



## **“A Stronger and Wider Peace: A U.S. Strategy for Advancing the Abraham Accords” Key Findings**

In 2020, the United States helped Israel broker historic agreements to normalize relations with four Arab countries: the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan. Known as the Abraham Accords, these landmark deals are enabling unprecedented trade, cultural exchanges, and even defense cooperation between several of these states and Israel. The United States has a fundamental interest in strengthening and expanding the Accords. They have enabled a qualitative leap forward in cooperation between not just governments, but peoples. At a time of profound concern over America’s commitment to the Middle East, U.S. leadership to strengthen and expand the Accords can advance U.S. interests in the region and shore up Washington’s waning global prestige and influence. By increasing the capacity of America’s most capable Middle East partners to work together in shouldering the burden of upholding regional stability and security, the Accords also provide the United States with a way to balance its need to continue safeguarding its vital interests in the Middle East with the growing imperatives of strategic competition with China and Russia.

The report offers several key findings concerning the Accords and provides a set of recommendations for U.S. policymakers to ensure that the Accords achieve their full potential:

- **The Accords are an historic achievement that have created significant opportunities to advance U.S. interests.** By triggering a major realignment in Arab-Israeli relations, the opportunity now exists for the first time to bring America’s most important Middle East partners together in a coalition to bolster regional stability, security, and prosperity.
- **U.S. leadership remains essential to success.** Without U.S. support, the Accords would not have happened. Realizing their full strategic potential, especially their expansion to other key states, will require sustained engagement. Success is not foreordained.
- **The Biden administration has been slow in embracing the Accords.** While advancing the Accords was not a priority for the administration during much of 2021, there have been encouraging recent signs that it intends to play a more active role going forward.
- **Saudi Arabia is the big prize, but challenging.** As the Muslim world’s most influential state, bringing Saudi Arabia into the Accords would be a game changer that could transform the geopolitics of the Middle East, but significant obstacles on both the Saudi and U.S. sides would need to be overcome.
- **Israel’s move to CENTCOM is crucial.** With Israel now included in CENTCOM’s area of operations, the opportunities for the United States to develop defense cooperation between Israeli and Arab militaries have dramatically expanded.

- **The Accords have already demonstrated high potential for defense cooperation.** Last November's first-ever combined naval exercise involving Israel, the UAE, and Bahrain is but one example of the important opportunities that the Accords are creating to shape the region's security environment in ways advantageous to U.S. interests.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**Send clear signals of U.S. support for strengthening and expanding the Accords.** The Biden administration and Congress should take steps to underscore that consolidating the Accords, including in the area of defense cooperation, and expanding them to include new members are among Washington's highest priorities. Specific initiatives could include the following:

- Appoint a Special U.S. Envoy for Normalization: Appointing a Special Envoy would send an unmistakable signal that strengthening the Accords and expanding them to more countries was now among the administration's highest priorities.
- Convene a Summit on Middle East Security with Israel and its Peace Partners: President Biden should convene a summit of leaders from Israel, the Abraham Accords countries, Egypt, and Jordan to launch a new U.S.-led security forum focused on building Arab-Israeli cooperation to bolster regional stability and security.
- Pass an Abraham Accords Defense Cooperation Act: To promote Arab-Israeli defense ties, Congress should pass legislation identifying key areas for U.S. efforts to catalyze greater cooperation, including integrated regional defenses against ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and drones, as well as joint U.S.-Israel-Arab projects to research and develop vital military technologies.

**Be Flexible, But Ambitious, In Developing Defense Cooperation.** The Biden administration should guard against overreaching in its efforts to forge a new Middle East security architecture and remain attuned to the sensitivities and constraints of Israel's new Arab partners.

Opportunities to achieve this include:

- Integrate Israel More Fully into CENTCOM: U.S. Central Command offers a natural locus to consolidate Arab-Israel security cooperation under American auspices. An agenda should focus on integrating Israel into CENTCOM structures and activities (e.g., the assignment of Israel Defense Force liaison officers) alongside Arab militaries, as well as developing a robust schedule of new combined exercises involving U.S., Israeli, and Arab militaries in all domains.
- Strengthen Maritime Security in the Middle East: The Middle East is home to some of the world's most important, but also conflict-prone, waterways and maritime chokepoints. Maritime security offers opportunities for CENTCOM to integrate Israel into existing U.S.-led multinational task forces that are already engaged in critical missions to uphold international norms and protect regional sea lanes critical to the global economy.

- Develop Integrated Regional Air Defense: Defending against Iran’s ever-expanding, increasingly precise, and lethal arsenals of missiles and drones is a shared priority for Israel, its Arab neighbors, and U.S. forces based in the Middle East. Israel’s unprecedented operational success in building layered missile defenses is highly valued by several Arab states and offers significant new opportunities for the United States to help organize a more effective regional air defense network drawing on Israeli technologies and know-how.
- Catalyze Regional Defense R&D Cooperation: The Accords represent the great potential for a mutually-beneficial marriage between the enormous financial capacity of Arab countries in the Gulf and Israel’s world-class defense innovation base. The Biden administration should make sure the United States will be able to benefit from such efforts by using its good offices and leadership to catalyze joint U.S.-Israel-Arab R&D projects.

**Develop a U.S. Strategy for Israel-Saudi Normalization.** Given the potentially transformative geopolitical impact on the Middle East of a Saudi decision to normalize relations with Israel, the Biden administration should prioritize encouraging further progress in Saudi-Israeli relations, including determining what steps the United States could take to incentivize such movement – in particular through improvements in the U.S.-Saudi bilateral relationship. While such efforts would likely trigger a fierce domestic backlash within the Democratic Party, the strategic payoff for U.S. interests and prestige on a global scale would be significant. An essential first step should be the appointment of a new U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia who has a personal relationship with President Biden and is able to speak authoritatively on his behalf with the Saudi leadership, especially Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Any path forward would clearly need to include firm commitments that address U.S. concerns over the 2018 murder of columnist Jamal Khashoggi.