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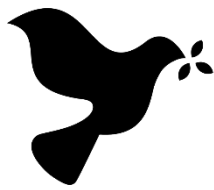


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Bridges and Boundaries: Israel, Syria and Lebanon Amidst Regional Realignments

19 DECEMBER 2025

Dr Gad Yishayahu and Yasmine Tlass



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Cambridge Middle East and North Africa Forum Ltd
Mailing Address: C/O Parker Russell, 122 Leadenhall Street,
London, EC3V 4AB United Kingdom
www.cmenaf.org

Abraham Accords (UK) Ltd
New Derwent House, 69-73 Theobalds Road,
London, WC1X 8TA United Kingdom
www.abraham-accords.uk

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Amidst Regional Realignment

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Background

About the UK Abraham Accords Group

The **UK Abraham Accords Group (UKAAG)** is a non-partisan and non-profit, UK based organisation dedicated to supporting the implementation and expansion of the historic peace agreements known as the Abraham Accords. The organisation was launched in the British Parliament in September 2021, marking the first anniversary of the Abraham Accords.

UKAAG's mission is to establish a successful parliamentary group to build and maintain bi-partisan support within the UK political system for the Abraham Accords. It also seeks to develop trade, governmental and cultural cooperation, and promote peace and economic prosperity in the region.

Furthermore, UKAAG strives to cut across old divides in parliament, government and the media, reflecting the changing nature of the Middle East. The UK Abraham Accords Group also aims to promote social responsibility, inclusiveness, and embrace high principles of governance as part of the mission.

About the Cambridge Middle East and North Africa Forum

The **Cambridge Middle East and North Africa Forum (MENAF)** is an independent, non-partisan think-tank and registered charity based out of the academic community of the University of Cambridge. The Forum is dedicated to encouraging original, intelligent, and constructive dialogue about the Middle East and North Africa, and to developing and advancing policies that secure Britain's role in it.

In addition to its publicly-available projects and publications—especially *Manara Magazine* and the *Strategic Brief*—the Forum provides independent analysis and recommendations to policymakers in Parliament, Whitehall, and around the world. The Forum hosts regular roundtables and Track II dialogues for London's business, policy, and diplomatic communities.

About the Research Team

Dr Gad Yishayahu – A scholar and practitioner specializing in Foreign Policy Crisis and crisis management, Dr Yishayahu is presently serving as a Visiting Lecturer at City St George's, University of London (City), where he completed his PhD, and a Research Fellow at the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism, Reichman University (IDC Herzliya). Dr Yishayahu is Senior Fellow and Lead Research on Security and Crisis at the Cambridge Middle East and North Africa Forum (MENAF). Dr Yishayahu was previously a Visiting Scholar at the Department of Politics and International Studies (POLIS) at the University of Cambridge. His research focuses on contemporary Foreign Policy Crises and their implications on the discipline of crisis management.

Yasmine Tlass – Yasmine Tlass is PhD candidate in Political Science at the University of Kent. Her work focuses on the role of the security establishment in authoritarian resilience in the case of Syria, studying security institutions, legitimacy, authoritarian learning and post-conflict state-building. Ms Tlass has Master's degrees in Diplomacy, Development and International Relations as well as in Political Science & Public Affairs from Hautes Etudes Internationales Et Politiques. Previously, she worked at Centre Euro Arabe, a think tank dedicated to Euro-Arab relations, policy research and post-conflict analysis. Ms Tlass also contributed to research projects on regional politics and transitional justice at Carep Paris, Iremmo and Issam Fares Institute.

Introduction: Regional context and strategic drivers

By the Executive Team of the Cambridge Middle East and North Africa Forum (MENAF)

The Abraham Accords emerged in late 2020 as a general declaration of peace and a set of bilateral agreements between participating countries, normalizing diplomatic relations between the State of Israel, the United Arab Emirates, the Kingdom of Bahrain, and the Kingdom of Morocco. The Accords expanded Israel's official relations with Arab states for the first time since the Egypt-Israel peace treaty of 1979 and the Jordan-Israel peace treaty of 1994 were signed. The Accords are a namesake of Biblical Abraham, whom both Jews and Arabs trace their ancestry to, symbolising brotherhood and representing a break with over five decades of the policy of the so-called “3 no-s”. The 1967 Arab League Summit held in Khartoum, Sudan following Israel's Six-Day War with a coalition of Egypt, Syria and Jordan declared that member states would follow a policy of *no* peace with Israel, *no* recognition of Israel, and *no* negotiations with Israel, altogether boycotting the country.

Ceremoniously signed at the White House on 15 September 2020, the diplomatic opening of the Abraham Accords, led by the United States under President Donald Trump's first administration (2017–21), built on a clash of interests between its signatories. On the one hand, a general apprehension about the Muslim Brotherhood and the proliferation of Islamist militant groups in the region since the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011 had already prompted Gulf monarchies to foster clandestine relations with Israel on specific security matters. Iran's increasingly more ambitious nuclear and ballistic missile development programmes provided an additional point of concern. On the other hand, the declared scaling down of the U.S.' military and political investments in the Middle East under President Barack Obama's tenure (2009–17) and the concurrent expansion of Iran's so-called “Axis of Resistance” – a network of armed non-state proxy groups spanning the Palestinian Territories, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Yemen – gave rise to an acute appetite for security guarantees. A series of escalatory actions since 2015, beginning with Houthi-led cross-border missile and drone attacks on Saudi Arabia from Yemen, and witnessing strikes on Saudi Aramco infrastructure, the East-West Crude Oil Pipeline, the Shaybah oil field, and the Abqaiq oil facility in 2019 further increased security concerns. In early 2022, oil and aviation facilities were also attacked in the Abu Dhabi and Dubai areas of the UAE.

The bilateral agreements of the Accords were therefore concluded under close U.S. patronage and were supplemented by unique benefits provided by Washington to each of the participants. Included in this package deal, joint military exercises, intelligence sharing and cooperation on early-warning systems – particularly on threats posed by Iran – were increased. Access to air defence systems and precision-guided munitions were made available, and the UAE also received approval for the sale of F-35 fighter jets and MQ-9B Reaper drones. The U.S. also opened doors for foreign direct investment, particularly in the technology, renewable energy and infrastructure fields. In the case of Morocco, Washington granted support to Rabat in recognizing the latter's sovereignty over the disputed Western Sahara territory.

Sudan joined the Abraham Accords in January 2021 after the U.S. removed it from its sanctions list against state sponsors of terrorism, although a military coup, an ensuing civil war and a still-ongoing crisis have prevented the country from meaningfully implementing the agreement.

In the summer of 2023 reports emerged that the United States had been engaging with Saudi Arabia since 2020 with the aim of expanding the Accords. This followed comments made by Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman that “We don’t look at Israel as an enemy, we look to them as a potential ally, with many interests that we can pursue together.”¹

The prospect of Saudi-Israeli talks with U.S. facilitation represented a strategic inflection point – perceived as leading to the permanent side-lining of the Palestinian issue through the endorsement of the Abraham Accords framework by the leader of the Muslim world and the custodian of Islam’s holy sites – and contributed to the timing of Gaza Strip-based militant and political group Hamas’ unprecedented incursion into and terrorist attacks on Israel on 7 October 2023. Hamas had enjoyed Iran’s military, training and financial aid since the 1990s and its anti-Israel and anti-Zionist ideology bode well with Tehran’s broader adoption of the narrative of Palestinian resistance against Israel as part of its doctrine of striving for the eventual destruction of the Jewish State.

Israel’s military response stretched out over two years and the conflict expanded to other geographic areas shortly after its start, including clashes between Israeli security forces and Palestinian militants in the West Bank, border skirmishes and exchanges of attacks between the Israel Defence Forces and militant and political group Hezbollah in southern Lebanon, Israeli airstrikes in Syria against Iran-backed militias and weapons depots, as well as missile and drone attacks on southern Israel conducted by the Houthis in Yemen. The war culminated in the first direct sustained military clash between Israel and the Islamic Republic of Iran between 13 and 24 June 2025, having drawn in the U.S. too to conduct its first “bunker-buster” attack in combat on Iran’s nuclear facilities in Fordow, Natanz and Isfahan.

The military confrontation between Israel and Iran ended on 23 June 2025 after President Trump announced a ceasefire. Israel also agreed to a U.S.-brokered ceasefire deal with Hamas on 9 October 2025. Large-scale Israel-Hezbollah hostilities were halted after the signing of the Israel-Lebanon ceasefire agreement a year prior, on 27 November 2024.

The multi-front war has given rise to a number of important political and structural changes. Indeed, Iran’s so-called “Axis of Resistance” finds itself drastically weakened following Israel’s destructive war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip, its weakening of Hezbollah in Lebanon, the collapse of Bashar al-Assad’s regime in Syria in late 2024, the U.S.’ bombing campaign of the Houthis, and the removal of the immediate nuclear threat posed by Tehran, all over the course of the last year of the conflict. Importantly, the security risks posed by these actors have been suppressed or delayed, but not altogether neutralised, providing a shrinking window of opportunity for invested and interested actors to solidify the newly gained status quo.

Gulf states have increasingly taken an interest in Lebanon and Syria, aiming to mitigate risks stemming from the instability and hoping to shape political and economic trajectories. Other regional states hosting large Syrian refugee populations since 2011 – especially Turkey, which has taken in over 3.7 million Syrians – also gained significant leverage. Turkey, however, has gone further, stepping in with a more assertive foreign policy stance, conducting military operations and supporting allied factions, positioning itself as a leading actor in shaping Syria and the Levant region’s future, more broadly. Ankara also appears to have filled the role

¹ The Times of Israel (2022). “Saudi crown prince says Israel could be a ‘potential ally’”, retrieved from: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/saudi-crown-prince-says-israel-could-be-a-potential-ally/>.

Iran had occupied until recently, in championing Palestinians' rights and plight for statehood with President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan branding himself as a leading voice on the issue.

The Hamas-Israel ceasefire follows a series of major mediation efforts pursued by international and regional actors, which included several rounds of U.S. engagement, Qatar's leadership in a variety of multilateral configurations (also supported by Egypt and, at times, Turkey) between November 2023 and February 2025, as well as a United Nations Security Council resolution adopted in June 2024. Throughout the above-mentioned negotiations, the Palestinian issue remained salient, with mediators repeatedly tying ceasefires, humanitarian access to the Gaza Strip, and exchanges of prisoners with hostages to broader questions of Palestinian statehood and rights. This focus helped encourage broader international engagement on the two-state solution. In a significant diplomatic shift ahead of the United Nations General Assembly on 21 September 2025, the United Kingdom formally recognized the State of Palestine, framing the move as essential to keeping alive the prospects for peace and a viable two-state outcome. Alongside the UK, several EU member states also moved to recognize Palestine during this period or shortly thereafter, including Portugal, France, Belgium, Luxembourg, and Malta, marking a wave of Western recognition aimed at reinforcing international support for Palestinian self-determination during the ongoing war.

The United States continues to act as the architect and guarantor of the Abraham Accords, pursuing a security-first, transactional, and expansion-oriented approach. The European Union maintains a normative and humanitarian stance but is cautious, internally fragmented over issues such as the recognition of Palestine between its member states, and limited in its hard-power leverage. The United Kingdom occupies a middle ground between the U.S. and the EU, signalling normative alignment through the recognition of Palestine while seeking relevance via mediation and security enablement. Israel pursues security maximalism, viewing normalization agreements as a counterbalance to diplomatic isolation and resisting Palestinian statehood under its current political arrangements. Arab states of the Gulf prioritize stability, regime security, and regional economic integration, although they do not abandon ideological considerations with regard to Palestinians. Turkey, under President Erdoğan, uses the Palestinian question for the purposes of Neo-Ottoman and Islamist signalling and maintains a competitive posture toward Israel and the Gulf. Finally, Lebanon and Syria remain weak states whose primary value lies in stabilization rather than leadership, reflecting the broader multipolar landscape.

Prior to 2020, the U.S.-Iran rivalry largely defined regional competition, with the Assad-Iran-Russia axis consolidating influence in Syria and broader Arab states exhibiting limited strategic autonomy. In the post-war period, however, U.S. influence, while still central, is no longer unchallenged. Turkey and Israel have emerged as competing regional powers while the Gulf states increasingly act as strategic balancers. Meanwhile, Iran's role has diminished from that of a network-builder shaping regional alignments to a spoiler with more constrained influence at present. This framework underscores the multipolar character of the contemporary Middle East and provides a lens through which to evaluate emerging policy options.

Executive summary

“We brought peace once, and we will expand it again. The Abraham Accords are not finished – they are only beginning.”

– President Donald J. Trump, October 2025

“Conditions are moving toward negotiations to achieve peace and stability ... therefore ... through dialogue and negotiations solutions can be reached.”

– President Joseph Aoun, 13 October 2025

The Syrian President described a security pact with Israel as a “necessity” that would need to respect Syria’s airspace and territorial unity. He also noted that if the security pact succeeds, “other agreements could be reached.”

– President Ahmed al-Sharaa, 17 September 2025

Five years after their signing, the Abraham Accords have emerged from an audacious diplomatic experiment into a stable structure in the transforming Middle East’s security, trade, diplomatic and political architectures. The Israel– Hamas ceasefire in Gaza, signed on 9 October 2025², motivated Washington’s intentions to expand the framework, with President Donald Trump’s commitment to renew the leading role of the United States as the patron of the second phase. The majority of scholars and policymakers the authors of this report have engaged with agree that the Accords’ survival in defiance of the multi-front war between Israel, Hamas and a number of additional actors – part of the Islamic Republic of Iran’s “Axis of Resistance” – is a strong validation of their resilience. The first wave of the Accords that comprised of four Arab countries (the United Arab Emirates, the Kingdom of Bahrain, the Kingdom of Morocco, and the Republic of the Sudan) has endured wars, political transitions, and ideological reversals, and maintained diplomatic relations between its signatories.

This paper argues that the Abraham Accords have evolved from a diplomatic initiative into a stress-tested regional architecture that structures security coordination, economic integration, and strategic alignment between participating countries. The regional war of 2023–25 did not jeopardize this architecture; rather, it clarified its hierarchies, limits, and potential pathways for expansion.

Based on U.S. Central Command’s (CENTCOM) leaked documents, the *Washington Post* (WP) revealed that Arab countries around the region quietly shared intelligence with Israel during Iran’s April 2024 missile attacks.³ Moreover, the WP argues that the Accords partners not just maintained diplomatic relations with Israel but rather expanded cooperation with the Israel Defence Forces during the regional war between 2023 and 2025. This underscores how the new regional framework cooperates through shared security considerations and technology. This wartime coordination was arguably enabled by Israel’s integration into CENTCOM by

² Staff, T. (2025). “Full text of Oct. 9 Israel– Hamas deal on Trump’s plan for ‘comprehensive end’ to Gaza war”, *The Times of Israel*, accessed on 2 November 2025, retrieved from: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/full-text-of-oct-9-israel-hamas-deal-on-trumps-plan-for-comprehensive-end-to-gaza-war/>.

³ Kenner, D. (2025). “Arab states expanded cooperation with Israeli military during Gaza war, files show”, *Washington Post*, accessed on 5 November 2025, retrieved from: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2025/10/11/us-israel-arab-military-leaked-documents/>.

the U.S. and demonstrates that bi- and multilateral interactions as part of the Accords now function as an embedded security platform.

This report, designed for UK decision-makers, evaluates the Abraham Accords at five years through three analytical lenses, examining their performance as a regional security and economic architecture; their transformation under the 2023-25 regional war; and their differentiated expansion potential in the Levant, with a comparative focus on Lebanon and Syria. It offers UK decision-makers practical pathways to enhance and extend the United Kingdom's positionality in this framework, focusing particularly on Lebanon and Syria. The report introduces a typology of Arab-Israeli relations, ranging from confrontation and de-confliction to estrangement and rapprochement, situating the Abraham Accords as a distinct "networked" model of peace that differs fundamentally from earlier "cold" peace treaties between Israel, Egypt and Jordan. The report's main conclusions are as follows:

1. What began as a clash of interests against the Iran-led "Axis of Resistance" has matured into a durable regional architecture, combining security coordination, economic integration, and U.S.-backed deterrence.
2. Iran's weakening has not produced a persisting strategic vacuum but a competitive realignment, enabling the rise of a Turkish-Qatari axis that both complements and contests the Abraham Accords framework.
3. The United States remains the indispensable architect and guarantor of the Accords. Expansion into new theatres - particularly Lebanon and Syria - is contingent on sustained U.S. military presence, security and economic leverage, and diplomatic sponsorship.
4. The United Kingdom's comparative advantage (and opportunity) lies in acting as a transatlantic bridge - translating U.S. strategic momentum into frameworks palatable in European capitals while integrating normative accountability with security pragmatism.
5. An "Abraham Accords 2.0" phase requires shifting from war-time security coordination toward post-conflict economic reconstruction, sector-specific integration, and public-facing dividends that can rebuild eroded legitimacy.
6. Lebanese President Joseph Aoun's commitment to negotiate with Israel suggests Lebanon is tentatively repositioning itself toward negotiation over confrontation.⁴
7. Lebanon represents the most plausible near-term candidate for functional engagement with Israel through structured non-belligerence, maritime coordination, and security enforcement mechanisms short of full normalization. While President Aoun's intentions appear genuine and positive, the central question is his ability to enforce Hezbollah's disarmament as Israel continues to strike Hezbollah's infrastructure and its operatives that are repeatedly attempting to restore the group's military capabilities.
8. Syria's pathway differs fundamentally. Fragmented sovereignty, Turkish military entrenchment in the north, and Israel's security doctrine in the south render full normalization unrealistic. Instead, U.S.-led economic reconstruction, conditional de-

⁴ Houssari, N. (2025). "Lebanon's president says 'no choice but to negotiate with Israel using diplomatic language'", *Arab News*, accessed on 3 November 2025, retrieved from: <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2621291/middle-east>.

confliction, and modular cooperation offer the only viable route for Syria's indirect integration into the Abrahamic framework.

9. For the United Kingdom, relevance in the post-war Middle East depends on early alignment with U.S.-led regional restructuring while shaping its economic, humanitarian, and institutional dimensions - particularly in Lebanon and Syria - before alternative centres of power consolidate their influence.

I. The Abraham Accords at five years: Performance, perspectives and interpretations

1.1 Achievements and performance

Five years after their signing, the Abraham Accords have produced quantitative advantages in four spheres:

- **Trade:** Based on data published by the Israeli Ministry of Economy and Industry, since 2021, Israel and the UAE trade increased from \$1.2 billion (£960 million) to \$3.2 billion (£2.56 billion) in 2024, reaching \$1.72 billion (£1.38 billion) by mid-2025.⁵ While trade volumes with Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan remain smaller, notable growth was registered. Israeli-Moroccan trade, for instance, increased from \$150 million (£120 million) in 2021 to \$320 million (£256 million) in 2024, reflecting the opening of new agricultural and technological export channels. Trade with Bahrain reached \$85 million (£68 million) in 2024, driven largely by the finance and technology sectors, whereas Sudanese trade remains minimal but shows early signs of expansion in agribusiness.

Economic cooperation has extended beyond trade to include joint technological ventures, such as Israeli-UAE fintech start-ups and renewable energy projects.

- **Security and defence:** A major shift that the Accords enabled was the reposition of the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) from the responsibility of the U.S.' European EUCOM to CENTCOM, which is based in the Middle East. For context, EUCOM (U.S. European Command) primarily oversees American military operations in Europe and parts of Eurasia, whereas CENTCOM (U.S. Central Command) covers the Middle East and the Horn of Africa. By moving Israel under CENTCOM's area of responsibility, the IDF gained a direct operational link with regional Arab militaries, facilitating joint exercises, intelligence sharing, and rapid coordination against regional threats. Security cooperation includes shared missile defence drills, intelligence coordination on Iranian proxy movements, and cybersecurity collaboration with Bahraini and Moroccan authorities. This shift enabled the conditions for regional defence cooperation agreements, as witnessed in the Iranian missile attacks of April 2024.⁶ Another example out of many is the Israeli-Moroccan defence agreement signed in 2021, which was the first ever agreement Israel signed with an Arab country⁷. Other security agreements include the Israeli-Bahraini memorandum of understanding on intelligence sharing (2021) and the trilateral security consultations between Israel, the UAE, and Egypt focused on countering missile and drone threats. These agreements collectively illustrate the broadening security architecture enabled by the Accords. In an interview

⁵ מנהל סחר חוץ (2025) חמש שנים לחתימה על "הסכמי אברהם" עם איחוד האמירויות "Abraham Accords" with the United Arab Emirates) משרד הכלכלה והתעשייה מדינת ישראל, accessed on 27 October 2025, retrieved from: <https://www.gov.il/he/pages/economy-news-five-years-to-abraham-agreements-150925>.

⁶ Orion, A. and Montgomery, M. (2021). "Moving Israel to CENTCOM: Another Step Into the Light", *The Washington Institute*, accessed on 2 November 2025, retrieved from: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/moving-israel-centcom-another-step-light>.

⁷ Gross, J.A. (2021). "In Morocco, Gantz signs Israel's first-ever defense MOU with an Arab country", *The Times of Israel*, accessed on 26 October 2025, retrieved from: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/in-morocco-gantz-signs-israels-first-ever-defense-mou-with-an-arab-country/>.

with IDF spokesman Brigadier General Effie Defrin, who served as the former head of the Foreign Relations Division, he commented⁸:

“After joining CENTCOM, suddenly, Israeli commanders found themselves sitting around the table with Arab commanders that used to perceive us as enemies for years. But an amazing thing happened - unexpectedly, it looked so natural... At that time, Iran was the main threat for the entire region. They were disappointed that the Americans did not help them after Iran’s proxy, the Houthis, attacked Aramco oil processing facilities in eastern Saudi Arabia in 2019. They were looking for a regional power that could help them protect themselves against Iran and they perceived us as a regional power... if Israel is gone, there will not be regional peace because the Iranians will attack them... there was never an intent to fight shoulder to shoulder against Iran, but to defend [against it], yes. But without the American umbrella it would not happen because the Americans facilitated it...”

- **Tourism and education:** The UAE became one of the top destinations for Israelis as more than 550,000 people visited the country in 2024⁹. Israelis traveling to Bahrain numbered over 40,000 in 2024, while Morocco hosted roughly 125,000 Israeli tourists. Another interesting aspect is the rise of Hebrew lessons in Gulf countries¹⁰. Hebrew is now taught in select schools across the UAE, Bahrain, and Morocco, and academic partnerships with Israeli universities have expanded, resulting in over 300 joint research projects by mid-2025. Tourism revenues across all Abraham Accords partners have contributed significantly to local hospitality sectors, representing tangible economic benefits from normalization.
- **Diplomatic relations:** A crucial point to consider in the diplomatic sphere is that no Arab country that is a signatory to the Accords severed its diplomatic ties with Israel during the Gaza and broader regional war. As Kateb (2025) notes: “None of the signatories have formally walked away from the Accords, illustrating the prevalence of long-term strategic objectives over immediate political headwinds.”¹¹

1.2 Scholarly perspectives at five years

According to some Israeli scholars such as Podeh and Guzansky (2025), the Accords’ framework is a resilient structure that has endured crises which once would have fractured it. Podeh labels the process “unexpectedly durable,” emphasizing the network of security and economic cooperation that continued and even increased during the war in the Gaza Strip. He argues that the challenge is not the absence of peace but rather the investment needed to preserve it. In his words, the Accords must be “watered and tended” through sustained dialogue, joint projects, and cultural exchange if they are to outgrow their elite

⁸ Interview with IDF spokesman Brigadier General Effie Defrin, conducted by Dr Gad Yishayahu, Tel-Aviv, 23 October 2025.

⁹ Emirates Leaks (2025). “Statistics Confirm UAE as Israelis’ Favorite Travel Destination Abroad”, accessed on 5 November 2025, retrieved from: <https://emiratesleaks.com/statistics-confirm-uae-as-israelis-favorite-travel-destination-abroad/?lang=en>.

¹⁰ Neurink, J. (2021). “Hebrew language in high demand in Gulf states”, *DW*, accessed on 7 November 2025, retrieved from: <https://www.dw.com/en/gulf-states-embrace-israel-and-the-language-too/a-56834169>.

¹¹ Kateb, A. (2025). “The Abraham Accords After Gaza: A Change of Context, The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace”, accessed on 3 November 2025.

foundations.¹² It is important to clarify what is meant by “elite foundations.” The Accords were largely driven by government leadership, financial elites, and business communities in signatory countries. While they have generated macro-level economic gains and enhanced strategic security, these benefits have not always translated directly to popular constituencies. For instance, while Israeli-UAE trade has surged, average citizens in Morocco or Sudan see only indirect benefits, and public sentiment regarding normalization remains cautious or sceptical on the Arab street.

Conversely, Zaga (2025) underscores the Accords’ fragility under their strategic appearance. She contends that while the elite-driven UAE entered the Accords from a position of strength, its success relays on its public legitimacy.¹³ The Palestinian issue remains salient across all Abraham Accords member countries, shaping public opinion and legitimacy. In Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan, surveys indicate that while government elites support normalization, public approval is contingent on progress toward Palestinian rights and a viable two-state solution. In this context, the Palestinian issue remains a moral and political benchmark.

This is reflected in Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman’s latest meeting with President Trump on 18 November 2025, where he commented that “We want to be part of the Abraham Accords, but we want also to be sure that [we] secure a clear path [toward a] two-state solution.”^{14 15}

In his paper, “Five Years On: Resilience and Roadblocks”, Makovsky of the Washington Institute introduces another angle.¹⁶ According to him, the success or expansion of the Accords is contingent on the U.S.’ momentum, thus, continued American engagement is imperative for any future expansion. He contends that any expansion of the Accords with Lebanon and Syria will require an amalgamated reconstruction in the Gaza Strip with Arab partners, and careful Israeli efforts to rebuild regional trust.

From the Gulf’s perspective, encompassing both the UAE and Bahrain, the approach is more cautious. At a panel marking the five-year anniversary of the Accords in the Washington Institute, Ahdeya al-Sayed, former president of the Bahrain Journalists Association, said:

“Despite optimism that the United States will help strengthen Israeli-Bahraini ties, the reality is that their relations cannot improve until the Gaza war concludes and all Israeli hostages are released. Flights between Manama and Tel Aviv have been paused since the conflict broke out two years ago, reflecting stagnation in their relationship... Arab countries must recognize that Hamas started the war... and they must also understand why Israel seeks to defeat the group completely, despite the devastating reality on the ground in Gaza... The Islamic Republic remains the greatest threat to Bahrain... The

¹²Guzansky, Y. and Podeh, E. (2025). “Five Years On: Are the Abraham Accords Here to Stay?”, *INSS*, accessed on 6 November 2025, retrieved from: <https://www.inss.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/No.-2035.pdf>.

¹³ חדשות וואלה (Five years to the Accords the lessons that we learned) זגה ג' (2025) חמש שנים אחרי: השיעורים שלמדנו מהסכמי אברהם accessed on 6 November 2025, retrieved from: <https://news.walla.co.il/item/3780754>.

¹⁴ Magid, J. (2025). “MBS tells Trump he wants to join Abraham Accords, but path to Palestinian state crucial”, *The Times of Israel*, retrieved from: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/mbs-tells-trump-he-wants-to-join-abraham-accords-but-path-to-palestinian-state-crucial/>.

¹⁵ Al Arabiya English (2025). “The full schedule for the Saudi Crown Prince’s visit to the US”, retrieved from: <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/saudi-arabia/2025/11/18/the-full-official-schedule-for-the-saudi-crown-prince-s-visit-to-the-us>.

¹⁶ Mackovsky, D. (2025). “Resilience and Roadblocks: The Abraham Accords at Five Years”, *The Washington Institute*, accessed on 7 November 2025, retrieved from: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/resilience-and-roadblocks-abraham-accords-five-years>.

reality is that Israel is part of the Middle East and can no longer be isolated or pushed aside.”

In a policy paper titled “2030 roadmap for UK-Israel bilateral relations” and published by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office¹⁷ in March 2023, an optimistic tone was introduced:

“The UK will work with Israel to both deepen and expand these developments, and build upon the progress of the historic Negev Summit in March 2022, to explore opportunities for regional cooperation and development in coordination with the emerging regional architecture in both security and civilian spheres.”

A year later, in April 2024 during a meeting of the House of Lords International Relations and Defence Committee, then Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs David Cameron said:¹⁸

“I support the Abraham Accords, which was a number of Arab states normalizing their relations with Israel, and that was a positive step forward, but some people looking at that thought, ‘Oh, well, we can sort of create peace between the Arab world and the Israeli world without fixing the Palestinian problem.’ That was a mistake. You have to fix the Palestinian problem.”

A similar approach was presented in the House of Commons Library’s paper about the Accords, published in September 2025. It maintained that while the UK supports the expansion of the Accords, “there are no prospects of such expansion until an agreement is reached between Israel and Hamas.”¹⁹

Taken together, both sources underline maintaining involvement with all parties while ensuring that UK policy remains anchored in humanitarian principles and balanced diplomacy.

The U.S. discourse introduces competing approaches regarding the expansion of the Accords. The first conservative perspective to be noticed is provided by the Heritage Foundation. In his paper, “To Achieve Lasting Middle East Peace, We Must Expand the Abraham Accords” (2025), Asher Freedman argued that the renewed U.S. initiative under President Trump demonstrates a decisive effort to reconstruct American leadership in the region.²⁰ According to him, “the last two years of regional conflict mean expanding the circle of warm peace in the Middle East [which] will require renewed U.S. leadership.” He contends that only a bold, pragmatic expansion, not bureaucratic caution, will increase the possibility for durable peace.

¹⁷The UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (2023). “2030 roadmap for UK-Israel bilateral relations”, accessed on 10 November 2025, retrieved from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2030-roadmap-for-uk-israel-bilateral-relations/2030-roadmap-for-uk-israel-bilateral-relations>.

¹⁸The International Relations and Defence Committee (2024). “Corrected oral evidence: Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Non-inquiry session)”, *The House of Lords*, accessed on 9 November 2025, retrieved from: <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/14758/pdf/>.

¹⁹House of Commons Library (2025). “Israel and the Abraham Accords in 2025: Five years on”, *UK Parliament*, accessed on 9 November 2025, retrieved from: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/israel-and-the-abraham-accords-in-2025-five-years-on/>.

²⁰Freedman, A. (2025). “To Achieve Lasting Middle East Peace, We Must Expand the Abraham Accords”, *The Heritage Foundation*, accessed on 27 October 2025, retrieve from: <https://www.heritage.org/middle-east/commentary/achieve-lasting-middle-east-peace-we-must-expand-the-abraham-accords>.

On a similar note, Paul McCarthy provides an interesting angle about the divergences between European and U.S. policy approaches. In his paper, “Europe’s Reckless Recognition of Palestine Threatens the U.S.-Europe Alliance” (2025),²¹ McCarthy contends that unilateral recognitions of a Palestinian state by different European governments have “undermined Washington’s efforts to mediate a sustainable peace and jeopardized trans-Atlantic cohesion at a pivotal moment.” In his view, European attempts to maintain moral leadership have endangered the U.S.-led framework, encouraged reluctant actors and concerned Gulf partners, who depend on U.S. security guarantees.

Both Fredman and McCarthy introduced a conservative U.S. narrative that is based on three components: (1) that the Accords initiated by President Trump remain the most sustainable structure for prolonged regional stability; (2) that the U.S., once again, is positioning itself as the chief architect and guarantor of the Accords; (3) that the European deviation from this stance exposes the highest external threat to the Accords’ amalgamation and expansion.

This is a clear example of the potential role the UK may serve as a bridge between the U.S. and EU countries, potentially reviving the UK’s historic role that once enabled it to impact both Western and regional policies. By uniting with the EU’s cautious approach, London is risking missing the American train. For an actor pursuing renewed global influence, remaining the link between the trans-Atlantic split could be its highest strategic asset (or one of its prominent losses).

The second American perspective is introduced by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. In his piece, “The Abraham Accords After Gaza: A Change of Context” (2025), Kateb argues that only the renewal of negotiations between the U.S. and Iran will enable the expansion of the Accords:

“A successful diplomatic outcome could eat away at one of the main motivations behind the Abraham Accords and revive the Palestinian question as a central regional concern that needs to be addressed before the Accords can be expanded to other countries.”²²

A different American perspective is introduced by the Atlantic Council’s paper, “The Abraham Accords at Five” (2025).²³ The report underlines Morocco’s unique calculus, framing normalization with Israel less as reconciliation but rather as an entrance ticket to a U.S.-led pan-Abrahamic club. In this context, Morocco’s move is viewed as “a calculated bid to position the kingdom as a dependable, pro-Western partner,” securing the monarchy’s durability. This emphasizes the wide spectrum of the Accords, serving not just as a peace project, but also as a strategically realistic search for superpower patronage in order to secure regime resilience in a shifting world order.

A more critical voice emerges from the Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP). In his paper, “The Limits of Protection and Profits: Five Years into the Abraham Accords” (2025), Keshavarzian argues that the Accords’ visible stability obscures deep

²¹ McCarthy, P. (2025). “Europe’s Reckless Recognition of Palestine Threatens the U.S.-Europe Alliance”, *The Heritage Foundation*, accessed on 27 October 2025, <https://www.heritage.org/global-politics/commentary/europes-reckless-recognition-palestine-threatens-the-us-europe-alliance>.

²² Kateb, A. (2025). “The Abraham Accords After Gaza”.

²³ Minor, A. and Shapiro, D. et al. (2025). “The Abraham Accords at five”, *The Atlantic Council*, accessed on 7 November 2025 <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/the-abraham-accords-at-five/>.

imbalances.²⁴ He contends that the treaty network remains structurally dependent on U.S. military primacy, without which its Arab partners would struggle to maintain their emerging alignment with Israel. He maintains that the economic profits have been disproportionately distributed, benefiting mostly the elites. According to him, the Accords' longevity depends on whether they can "translate elite coordination into popular legitimacy and equitable development."

A further critical Arab view is offered by *The New Arab*. It cautions that the cost of joining the Accords increased during the Gaza War and Israel's prolonged refusal of the two-state solution. This approach emphasizes a heightened sense of frustration across parts of the Arab world that Israel's militarism and the absence of a credible peace process are continuously eroding Arab states' motivations to engage or deepen their participation.²⁵ The authors of this paper argue that the scope to which states decide to join the Accords will be formed primarily by their national interests, as demonstrated by the Moroccan case earlier and Kazakhstan's recent accession.²⁶

1.3 Synthesis

Taken together, these perspectives outline a richly textured political landscape, characterized by:

- **Agreement** on the Accords' endurance and strategic utility under the leadership and endorsement of the U.S.
- **Disagreement** on the Accords' societal depth, moral legitimacy, and dependence on external power.
- **Caution** about progress on the Palestinian issue, in addition to Iran's rapprochement with the region and the West for the next breakthrough.

To conclude, the Abraham Accords at five years are resilient yet limited. Drawing on these highly valuable perspectives, we have formulated the following conclusions:

1. **Longevity through utility:** The Accords withstand challenges because they serve national interests and goals yielding tangible economic and security benefits.
2. **Superpower matters:** Without the U.S. leadership and preservation, the Accords risk stagnation.
3. **Preconditions are not mandatory:** Although the Palestinian issue remains the Achilles' heel, statehood is not a necessary precondition for the further expansion of the Accords.

²⁴ Keshavarzian A (2025) The Limits of Protection and Profits—Five Years into the Abraham Accords, the Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP) <https://www.merip.org/2025/10/the-limits-of-protection-and-profits-five-years-into-the-abraham-accords/>.

²⁵ The New Arab (2025). "Five years on, could Israeli aggression sink Abraham Accords?", accessed on 28 October 2025, retrieved from: <https://www.newarab.com/news/five-years-could-israeli-aggression-sink-abraham-accords>.

²⁶ Troianovski, A. (2025). "Kazakhstan Is Joining the Abraham Accords, Trump Says", *The New York Times*, accessed on 7 November 2025, retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/11/06/us/politics/kazakhstan-abraham-accords.html>.

4. **A bridge between actors:** If the UK wishes to become involved, it is imperative to amalgamate the U.S. momentum with European accountability to modify transactional normalization into the systemic order that includes the northern frontier.

II. Shifting axes: The aftermath of war and the reconfiguration of the Abraham Accords (2020-25)

2.1 The Trump cycle

Five years have passed since the signing of the Accords during which the Middle East's power framework has witnessed the most dramatic repositioning since the end of the Cold War – perhaps even since the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916. Much like Sykes-Picot demarcated imperial spheres of influence, the post-2020 period has seen the erosion of inherited regional arrangements and the emergence of new security alignments. Unlike Sykes-Picot, however, this was shaped by local agency, rather than colonial design. Between roughly 2015 and 2025, the region experienced a competitive multipolar struggle in which global and regional powers repositioned themselves through wars, proxy conflicts, and the exhaustion of earlier security arrangements.

Four interlocking facets can be identified that enabled the historic signing of the Accords. This began in May 2018 during President Trump's first term, who decided to withdraw from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) of 2015 – widely referred to as the Iran nuclear deal – negotiated during the Obama administration. This was followed by the assassination of the head of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' (IRGC), Qassem Soleimani, by the U.S. in January 2020. And finally, the American endorsement of the *outside-in approach* that prioritized Arab normalization over Palestinian self-determination during 2019. This reflected a growing frustration among several Arab governments – particularly in the UAE, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia – with what they perceived as the paralysis of Palestinian leadership, the rejection of incremental diplomatic gains, and an unwillingness to adapt to shifting regional realities. Emirati officials, for instance, explicitly framed normalization as a means to “preserve the possibility” of a two-state solution rather than remain in the deadlock of stalled negotiations.²⁷ This was reinforced by the Trump administration's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital in December 2017, signalling an unprecedentedly favourable American posture toward Israeli political claims.

The establishment of the Accords was followed by a period of retrenchment in the Middle East under President Joe Biden (2021-24), albeit he tried to carry the Accords further, with Saudi Arabia emerging as the focus of his administration's expanded normalization efforts:

“We will also continue building on the Abraham Accords, which I strongly support because they deepen, they deepen Israel's integration into the broader region and establish lasting ties for business, cooperation and tourism.”²⁸

Despite Biden's declarations, Washington shifted its focus to China; the war in Ukraine and the overwhelming threats posed by Russia; the COVID-19 pandemic; the disorganized withdrawal from Afghanistan, and a cautious approach towards Iran's expansion. These constituent policies demonstrated the U.S. disengagement from the region and suggested

²⁷ Fakhro, E. (2024). *The Abraham Accords: The Gulf States, Israel, and the Limits of Normalization*, Columbia University Press.

²⁸ Gangitano, A. (2022). “Biden says he ‘strongly supports’ Trump's Abraham Accords”, *The Hill*, accessed on 29 October 2025, retrieved from: <https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/3558921-biden-says-he-strongly-supports-trumps-abraham-accords/>.

that the U.S. is a superpower in demise. For Gulf states, this perceived disengagement was most acute in the security domain. Despite repeated Emirati and Saudi requests for formal defence guarantees, advanced air-defence integration, and clearer red lines against Iran, the Biden administration hesitated to extend a security umbrella comparable to NATO-style assurances. This ultimately reinforced Gulf leaders' incentives to diversify their security partnerships – precisely the gap the Abraham Accords began to fill.

Against this background, international and regional actors reacted as follows:

- In March 2023, China penetrated the vacuum, brokering a reconciliation agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia. This symbolic agreement underscored Beijing's mediating capabilities without utilizing hard power (unlike the U.S).
- Russia consolidated its military foothold in Syria through permanent basing at Tartus and Khmeimim, expanded its influence in Africa via security arrangements in Libya, Mali, and Sudan linked to the paramilitary Wagner Group, and deepened its strategic alignment with Iran through arms transfers, intelligence-sharing, and diplomatic coordination.
- Turkey utilized the vacuum to extend its influence in the region and beyond from Libya, the East Mediterranean, from Somalia and Sudan to northern Syria and northern Iraq, all under its Neo-Ottoman approach.

However, the restructuring came to a stalemate after the Hamas massacre of 7 October 2023, prompting Israel to invade the Gaza Strip. What began with the war in Gaza expanded swiftly into six arenas: Hezbollah in Lebanon; Syria; the Houthis in Yemen; Iraqi Hezbollah, Iran, and the West Bank. This regional war arrived to its pinnacle moment after Israel and the U.S. attacked Iranian nuclear facilities in June 2025. Israel's *Operation Rising Lion* in Iran exposed the limits of Chinese and Russian aspirations in the region.

The return of President Trump to the Oval Office in January 2025 marked the return of the U.S. to the region, the revival of deterrence through military supremacy, and the intention of expanding the Abraham Accords. Washington's old/new paradigm rests on four pillars: the decline of both Russian and Chinese involvement; the deterrents of Iran; the strong partnership with Israel and Turkey; and the incorporation of the Accords as the region's central security and economic architecture. The main outcome is regenerated U.S. supremacy and centrality in the region and beyond.

2.2 Regional shifts in the aftermath of the war

The regional war between 2023 and 2025 transformed the Middle East's strategic map, therefore rendering it more fluid, transactional and structurally multipolar. In this context, the authors of this report have identified three clusters that are restructuring the new order, led by three regional powers:

1. The first is the **surviving Abraham Accords axis, led by Israel**. As Benny Gantz Israel's former Minister of Defence, and former IDF Chief of General Staff, who served as minister in the Israeli war cabinet during the war, told the authors²⁹:

²⁹ Interview with former Israeli Minister of Defence, former IDF Chief of General Staff, and Member of the Knesset Benny Gantz, by Dr Gad Yishayahu, Israel, 30 September 2025.

“Israel is a regional power in the Middle East by virtue of its political influence, its security superiority, and its impact on the region and its development... Israel also serves as a bridge between the Middle East and the West, in particular, the world’s leading superpower, the U.S... Its strategic partnership with the U.S, which grants it a qualitative edge over its adversaries in the region, which I dealt with extensively during my tenure as a defence minister following the Abraham Accords..., and its diplomatic and military capabilities enable Israel to shape regional dynamics and advance peace normalization agreements...”

Despite the Gaza war and criticism from the public in several countries, the Accords axis endorsed by the U.S. has prevailed and even expanded its coordination and cooperation.³⁰ According to leaked CENTCOM documents that were published in the Washington Post, even Qatar and Saudi Arabia, which do not have formal diplomatic relations with Israel, played an important role in the regional air-defence plan led by CENTCOM to combat Iran’s missiles and drones. That such coordination occurred even with states lacking formal diplomatic ties with Israel underscores how security imperatives have temporarily overridden political symbolism – while also highlighting the provisional, crisis-driven nature of this cooperation. As the IDF spokesman Brigadier General Effie Defrin told the authors in an interview³¹:

“After what happened on October 7 and right after we started manoeuvring into Gaza, we were convinced that the manoeuvre will end of our mutual efforts with the Arab countries, but the opposite happened... when I met with them (my counterparts), they told me ‘do what you have to do to destroy this evil organization otherwise we will be next... they (Hamas) do not represent us. The coordination (with our Abraham Accords counterparts, in addition to Egypt and Jordan) during the Iranian attacks on Israel were fascinating. It was a combination of air, land, intelligence, radars, sensors etc. It happened in April 2024, in October 2024, and then, we launched our attack on Iran in June 2025... I think that after two years of war there is no way back.”

This multilateral cooperation framework did not emerge in a vacuum. Prior to the war, the United States had already maintained extensive bilateral security ties with Israel, Egypt, Jordan, the UAE, Bahrain, and Morocco, including arms sales, joint exercises, intelligence sharing, and coordination on missile defences. However, these arrangements remained largely bilateral and fragmented. The war demonstrated both the utility and the limits of this model. While ad hoc coordination succeeded in intercepting Iranian attacks, Gulf leaders continued to signal that their long-term security concerns – particularly regarding missile defence integration and U.S. reliability – had not been fully resolved.

2. The second is the **Axis in demise led by Iran**. What started at the beginning of the war as a demonstration of power ended in Tehran’s drastic weakening. This began with Israel’s assassination of Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah in September 2024, arguably the most prominent leader in the “Axis”. Combined with certain chain reactions in the region and the eventual collapse of the Assad regime in Syria in December 2024, Iran lost its overland supply route between Tehran and Beirut. Ultimately, these events enabled Israel to set back Iran’s “Ring of Fire”, its missile

³⁰ Kenner, D. (2025). “Arab states expanded cooperation with Israeli military during Gaza war, files show”.

³¹ Interview with IDF spokesman Brigadier General Effie Defrin.

capabilities and, finally, its nuclear project. As Guzansky and Podeh conclude: Iran's influence in the region "has shrunk from a network to a narrative."³² Nevertheless, the Iranian threat is still very severe as IDF spokesman Brigadier General Effie Defrin told the authors³³.

"The Iranians saw our joint efforts with the Arab and Gulf countries, and they were pushing very hard to destroy it... the October 7 massacre was a direct fruit of the Iranian effort, our intelligence found a lot of documents and evidence in the tunnels of Gaza supporting this... Iran did not vanish and we have to be very modest when we talk about Iran. We are talking about a country with heritage, scientists, a strong country that has capabilities to produce long-range missiles or... a nuclear bomb if they want to. They are smart people and if they will decide that they are going to pull all their country's effort and economy invested to build a nuclear bomb, they will eventually do it. We have disrupted them, showing them that they can only lose from that. This threat still exists, they still have proxies. It is threatening the entire region. So, the threat is still there. Therefore, the potential (for cooperation) with Arab countries is still there."

3. The third is the expanding **pragmatic Islamic axis led by Turkey and Qatar**. Turkey, supported by Qatar, has benefited mostly from the decline of Iran and the struggle of Israel. The collapse of the Assad regime in Syria enabled Ankara to enter this strategic arena much more prominently than before. Add to this Turkey's endorsement of Hamas and its effective way of encouraging Hamas to sign the ceasefire agreement with Israel, augmenting its positionality in the eyes of the region and, more importantly, in the eyes of the Trump administration.

2.3 Anticipated patterns in the new order

Economic integration

Trade as it is facilitated by the Abraham Accords – mostly in the fields of energy and technology – is one of the core pillars of the new regional system of cooperation. The end of the war opens the door to the revival of the Negev Forum. The Negev Forum was launched at the Negev Summit in Israel in March 2022, with the foreign ministers from Israel, the U.S., the UAE, Bahrain, Egypt, and Morocco meeting together for the first time.³⁴ They launched the Forum with a steering committee and six working groups, covering security, health, water and agriculture, energy, education and coexistence, and tourism. The working groups were tasked with developing multilateral projects aimed at bringing the benefits of regional integration to the citizens of their countries.

Yet, as mentioned earlier, integration is uneven as the main beneficiaries are the high-tech industry and the elite circles in Arab countries. In order to counterbalance and expand inclusion, prioritizing investment in the fields of energy infrastructure, health, water, agriculture and education would be beneficial. The Cambridge Middle East and North Africa Forum (MENAF) and the UK Abraham Accords Group's joint research project on "UK AI

³² Neurink, J. (2021). "Hebrew language in high demand in Gulf states".

³³ Interview with IDF spokesman Brigadier General Effie Defrin.

³⁴ The U.S. Department of State (2022). "Negev Forum Steering Committee Joint Statement", accessed on 8 November 2025, retrieved from: <https://2021-2025.state.gov/negev-forum-steering-committee-joint-statement/>.

Diplomacy: Boosting British Influence in MENA and Strengthening the Abraham Accords”, published in April 2025, highlighted several concrete avenues for cooperation in the energy, health technology, education and governance sectors that could witness a more equitable distribution of the benefits of bi- and multilateral cooperation between participants to the Accords. This could enable a more inclusive attitude about the Accords while offering countries such as the UK an opportunity to export their soft power capabilities to broaden dividends. Rather than broad integration, post-war cooperation is likely to advance through sector-specific projects with visible domestic impact. These include cross-border electricity grids, desalination and water-recycling plants, joint vocational training programmes in renewable energy, and regional disease surveillance systems. Such initiatives are more likely to translate strategic normalization into everyday economic value.

Security interoperation

If there is one component that serves as the threshold pre-condition for the survival and expansion of the Accords, it is in the security domain. The aftermath of the war illustrates more than ever the centrality of the CENTCOM defence architecture. Turning towards the future, there is an opportunity to increase the cooperation between the armies through joint exercises, intelligence sharing, and the establishment of operational joint command and control centres specializing in cyber and information warfare and maritime warfare. Some of these initiatives were already discussed in the leaked CENTCOM documents:

“A 2024 briefing document envisioned the creation of a “Combined Middle East Cyber Center” by the end of 2026 to serve as a headquarters for education and exercises on defensive cyber operations. Another document advocated for the creation of an “Information Fusion Center” for partners to “rapidly plan, execute, and assess operations in the information environment.”³⁵

Yet these initiatives remain prospective rather than institutionalized. Gulf partners continue to lack binding guarantees regarding command authority, rules of engagement, and long-term U.S. commitment – gaps that leave space for the Accords to evolve further as a formalized security architecture.

Mending fractured public opinion

According to the Arab Barometer Wave VIII (September 2023 – July 2024), public backing for normalization with Israel fell post 7 October 2023, including in countries that signed the Abraham Accords. In none of the seven countries surveyed by Arab Barometer in 2023–24 did support exceed 13%. Support declined across all Abraham Accords partners too. In Bahrain, approval remained in single digits throughout 2024; in the UAE, public endorsement fell sharply but was partially offset by state-controlled narratives emphasizing economic gains; and in Sudan, normalization remained elite-driven and politically fragile. Data from Syria and Lebanon – where normalization is currently absent – suggest even deeper hostility, reinforcing the regional salience of the Palestinian issue beyond formal signatories.

To withstand the lack of public support, the Accords must generate benefits that are locally visible and politically defensible. These include subsidized student exchanges in applied sciences, jointly funded desalination plants employing local labour, cross-border pilgrimage

³⁵ Kenner, D. (2025). “Arab states expanded cooperation with Israeli military during Gaza war, files show”.

corridors, Arabic-Hebrew media partnerships, and regional climate adaptation projects in agriculture. Such initiatives anchor normalization in daily life rather than elite diplomacy.

2.4 The war and its aftermath in sum

There is a consensus among scholars and decision-makers that the war has transformed the regional architecture, upgrading the Accords from a diplomatic brand to a stress-tested structure. Nonetheless, they have endured a regional war, disinformation warfare, great-power rivalry and fractured public opinion. Yet, survival alone does not guarantee longevity therefore, the road to expansion hinges on three intertwined requirements:

1. Lowering the flames: Israel must recalibrate its Palestinian policy to rebuild Arab confidence, while Palestinian political leadership must decisively reject armed resistance and re-engage with diplomatic pathways enabled by the post-war environment.
2. Only the consistent involvement of the U.S. in the region – combining diplomatic leadership with credible security partnerships and reassurance to Gulf states – can keep the Accords strategic rather than symbolic.
3. Security: The war confirmed that security remains the threshold pre-condition for the survival and expansion of the Accords.
4. Inclusivity is crucial: Governments must translate elite cooperation into tangible benefits for their citizens.

III. Typologies of peace: From cold treaties to the Abrahamic network

3.1 A spectrum of peace and normalization

The nature of Arab–Israeli peace has evolved from narrow bilateralism to a multidimensional regional framework. Relations now range from confrontation to rapprochement, reflecting both the changing security environment and the diversification of national interests.

This typology illustrates characteristics of Israel and Arab/Muslim countries in the region through a four-tier dimension, considering security, economic, diplomatic and cultural components.

The following typology captures these modes of engagement:

Mode	Security	Economic	Diplomatic	Culture
Rapprochement	Coordinated defence and intelligence cooperation	Integrated trade, energy, and infrastructure projects	Full diplomatic representation and open embassies	Active cultural, academic, and tourism exchanges
Estrangement	Crisis communication and operational coordination	Limited technical and humanitarian cooperation	Indirect or partial diplomatic channels	Civil society and humanitarian collaboration
De-confliction	Minimal contact; ad-hoc coordination	Sanctions or symbolic trade restrictions	Downgraded or suspended relations	Restricted NGO activity and minimal public interaction
Confrontation	Open conflict or proxy warfare	Blockades and economic isolation	No diplomatic ties	Humanitarian breakdown and polarization

3.2 Comparative lens: From Egypt and Jordan to the Gulf model

Israel’s early treaties with Egypt (1979)³⁶ and Jordan (1994)³⁷ represented classical, security-first deals. Both were U.S.-brokered, bilateral, and designed primarily to end the state of war,

³⁶ United Nations. (1979). “Treaty of Peace between the Arab Republic of Egypt and the State of Israel”, *United Nations Treaty Series*, 1136: I-17813, retrieved from:

<https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%201136/volume-1136-I-17813-English.pdf>.

³⁷ United Nations Peacemaker (1994). “Treaty of Peace between the State of Israel and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan”, *United Nations Peacemaker Database*, 26 October 1994, retrieved from:

<https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/default/files/document/files/2024/05/il20jo941026peacetreatyisraeljordan.pdf>.

delivering a cold peace; stable at the state level but largely devoid of people-to-people contact. Their durability stemmed from U.S. military and financial guarantees, not from regional cooperation or interdependence.

In practice, cooperation under both treaties has been concentrated in narrowly defined security and other functional domains. Between Israel and Egypt, this includes close military coordination in the Sinai Peninsula under the framework of the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO), intelligence-sharing against jihadist groups, coordination on the Gaza Strip's border management, and energy cooperation through Israeli natural gas exports to Egyptian liquefaction facilities. Civilian interaction, however, remains limited, and economic ties are largely state-mediated rather than societally embedded.

Between Israel and Jordan, cooperation centres on border security, intelligence coordination against extremist threats, water-sharing arrangements under the 1994 treaty, and energy trade, including Israeli gas supplies and electricity coordination. While these mechanisms have proven resilient during periods of political tension, they operate largely below the public radar and have not translated into broad-based normalization or popular acceptance.

By contrast, the Abraham Accords inaugurated a “Gulf model” of peace. Although security remains the main theme, it is fused with economic integration, technological collaboration, and cultural diplomacy – a framework requiring constant reinforcement through investment, education, and public engagement. As Podeh and Guzansky (2025) describe, the shift is one “from binary peace/no peace logic to a spectrum of normalization.”^{38 39}

In an exclusive interview, Robert Greenway, Deputy Assistant to the President and Senior Director for the Middle East and North Africa on the National Security Council during the first Trump administration, emphasized that the most important premise of the Accords' success, and what could contribute to their expansion, is addressing shared security threats and a shared vision of economic prosperity. This new architecture, driven by shared interests rather than territorial concessions, has proven more resilient under crisis conditions.⁴⁰

3.3 The current landscape of peace

Today, Israel maintains formal peace or normalization agreements with six Arab and/or Muslim states. Together, these agreements mark the broadest web of Arab-Israeli relations in modern history. One that has endured war, political turnover, and ideological contestation.

1. Egypt (1979): Strategic peace, endorsed by U.S. security coordination.
2. Jordan (1994): Functional, institutionally stable but socially limited.
3. United Arab Emirates (2020): Comprehensive partnership covering trade, energy, technology, and defence.
4. Bahrain (2020): Security-focused alignment with expanding economic links.

³⁸ Heritage Foundation (2025). “The Abraham Accords: Five Years On — A New Framework for Regional Integration”, retrieved from: <https://static.heritage.org/-2025/AbrahamAccordsFiveYearReport.pdf>.

³⁹ Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) (2025). “Five Years On: Are the Abraham Accords Here to Stay?”, retrieved from: <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/abraham-accords-5-years/>.

⁴⁰ Interview with Robert Greenway, by Yasmine Tlass, 2 November 2025.

5. Morocco (2020): Multifaceted cooperation tied to Western Sahara recognition and trade integration.
6. Sudan (2021): Normalization framework pending full implementation amid internal transition.
7. Kazakhstan (2025)⁴¹: Security-focused alignment with expanding economic links.

⁴¹

IV. Lebanon and Syria: Prospects and risks

4.1 Lebanon: From de-confliction to gradual rapprochement

The ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon signed in 2024, along with the decline of Hezbollah's grip on the country, offers an interesting challenge of whether the Accords framework can expand. The country's fragile post-conflict state revolves around three domains: security, governance, and economic stabilization.

Security domain

The November 2024 ceasefire, underpinned by a refined interpretation of UN Security Council Resolution 1701, introduced a novel enforcement mechanism, giving Israel two distinct advantages:

1. Freedom to act against Hezbollah where the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) cannot operate effectively.
2. The International Monitoring and Implementation Mechanism (IMIM) committee chaired by the U.S. was created to monitor the ceasefire.

Specifically, the ceasefire framework introduced an enforcement mechanism that departed from previous interpretations of Resolution 1701 by emphasizing active preventative measures rather than reactive responses. First, it granted Israel greater operational latitude to act against imminent violations of the ceasefire in technical terms – such as weapons transfers or the build-up of forces south of the Litani river – without being framed as a breach of the ceasefire itself in the legal sense. Second, it strengthened international monitoring and reporting mechanisms, increasing the political and operational costs for Hezbollah to reconstitute its military presence in southern Lebanon, while reducing Israel's exposure to diplomatic backlash for defensive or pre-emptive actions.

Israeli strikes have killed or captured more than 340 Hezbollah field commanders since late 2024 while the LAF has dismantled roughly 500 fixed positions south of the Litani river. As a result, Hezbollah's arsenal has been reduced by about 80% when it comes to its rocket stockpile and 70% when it comes to its drone capability, leaving the organization militarily bruised.⁴² Nevertheless, Hezbollah is refusing to disarm and constantly attempts to rebuild its power. Estimates before the latest war put Hezbollah's inventory at around 150,000–200,000 rockets and missiles, and hundreds of precision-guided systems. Even though recent strikes reportedly destroyed many weapons depots and launch sites, some analyses suggest Hezbollah may still retain rockets and missiles.

In his February 2025 address marking the anniversary of Nasrallah's death, Hezbollah's acting secretary-general, Naim Qassem, vowed that the group "will never surrender its weapons." Yet Lebanese President Joseph Aoun and Prime Minister Nawaf Salam have made state monopoly on arms an official government doctrine, backed by a parliamentary

⁴² Fabian, E. and Berman, L. (2024). "PM said meeting on Lebanon diplomatic solution; Hezbollah has lost 80% of its rockets," *The Times of Israel*, retrieved from: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/pm-said-meeting-on-lebanon-diplomatic-solution-hezbollah-has-lost-80-of-its-rockets>.

majority.⁴³ LAF commander Brigadier General Rodolphe Haykal maintains that while the army will avoid civil war, it “will not concede sovereignty southwards.”⁴⁴ This new balance of partial deterrence and assertion marks a turning point in Lebanon’s post-war security landscape. Yet this approach enables Israel to justify its daily strikes on Hezbollah’s operatives and infrastructure blaming the LAF’s reluctance to confront Hezbollah.

Economic and governance domains

Lebanon’s economy has experienced a deep crisis for years, driven by the recent history of prolonged political paralysis, a sovereign debt collapse, banking-sector breakdown, significant currency depreciation, and repeated shocks emanating from conflicts. Since 2019, Lebanon’s real GDP has contracted by over one third, and the 2023–24 war further eroded output, pushing the economy back into recession with real GDP shrinking an estimated 6–7% in 2024 alone. Inflation and currency collapse devastated purchasing power, and high unemployment and rising poverty have followed, with multidimensional poverty now affecting the majority of the population and basic services deteriorating sharply. Over 1 million people were displaced during the latest conflict, and significant physical and economic damages – estimated in the billions of dollars – have compounded humanitarian needs and job losses. Even with early signs of stabilization and modest GDP growth projections for 2025, public revenues and investment remain weak, social safety nets are inadequate, and structural reforms are urgently needed to restore confidence and living standards.

Hezbollah’s legitimacy has long stemmed from its parallel state network and service delivery, providing economic and social benefits to Lebanese citizens, which have for decades filled the vacuum left behind by the Lebanese state. Its control of the Health Ministry allowed Hezbollah to offer pharmaceutical products and medications at lower prices in the Bekaa Valley, southern Lebanon and in the southern suburbs of Beirut. Hezbollah has also maintained a parallel social security system for its members through the “Al Sajed” card, refilled with \$200 a month and used to purchase products from “Al-Nour” markets, stores that offered subsidized Syrian and Iranian products.^{45 46}

This welfare apparatus has been sustained by a parallel economy. Hezbollah’s main source of funding came from the Iranian regime, as well as an illicit trade network – including smuggling, drug trafficking, and money laundering.^{47 48 49}

⁴³ Owen, R. and Parker, T. (2025). “Lebanese Army Walks Political Tightrope to Disarm Hezbollah.” *Reuters*, 28 October 2025, retrieved from: <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/lebanese-army-walks-political-tightrope-disarm-hezbollah-2025-10-28>.

⁴⁴ Haykal, R. (2025). “Haykal Says Army Will Succeed in Its Mission While Maintaining Civil Peace.” *L’Orient-Le Jour*, 20 September 2025, retrieved from: <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1475482/haykal-says-army-will-succeed-in-its-mission-while-maintaining-civil-peace.html>.

⁴⁵ Ghaddar, H. (2020). “Hezbollah Has Created Parallel Financial and Welfare Systems to Manage the Current Crisis”, *Washington Institute*, retrieved from: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/hezbollah-has-created-parallel-financial-and-welfare-systems-manage-current-crisis>.

⁴⁶ Yassine, M. (2024). The al-Sajjad card, Hezbollah’s new weapon, *L’Orient Le Jour*, retrieved from : <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1369441/the-al-sajjad-card-hezbollahs-new-weapon.html>.

⁴⁷ Young, M. (2025). “Lebanon’s New Breed of Drug Barons. Carnegie Endowment for Peace”, retrieved from: <https://carnegieendowment.org/middle-east/diwan/2025/03/lebanons-new-breed-of-drug-barons?lang=en>.

⁴⁸ Hochet-Bodin, N. Deux, A. and Bensimon, C. (2025). How Hezbollah raises funds in West Africa, *Le Monde*, retrieved from: https://www.lemonde.fr/en/le-monde-africa/article/2024/10/12/how-hezbollah-raises-funds-in-west-africa_6729206_124.html#.

⁴⁹ Giambertoni, M. (2025). “Hezbollah’s Networks in Latin America”, *RAND*, retrieved from: https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/perspectives/PEA3500/PEA3585-1/RAND_PEA3585-1.pdf.

Iran's financing of Hezbollah is closely tied to its strategic interest in undermining prospects for Israeli-Palestinian peace. As Matthew Levitt notes, Iran not only funds Hezbollah but also channels funds to Hamas through this group, illustrating Tehran's broader interest in instrumentalizing the Palestinian question to cultivate regional legitimacy, allowing it to position itself as the principal defender of the "resistance" against Israel.⁵⁰

Following the war in the Gaza Strip and, more broadly, the region, however, the intensification of sanctions against Iran, the regime change in Syria, and the general weakening of both Iran and the rest of its "Axis of Resistance" have begun to erode Hezbollah's financial autonomy, bringing about the contraction of its parallel governance structures as a direct result. As this process is ongoing, a window of opportunity opens up in front of the Lebanese state to reassert its control over economic regulation and social welfare provisions, gradually reclaiming authority that had long been outsourced to Hezbollah.

The tightening of Hezbollah's budget has also entailed a delay in the payment of its salaries, a reduction in subsidies, and the erosion of its patronage networks. In this context Hezbollah's inability to maintain its previous welfare system reduces its positionality in its Shi'a strongholds.⁵¹

Financial leverage has reinforced this dynamic. The Central Bank's July 2025 decree, banning dealings with Hezbollah's al-Qard al-Hasan network, effectively severed the group's domestic funding channels.⁵² At the same time, the IMF-linked reforms on banking secrecy and debt restructuring have tied international assistance to complete transparency.

Diplomatic relations

Washington's special envoy, Tom Barrack, has turned financial leverage into diplomatic momentum, linking IMF disbursements to verified demilitarization benchmarks too. The collapse of the Iranian and Syrian corridors further isolates Hezbollah. For decades, the group's resilience depended on two lifelines: Syrian-controlled smuggling routes that enabled the movement of fighters, cash and goods, and Iranian supply chains that sustained Hezbollah's military capacity. With Syria's new leadership under President Ahmed al-Sharaa closing smuggling routes to and from Lebanon, Hezbollah's capacity of free movement across borders diminished (although some remnants are still operating due to porous borders and in the face of ongoing instability in Syria⁵³). Simultaneously, Iran's capacity to (re)stock arms has weakened under sanctions and internal unrest. Together, these changes sever Hezbollah from both its territorial movement and its primary foreign patron, forcing it into an unprecedented level of isolation within Lebanon.^{54 55}

⁵⁰ Levitt, M. (2005). "Hezbollah Finances: Funding the party of God", *Washington Institute*, retrieved from: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/hezbollah-finance-funding-party-god>.

⁵¹ Kishore, S. (2025). "Hezbollah's Collapse Is Lebanon's Opportunity." *Lawfare*, 21 September 2025, retrieved from: <https://www.lawfaremedia.org/article/hezbollah-s-collapse-is-lebanon-s-opportunity>.

⁵² Houssari, N. (2025). "Lebanon's Central Bank Bans Transactions with Hezbollah Financial Affiliate." *Arab News*, 15 July 2025, retrieved from: <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2608180/middle-east>.

⁵³ Sharawi, A. (2025). "The Quiet Return of Hezbollah's smuggling Networks in Syria", *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, retrieved from: <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2025/10/01/the-quiet-return-of-hezbollahs-smuggling-network-in-syria/>.

⁵⁴ Institute for the Study of War (2025). "Iran update", 10 November 2025, retrieved from: <https://understandingwar.org/research/middle-east/iran-update-november-10-2025/>.

⁵⁵ Reuters (2025). "Hezbollah chief says group lost its supply route through Syria", retrieved from: <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/hezbollah-chief-says-group-lost-its-supply-route-through-syria-2024-12-14/>.

Gulf states historically invested in Lebanon's banking, real estate, tourism, and service sectors, creating mutual benefits. Gulf capital sought out opportunities while Lebanon's economy benefitted from cash flows.

Moreover, Lebanon has long served as "the cultural hub" for the Arab world in the fields of tourism, education, and art. Its interaction between Arab and Western cultures and its liberal market economy is highly compatible with the Gulf's vision of the region. In their report, Elie Al Hindy and Stephanie Aboud argue that "the Gulf's vision and the region's success and advancement cannot be fully achieved without Lebanon being an important part of it", emphasizing that Lebanon is in the second tier of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and the latter cannot be achieved without a stable and peaceful Lebanon.⁵⁶

Lebanon's stability is viewed as part of the Gulf states' broader regional security interests: a failed or chaotic Lebanon could destabilise their neighbouring countries, re-opening channels for rival powers such as Iran and negatively affect the ambitions of Gulf countries via spill-over effects.

That said, there is a generational shift in Gulf leadership. Younger rulers are less emotionally connected to Lebanon and are more focused on high-priority strategic objectives, less willing to devote resources to foreign countries unless investments serve their own interests. Hence, Gulf reconstruction tenders, valued at \$5 billion, are conditional on a continued disarmament progress.⁵⁷ European countries are also following suit. France pledged €100 million (£86 million) for support of the Lebanese Armed Forces, which is contingent on making progress with disarming Hezbollah. Gulf states, notably Saudi Arabia and the UAE, have linked future large-scale aid to similar progress. Qatar contributed \$60 million (£47 million) for military salaries and equipment without formal preconditions. Additional pledges include Iraq's \$20 million (£16 million) and the Arab Fund's \$120 million (£94 million) for reconstruction projects. These commitments show broad international willingness to invest, but emphasize security and political reforms for the most part.

Future scenarios⁵⁸

Formal recognition of Israel remains politically impossible in Lebanon in the near future. Nevertheless, state institutions can engage pragmatically through technical, security, and economic channels when shielded from symbolic normalization, with the 2022 maritime boundary agreement providing a functional precedent. Any Lebanon-Israel arrangement would most likely take the form of a Structured Non-Belligerence Agreement (SNBA), rather than a full peace treaty, combining security understandings, economic cooperation, and U.S.- or UN-backed oversight.

- *Security and border management:* Revised UNSCR 1701 enforcement mechanisms could be codified, with the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) maintaining authority south of the Litani river, verified by a U.S.-led monitoring body. Israeli operational freedom clauses could be quietly acknowledged, triggered only by the LAF's enforcement failures.

⁵⁶ Al Hindy, E. and Abboud, S. (2025). "The Indispensable but Reluctant Role of Gulf States in Lebanon's Revival", *Konrad Adenauer Stiftung*, retrieved from: <https://www.kas.de/en/web/libanon/single-title/-/content/the-indispensable-but-reluctant-role-of-gulf-states-in-lebanon-s-revival>.

⁵⁷ Chouayfati, P. (2025). "Gulf States Investing for a Lebanon Without Hezbollah's Guns", *The Beirut*, 7 October 2025, retrieved from: <https://www.thebeiruter.com/article/gulf-states-investing-for-a-lebanon-without-hezbollah%E2%80%99s-guns/223>.

⁵⁸ Most analysts see the first two scenarios as forming a spectrum of likely outcomes, describing Lebanon's future as one of "hybrid calm: strategic quiet with tactical friction." (4))

- *Economic and energy cooperation:* Maritime coordination could expand beyond gas extraction to include electricity interconnection, offshore infrastructure protection, and escrow-based revenue mechanisms to prevent the diversion of funds.
- *Diplomatic engagement:* No embassies, flags, or symbolic recognition would be involved. Instead, permanent technical liaison offices could operate under U.S./UN cover, using trilateral formats (Lebanon-Israel-U.S.) to avoid bilateral symbolism.

The arrangement would be explicitly framed as a sovereignty-restoration agreement rather than normalization with Israel, presented domestically as enabling reconstruction and preventing war. Such an approach delivers security and economic dividends without political rupture, mirroring the functional logic of the Abraham Accords while adapting to specific Lebanese political and ideological constraints, and keeping the door open for gradual normalization if conditions evolve.

Lebanon's trajectory could follow one of several paths: (1) Managed Rapprochement, with progressive Hezbollah disarmament, full LAF control to the border, and limited Israel-Lebanon maritime coordination; (2) Contained Deconfliction, where the ceasefire endures, disarmament halts north of the Litani river, and reforms proceed slowly; or (3) Renewed Escalation, with Hezbollah rearming via external funding, Israeli forceful response, and the collapse of equilibrium. Currently, Lebanon's status is perceived to lie between contained deconfliction and renewed escalation, reflecting both fragile state institutions and the ongoing influence of non-state actors.

4.2 Syria: Between fragmentation and rival reconstruction

The fall of Bashar al-Assad and the rise of an interim government under Ahmed al-Sharaa' have reordered the scene in Syria. Iran's retreat has prompted Turkey to assert patronage and Israel to conduct preventive deterrence operations in the south of Syria.⁵⁹ At the same time, the establishment of a permanent U.S. base to be built near Damascus – formalised in November 2025 during al-Sharaa's visit to the White House – has added a new layer to the regional balance. On the societal level, "the Syrian youth generation has become more realistic in its outlook. It no longer seeks grand ideological slogans, but rather employment, security, and essential services."^{60 61}

Governance challenges

Since Assad's fall and subsequent fleeing from Syria in late 2024, the country has entered a transitional phase with efforts to rebuild state institutions. In October 2025, the first parliamentary elections since Assad's ouster created a 210-member assembly, partly elected and partly appointed, as a step toward restoring stable political life amid post-war displacement. The interim government, led by al-Sharaa, introduced a provisional constitution and a multi-year roadmap for broader elections and institutional reconstruction. Economic governance bodies, including the Syrian Development Fund and the Supreme Council for Economic Development, have been set up to coordinate reconstruction and attract foreign direct investment. These developments signal a cautious move toward political pluralism, although challenges remain.

The current governance landscape in Syria is profoundly fragmented. Years of conflict since the outbreak of the civil war in 2011 have produced localized forms of legitimacy, competing centres of authority, and asymmetric visions for the future of the state. Sectarian and ethnic identities – shaped by decades of authoritarian rule – continue to structure political expectations and fears across the country. Assad's "Alawitization" of the military and security sectors entrenched the association between regime survival and communal survival, deepening sectarian cleavages that now define the post-conflict order.

Sectarian fragmentation: Alawites, Druze and legacies of the conflict

In today's landscape, the Alawite community along the coastal region finds itself politically marginalized despite having long served as the backbone of Assad's security apparatus. This shift intensified local tensions. In March 2025, following an ambush, clashes erupted between the HTS forces and Alawite "Assad regime loyalists", leading to mass "revenge

⁵⁹Plunkett, S. (2025). "Turkey Expands into the Middle East Void", *The Soufan Center*, 23 October 2025, retrieved from: <https://thesoufancenter.org/intelbrief-2025-october-23/>.

⁶⁰ Reuters (2025). "US military to establish presence at Damascus airbase, sources say", retrieved from: <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/us-military-establish-presence-damascus-airbase-sources-say-2025-11-06/>.

⁶¹ Interview with Muhammad Chalati, by Yasmine Tlass, September 2025.

killings” of 1,500 Alawite civilians.⁶² Al-Sharaa vowed to hold accountable those responsible and a first trial was held in mid-November 2025.⁶³

In the South, the Druze of Suwayda now insist on preserving their margin of self-governance, with some even calling for complete independence. This demand resulted in violent clashes between the Druze and HTS forces; then between the Druze and Bedouin tribes in July 2025, resulting in over 1000 deaths, and an ongoing siege on Suwayda. This crisis risks the long-term fragmentation of Southern Syria and the solidification of the crisis along the current lines of clashes.⁶⁴

Kurdish autonomy and regional entanglements

Claims of autonomy are not exclusive to the Druze community in Syria. The Kurdish movement – organized under the Democratic Autonomous Region of Northeast Syria (DAANES) – has long pursued self-rule, and the prospect of a future Kurdistan. During the years of conflict, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) were the U.S. and the UK’s most reliable on-the-ground partner in the fight against ISIS. This cooperation allowed the Kurds to have territorial control over strategic areas in Syria – Turkish borders, access routes to Iraq, vital trade, energy and security corridors, and the control of 95% of the country’s oil and gas resources.

For Turkey, however, Kurdish self-rule along its southern border is considered a threat to its own national stability. Ankara has framed any form of Kurdish political, administrative or security control as an extension of the PKK terrorist threat, prompting successive incursions on these SDF-ruled areas.

Despite these pressures, in October 2025, the SDF agreed to integrate into the Syrian National Army, within three consolidated divisions, instead of individually. This is an important step toward state reconstruction, but its implementation remains uncertain.

HTS and a fragmented central authority

Beyond the challenge of centralizing power amid Druze and Kurdish autonomy claims, the HTS government also struggles with an equally serious problem: its inability to discipline and unify its own factions.

When Hay’at Tahrir Al Sham (HTS) – a rebel armed group with jihadist origins and historic links to Al-Qaeda – assumed power in December 2024, one of its earliest peacebuilding initiatives was the attempted integration of rebel factions into a unified national army. The goal was to consolidate power and present a coherent security apparatus, yet this effort stalled in the absence of a genuine disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process. A year after the collapse of the Assad regime, the apparatus is composed of multiple armed sub-factions, foreign fighter contingents, and local militias with varying agendas –

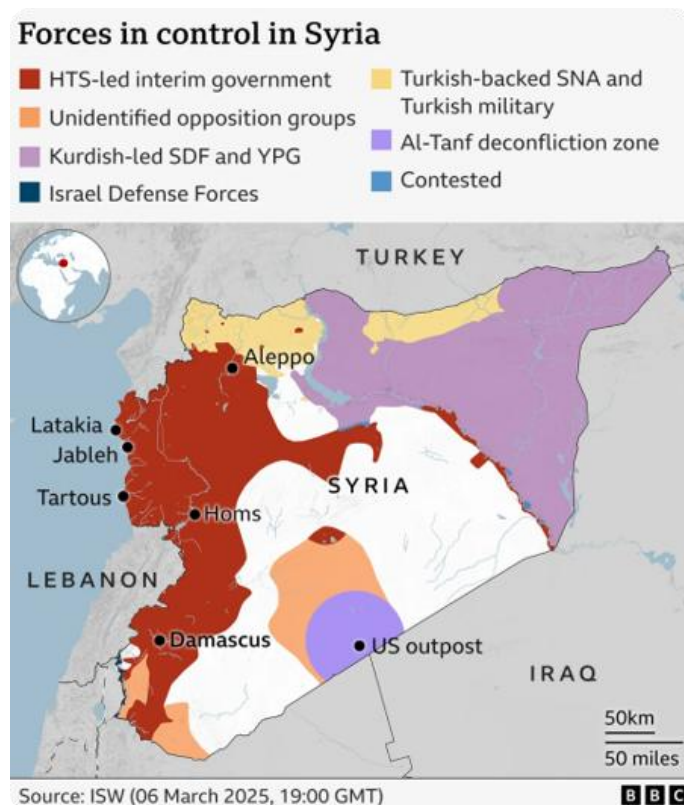
⁶²Reuters (2025). “Syrian forces massacred 1,500 Alawites. The chain of command led to Damascus”, retrieved from: <https://www.reuters.com/investigations/syrian-forces-massacred-1500-alawites-chain-command-led-damascus-2025-06-30/>.

⁶³ Reuters (2025). “Syria opens first trial over coastal violence after Assad's fall”, retrieved from: <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/syria-opens-first-trial-over-coastal-violence-after-assads-fall-2025-11-18/>.

⁶⁴Rankin, J. (2025). ‘Tense calm’ returns to Syria’s Sweida province after week of deadly violence”, *The Guardian*, accessed on 23 November 2025, retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jul/20/tense-calm-syria-sweida-province-week-deadly-violence-bedouin-druze>.

some more pragmatic and willing to adapt to Al-Sharaa's more progressive engagement with the West, others rather rooted in and adhering to hard-line Islamist ideology.

This persistent fragmentation illustrates structural weaknesses in authority, service-delivery, and overall state legitimacy (see Map 1. Forces in control in Syria). These weaknesses complicate any transition to more centralised state authority, increase the risk of renewed disintegration, and make the broader Syrian governance settlement more fragile.



Map 1. Forces in control in Syria. *Source:* BBC.

Regional visions and implications for de-confliction

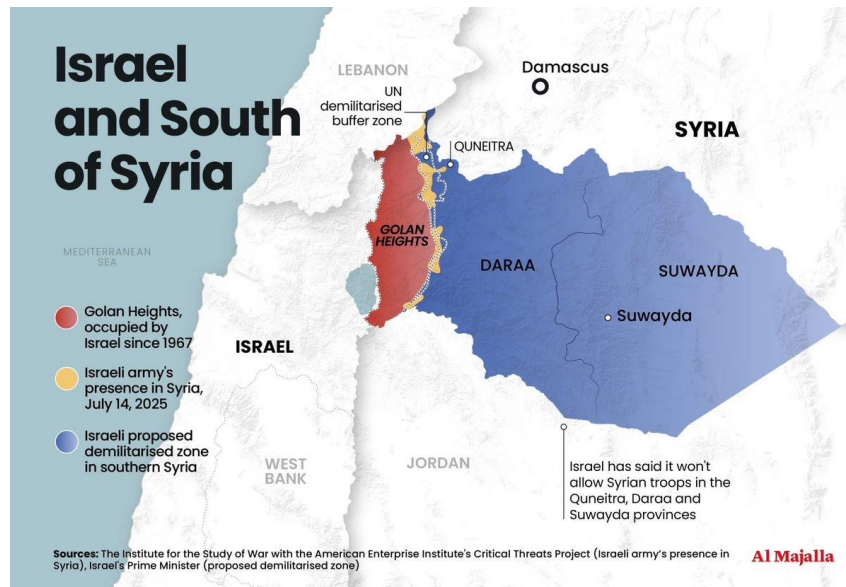
These dynamics intersect with competing visions for Syria and the Levant region: Turkey seeks to contain Kurdish influence, Gulf states prioritize containing Iran, while Israel seeks to protect itself and minorities from any spill-over effects.

Any attempt at an Abraham Accords 2.0 framework involving Syria would thus depend on a stable, coherent, and de-conflicted Syrian state capable of coordinating on borders, reconstruction, counterterrorism, and regional economic integration. In this context, the current fragmentation of governance in Syria is the primary obstacle, and addressing it is central to preventing renewed conflict and enabling long-term regional cooperation.

Security environment

Israel's doctrine of maintaining a proactive buffer zone now extends 10-15 kilometres (6-9 miles) inside Syrian territory. Air and artillery strikes in Damascus (July 2025) and Suwayda demonstrate a shift from reactive containment to pre-emptive control (see Map 2. Israel and South of Syria). The CSIS (2025) describes this as "security through denial rather than dialogue."

The Druze communities of southern Syria, the Kurds and other minorities in the north, and the Alawites along the northern shores now coordinate with Israel in maintaining local stability. Beyond the communal level, it has also become evident that, on the national scale, “indirect” coordination on border management under broader regional frameworks sponsored by major powers cannot be ruled out.⁶⁵ Security discussions between Israel and Syria are currently at an impasse, as Israel maintains that withdrawal from the southern buffer zone would only be possible under a full peace agreement, which Syria is not presently willing to negotiate.⁶⁶



Map 2. Israel and South of Syria. *Source:* Al Majalla.

On the prospect of a de-confliction agreement between Israel and Syria emerging, an interviewee mentioned that such an agreement, under American sponsorship, has become a “necessity” rather than a “strategic gain for Syria”, as it could help regulate the extent of intervention in Syria and confine it to ensuring Israel’s security. However, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu insists on attaining a full peace deal, not a partial agreement, which seems to be problematic for Damascus. A full peace deal would imply accepting the status of the contested Golan Heights. Israel’s efforts in achieving a full peace deal also stems from its effort to ensure that any withdrawal does not leave its border region exposed to hostilities in the future.⁶⁷

Turkey’s ascendancy

Ankara’s influence in Syria rests on economic power, military presence, and ideological reach. Hosting over three million Syrian refugees, Turkey portrays itself as a humanitarian protector while consolidating political leverage with the HTS government. The recent Education Cooperation Agreement (May 2025), which aligns Syrian curricula with Turkish standards and introduces the Turkish language in Syrian schools, exemplifies what scholars

⁶⁵ Interview with Muhammad Chalati, by Yasmine Tlass, September 2025.

⁶⁶ The Times of Israel (2025). Report: Israel-Syria talks at dead end, with Jerusalem only willing to withdraw troops for full peace deal. https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/report-israel-syria-talks-at-dead-end-with-jerusalem-only-willing-to-withdraw-troops-for-full-peace-deal/.

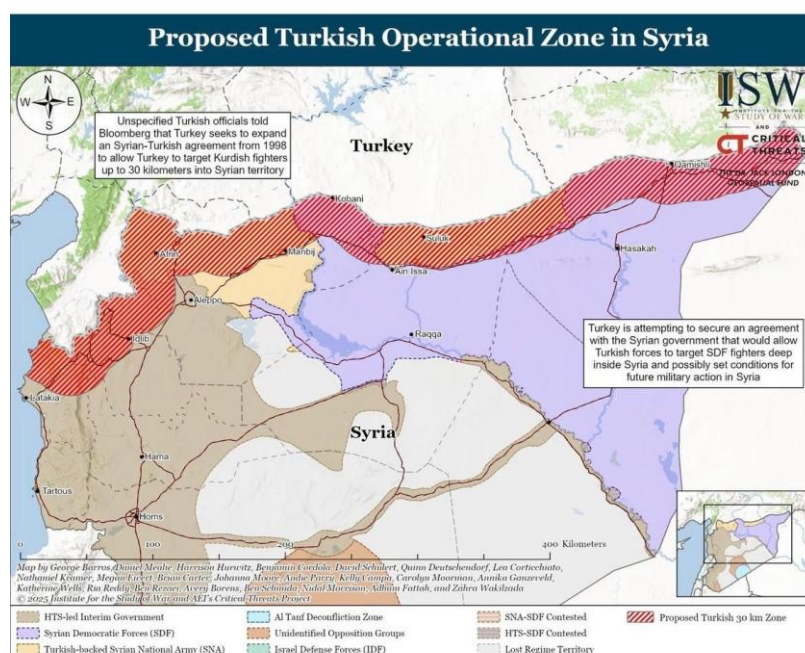
⁶⁷ Interview with Tawfeeq Othman, by Yasmine Tlass, November 2025.

label “Turkification”.⁶⁸ To some, this approach underlies Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s vision of a neo-Ottoman project, as well as the possibility of a renewed political Islam:

“The fate of this neo-Ottoman project is clear to anyone with a basic understanding of history – except, perhaps, for Islamist extremists who share this vision in their quest to establish a caliphate. As the whole world now recognizes, political Islam has become a danger to all, and Turkey today is among its strongest supporters.”⁶⁹

Militarily, Turkey plans to supply Damascus with armoured vehicles, drones, and artillery under a Turkey-Syria Security Agreement, which also allows Turkish forces to conduct cross-border operations against Kurdish militants and grants basing rights in Homs Province (see Map 3. Proposed Turkish Operational Zone in Syria). This consolidates Turkey as Syria’s new dominant patron.⁷⁰

While Washington continues to coordinate with the SDF on counter-ISIS operations, its strategic priority has shifted toward stabilizing the new Syrian government and managing regional de-confliction, rather than supporting long-term Kurdish autonomy. Nevertheless, its continued reliance on the SDF – combined with its new strategic base near Damascus – has exacerbated Turkish anxieties. This dynamic produces renewed friction as Ankara seeks to roll back Kurdish self-rule while the U.S. tries to prevent escalation, raising the risk of Turkish troops clashing directly with U.S. partners, or even with U.S. forces themselves. This places the Kurdish question at the heart of the region’s de-confliction challenges.



Map 3. Proposed Turkish Operational Zone in Syria. *Source:* Institute for the Study of War.

⁶⁸ Sana (2025). “Syrian-Turkish agreement to advance educational sector”, 30 October 2025, retrieved from: <https://sana.sy/en/syria-and-the-world/2275069/>.

⁶⁹ Interview conducted with Suhail Zebyan, by Yasmine Tlass, September 2025.

⁷⁰ Bloomberg (2025). “Turkey Plans to Supply Arms to Syria, Seeks Wider Deal on Kurds”, *Bloomberg*, 17 October 2025, retrieved from: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2025-10-17/turkey-plans-to-supply-arms-to-syria-seeks-wider-deal-on-kurds>.

Ankara-Jerusalem friction and the U.S. balance

With Iran significantly weakened, Turkey and Israel have become the two primary regional powers and competitors. This clash was depicted in three different instances in 2025 alone. Israeli strikes south of Homs hit a warehouse (or multiple warehouses) containing Turkish missiles and air defence systems transferred to the site in September 2025. Israel hit Syrian bases scoped by Turkey in east Syria in April 2025, and an Israeli airborne raid near Damascus recovered surveillance equipment, allegedly planted by Turkey in August 2025.⁷¹ The authors of this report classify the status between the countries as a Foreign Policy Crisis (FPC). An FPC refers to a situation that (a) emanates from a single event, such as a border dispute, economic boycott, or alleged mistreatment of a minority group; which (b) poses a threat to the core interests and high-priority values of a state's decision-making unit; which (c) restricts the time in the period available for taking decisions, before the situation becomes irreversible; and which (d) heightens the probability of military hostilities before the threat is overcome. In this context both countries perceive these events to qualify as an FPC. The U.S.' establishment of a base near Damascus could balance this new friction.⁷² Indeed, a stabilizing U.S. presence institutes points toward a significant opening for a scenario of de-confliction with Israel.

The ripe moment: Economic reconstruction as an incentive for peace

Syria's economy has been decimated by more than a decade of conflict and sanctions, erasing nearly four decades of development. The war has cut GDP by over half compared with its pre-2011 level, with cumulative losses estimated at around \$800 billion (£624 billion), and the cost of reconstruction projected at roughly \$216 billion (£169 billion), nearly ten times the country's 2024 output. 90% of Syrians now live in poverty, one in four is unemployed, and basic infrastructure – especially energy, housing, water, and health facilities – has suffered extensive damage, leaving millions dependent on humanitarian aid and struggling to meet basic needs.

Syria's reconstruction market, estimated at \$400 billion (£299 billion), has attracted a diverse set of regional and European actors, with Turkey and the Gulf states positioning themselves first to shape this period of reconstruction. Turkish companies have expanded across northern Syria, with bilateral trade having reached \$1.9 billion (£1.4 billion) in the first seven months of 2025.⁷³

In May 2025, the World Bank announced that Saudi Arabia and Qatar paid off all of Syria's outstanding debt.⁷⁴ At the ninth edition of the Future Investment Initiative held in Riyadh, President Al-Sharaa revealed that major Saudi companies have already commenced projects worth \$7 billion (£5.2 billion), while leading Qatari firms have begun investing in the Damascus Airport and in power generation projects.⁷⁵ The UAE has signalled pledges of

⁷¹ Beeri, T. (2025). "Airstrikes Across Syria - 02 April, 2025", *Alma research and education center*, accessed on 23 November 2025, retrieved from: <https://israel-alma.org/airstrikes-across-syria-02-april-2025/>.

⁷² Reuters (2025). "Exclusive: US military to establish presence at Damascus airbase, sources say", 7 November 2025, retrieved from: <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/us-military-establish-presence-damascus-airbase-sources-say-2025-11-06/>.

⁷³ Atlantic Council (2025). "Is a new era of Turkey-Syria economic engagement on the horizon?", retrieved from: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/is-a-new-era-of-turkey-syria-economic-engagement-on-the-horizon/>.

⁷⁴ AP (2025). "World Bank says Saudi Arabia and Qatar have paid off Syria's outstanding debt", retrieved from: <https://apnews.com/article/syria-world-bank-saudi-arabia-qatar-debt-007d228b56cd1a42cc1daaf1e662cfec>.

⁷⁵ Trade Arabia (2025). "Syria secures \$28bn investments; Gulf states lead", retrieved from: <https://www.tradearabia.com/News/329825/Syria-secures-%2428bn-investments%3B-Gulf-states-lead>.

significant investment in Syria, extending to the development of the port in Tartous worth \$800 million (£598 million). There is a consensus among analysts that these investments also serve as a strategy to prevent the resurgence of Iranian influence in Syria.^{76 77}

The reopening of the Turkey-Syria-Jordan corridor, agreed at the Amman Summit, adds another avenue for economic recovery, reviving the Levant's logistics arteries. Within this framework, Israel exerts indirect influence via energy interconnection and infrastructure security, particularly in southern Syria. Such engagement could proceed relatively smoothly if accompanied by serious improvements in the economic and security spheres.

Despite their domestic constraints, both Saudi Arabia and Turkey view Syria as a strategic priority, but they approach it differently: The Saudis lack the military and strategic capabilities to match Turkey, while Ankara does not possess the financial leverage Riyadh can wield. As a result, Saudi Arabia's investment can be viewed as also aiming to contain Turkish influence in Syria.⁷⁸

This dynamic intersects with broader realities on the ground. As one interviewee noted, "had the economic situation been different, one might have seen resistance movements forming along the border," referring to how deteriorating livelihoods in Daraa, and Syria in general, have shaped the pragmatic acceptance of Israeli incursions. This convergence of economic pragmatism and security fatigue indicates what mediation literature refers to as "the ripe moment", and it underpins the emerging logic of a de-confliction, brokered by the U.S. Local actors understand that stability is a prerequisite for economic recovery, even if stability itself is externally mediated. Another interviewee emphasized that "there can be no economy without real social and communal security," underscoring the inseparability of reconstruction from local, regional and international perceptions of safety and order. Consequently, any economic engagement in Syria depends on a minimum threshold of stability; as one respondent put it, "even if exploitative, it nonetheless contributes to that stability."

Future scenarios

Full normalization between Syria and Israel remains politically impossible in the near term. Domestic instability, unresolved territorial disputes over the Golan Heights, and external influence from actors including the U.S., Turkey, and Gulf states prevent the emergence of classic bilateral peace agreements. Instead, Syria's engagement in regional systems is likely to follow hybrid, modular arrangements combining security understandings, economic cooperation, and third-party guarantees under U.S. (and potentially UK) sponsorship. The most plausible is a U.S.-brokered Conditional De-confliction and Reconstruction Compact (CDRC), which links Syrian restraint and compliance to phased economic reintegration.

- *Security and border management*: A multi-layered architecture could include formalized buffer zones, rules of engagement in southern Syria, and indirect coordination via U.S. and UN mechanisms. Israeli kinetic operations would be gradually reduced contingent on Syrian compliance. Conditional security agreements

⁷⁶ Middle East Monitor (2025). "The Gulf states are building a regional order, and Syria is its first benefactor", retrieved from: <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20250807-the-gulf-states-are-building-a-regional-order-and-syria-is-its-first-benefactor/>.

⁷⁷ Henry Rogers (2025). "Why is Saudi Arabia Investing in Syria?", *New Lines Institute*, retrieved from: <https://newlinesinstitute.org/geo-economics/why-is-saudi-arabia-investing-in-syria/>.

⁷⁸ Bokhari, K. (2025). "Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Syrian Reconstruction", *Forbes*, retrieved from: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kamranbokhari/2025/08/15/saudi-arabia-turkey-and-syrian-reconstruction/>.

could also enable Turkey and Israel to delineate influence zones, with U.S. oversight mitigating escalatory risk.

- *Economic integration:* Reconstruction-for-restraint links phased sanctions relief to militia control, border stabilization, and counter-terrorism benchmarks. Priority investments in southern Syria would reduce incentives for proxy mobilization. Syria could be integrated into regional energy transit routes and trade corridors connecting Jordan, Turkey, and the Gulf, with Israeli participation limited to infrastructure security and indirect energy cooperation.
- *Diplomatic engagement:* Short of bilateral recognition, Syria could participate in multilateral regional frameworks under U.S. guarantorship, embedding the country in regional systems through behaviour-based incentives rather than political transformation.

This approach shifts normalization from ideology to behaviour, leveraging economic and security incentives to promote gradual stability. It allows Israel and regional actors to extract de-confliction and operational predictability without demanding formal political concessions, while providing Syria a path for economic reintegration.

Future trajectories for Syria under this framework can be understood through several plausible scenarios: (1) Stabilized De-confliction, in which U.S. forces in Damascus act as a stabilizing presence while Turkey and Israel delineate zones of influence, keeping politics frozen but quiet; (2) Conditional Security Agreement, where Syria consents to Turkish deployments in exchange for phased Israeli pullback under U.S. mediation, reducing the risk of escalation; (3) Escalatory Relapse, in which miscalculations between Turkey and Israel or internal destabilization could reignite hostilities and potentially trigger broader regional conflict; and (4) High-Risk, High-Reward Corridor, in which a Western-backed Daraa-Suwayda-SDF belt emerges under Israeli protection, balancing local autonomy, security guarantees, and regional leverage while containing both Turkish and Iranian influence.

4.3 Comparative matrix: Lebanon and Syria post-2025

For Lebanon, progress in maritime border demarcation, energy cooperation, and the potential weakening of Hezbollah's influence indicate movement from de-confliction toward gradual, conditional rapprochement, contingent on sustained LAF authority and U.S.-mediated oversight. For Syria, whose sovereignty remains fragmented, initial steps toward managed de-confliction may be achieved through security coordination, phased reconstruction diplomacy, and behaviour-based incentives that tie economic reintegration to militia control and compliance with regional security norms. The emerging dynamics in both countries confirm that their respective relations with Israel are evolving from quasi-isolation toward pragmatic, modular interaction, prioritizing security and economic cooperation over formal political recognition.

Actor	Security Objective	Diplomatic Objective	Economic Objective
Israel	Deny Iran and/or Hezbollah's return; maintain buffer zones	Codify right to protect its border region from hostilities; safeguard vulnerable communities such as the Druze	Secure borders and energy corridors
Lebanon	Extend LAF control south of Litani river; prevent spill-over; disarm Hezbollah	Engage through U.S.-mediated technical channels	Get access to reconstruction and energy-related financial aid
Syria (Interim)	Control militias; avoid decentralization	Achieve recognition and sanctions relief	Post-war economic reconstruction; reopen trade and energy routes
Turkey	Maintain northern military foothold in north Syria; expand soft power influence; counter Kurds; reconstruct Syria	Institutionalize regional leadership; coordinate with U.S./Israel on security	Integrate into Syrian markets and reconstruction projects
U.S.	Contain Iranian influence; prevent escalation between Turkey and Israel	Broker managed de-confliction; guarantee compliance mechanisms	Tie aid and reconstruction support to reform and security arrangements
Iran	Preserve proxy influence	Maintain symbolic deterrence	Circumvent sanctions
Gulf States	Fund stability; limit Iranian and Turkish influence	Reinforce U.S./Israel partnership and regional stability	Channel investment via state institutions and reconstruction programmes

4.4 Key risks in Lebanon and Syria

The pathway for UK engagement under an “Abraham Accords 2.0” framework, particularly in Lebanon and Syria, offers significant strategic benefits, however, it is exposed to a range of political, security, legal, and reputational risks. The early identification of such risks is essential for calibrating engagement, defining red lines, and preserving strategic optionality.

UK entrapment in U.S.-Israel-Turkey escalation in Syria. The framework assumes that the United States can effectively manage de-confliction between Israel and Turkey in Syria.

However, structural tensions between Israel and Turkey – exacerbated by Turkish military entrenchment and Israel’s preventive doctrine – create a risk of escalation. UK participation in U.S.-led coordination mechanisms or intelligence-sharing could inadvertently draw London into a crisis. While tensions are persistent, all parties currently seek to avoid open conflict, rendering its likelihood medium. The impact, however, would be high, potentially exposing UK forces, straining NATO cohesion, and forcing London into politically sensitive choices between Ankara and Jerusalem. Mitigation measures include limiting UK military engagement to enabling and advisory roles, insisting on explicit de-confliction mandates in any UK-U.S. cooperation, maintaining bilateral crisis hotlines with both Turkey and Israel, and defining clear UK red lines for disengagement, should escalation thresholds be crossed.

Collapse of political consensus in Lebanon. The framework assumes gradual convergence around Lebanese state sovereignty and the primacy of the LAF. This consensus, however, remains fragile. Economic deterioration, sectarian backlash, or Hezbollah’s reconstitution could fracture elite alignment, undermine the conditionality for reforms, and delegitimize UK-backed institutions. Given Lebanon’s structural vulnerabilities, this risk is medium-high in likelihood and high in impact, as a political collapse would stall demilitarization, undermine donor confidence, and expose the UK to accusations of backing a failed strategy. To mitigate this risk, UK assistance should be sequenced in small, reversible tranches tied to verified benchmarks. Policy should avoid over-personalization around individual leaders, parallel humanitarian channels should be preserved, and coordination with Gulf donors should be prioritized to prevent unilateral exposure.

HTS radicalization or fragmentation in Syria. The interim Syrian authority under HTS is treated as pragmatically adaptable. Yet internal factionalism, ideological relapse, or splintering could produce renewed jihadist violence or localized warlordism, undermining reconstruction and de-confliction efforts. The likelihood of this risk is medium, reflecting the uncertain and leader-dependent cohesion of HTS, while the potential impact is high, as radicalization could halt international engagement, trigger the snapback of sanctions, and discredit early Western and Gulf investments. Mitigation measures include conditioning UK engagement on verifiable governance and security reforms, supporting third-party monitoring of education, policing, and local administration, avoiding security-sector integration without a credible DDR process, and maintaining contingency plans for rapid disengagement or re-sanctioning.

UK reputational damage in Europe and the Global South. Deep alignment with a U.S.- and Israel-led framework carries the risk of portraying the UK as dismissive of humanitarian norms, Palestinian rights, or multilateral processes, particularly in Europe, the Arab world, and the Global South. The likelihood of reputational challenges is medium, as narrative contestation is already intense, while the impact is medium-high, potentially weakening UK influence in multilateral forums and constraining coalition-building. Mitigation strategies include pairing security alignment with visible humanitarian leadership, maintaining public commitment to international law and civilian protection, preserving UK policy distinctiveness within transatlantic alignment, and leveraging multilateral institutions to share burden and enhance legitimacy.

V. The United Kingdom's strategic outlook 2025-26

5.1 Why the Accords' expansion matters

The expansion of the Abraham Accords into Lebanon and Syria represents more than a regional political shift; it is a potential pivot point for broader Mediterranean and Eurasian stability. For London, the stakes are both economic and strategic.

Economic stakes are immediate and tangible. Around 85% of UK international freight by weight and 12-15% of global trade transit the Red Sea-Suez corridor⁷⁹, meaning instability along the Levantine littoral quickly feeds into UK prices and supply chains. Any disruption – whether through conflict, militia activity, or migration shocks – could delay energy deliveries, disrupt commerce, and inflate costs.

Strategic stakes are equally compelling. The UK's total exports and imports exceed £1.8 trillion annually⁸⁰, making open, predictable corridors from the Mediterranean to Central and South Asia crucial. A managed peace stretching from Casablanca to the Golan would mitigate the risk of proxy conflicts and enhance regional stability. Conversely, actors such as HTS, pro-Assad militias, ISIS remnants, and Iran-backed proxies could exploit governance vacuums, reigniting localized conflicts with cascading effects on Europe's doorstep.

The UK possesses unique advantages: diplomatic credibility, development expertise, and proven experience in security-sector reform. Recent operational cooperation with the United States in the Red Sea campaign (2024-25) reaffirmed London's capacity to be a serious strategic enabler. Embedding itself within a U.S.-led Abraham Accords 2.0 framework would allow the UK to act as a bridge between American assertiveness and European caution, safeguarding both regional stability and British interests.

5.2 UK policy options

London faces a strategic choice in how to engage with the Accords' expansion. Broadly, four approaches are available, each balancing risk, influence, and resource commitments.

Option A: Full alignment with U.S.-led Abraham Accords 2.0 would position the UK as a committed partner of Washington, leveraging diplomatic, defence, and development resources to shape outcomes. Strategically, it would maximize influence and credibility, but politically it risks criticism and could strain relations with Europe. Regionally, allies would welcome the UK's engagement, but adversaries may view it as interventionist. Trade-offs include balancing other priorities such as Ukraine, the Indo-Pacific, and domestic constraints.

⁷⁹ Department for Transport (2025). "Port freight annual statistics 2024: Route information", 17 December 2025, retrieved from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/port-freight-annual-statistics-2024/port-freight-annual-statistics-2024-route-information>.

⁸⁰ House of Commons Library (2025). "Trade in goods and services: economic indicators", retrieved from: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn02815>.

Option B: Conditional alignment with European safeguards would involve selective engagement, aligning with U.S. objectives only where multilateral safeguards are in place. It would reduce reputational and political risks and strengthen European coordination, albeit influence is more limited. Resource commitments are lighter, focusing on advisory roles, diplomatic posts, and technical support. Regional reaction is cautiously positive, but decision-making may be slower.

Option C: Offshore balancer / minimal engagement would maintain a low-profile presence through intelligence-sharing, naval overflights, and occasional diplomacy. This approach would conserve resources and limit domestic and international political exposure, but UK influence in this scenario would be minimal. Regional actors may perceive disengagement, and opportunity costs include missed economic and diplomatic openings.

Option D: Humanitarian-first, security-light approach would prioritize aid, reconstruction, and people-to-people programmes while minimizing direct security involvement. Strategically, this would enhance UK soft power and align with values-based diplomacy, however, it limits leverage over security and governance outcomes. Resources focus on development funding and diplomatic staffing, while regional reception is generally positive.

To ensure policy discipline, the UK's engagement should be guided by measurable benchmarks that indicate when to deepen, adjust, or exit involvement. These indicators protect against strategic drift and ensure accountability.

Domain	Indicator	Measurement	Decision Implication
Security (Lebanon)	LAF deployment south of Litani river;	Verified troop presence, patrol frequency, command authority;	Scale up assistance if sustained
	Reduction in Israel-Hezbollah incidents	Incident tracking over 6-12 months	Escalate diplomacy if trend reverses
Governance (Lebanon)	Enforcement of financial reforms	IMF benchmarks, central bank compliance	Pause funding if benchmarks missed
Security (Syria)	Stabilization of southern Syria	Reduction in Israeli strikes, militia activity	Advance de-confliction talks
Governance (Syria)	Functioning interim institutions	Local service delivery, budget execution	Conditional reconstruction access
Economic Integration	Energy and trade corridor activation	Operational pipelines, transit agreements	Encourage UK private sector entry

5.3 Implications for the United Kingdom

For the United Kingdom, the transformation of Arab-Israeli relations presents an opportunity to reclaim strategic relevance in the Middle East. The Abraham Accords in the aftermath of the war realignments in the Middle East now define the architecture of a shifting

regional order. The question is whether London will participate meaningfully in shaping its next phase.⁸¹

The UK's interests and long-standing ties place it in a uniquely advantageous position. As a historical power with enduring diplomatic, defence, and economic linkages, the UK retains both credibility and capability.⁸² Its operational participation alongside the United States in the Red Sea campaign against the Houthis (2024-25) demonstrated that, when aligned with Washington's strategic leadership, the UK can act as a decisive enabler rather than a bystander.

To remain relevant, the UK must anchor itself within the U.S.-led framework of the "Abraham Accords 2.0", serving as a bridge between Washington's assertive pragmatism and Europe's cautious multilateralism. Such positioning would allow London to translate American strategic momentum into European policy coherence, restoring its long-standing role as the trans-Atlantic bridge.

Practically, this means complementing U.S. security leadership with British diplomatic initiative: facilitating negotiations, supporting reconstruction diplomacy in fragile states such as Lebanon and Syria, and maintaining open communication channels between Brussels, Washington, and regional capitals. By doing so, the UK would add depth, continuity, and legitimacy to Western engagement in international matters, bridging the normative and political gap between Europe and the United States.⁸³

In this role lies the essence of modern British influence: stabilizing force in a region where power is shifting, but where trusted intermediaries remain indispensable.

5.4 UK Policy Priorities 2025-26

1. **Support conditional demilitarization in Lebanon:** Tie all British and multilateral assistance to verified LAF control south of the Litani river and continued dismantling of Hezbollah positions. Maintain liaison officers within the U.S.-chaired oversight cell and provide training in border management and defence auditing.
2. **Anchor reconstruction in state institutions:** Route donor funds through audited ministries; exclude NGOs linked to armed groups. Apply British procurement and financial-integrity standards to shape international assistance.
3. **Link energy to governance:** Back the Karish-Qana offshore-gas projects only once EITI-compliant transparency and LAF-security benchmarks are met. Frame British export credit as an incentive for reform, not a subsidy for risk.

⁸¹ Greenway, R. (2022). "The Abraham Accords Are an Opportunity for Our European Partners to Build a New Relationship with the Middle East", *Abraham Accords Peace Institute*, August 2022, retrieved from: <https://www.aapeaceinstitute.org/latest/robert-greenway-the-abraham-accords-are-an-opportunity-for-our-european-partners-to-build-a-new-relationship-with-the-middle-east>.

⁸² Council on Geostrategy (2024). "The Red Sea: Britain's Uncertain Link", *Council on Geostrategy*, February 2024, retrieved from: <https://www.geostrategy.org.uk/app/uploads/2024/02/The-Red-Sea--Britains-uncertain-linkGSPPP01.pdf>.

⁸³ CSIS (2025). "Making the U.S.-UK Special Relationship Fit for Purpose", *Center for Strategic & International Studies*, 15 July 2025, retrieved from: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/making-us-uk-special-relationship-fit-purpose>.

4. **Assist the U.S. to reduce Turkish-Israeli rivalry:** Establish a discreet UK-U.S. de-confliction mechanism for Syrian airspace and border incidents. Use British channels in Ankara and Jerusalem to reopen intelligence hotlines and agree “no-strike” lists for critical infrastructure.
5. **Promote conditional and accountable reconstruction:** Support reconstruction initiatives in Syria through conditional partnerships that uphold transparency, inclusivity, and secular governance principles. Promote independent monitoring of education and media to prevent sectarian indoctrination.
6. **Reinforce regional air- and missile-defence integration:** Contribute British technical support and maritime-domain awareness to CENTCOM’s sensor network, ensuring interoperability with NATO standards and compliance with humanitarian law.
7. **Maintain trans-Atlantic alignment with agency:** Publish a joint UK-U.S. non-paper on Northern-Track stabilization to frame policy. Britain should cooperate with Europe, not hide behind it.
8. **Invest in people-to-people legitimacy:** Expand vocational training and university exchanges in both Lebanon and Syria. Use Chevening and British Council programmes to foster youth networks that embody the dividends of peace.
9. **Ring-fence humanitarian access:** Establish a rapid-response fund to preserve cross-border aid flows during border closures or renewed hostilities.
10. **Prepare for success:** If Lebanon and Syria stabilize, support technical normalization projects, civil aviation, telecommunications, energy interconnection under U.S. auspices, positioning British firms as early entrants.

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