



**Israeli-Arab Normalization and Advancing
Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Resolution:
Symposium Report and Compendium**

Executive Summary

Israeli-Arab Normalization and Advancing Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Resolution: Symposium Report and Compendium

Can the ongoing process of Israeli-Arab normalization be harnessed in the service of achieving a negotiated resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? If so, how?

J Street Policy Center's inaugural symposium in September 2022 addressed these central questions. It featured a vigorous discussion about the Abraham Accords and on progress and limitations in Israeli-Arab normalization. Participants who were critical of the Abraham Accords made strong arguments, noting that key parties who brought them about – particularly in the Trump administration and the Netanyahu government – did not do so with Palestinians' interests at heart. These are important concerns, and there are many challenges to adapting normalization in a way that fully incorporates Palestinians and advances conflict resolution. Without question, the incoming Netanyahu government, in which some of the most radical figures in Israeli society are set to assume powerful new roles, will exacerbate those challenges.

That said, Netanyahu has made clear that he will prioritize expanding the Accords, making it all the more imperative that actors who are committed to Israeli-Palestinian peace leverage that motivation to shape further normalization in the manner we recommend below, rather than allowing his right-wing government to use it as a wedge to further exclude the Palestinians from regional integration. The following recommendations for how to move the normalization process in the right direction draw on insights presented by our symposium participants.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS (IN BRIEF)

1) Make Palestinians a full and equal partner.

This includes, but is not limited to, full participation in the Negev Forum, a regional architecture which Palestinians and Jordan should both be incentivized to join.

2) Update and recommit to the Arab Peace Initiative.

Adopted by the Arab League in 2002, the Arab Peace Initiative (API) offered Israel comprehensive peace and normal relations with all Arab states – conditioned on establishment of a Palestinian state within the 1967 lines. Recommitting to an updated API would reaffirm that a two-state solution remains key for full Israeli normalization with the entire Arab world.

3) Leverage normalization moves by Arab states to secure benefits for Palestinians.

Arab states should reward Israeli concessions, with particular focus on Israeli steps that do not simply improve Palestinian quality of life, but could carry political momentum. Examples could include: fostering Palestinian energy independence, allowing building master plans for Palestinians in Area C, establishing a joint forum on reducing tensions in Jerusalem, and moving ahead with an agreement to develop the Gaza Marine gas field.

4) Appoint a US Special Envoy to work on normalization and linkages with the Israeli-Palestinian issue.

The Biden administration should appoint a Special Envoy to promote Israeli-Arab regional integration, with particular emphasis on the Israeli-Palestinian aspect of the role. The success of a US Special Envoy in brokering the Israel-Lebanon maritime agreement provides a model for the proactive diplomatic role the United States can and should play in the region.

5) Rebuild trust between the US, the Palestinians, and their leadership.

US-Palestinian relations have improved since President Biden took office, but considerable strains remain. This relationship must be repaired, for its own sake and so the US can help persuade Palestinians to participate in regional integration frameworks. Reciprocal gestures could start with fulfillment of the Biden administration promise to reopen the US Consulate in Jerusalem.

6) Improve ties between the Palestinian Authority and the United Arab Emirates.

Abu Dhabi is playing a key role in agreements between Israel and its immediate neighbors. The Palestinians should be part of such agreements, but that will be difficult as long as the Palestinian-Emirati relationship remains fraught. A US Special Envoy could mediate between the PA and UAE – and Arab countries like Egypt and Jordan could help, as well.

7) Find and enhance roles for particular Middle Eastern countries.

There are several regional countries that are motivated to play significant positive roles on this issue, including Morocco, Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan. The US, especially with a Special Envoy at the helm, would be in a strong position to identify how these countries can best contribute.

8) Call on Europe to incentivize Israel to involve Palestinians in normalization and regional structures.

Easier access to EU funds for Israeli companies, harmonizing mobile communications schemes, an export agreement for Israeli organic produce, and an arrangement allowing Israel to adopt European food standards to reduce the cost of living could all be on the table to incentivize Israel to accept Palestinian representation and Palestinian issues in regional mechanisms.

9) Build on regional mechanisms in the European-Mediterranean area.

The EU can contribute to the eventual advancement of a political process between Israel and the Palestinians by fostering a broader regional envelope. Existing organizations, like the Union for the Mediterranean and the East Mediterranean Gas Forum, provide a basis to build on.

10) Increase people-to-people (P2P) contacts.

Without cannibalizing existing funding for the Middle East Partnership for Peace Act, new money could be raised from Negev Forum countries to initiate broader P2P programs that bring together Israelis, Palestinians, and people from Arab countries normalizing relations with Israel.

I. INTRODUCTION

On September 20, 2022, the J Street Policy Center held its inaugural symposium on the theme of “Israeli-Arab Normalization and Advancing Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Resolution.” The hybrid in-person and virtual meeting brought together Middle East policy experts to discuss whether, and how, the process of normalization of relations between Israel and some Arab states could be harnessed productively to advance Israeli-Palestinian conflict resolution toward the achievement of a two-state solution and an end to the occupation.

This report summarizes the main points of discussion and offers recommendations – most of which were introduced by symposium participants. Notably, the symposium took place prior to the recent Israeli parliamentary election that is set to sweep former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu back to power at the helm of an extremist, ultra right-wing bloc including the Jewish Power and Religious Zionist parties, respectively led by Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich. As many of our participants noted, the outcome of the election will have a significant impact on Israel’s approach to the Israeli-Palestinian issue, including in the context of Israeli-Arab normalization.

II. SUMMARY OF SYMPOSIUM DISCUSSION

Symposium participants shared a common sense of urgency regarding the need to find a path to addressing the neglected Israeli-Palestinian conflict, particularly given the deteriorating situation on the ground in the occupied Palestinian territory. They differed in their views of the Abraham Accords – the two-year-old agreements and declarations signed by Israel and four Arab states (the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan) and brokered during the waning months of the Trump administration – and whether and how Israeli-Arab normalization could be used to advance Israeli-Palestinian peace.



Abdullatif bin Rashid Al Zayani, Benjamin Netanyahu, Donald Trump, and Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan attend the Abraham Accords ceremony in The White House (Noam Galai/September 2020)

Assessing the Abraham Accords: Significant Critiques

The seminar featured a lively exchange of views regarding the Abraham Accords and their relationship to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Some participants embraced the very negative view of the normalization agreements between Israel and select Arab states that Palestinians and their leadership demonstrated following the signing of the Abraham Accords. The fact that the [UAE secured a pledge](#) from then-Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to “suspend” de jure annexation of large swathes of the West Bank in exchange for the establishment of Emirati-Israeli diplomatic relations did not persuade these experts that Israeli-Arab normalization could benefit Palestinians. To the contrary, in the words of one speaker, the Abraham Accords were “not only a disengagement from the Palestinian issue, but definitely a consent from those Arab countries to the reality for Palestinians under occupation” by participating in a process designed by a former US administration that “[sought to sideline](#)” Palestinians.

This view is consistent with the reaction of many Palestinians to the normalization deals. According to [polling](#) by the Ramallah-based Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, only eight percent of Palestinians thought the Israel-UAE agreement

served both Israeli and Palestinian interests, while 86 percent felt they benefited Israel alone. The survey found that the most common word used by Palestinians to describe the agreement was “betrayal.” Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas [condemned](#) the agreement and [recalled](#) Palestine’s ambassador to the UAE, while hundreds of Palestinians took part in [protests](#) against the deal.

Those most critical of the Abraham Accords argued that the agreements robbed Palestinians, who are deeply disadvantaged in the asymmetrical balance of power vis-a-vis Israel, of what little leverage they had at their disposal. The dynamic in the Arab world has shifted dramatically since the aftermath of the 1967 war, when Arab heads of state [resolved](#) at the Arab League Summit in Khartoum that they would “unite their political efforts at the international and diplomatic level” against Israel, with the “Three No’s”: no peace with Israel, no negotiations with Israel, and no recognition of Israel. Thirty-five years later, in a 2002 initiative led by Saudi Arabia, the Arab League unanimously adopted the [Arab Peace Initiative](#) (API), offering Israel comprehensive peace and normalization of relations with all Arab states – on the condition that Israel withdraw fully from the territories it occupied in the 1967 war, accept the establishment of a Palestinian state within the 1967 lines, and agree to a “just solution” to the Palestinian refugee problem in accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution 194.



2007 Arab League Summit (Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs/2007)

Whereas the API (to which Israel [never responded](#)) was predicated on the principles of “land for peace” and Arab consensus, the Abraham Accords violated both of these tenets. Thus, in the view of some symposium participants, the Accords “killed” or rendered the API moot, while at the same time decreasing the likelihood of a two-state solution by giving Israel the benefits promised by the API without achieving anything more than a postponement of annexation in return. Further, some expressed frustration that the Accords were marketed as peace agreements when they were actually bilateral agreements between countries (at least in the cases of UAE and Bahrain) that had never been at war with Israel.

In the context of US foreign policy, and the vision set out by the Biden administration of the United States as leading the battle for democracy in a global struggle between democracy and authoritarianism, one participant characterized the Middle East as a region in which the US has put itself on the side of the latter, to the detriment of its credibility. In this context, the speaker warned that the Abraham Accords make it harder for the US to make significant “asks” of the parties to the Accords – since those countries can warn that US pressure is threatening the normalization process. Meanwhile, normalization has arguably [enabled](#) Arab signatories to the Accords to increase their authoritarian practices through the acquisition of repressive technologies.

Emphasizing the Need to Leverage Normalization

On the other hand, many symposium participants argued strongly for the need to find creative ways to harness Israeli-Arab normalization to benefit Palestinians and move toward a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Most who did so agreed that the Abraham Accords were problematic from a Palestinian perspective. They noted that normalization came about as the Palestinian issue declined as a priority for Arab countries, both because it appears unsolvable after so many years and also due to the Palestinian Authority’s mismanagement of relations with Arab states. (One

point on which participants on both sides of the debate about the Abraham Accords agreed was that the Palestinian Authority under President Mahmoud Abbas has badly mishandled the Palestinians’ crucial relationships with leaders of several Arab countries, much to the detriment of the Palestinian cause.) At the same time, the declining role of ideology as a driving force in the Arab world and a changing threat landscape – in particular, the emergence of Iran as a chief threat for Israel and the Arab Gulf states – have created incentives for Arab states to make official the informal ties they had maintained quietly with Israel for years.

Given these factors, many participants stressed that Israeli-Arab normalization is a *fait accompli*, and argued that the question that must be addressed now is how Palestinians and those who prioritize bringing an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can make the best of this reality. While one participant argued that the only thing the Palestinians have as the weaker party is the “power of no,” another responded that this purported “power” had worsened the Palestinians’ position and they would become further isolated if they continued to reject the prospect of engaging with the Abraham Accords and the [Negev Forum](#) through which the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, Egypt, Israel, and the US have established a new [“framework for regional cooperation.”](#)



Representatives from Bahrain, Egypt, Israel, the United States, Morocco, and the United Arab Emirates at the Negev Summit (March 2022/US State Department)

Regarding the Arab Peace Initiative, most who argued for finding creative ways to utilize normalization to generate progress on the Israeli-Palestinian front made the case that pronouncements of the death of the API were premature. Their position appeared to have been validated by a [meeting](#) hosted in New York by Saudi Arabia, the European Union, and the Arab League on the sidelines of the September 2022 United Nations General Assembly meetings, with the goal of “relaunching the Arab Peace Initiative.” Diplomats from 25 countries – including Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, France, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Norway, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Sweden, Sudan, Tunisia, UAE, UK, US (represented by Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs Barbara Leaf), and Yemen – attended, and were joined by representatives from the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the Gulf Cooperation Council, and other multilateral organizations. Josep Borrell, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, [wrote](#) that the meeting signaled “growing interest” in reviving and building on the Arab Peace Initiative “to make progress towards a comprehensive regional peace that ends the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and brings substantial security, trade, and other cooperation for the region at the same time.”



US President Barack Obama shakes hands with King Salman (July 2015/Pete Souza)

The Abraham Accords appear to have both a “glass ceiling” and a “glass floor,” which participants attributed at least in part to their disconnect from the Palestinian issue, and even apparent undermining of the Palestinian cause. As evidence of an apparent “glass ceiling,” no additional Arab countries have signed onto the Accords since Sudan [quietly](#) signed a [declaration](#) in January 2021. Saudi Arabia, at least while King Salman is still alive, is maintaining its adherence to the API and [insisting](#) on Palestinian statehood as a condition for normalizing relations with Israel, even as it has taken small measures like [opening its airspace](#) to flights to and from Israel. Neither Oman and Qatar (which have long maintained contacts with Israel), nor other countries [predicted](#) to be next to sign onto the Abraham Accords, have joined.

The “glass floor” refers to the lack of a trickle-down effect that would lead public opinion in the Arab world to become increasingly accepting of normalization with Israel. To the contrary, [Arab Barometer polling](#) shows the unpopularity of normalizing relations with Israel. In Morocco, one of the countries in which favorability ratings are highest, only 31 percent have a positive view of normalization. Even more significant, [longitudinal surveys by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy](#) have found that Arab public opinion has soured on the deals over time. In November 2020, shortly after their governments normalized relations with Israel, public opinion was almost evenly split

over the Abraham Accords in Bahrain and UAE, with 45 percent and 47 percent approval in the two countries (respectively). In March 2022, approval had dropped dramatically to only 20 and 25 percent. The 2022 World Cup in Qatar appears to have served a clarifying purpose in this regard, with [outpourings of support for Palestine](#) – most visibly, by the spectacularly successful Moroccan team – demonstrating that concern for Palestinians remains strong in the Arab world.

As for the Palestinian Authority, one of our participants noted that its reaction to the Abraham Accords became more muted over time. A few months after their governments signed the Accords, the PA [sent](#) its recalled ambassadors back to UAE and Bahrain. It did not comment publicly on the announcement of normalization agreements between Israel and Morocco, and subsequently the declaration by Sudan. Could the PA be convinced it is in Palestinian interests to participate in regional cooperation platforms such as the Negev Forum, as Jordanian and Egyptian officials have recently encouraged the PA to consider? Among our experts who felt this was possible, they stressed that small-scale projects or marginal benefits from major projects undertaken by others wouldn’t be sufficient. Indeed, one of our Israeli participants warned that if Palestinians pursue economic benefits alone, without insisting on a political dimension, it will strengthen the position of Israelis who argue that there is no need for a political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and that material benefits to improve quality of life are sufficient for Palestinians. Persuading the Palestinian leadership to participate in a regional cooperation grouping, such as the Negev Forum, will likely require both major economic incentives and a declared goal of reaching a two-state solution, to which the PA [remains committed](#).

The election victory of Benjamin Netanyahu’s ultra far-right bloc is undoubtedly a major setback to the cause of Israeli-Palestinian peace and conflict resolution. Several symposium participants spoke about the potential for progress in the event that the Israeli elections would yield a stalemate, enabling Prime Minister Yair Lapid to remain in office in a



The Moroccan national football team poses with the Palestinian flag after a win at the 2022 World Cup (Amro Ali/December 2022)

caretaker capacity for several more months. As Foreign Minister serving under Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, Lapid agreed to including the Israeli-Palestinian issue in the statement issued by the Negev Forum steering committee at the close of its June meeting in Bahrain, and then formally articulated his support for a two-state solution in his speech before the UN General Assembly in September. With 57 percent of Israelis believing their government should utilize the countries with which it has normalized relations in order to promote peace with the Palestinians (according to [polling by Israeli think tank Mitvim](#)), it seemed plausible that Prime Minister Lapid could have been open to positive moves in this direction following a constructive or inconclusive result in Israel's November 1 election.

We will never know if that might have transpired, due to the victory of the Netanyahu bloc. According to one Israeli participant, however, the Abraham Accords could prove especially important under a right-wing annexationist government. Should the next government include “the most extreme, rabid, pro-segregation” Members of Knesset like Itamar Ben-Gvir, who would push measures to try to make a two-state solution infeasible (such as settlement construction in the strategically important [E1 corridor](#)), the government could be dissuaded from moving ahead in order to avoid harm to its valuable relationships with its normalization partners. Given the extent of economic ties already formed, “Israel would have billions to lose” in that situation. In a similar vein, another participant made the case that the “fragility” of the Abraham Accords could make them especially useful in curbing dangerous Israeli moves toward Palestinians living under occupation. Whereas the Biden administration has demonstrated an unwillingness to impose consequences on Israel for problematic behaviors, Israel should not assume Arab partners would not do so. During the 11-day escalation in Gaza in May 2021, senior representatives of the Abraham Accords signatories appealed to the Israeli government. They noted in [discussions with Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz](#) that televised images of the war would impact public opinion in their countries and impinge on their ability to proceed with normalization.



Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich

In sum, J Street Policy Center's inaugural symposium featured a vigorous and productive discussion about the Abraham Accords, as well as progress and limitations in Israeli-Arab normalization. The central question was how normalization can be harnessed in the service of resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and achieving a negotiated solution to end the occupation. We take seriously the strong arguments presented by symposium participants who noted that key parties who brought about the Abraham Accords – particularly in the Trump administration and the Netanyahu government – did not do so with Palestinians' interests at heart. We recognize that there are many challenges to adapting the normalization process in a way that fully incorporates Palestinians and advances conflict resolution. That will be even more true after the swearing in of a new Netanyahu government, in which some of the most radical figures in Israeli society are set to assume [powerful new roles](#). That said, Netanyahu has made clear that he will [prioritize expanding](#) the Accords, making it all the more imperative that actors who are committed to Israeli-Palestinian peace leverage that motivation to shape further normalization in the manner we recommend below, rather than allowing his right-wing government to use it as a wedge to further exclude the Palestinians from regional integration.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing on the insights presented by our participants during the symposium, as well as the works they have allowed us to include in the compendium that follows this section, we offer these recommendations for how to move the normalization process in the right direction. These recommendations are offered by the J Street Policy Center and do not necessarily represent the views of our symposium attendees.



The first meeting of the Negev Forum's Steering Committee in Bahrain (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs/June 2022)

1) *Make Palestinians a full and equal partner in all future activities flowing from the Abraham Accords.*

This includes, but is not limited to, full participation in the Negev Forum. In the months following the Negev Summit held at Sde Boker (Israel) in March 2022, the six participating countries (Israel, UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, Egypt, and the US) [established a regional architecture](#) to advance these goals: regional stability and security, diplomatic and economic cooperation, and people-to-people ties. To carry that work forward, the Negev Forum inaugurated six multilateral working groups dealing with food security and water, energy, tourism, health, education and tolerance, and regional security. Palestinians should be invited and incentivized to join the Negev Forum, and each of its six working groups, as a full partner. Jordan has chosen not to participate in Negev Forum meetings

thus far despite being courted by participating countries. The Jordanian government [indicated](#) that it would not join the Negev Forum unless Palestinians were present at the table. The Palestinian Authority and Jordan should both be incentivized to join and [Amman can play a key role](#) in assessing how to mainstream the Palestinian issue across all six working groups and considering what can be added to each of the groups to attract Palestinian participation.



Text of the Arab Peace Initiative, 2022

2) *Update and recommit to the Arab Peace Initiative.*

The United States should encourage the Arab League to formulate a revised Arab Peace Initiative that takes into account recent developments (including the Israeli-Arab normalization deals). The EU or the [Munich Group](#) (France, Germany, Jordan, and Egypt) could work with the US to push such an initiative. Following revision, the Negev Forum could establish a new seventh working group dedicated to translating the API from a vision to an action plan. The revised API should be marketed to all relevant stakeholders, and public opinion experts in Israel – where the API was [never previously](#) sold to the public – and other relevant countries could be employed for this purpose.

The API remains a vital approach, and key Arab states – in particular, [Saudi Arabia](#) – remain committed to it. Updating and recommitting to the API reaffirms that a two-state solution remains the key requirement for full Israeli normalization with the

entire Arab world. Calls for an Arab Peace Initiative 2.0 and proposals for how to achieve it predate the Abraham Accords and remain relevant today. Among such proposals is a [multi-track approach](#) (with an Israeli-Palestinian bilateral track, an Israeli-Arab regional track, and a broader multilateral track) and staged implementation over a reasonable period, with clear milestones. Both for those who prioritize solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and for those who care most about Israel normalizing relations with as many Arab countries as possible, the API continues to be indispensable.

3) *Leverage normalization moves by Arab states to secure benefits for Palestinians.*

Arab states would reward concessions by Israel at an equal level. Larger Israeli concessions, especially those that are more political in nature, would receive bigger rewards from Arab states. There should be a particular focus on steps that do not simply improve Palestinian quality of life or manage the conflict, but could actually carry political momentum. Examples could include: fostering Palestinian energy independence, allowing building permit master plans for Palestinian construction in Area C, establishing a joint Israeli-Palestinian-Jordanian regional forum on reducing tensions in Jerusalem (which could eventually also include Morocco and Saudi Arabia), and moving ahead with an agreement to develop the [Gaza Marine gas field](#), which could provide an

economic lifeline to the Palestinians in Gaza. Palestinians should be included – and avail themselves of opportunities to join – regional projects like the [Israel-Jordan-UAE](#) deal to exchange solar energy for desalinated water. Palestinians must have a significant voice regarding which specific projects they want to get involved in. Since they lack free movement and access, projects increasing their ability to travel could be attractive to Palestinians – for example, the creation of a [new airstrip in the Jordan Valley](#) that Palestinians could use to go abroad.

4) *Appoint a US Special Envoy to work on normalization and linkages with the Israeli-Palestinian issue.*



Prime Minister Yair Lapid (L) meets with US mediator Amos Hochstein after the signing of the Israel-Lebanon maritime agreement (Government Press Office/October 2022)



Representatives from the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Israel, and the United States at the Project Prosperity MOU signing (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs/November 2022)

International involvement will be essential in order to catalyze movement on these recommendations. The Biden administration should appoint a Special Envoy to promote Israeli-Arab regional integration – with a key part of the job being to harness normalization to bring in the Palestinians and advance Israeli-Palestinian conflict resolution. According to [reporting](#), former US Ambassador to Israel Daniel Shapiro was expected to be tapped for a position similar to this in 2021, but the role was never created. Establishing and filling such a position should be prioritized, with particular emphasis on the Israeli-Palestinian aspect of the role. The recent impressive success of US Special Envoy Amos Hochstein in brokering the

[Israel-Lebanon maritime agreement](#) is an important example of the kind of proactive, engaged diplomatic role that the United States can and should play in the region — putting forward its own concrete proposals to help build common ground toward resolution of complex matters, even between parties that don’t currently engage in direct, bilateral negotiations with each other.

5) *Rebuild trust between the US, the Palestinians, and their leadership.*

US-Palestinian relations have improved somewhat since President Biden took office from the low to which they plummeted during the Trump administration. There are still, however, considerable strains – with Palestinians [frustrated](#) that the Biden administration has not fulfilled its promises to roll back at least some of the detrimental actions implemented under Trump or otherwise taken actions to realize its oft-repeated desire to [achieve](#) a “reality in which Israelis and Palestinians alike can enjoy equal measures of security, freedom and prosperity.” President Abbas has handled this quite poorly, by seeking to [ingratiate](#) himself to Russian President Vladimir Putin during the latter’s brutal and unjustified invasion of Ukraine and making disparaging [remarks](#) about senior Biden administration officials.



Former United States Consulate in Jerusalem (Magister/July 2009)

This relationship must be repaired, both for its own sake, and so that the US can play a role in convincing the Palestinians and their leadership that it is in their interest to participate in regional

integration frameworks, such as the Negev Forum. This could take the form of a significant political gesture by the US, such as finally making good on its repeated [promise](#) to reopen the US Consulate in Jerusalem. The Palestinians could reciprocate with significant [moves](#) of their own, such as tightening security coordination with Israel – and, ultimately, reforming their problematic [prisoner payments program](#).

6) *Improve the relationship between the Palestinian Authority and the United Arab Emirates.*



Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas (Palestinian News and Info Agency/August 2020)

It will be difficult to make progress on leveraging the Israeli-Arab normalization process to enable progress on the Israeli-Palestinian front as long as there is great tension between the PA and UAE. Once content with the status of a second-tier power, UAE emerged as a major regional player during and after the Arab Uprisings that began in 2010-11. Steven Cook of the Council on Foreign Relations goes so far as to [assert](#) that “the UAE has become the most influential player in the Middle East, using its vast financial resources and military power in an effort to shape events in the Arab world.” Given those resources, Abu Dhabi can play a key role in agreements between Israel and its more immediate neighbors, as it has done by joining Israel and Jordan in signing a [Memorandum of Understanding](#) for a deal in which Israel will purchase power from a Jordan-based solar energy facility (to be built by an Emirati company) and

Jordan will purchase desalinated water from Israel. This is the kind of agreement that Palestinians should be part of, but that will be difficult as long as the Palestinian-Emirati relationship remains so fraught. Once the US and the PA repair their own relationship, the US would be in a good position to mediate between the PA and UAE – and Arab countries such as Egypt and Jordan could play an intermediary role, as well.

7) Find and enhance roles for particular Middle Eastern countries.

There are several countries in the region that are motivated and able to play significant positive roles on this issue. The US, especially with a Special Envoy at the helm of American efforts, would be in a strong position to identify how these countries can best contribute. One example is **Morocco**, an Abraham Accords signatory with a [history](#) of informal ties with Israel and a unique [connection with Israelis](#) – nearly a million of whom are of Moroccan heritage and maintain a positive emotional connection to Morocco. The Kingdom played a significant role in [mediating](#) an agreement to keep the Allenby Bridge crossing open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to make travel easier for Palestinians. Notably, Morocco chairs the Arab League’s Al Quds (Jerusalem) Committee and could help to spearhead multilateral coordination on Jerusalem in the context of Israeli-Arab regional integration. Another example is **Turkey**, which [restored](#) full diplomatic relations with Israel in August, while still maintaining its long-running commitment to the Palestinian cause. While not a party to the Abraham Accords or the Negev Forum, Turkey could have a significant role to play. There is room for the two countries with longstanding peace treaties with Israel that pre-date the Abraham Accords, **Egypt** and **Jordan**, to become more involved in the Negev Forum and other regional efforts. Their close ties with Palestinians and unique positioning – including Egypt’s connection to Gaza and Jordan’s special role in Jerusalem – will naturally entail raising and prioritizing the Palestinian issue.



Israeli Minister of Transport Merav Michaeli meets with Moroccan Minister of Transport Mohamed Abdeljali (Merav Michaeli/July 2022)

8) Call upon Europe to offer incentives to Israel to involve Palestinian leaders and address issues related to their conflict in further normalization accords and emerging regional structures.

The European Union is Israel’s largest trade market and closer cooperation on a range of issues has been a consistent goal of Israeli governments, even as disagreements over Israel’s policies and actions in the Palestinian territories have sharpened. An October 3, 2022 meeting of the [EU-Israel Association Council](#) marked an [attempt](#) by the EU and Prime Minister Lapid’s government to advance coordination in key areas after a ten-year hiatus due to tensions over the conflict and occupation. Israel [raised](#) the idea of the EU becoming part of the Negev Forum, while also proposing the expansion of bilateral cooperation on energy security, cost of living, research, and trade.

On one hand, the return of Netanyahu as Prime Minister at the head of Israel’s most right-wing government to date certainly casts doubt on the prospects for enhanced EU-Israel coordination in the near future, especially given that Netanyahu’s decision to pull back from the Association Council is what precipitated its ten-year dormancy. At the same time, the appeal to Netanyahu of securing practical, bread-and-butter wins vis-à-vis Europe is clear. Easier access to EU funds for Israeli companies, harmonizing mobile communications

schemes, an export agreement for Israeli organic produce, and an arrangement allowing Israel to adopt European food standards to reduce the cost of living could all be on the table to incentivize Israel to accept Palestinian representation and Palestinian issues within emerging regional mechanisms.



EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell meets with Israeli Minister of Intelligence Elazar Stern (Council of the EU/October 2022)

9) Build on regional mechanisms in the European-Mediterranean area.

Another way in which the European Union can contribute to the eventual advancement of a political process between Israel and the Palestinians is through establishing a “broader regional envelope.” This would include the Palestinians and Israel, along with Jordan, Egypt, and Gulf countries, as well as EU states – in particular the countries in the Eastern Mediterranean (Greece, Cyprus, France, Italy, Spain, and Malta) that share a common set of strategic and other interests. In such an [Eastern Mediterranean Basin regional system](#), a comprehensive strategy for achieving benefits for participants in areas of shared and overlapping concern could include resumption of an Israeli-Palestinian political process as both a component and an outcome of the strategy. Such a framework would recognize that environmental and climate challenges are inherently regional and can only be addressed through regional cooperation, which could bring together resources to tackle issues such as water desalination and supply,



Sixth Ministerial Meeting of the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF/November 2021)

agriculture and food security, energy, and transportation infrastructure.

Existing regional organizations provide a basis on which to build. Israel and Palestinians jointly participate in Mediterranean regional mechanisms on a state-to-state level, with Israel acknowledging (at least tacitly) Palestinian participation on equal footing as the State of Palestine, rather than as the Palestinian Authority. These regional mechanisms include the [Union for the Mediterranean](#) (UfM) and the [East Mediterranean Gas Forum](#) (EMGF). The latter organization includes Italy, Greece, and Cyprus, in addition to Israel, Palestine, Egypt, and Jordan. EMGF’s mandate [could be broadened](#) to make it a regional forum to explore cooperation on sustainable energy, water, economic cooperation, and tourism. The [Middle East Desalination Research Center](#) (MEDRC), established in 1996 by the Madrid Conference’s water working group – based in and chaired by Oman, with an Executive Council that includes the US, Korea, Japan, Palestine, Jordan, Israel, Qatar, Spain, and the Netherlands – serves as another example of the fruits of regional cooperation and the power of climate issues and water scarcity to bring regional states together.

10) Increase people-to-people contacts.

There are many longstanding people-to-people (P2P) programs that bring together Israelis and

Palestinians to form relationships at the individual and civil society level. Thanks to the [Middle East Partnership for Peace Act \(MEPPA\)](#), the US now provides funding (\$50 million dollars per year over five years) to facilitate scaling up those programs. Without cannibalizing this existing funding, new money could be raised – perhaps \$50 million a year from the Negev Forum countries themselves – to initiate broader P2P programs that bring together Israelis, Palestinians, and people from Arab countries that are normalizing relations with Israel. We heard from several of our seminar participants about the need for Israelis on the left of the political spectrum, who prioritize Israeli-Palestinian peace and want to end the occupation, to engage regarding normalization and pursue dialogue with Arab countries that are normalizing with Israel. As it stands now, those countries are hearing mostly from those on the right who do not prioritize political resolution of the Palestinian issue, and might prefer to bypass it altogether.



Israelis and Palestinians engaging in people-to-people activity (ALLMEP)

IV. Compendium of Articles

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