netanyahu must maintain his political support, which encourages him to focus on achieving peace with the Gulf States (Lazin, 2023).

CONCLUSION

The agreement to normalize relations between Israel and the Gulf States is Israel's strategy to improve its status as an emerging economy. The Abraham Accords is an agreement made by Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States on August 13, 2020. The Abraham Accords gave Israel a formal opportunity to openly cooperate economically with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. The agreement is considered pragmatic, prioritizing the implementation of policies that are immediately beneficial. Israel's economic growth is considered beneficial to Middle Eastern countries, increasing cooperation in various sectors. Using the theories of defensive neorealism and liberalism, it is possible to understand how Israel and other Arab countries, such as the UAE and Bahrain, seek to improve their status in the international system through the Abraham Accords framework.

In addition to the economic benefits, through the Abraham Accords, Israel seeks to erase the Arab states' discrimination, alienation, and isolationism towards it. Moreover, Israel's attempt to sideline the Israeli-Palestinian issue in the policy recommendations and substance of the Abraham Accords demonstrates its expansion in influence. The Gulf states, which previously supported the Palestinians, were willing to normalize relations with Israel, their long-time opponent, attracted by Israel's promise of economic progress and security certainty. With the Abraham Accords, Israel was perceived as a pioneer in shaping the modern Middle East and advancing regional peace efforts amidst long-standing conflicts. Israel's next focus is on the Middle East at large, especially in normalizing relations with Saudi Arabia. Normalizing relations with Saudi Arabia will maximize Israel's economic potential, open new markets, create lucrative investment opportunities, and promote long-term peace. More than that, it will raise Israel's profile in the global system.

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