



By: Ahmad El Hussein

Abraham Accords 2.0 – turning Gulf fear into diplomatic payment



For nearly two weeks, regional capitals worked tirelessly to prevent the confrontation between the United States, Israel and Iran from becoming a wider Middle Eastern war.

Saudi Arabia feared oil instability and damage to the region's political order. Qatar feared the destruction of its diplomatic balancing role. The UAE feared a return to the security environment it had quietly tried to escape.

Egypt feared a further collapse of Gaza, new displacement pressures at its border, renewed instability in the Red Sea, and another regional shock that could deepen its economic and security burdens.

Turkey feared regional fragmentation. Pakistan feared being pulled into a wider confrontation while managing its ties with China, Iran, and the Gulf.

Then Trump added another layer of complication. Just as expectations grew that a breakthrough with Iran might be approaching, he linked the diplomatic track to the expansion of the [Abraham Accords](#).

What had seemed like negotiations to end a war, difficult as that may be, suddenly became something much more ambitious: an attempt to achieve a regional realignment from a single crisis.

Every crisis becomes leverage

The question is no longer only whether Washington and Tehran can end the confrontation. It is whether Trump is trying to turn Gulf fear into diplomatic payment.

The Gulf states mostly wanted the war contained, the Strait of Hormuz reopened and secured, oil markets stabilised, and Washington to restrain renewed Israeli escalation.

Now **Trump** seems to be suggesting that de-escalation comes with an additional condition: normalisation with Israel.

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This reflects his instinctive approach to power. Every crisis becomes leverage, a transaction, and an opportunity that could yield maximum return.

He wants to end the war with Iran, expand the Abraham Accords, deliver Saudi normalisation, reassure Gulf monarchies and keep them as clients, preserve Israeli superiority, contain oil volatility, show strength without entering another forever war, and still claim that maximum pressure worked and that he won.

If the late Leslie Gelb were advising him, he might have reached for one of his favourite warnings: too many moving parts.

The hard questions remain

The problem is that Trump has not yet secured the basic elements of an understanding with Iran.

The hard questions remain: enrichment, sanctions relief, sequencing, verification, guarantees, regional deterrence, and the future of Iran's allied networks.

Iran is negotiating from a position of deep distrust following the collapse of the [JCPOA](#) and years of maximum pressure.

Lebanon is only one part of the broader Israeli question

Trump is still struggling to convince Tehran about the mechanics of ending the confrontation, yet he has already linked this effort to the much larger ambition of reorganising the region.

Lebanon appears to be one of the central complications in those negotiations, though few outside the process appreciate how much

weight it carries. However, Lebanon is only one part of the broader Israeli question.

Trump seems to believe that once he has an understanding with Iran and momentum towards normalisation, he can approach Netanyahu and persuade Israel to show greater flexibility across the board: not only on Lebanon, but also on Gaza, the West Bank, Syria, and the broader posture of annexation and coercive dominance.

That sequencing assumes a level of Israeli responsiveness that the current government has given no reason to expect.

The weakness of the choreography

The weakness of the choreography is clear. Trump is asking the **Gulf states** to normalise relations with an Israel that may not be interested in the type of regional order that normalisation requires.

The first Abraham Accords were presented as a new era of integration: technology, investment, intelligence cooperation, tourism, and pragmatic coexistence.

The **Palestinian issue** was not resolved; it was downgraded. The assumption was that prosperity and shared interests could bypass the old conflict.

Many in the Gulf are now asking a more uncomfortable question: which Israel are they being asked to normalise with?

Gaza shattered much of that illusion. So did the intensified pressure on Lebanon, the continued expansionist logic in the West Bank, and the rise of openly maximalist currents within **Israeli politics**.

Many in the Gulf are now asking a more uncomfortable question: which Israel are they being asked to normalise with?

An Israel seeking regional integration is one thing; an Israel pursuing annexationist and fragmentationist designs is another.

The political cost of normalisation

Saudi Arabia's buyer's remorse is rooted in exactly this contradiction. The original appeal of the Abraham Accords for Saudi Arabia and the rest of the GCC was never only Israel.

It was the promise that normalisation would unlock a deeper American security commitment: treaties, guarantees, access to weapons, intelligence sharing, and reassurance that Washington would stand behind its partners when the region became unstable.

The war with Iran has weakened that premise. If the Gulf states still had to beg Trump to restrain escalation, protect oil stability, and prevent the conflict from reaching their shores, then the security value of the bargain has already been shown to be less substantial than claimed.

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Trump now thinks he is selling the GCC something valuable. However, the war has shown that the product itself may be obsolete.

Riyadh may still want strategic channels with Israel and may still see value in American-sponsored regional security architecture.

However, it cannot ignore the political cost of normalisation while Israel behaves less like a state seeking acceptance and more like a power seeking permanent domination.

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Israeli escalation

The Gulf states spent years trying to avoid a binary confrontation with Iran. The **Saudi-Iranian rapprochement** brokered by Beijing was not sentimental; it was the result of strategic exhaustion.

Riyadh concluded that permanent escalation was too costly. The UAE reached a similar conclusion after years of regional blowback. Qatar never abandoned its channels. Oman had always preferred mediation.

None of these states wants to be trapped again between Iranian retaliation and Israeli escalation.

Trump's bargain risks pushing them back into exactly that trap. What Washington describes as diplomatic momentum may appear from Riyadh, Doha, Ankara, and Islamabad as strategic extraction – Trump's shakedown of the GCC: security dependency converted into normalisation, fear into alignment, and war termination into leverage.



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If normalisation appears voluntary, it can be managed. If it appears extracted under duress while Gaza, the West Bank, and Lebanon burn and annexationist rhetoric expands, it

becomes politically toxic.

The danger is overreach. Iran will interpret the negotiations as a cover for assembling a regional bloc against it.

Saudi Arabia may decide that strategic autonomy is worth more than a photo opportunity. Turkey and Pakistan may refuse to be incorporated into an anti-Iran architecture. Israel may accept normalisation without offering meaningful restraint in return.

The central flaw runs through all of it: Trump wants to sell regional integration while relying on an Israeli partner moving in the opposite direction.

A regional order cannot be built on normalisation if its strongest beneficiary continues to pursue annexation, fragmentation, and permanent coercion.

What began as an effort to end a war is becoming a test of how much Trump believes he can gain from ending it.

He will discover that a single agreement cannot bear the weight of every ambition placed upon it.

Ahmad El Hussein is a political analyst and essayist who writes on Middle Eastern geopolitics, US foreign policy, and the evolving structure of regional power, with particular focus on Lebanon, Iran, Saudi Arabia, the Arab Gulf, and the future of American influence in the region.