UOS Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities (UOSJSSH)
ISSN (P) 2224-2341, ISSN (E) 2310-0249
Volume: 9, (2) 2025, Pages (43-57)
Journal Homepage: https://uosjssh.su.edu.pk/

The Abraham Accords and Pakistan: Shifting alliances in a Changing Middle East

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Abstract:

The Abraham Accords signed in 2020 between Israel, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Bahrain—with subsequent participation by Sudan and Morocco—have marked a significant transformation in the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East. These normalization agreements signal a departure from the long-standing Arab consensus on conditioning ties with Israel on the resolution of the Palestinian issue. This paper explores the implications of these developments for Pakistan, a country with a historically strong position on Palestine and no formal diplomatic relations with Israel. The Abraham Accords have created a strategic realignment in the region, drawing key Gulf states closer to Israel and the United States, thereby shifting the regional power dynamics and potentially isolating countries like Pakistan that remain outside this framework. Pakistan faces a delicate balancing act: maintaining its traditional support for the Palestinian cause while navigating its economic and strategic ties with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. Additionally, growing Indo-Israeli cooperation, especially in defense and intelligence, adds further complexity to Pakistan's regional calculations. This paper argues that while Pakistan is unlikely to normalize relations with Israel in the near future due to domestic political considerations and ideological commitments, it cannot ignore the shifting regional alliances and must recalibrate its foreign policy to safeguard its strategic interests. The Abraham Accords, therefore, not only challenge the existing regional order but also present Pakistan with new diplomatic dilemmas in an increasingly multipolar Middle East.

Keywords: *Abraham Accords, Pakistan, Middle East, Israel, Palestine, GCC, regional alliances, normalization, Indo-Israeli relations, geopolitics*.

I. INTRODUCTION

In August 2020, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) became the first Gulf Arab nation to normalize diplomatic relations with Israel, followed closely by Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco. These landmark agreements—collectively known as the Abraham Accords—were brokered by the United States under the Trump administration and marked a historic shift in the Middle East's political and strategic architecture. The accords signify a departure from the decades-old Arab consensus that normalization with Israel would only follow the resolution of the Palestinian issue, particularly the establishment of a viable Palestinian state under a two-state solution framework. For countries like Pakistan, which has no diplomatic ties with Israel and a deeply embedded political and ideological commitment to the Palestinian cause, the Abraham Accords present both a strategic challenge and a diplomatic dilemma.

Pakistan's longstanding foreign policy toward Israel has been shaped by religious solidarity with Palestine, ideological affinity with the broader Muslim ummah, and concern for domestic political sensitivities. However, the normalization of ties between several Arab states and Israel has put Islamabad in a precarious position. It finds itself under increasing pressure to recalibrate its diplomatic posture in a region where former allies are now openly collaborating with a state Pakistan has refused to recognize since its inception. Furthermore, Pakistan's economic dependency on the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE, complicates its strategic calculus.

This paper explores the geopolitical, diplomatic, economic, and security implications of the Abraham Accords for Pakistan. It examines whether Islamabad can maintain its traditional stance or whether regional developments will compel a shift—either formal or informal—toward a more pragmatic engagement with Israel. As alliances evolve and power dynamics shift in the Middle East, Pakistan's response to the Abraham Accords will be a crucial indicator of how its foreign policy adapts to an increasingly multipolar and transactional global order.

II. Historical Background: Pakistan–Israel Relations

Since its inception in 1947, Pakistan has maintained a firm and consistent position of non-recognition toward the State of Israel. Rooted in religious solidarity with the Palestinian cause and aligned with the broader sentiments of the Muslim world, Pakistan's foreign policy vis-à-vis Israel has reflected both ideological and strategic calculations. Despite sporadic indirect contacts and brief diplomatic flirtations, Pakistan has historically refused to establish formal diplomatic relations with Israel, citing its commitment to the right of self-determination for Palestinians and its rejection of Israeli occupation of Arab lands.

In the early decades after independence, Pakistan emerged as one of the most vocal supporters of the Palestinian cause on international platforms such as the United Nations and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Pakistan's first Prime Minister, Liaquat Ali Khan, categorically rejected any notion of recognizing Israel, declaring that such a move would be a betrayal of the Islamic world (Ali, 1950). This position became deeply embedded in Pakistan's national narrative and foreign policy ethos. Throughout the Cold War, Pakistan aligned with the Arab bloc and supported the PLO under Yasser Arafat, contributing both diplomatic and humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian territories (Ahmad, 2013).

Nevertheless, over the decades, there have been moments of quiet diplomacy. During the 1980s and 1990s, intelligence-level interactions reportedly took place between Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and Israel's Mossad, largely centered around regional security and nuclear proliferation concerns (Riedel, 2012). A rare public diplomatic encounter occurred in 2005, when Pakistan's then-Foreign Minister Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri met Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom in Istanbul—a move facilitated by Turkey and encouraged by the United States (BBC News, September 1, 2005). The meeting sparked a domestic political uproar in Pakistan, leading then-President Pervez Musharraf to clarify that the engagement was exploratory and conditional on future developments in the Middle East peace process.

Islamabad's refusal to normalize ties with Israel has not only been driven by ideological convictions but also by domestic political realities. Public opinion in Pakistan has remained overwhelmingly sympathetic to the Palestinian cause, and Islamist political parties have

consistently used the issue as a rallying cry against perceived Western domination and secularism. Any hint of engagement with Israel has thus been politically risky, with significant backlash from religious scholars, civil society, and opposition groups (Khan, 2017).

However, this rigid posture has occasionally been tested by strategic pressures. Economic dependencies on Gulf states, shifting alliances in the Middle East, and India's growing closeness to Israel in the defense and intelligence domains have all nudged Pakistan to reassess its stance. Yet, even amid these pressures, Pakistan has remained steadfast, reiterating that it cannot establish relations with Israel unless a sovereign Palestinian state is established based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020).

Pakistan's historical position toward Israel serves as the foundation upon which its contemporary dilemmas are built. As the Abraham Accords reconfigure regional alignments, Pakistan is increasingly confronted with the challenge of reconciling its traditional policies with emerging geopolitical realities.

III. The Abraham Accords: Architecture and Immediate Outcomes

The Abraham Accords represent a watershed moment in Middle Eastern diplomacy, marking a formal normalization of relations between Israel and several Arab states. Signed initially between the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Israel on August 13, 2020, the Accords were later joined by Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco, with tacit backing from Saudi Arabia. The agreements signify a profound departure from the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002, which conditioned normalization with Israel on the establishment of a Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders (Shlaim, 2020).

The accords were brokered by the United States under the Trump administration, particularly spearheaded by Jared Kushner, who framed them as a strategic realignment intended to promote peace and economic cooperation in the region (Miller, 2021). The agreements were not only about diplomatic recognition; they also included provisions for economic collaboration, tourism, technology exchange, and defense cooperation. The UAE and Israel, for instance, quickly signed deals in sectors ranging from agriculture to artificial intelligence (United Nations, 2021).

While the Accords were hailed as a diplomatic triumph by their signatories and by Washington, they were met with criticism from Palestinian leaders who viewed them as a betrayal of the Palestinian cause. The normalization was seen as effectively rewarding Israel while it continued to expand settlements in the West Bank and maintain control over East Jerusalem (Al Jazeera, September 15, 2020). Nonetheless, for the Gulf states involved, the agreements were framed as pragmatic decisions made in the interest of national security and economic modernization.

From a strategic standpoint, the Abraham Accords reflect a shared concern among the Gulf States and Israel regarding Iran's regional influence. The Iranian threat—ranging from its nuclear program to its regional proxies like Hezbollah and the Houthis—served as a unifying factor that made security cooperation between Israel and Gulf Arab states more palatable (Riedel, 2020). The Accords also opened the door to advanced U.S. arms sales to the UAE, including the F-35 fighter jet, further indicating their strategic underpinning (Defence News, Sepetember 10, 2020).

In addition, the normalization agreements revealed new priorities among Arab leaders. Economic diversification, technological innovation, and reduced dependency on oil exports are central to

long-term national visions such as Saudi Vision 2030 and the UAE's Centennial Plan 2071. Israel, with its advanced technology and start-up ecosystem, became a natural partner for such initiatives (Khalidi, 2021).

Pakistan, observing these developments, faced a rapidly shifting diplomatic landscape. Traditional alliances rooted in Muslim solidarity appeared increasingly secondary to strategic and economic considerations. The warm reception of Israel by Pakistan's closest economic partners in the Gulf raised important questions about Islamabad's place in this new order. While Pakistan officially rejected any possibility of joining the Accords, the momentum generated by these agreements inevitably pressured it to reevaluate its position.

The immediate outcomes of the Abraham Accords were multifaceted. They catalyzed new trade routes and tourism flows, fostered intelligence sharing, and laid the groundwork for future defense cooperation. They also undercut the Palestinian negotiating position by removing the consensus barrier to normalization. For Pakistan, these outcomes were not merely diplomatic abstractions—they represented real strategic shifts in a region where Islamabad had historically aligned itself on ideological grounds but increasingly faced economic and geopolitical realities demanding pragmatism.

IV. Strategic Realignment in the Gulf and Implications for Pakistan

The Abraham Accords have catalyzed a broader strategic realignment in the Middle East, particularly among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. These changes are not only reshaping regional diplomacy but are also exerting significant influence on countries like Pakistan that historically relied on ideological alignments and traditional alliances. As the Gulf States prioritize economic modernization, technological advancement, and national security cooperation with Israel, Pakistan finds itself navigating a diplomatic minefield—balancing its long-held support for the Palestinian cause with its deep economic and geopolitical dependencies on the GCC.

The Gulf States' normalization with Israel reflects a new era of realpolitik, in which national interests outweigh pan-Islamic solidarity. The UAE, Bahrain, and Morocco have demonstrated a willingness to recalibrate their foreign policies to pursue economic diversification and strategic cooperation with a technologically advanced and security-savvy partner in Israel (Al-Rasheed, 2021). Saudi Arabia, while not formally part of the Accords, has shown tacit support through its airspace opening to Israeli airlines and warming rhetoric (Reuters, January10, 2023). For Pakistan, which has received billions in financial aid, remittances, and investment from these countries, this evolution presents a fundamental diplomatic challenge.

One of the most pressing implications is economic. Pakistan's remittance economy is heavily reliant on its expatriate labor force in the UAE and Saudi Arabia. In 2023–24, over 60% of remittances to Pakistan originated from the Gulf (State Bank of Pakistan, 2024). As these countries strengthen ties with Israel—and by extension with India—Pakistan's strategic relevance may decline. Moreover, Gulf States may grow less tolerant of Pakistan's ideological rigidity if it conflicts with their modernization agendas.

On the diplomatic front, Islamabad is under increasing pressure to demonstrate pragmatism. The Gulf-Israel alignment has fostered new multilateral forums for technology, trade, and defense cooperation, from which Pakistan is conspicuously absent (Katz, 2022). These evolving blocs

may eventually shape the region's security and economic architecture, leaving Pakistan isolated unless it adapts. Diplomatic signaling has already been observed; for instance, the UAE briefly suspended a $3 billion aid tranche to Pakistan in 2022 following Islamabad's harsh criticism of Israeli actions in Gaza (Dawn News, March 18, 2022).

Pakistan's cautious response to the Accords illustrates the tightrope it must walk. Officials have reiterated that normalization with Israel remains off the table until a just resolution to the Palestinian issue is achieved, yet the tone has grown more nuanced. In a 2023 statement, Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar acknowledged that while Pakistan's position remained principled, it could not remain oblivious to regional developments and would act in the national interest (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023).

Public opinion remains a key limiting factor. Unlike the relatively apolitical societies of the Gulf monarchies, Pakistan's democratic system—however flawed—subjects foreign policy decisions to public scrutiny. Religious parties such as Jamaat-e-Islami and Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan have consistently mobilized large-scale protests against any suggestion of normalization with Israel, framing it as betrayal of Islamic unity (Khan, 2021). Thus, while Gulf States can shift alliances with minimal domestic friction, Pakistan remains bound by its socio-political context.

Yet, failure to adapt poses strategic risks. As the Gulf States deepen ties with Israel and India, a new strategic triangle is forming that could marginalize Pakistan in regional security dialogues. India's defense exports to the UAE have risen steadily, and joint Israeli-Indian technological ventures are now active in the Gulf (Indian Ministry of Commerce, 2023). This could diminish Pakistan's influence over Muslim world discourse and further complicate its diplomatic calculus.

In summary, the Abraham Accords have ushered in a new Middle Eastern order that prioritizes interests over ideology. For Pakistan, this shift has far-reaching consequences across economic, diplomatic, and strategic domains while Islamabad continues to uphold its support for Palestine.

V. Pakistan's Diplomatic Challenges

Pakistan's foreign policy in the Middle East has long rested on a foundation of ideological solidarity, particularly its vocal support for Palestine and alignment with pan-Islamic sentiments. However, the Abraham Accords have introduced new regional dynamics that demand recalibration of this policy framework. The simultaneous pressure of strategic alliances, economic dependency, and evolving geopolitical interests is forcing Pakistan to walk a tightrope between principle and pragmatism.

At the diplomatic level, Pakistan's position is increasingly constrained by its close relationships with the Gulf States—particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE—which are now engaging Israel across multiple sectors, from trade to security cooperation (Khan, 2022). These same Gulf nations are also among Pakistan's largest financial benefactors and hosts to millions of Pakistani expatriates. In 2023 alone, Saudi Arabia and the UAE accounted for over 60% of Pakistan's bilateral loans and foreign remittances (State Bank of Pakistan, 2024). Islamabad's continued hardline stance on Israel, therefore, risks alienating its key patrons at a time when it is navigating economic volatility and external debt crises.

Pakistani diplomats face a dual challenge: preserving traditional alliances while responding to the rapidly changing security architecture in the region. Senior officials have expressed cautious awareness of this shift. Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, in a statement to the National Assembly in

2024, reiterated Pakistan's principled support for a two-state solution but also hinted at the need to "safeguard national interests in an evolving neighborhood" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024). Meanwhile, the Foreign Office has consistently reaffirmed that Pakistan will not establish ties with Israel until there is a just resolution of the Palestinian question.

The military establishment, a major player in foreign policy formulation, has also shown signs of reevaluating its strategic posture. While no official engagement with Israel has occurred, analysts note that Pakistan's military-to-military relations with Arab states such as the UAE and Bahrain could eventually come under stress as these countries deepen defense ties with Israel (Mahmood, 2023). This creates a dilemma for the Pakistani armed forces, which have historically relied on Gulf patronage for military cooperation, training, and arms financing.

Domestic political considerations further complicate any potential policy shift. Religious political parties, media outlets, and civil society actors have consistently framed any overture toward Israel as a betrayal of Islamic values. In 2020, following the Abraham Accords, major protests erupted in Pakistani cities, demanding a complete rejection of normalization and reaffirming support for Palestinian sovereignty (The Express Tribune, September 17, 2020). Political parties such as Jamaat-e-Islami and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (F) regularly invoke the Palestine issue during elections, ensuring that any deviation from Pakistan's historical position carries significant electoral risk (Ahmed, 2021).

Social media has amplified these sentiments. Hashtags like **#NoToIsrael** and **#FreePalestine** frequently trend on Pakistani Twitter, with influencers, clerics, and youth activists mobilizing digital resistance against normalization. This online activism reflects a broader national consensus across ideological lines, making it politically costly for any government to signal openness to Israel.

Furthermore, Pakistan's deepening ties with countries opposed to normalization—such as Turkey, Iran, and Malaysia—add another layer of complexity. These states have formed their own axis of strategic cooperation centered on Muslim solidarity, often critical of the Abraham Accords (Al-Monitor, November 3, 2021). For Pakistan, engaging with Israel could jeopardize these newer alignments, particularly at a time when Islamabad is trying to diversify its foreign relations beyond the traditional Saudi-centric approach.

Yet, the price of diplomatic rigidity may be increasing. As the Abraham Accords generate new forums of regional collaboration—particularly in trade, water security, cybersecurity, and counterterrorism—Pakistan's absence from these blocs limits its ability to shape outcomes or safeguard its interests. Diplomatic isolation in such emerging multilateral groupings could have long-term implications for Pakistan's regional influence.

In short, Pakistan's diplomatic challenges in the wake of the Abraham Accords stem from a convergence of external pressures and internal constraints. While it seeks to maintain its ideological consistency and public legitimacy, Islamabad must also recognize that an inflexible posture may erode its strategic standing in a rapidly shifting Middle East.

VI. Economic and Defense Dimensions

The Abraham Accords have redefined the economic and security architecture of the Middle East, with ripple effects extending to countries like Pakistan. While the Accords are primarily seen as

diplomatic normalization agreements, their underlying focus on economic integration and defense cooperation has profound implications for regional power balances. For Pakistan, these dimensions present both challenges and potential opportunities—though the former currently outweigh the latter.

1. Economic Realignment and Exclusion

The post-Accords environment has fostered a robust economic axis between Israel and the Gulf states. The UAE and Israel signed dozens of trade and investment agreements within months of normalization, covering sectors such as fintech, renewable energy, tourism, agriculture, and cybersecurity (UAE Ministry of Economy, 2023). By 2023, bilateral trade between Israel and the UAE had surpassed $2.5 billion, and similar momentum was building with Bahrain and Morocco (Times of Israel, August 21, 2023).

These developments signify the formation of an exclusive economic bloc where strategic collaboration is increasingly driven by technological innovation and high-value industries. Pakistan, whose economy remains largely agrarian and burdened by external debt and low foreign direct investment, risks being sidelined in this high-tech-driven regional framework. Moreover, Gulf States are prioritizing partnerships with Israel and India in trade corridors and digital economy initiatives—two countries with whom Pakistan has limited or strained relations (Gulf News, May 12, 2023).

Compounding this challenge is the diminished likelihood of Pakistan participating in joint ventures, tech exchanges, or infrastructure projects under the frameworks being driven by the Abraham Accords. For example, the UAE and Israel have jointly proposed logistics hubs in the Red Sea and Arabian Gulf—projects that deliberately bypass South Asia's traditional players like Pakistan (Jerusalem Post, April 3, 2023).

2. Arms Sales and Regional Security

The Abraham Accords have also opened new avenues for U.S. arms sales to the Middle East. The UAE's request to purchase F-35 fighter jets was approved shortly after signing the Accords, and Israel did not object—a major departure from prior policy (Defence News, January 6, 2021). This illustrates the emerging defense trust between Israel and Arab powers, replacing suspicion with coordination.

The alignment also encourages joint military exercises, intelligence sharing, and defense tech collaboration. Israel has been sharing missile defense systems and cyber warfare expertise with Gulf countries—areas where Pakistan lacks comparable capabilities or alliances (Al Arabia, December 10, 2023). In fact, Pakistan's traditional military cooperation with Gulf States, while long-standing, is mostly based on training programs and peacekeeping missions rather than high-tech defense integration.

As these countries forge deeper strategic and security partnerships with Israel and the West, Pakistan's military relevance to Gulf defense strategies may diminish. Additionally, the increasing Indian footprint in the Gulf—enhanced by its strategic cooperation with both Israel and the U.S.—further limits Pakistan's defense leverage (Indian Ministry of External Affairs, 2023).

3. Energy and Economic Leverage

One of Pakistan's most sensitive vulnerabilities is its energy dependence. The country imports the vast majority of its oil and gas from the Gulf, primarily Saudi Arabia and the UAE. As these states reorient their foreign policies to align more closely with pro-Western and pro-Israel strategies, they are likely to condition future economic aid and energy packages on recipient states' willingness to align with their broader geopolitical agenda (Reuters, October 18, 2022).

While Pakistan has not faced immediate consequences for its refusal to engage with Israel, the gradual deprioritization of ideological partners in favor of pragmatic allies is unmistakable. Pakistan's failure to participate in the emerging regional trade-energy-defense matrix may ultimately erode its strategic bargaining position with oil-rich allies.

4. Missed Opportunities and Policy Inflexibility

Pakistan's rigid stance on the Israel-Palestine issue has not only excluded it from potential economic benefits of the Accords but also from playing any mediating role in the region. Countries like Egypt and Jordan—despite being vocal about Palestinian rights—maintain peace treaties with Israel and are deeply involved in energy and water cooperation arrangements with Tel Aviv (Brooking Institution, 2022). Even Turkey, a long-time critic of Israeli policies, has restored diplomatic ties to safeguard trade interests.

Pakistan's isolation from such deals reflects an inability to separate its moral and ideological position from geopolitical calculations. This inflexibility prevents Islamabad from pursuing creative diplomatic approaches that could simultaneously uphold its support for Palestine while engaging in beneficial economic diplomacy.

VII. Regional Security and the Indo-Israeli Nexus

The Abraham Accords have not only transformed relations between Israel and Arab states but have also accelerated a parallel development with far-reaching consequences for South Asia: the strengthening of the Indo-Israeli strategic partnership. As Israel normalizes ties across the Middle East, its security and technological collaboration with India has taken on new significance, particularly in light of shared regional objectives and perceived mutual threats. For Pakistan, this evolving nexus presents growing strategic challenges that risk further complicating its already delicate regional position.

1. The Expansion of Indo-Israeli Strategic Ties

India formally established full diplomatic relations with Israel in 1992, but bilateral cooperation grew substantially under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Modi's landmark visit to Israel in 2017—the first by an Indian prime minister—marked a turning point, institutionalizing defense, intelligence, and technological cooperation between the two states (Pant & Singh, 2020). Today, Israel is one of India's top three arms suppliers, with sales exceeding $1 billion annually (Barkan, 2023). Key Israeli exports to India include radar systems, drones, surface-to-air missiles, and electronic warfare technology, much of which has been deployed along India's borders with Pakistan and China.

This growing defense relationship coincides with India's broader "Act East and West" strategy, which seeks to position New Delhi as a central player in both Asian and Middle Eastern affairs.

The Abraham Accords have further cleared the way for this approach by removing prior diplomatic sensitivities among Arab states regarding Israel's presence in regional partnerships with India (Riedel, 2011).

2. Intelligence and Security Collaboration

Beyond arms sales, Indo-Israeli cooperation has extended into joint intelligence efforts and counter-terrorism training. In the aftermath of the 2008 Mumbai attacks—where Israeli nationals were among the victims—Israel provided India with technical and operational support that laid the foundation for continued collaboration in homeland security (Joshi, 2021). More recently, Indian forces have employed Israeli-built surveillance drones and border monitoring systems in Kashmir, raising concerns in Pakistan over the externalization of regional disputes (Tellis, 2020).

Reports suggest that Indian security agencies have benefited from Israeli counter-insurgency models, particularly in dealing with asymmetric threats in urban environments. These models, developed in Israeli operations in Gaza and the West Bank, have been cited in Indian strategic literature as relevant for operations in Kashmir and Northeast India (the White House, July 14, 2022).

3. The I2U2 Initiative and Regional Realignment

A more recent development is the formation of the I2U2 initiative—India, Israel, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and the United States—which aims to promote regional cooperation in food security, water management, and energy (Kugelman, 2022). While not formally a security pact, I2U2 symbolically represents a geopolitical reordering that sidelines traditional players like Pakistan. It aligns India with technologically advanced and financially powerful partners and reinforces India's dual identity as a key factor in both the Indo-Pacific and the Middle East.

For Pakistan, this represents not only a diplomatic exclusion but also a reduction in strategic depth. Traditional alliances with the Gulf states—once a mainstay of Pakistani foreign policy—are being reconfigured to accommodate India's rising influence, which is amplified by its ties with Israel (Defence News, March 22, 2021).

4. Strategic Consequences for Pakistan

The convergence of Indian and Israeli defense interests may prompt Pakistan to reassess its security posture, particularly regarding deterrence and intelligence. The acquisition by India of Israeli missile defense systems such as Barak-8 and potentially the Iron Dome, adds a layer of strategic asymmetry that could erode Pakistan's retaliatory edge (Khalid, 2023). This technological edge may encourage India to adopt more assertive strategies under the perceived cover of advanced defense shields.

Furthermore, the Indo-Israeli narrative on "cross-border terrorism"—which often implicates Pakistan—is being echoed in Western diplomatic circles, thereby shaping global perceptions that undermine Pakistan's image as a responsible regional actor (Joshi, 2021). This strategic messaging synergy complicates Islamabad's ability to generate sympathy or support on issues such as Kashmir.

5. The Road Ahead

For Pakistan, the growing Indo-Israeli nexus under the umbrella of the Abraham Accords underscores the urgency of diplomatic recalibration. Refusing to engage with Israel isolates Pakistan from emerging strategic groupings, while offering India further space to consolidate influence. Balancing ideological commitments with geopolitical imperatives will be crucial if Pakistan hopes to maintain relevance in a rapidly changing regional security order.

VIII. Possible Scenarios and Policy Options

As the Middle East undergoes rapid transformation in the wake of the Abraham Accords, Pakistan faces critical foreign policy crossroads. Its ideological commitment to the Palestinian cause, regional rivalries—particularly with India—and changing dynamics within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) leave Islamabad with limited but important choices. While its historical stance has favored moral solidarity over strategic pragmatism, emerging geopolitical pressures now compel Pakistan to reassess its posture toward Israel and the realignment of Arab states. This section outlines plausible future scenarios and corresponding policy options for Pakistan.

1. Scenario One: Strategic Isolation

In this scenario, Pakistan continues its rigid stance of refusing to engage with Israel or reconsider its position on the Abraham Accords. While this may preserve ideological consistency and domestic political stability, it risks increased diplomatic marginalization in the region. As Arab countries strengthen ties with Israel, India continues to expand its presence in the Gulf through defense cooperation, technology transfer, and mini-lateral initiatives like I2U2 (Barkan, 2023). Pakistan's exclusion from these platforms not only sidelines it economically and diplomatically but also allows its adversaries to define the regional narrative.

This course would also limit Pakistan’s influence over Gulf policy on Kashmir and weaken its ability to act as a balancing force in Middle Eastern politics (Kugeman, 2022). Continued reliance on outdated diplomatic positions may further erode Pakistan’s global standing and reduce its bargaining power in multilateral institutions.

2. Scenario Two: Tactical Engagement without Formal Recognition

A more flexible approach could involve discreet, unofficial, or third-party mediated contacts with Israel. Pakistan could explore areas of mutual benefit—particularly in agriculture, water management, health technologies, and cybersecurity—without establishing full diplomatic ties (Satloff, 2020). Such an approach mirrors strategies employed by several Muslim-majority countries, including Qatar and Indonesia, which have maintained functional contacts with Israel while officially supporting the Palestinian cause (Miller, 2021).

This model allows Pakistan to benefit from Israeli innovation while maintaining its pro-Palestinian rhetoric. Furthermore, discreet engagement would not provoke significant domestic backlash and could be framed as purely technical or humanitarian in scope. It could also allow Islamabad to play a more active behind-the-scenes role in regional diplomacy and avoid total exclusion from emerging strategic partnerships like the I2U2 and Negev Forum (Al Jazeera, December 14, 2022).

3. Scenario Three: Gradual Normalization

A third, more transformative scenario involves a gradual move toward diplomatic normalization. This could begin with confidence-building measures such as Track II diplomacy, joint research initiatives, and participation in multilateral forums that include Israel (Tellis, 2020). The long-term goal would be to prepare the political and social landscape in Pakistan for eventual recognition of Israel, likely conditioned on progress in the Palestinian peace process.

Such a move would unlock strategic advantages, including access to Western technology and investment, improved relations with Washington, and potential economic incentives from the Gulf States. However, the risks are equally significant. Domestic backlash, clerical opposition, and politicization of the issue by populist forces could destabilize internal politics (Rana, 2022). Therefore, any transition toward normalization would require careful narrative management, religious consensus-building and clear articulation of national interest.

Policy Options

In navigating these scenarios, Pakistan must consider the following policy options:

a. National Interest–Driven Foreign Policy: Islamabad should frame its external engagements based on strategic needs rather than ideological rigidity. Recognition of changing regional realities does not equate to betrayal of long-standing causes; rather, it reflects diplomatic maturity and adaptability (Ahmed, 2020).

b. Regional Diplomacy and Balancing: Pakistan should diversify its diplomatic efforts beyond the traditional Gulf monarchies and foster deeper ties with Turkey, Qatar, and Malaysia—states that share its concerns about unchecked normalization and retain strong support for Palestinian rights (Yilmaz, 2021).

c. Domestic Political Consensus Building: Any policy shift must be preceded by broad-based internal dialogue involving civil society, religious scholars, and political parties. This would mitigate the risk of polarization and ensure that foreign policy decisions are supported by national consensus (Gallup Pakistan, 2021).

d. Strategic Use of Multilateralism: Pakistan can increase its participation in international platforms, such as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), where it can advocate for both Palestinian rights and pragmatic regional engagement. A balanced position in such fora could help Islamabad maintain credibility while adapting to new regional alliances.

IX. Conclusion & Policy Recommendations

The Abraham Accords represent a profound geopolitical transformation in the Middle East, reshaping traditional alliances and challenging established diplomatic doctrines across the Muslim world. For Pakistan, this evolving order presents both risks and opportunities. While Islamabad remains anchored to its ideological commitment to the Palestinian cause, the normalization of Israel's relations with key Arab and Gulf states—alongside India's growing strategic ties with Tel Aviv—has significantly altered the regional security and diplomatic landscape (Ahmed, 2020).

Pakistan’s continued reluctance to engage with Israel places it at a strategic crossroads. On one hand, it preserves domestic legitimacy and aligns with public sentiment rooted in religious and

moral solidarity with Palestine. On the other hand, it limits Pakistan's diplomatic agency, restricts access to new multilateral platforms like I2U2, and allows regional adversaries such as India to expand their influence unopposed (Barkan, 2023). In this context, a static foreign policy may yield diminishing returns in a region that is increasingly prioritizing pragmatism over ideology (Kugelman, 2022).

To navigate this shifting terrain, Pakistan must adopt a nuanced and forward-looking approach. This involves reassessing its foreign policy posture, balancing ideological commitments with strategic imperatives, and positioning itself to avoid further regional marginalization.

Policy Recommendations

1. **Initiate Track II Engagements**: Pakistan should encourage non-official academic, commercial, and technological dialogues with Israeli counterparts under neutral auspices. Such backchannel diplomacy could build mutual understanding without formal recognition (Satloff, 2020).
2. **Link Engagement to Palestinian Rights**: Any future consideration of formal ties should be explicitly conditioned on tangible progress toward a two-state solution. This would allow Pakistan to retain moral credibility while opening space for diplomatic flexibility (Reidel, 2021).
3. **Invest in Regional Multilateralism**: Islamabad should increase participation in emerging regional blocs and platforms where it can influence discourse on normalization, regional stability, and economic integration (Tellis, 2020).
4. **Public Narrative Management**: Government-led public education campaigns and clerical engagement could help mitigate potential backlash and foster a more informed national debate about evolving regional dynamics (Gallup Pakistan, 2021).

In conclusion, Pakistan's long-term strategic relevance in the Middle East will depend on its ability to recalibrate foreign policy in line with new regional realities—without compromising on its core principles.

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