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In September and October 2020, Kosovo, Serbia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, and Sudan normalized relations with Israel in a flurry of agreements brokered by the United States. President Donald Trump suggested that, in addition to being valuable on their own terms, the agreements were part of a broader diplomatic effort to pressure the Palestinians into negotiating a peace deal with Israel. In December, the White House announced normalization of relations between Israel and Morocco in apparent exchange for U.S. recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over the disputed territory of Western Sahara.

On September 4, 2020, the Trump administration announced that after meetings with U.S. officials, Serbia and Kosovo had “each committed to economic normalization” and that both countries would also take diplomatic steps with respect to Israel. According to the White House, Kosovo “agreed to normalization of ties and the establishment of diplomatic relations,” and Serbia “committed to opening a commercial office” and “mov[ing] its embassy to Jerusalem by July.” President Trump heralded the moves, noting that other countries might follow suit and asserting “I think we’re going to have great peace in the Middle East[,] and nobody has been able to say that for a long time.”

The European Union (EU), however, warned Serbia and Kosovo that moving their embassies to Jerusalem could undermine their hopes of attaining EU membership.

Netanyahu’s comments foreshadowed the announcement on September 15 of formal diplomatic relations between Israel and the UAE and Bahrain, dubbed the Abraham Accords. The announcement came as a surprise to some, as it had not been anticipated by many in the international community. The agreements were seen as a significant step towards peace in the Middle East, as they opened up new possibilities for cooperation between Israel and its Arab neighbors.

The normalization of relations between Israel and the UAE and Bahrain was a significant development in the region. It marked the first time that an Arab country had established full diplomatic relations with Israel, and it was widely seen as a positive step towards resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The agreements were also seen as a response to the growing influence of China and Russia in the Middle East, as Israel sought to strengthen its ties with other countries in the region.

The agreements were not without controversy, however. Critics argued that the normalization of relations with Israel was a hindrance to the peace process and that it would only serve to perpetuate the status quo. Others argued that the agreements were a positive step towards peace, and that they would bring about a new era of cooperation between Israel and its neighbors.

In the wake of the agreements, there were calls for the international community to support the peace process, and for other countries in the region to follow the example of the UAE and Bahrain.

The normalization of relations between Israel and the UAE and Bahrain was a significant development in the region, and it marked a new chapter in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It was a positive step towards peace, and it showed that it was possible to move towards a resolution of the conflict in the Middle East. However, it was also a controversial move, and it was not without its critics. The international community would need to carefully monitor the situation and support the peace process in order to ensure that the agreements led to a lasting peace in the region.
Accords. In exchange for Israel suspending annexation of occupied West Bank Territory, the UAE signed a Treaty of Peace, Diplomatic Relations and Full Normalization Between the United Arab Emirates and the State of Israel, which provides that “[p]eace, diplomatic relations and full normalization of bilateral ties are hereby established between the United Arab Emirates and the State of Israel.” Bahrain in turn signed the Declaration of Peace, Cooperation, and Constructive Diplomatic and Friendly Relations, which provides:

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Foreign Minister Abdullah Al Zayani agreed to establish full diplomatic relations, to promote lasting security, to eschew threats and the use of force, as well as advance coexistence and a culture of peace. . . . The Kingdom of Bahrain and the State of Israel have agreed to seek agreements in the coming weeks regarding investment, tourism, direct flights, security, telecommunications, technology, energy, healthcare, culture, the environment, and other areas of mutual benefit, as well as reaching agreement on the reciprocal opening of embassies.

President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority, denounced the normalization agreements as a “violation of the Arab Peace Initiative, and the terms of reference of a comprehensive, lasting and just solution in accordance with international law.” The Arab Peace Initiative, unanimously adopted in 2002 by the Arab League, of which the UAE and Bahrain are members, promises Israel full diplomatic relations with all Arab League states in exchange for the establishment of a Palestinian state based on boundaries established in 1967 prior to the Six-Day War. Despite agreeing to normalize relations with Israel, both the UAE and Bahrain affirmed their commitment to the Arab Peace Initiative hours before signing the Abraham Accords.

In October, Sudan took steps to formally recognize Israel, doing so as part of a U.S.-brokered deal in which Sudan also agreed “to provide $335 million in compensation for victims.

of terrorism, which will be released to the United States following the rescission of Sudan’s State Sponsor of Terrorism designation and the enactment of [U.S.] legislation that would restore its immunities to those of a country not so designated.” Since longtime President Omar al-Bashir’s removal from power in April 2019, Sudan has been governed by a transitional government, which has pressed for better relations with the West and economic aid. According to the International Monetary Fund, removing Sudan “from the [State Sponsor of Terrorism list] eliminates one of the hurdles toward possible . . . debt relief.”

The deal with Israel has frayed ties among Sudan’s coalition transitional government. Former Prime Minister Sadiq al-Mahdi, who leads one of Sudan’s largest political parties, noted that “normalization opens risks to our fragile transitional situation . . . and can easily result in the collapse of this government.” The leader of Sudan’s transitional council, General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, however, heralded the agreement saying it could improve the Sudanese economy. He stated, “if the candidate [Trump] wanted some gains, we also wanted some gains. . . . We are more winners than any other party.”

Commentators suggested that the White House normalization initiatives were “timed conspicuously . . . [for President Trump’s] reelection campaign in need of evidence of his success as a statesman.” Nonetheless, some foreign policy experts like Aaron David Miller, a
longtime Middle East peace negotiator, said the agreements were “significant and redemptive” and that Trump administration officials “deserve credit, even though they jumped on a bus that had already left the station.”  

28 Martin Indyk, former special envoy for Israeli-Palestinian negotiations under President Barack Obama, however, wrote, “the breakthrough looks more like the latest in a long chain of unintended consequences.”  

29 In an interview, he said “[i]t gets Trump out of the corner he was in having agreed to legitimizing the [annexation of the West Bank] and then discovering that the Arab world had a problem with that. Now he’s got something he can claim credit for.”  

30 For his part, President Trump acknowledged that brokering normalization agreements between Israel and other states was part of a broader diplomatic effort to press the Palestinians to negotiate a peace deal.  

31 When asked whether he intended to “put pressure on the Palestinians to come to the table,” Trump replied, “yes, you could say that’s certainly a piece of it. The ultimate piece is it’s good for us to have, and it’s good for Israel. But certainly, that’s a piece of it.”  

32 The White House’s efforts continued after the election, resulting in an announcement in December that Morocco and Israel had reached a peace agreement and would normalize relations.  

33 In exchange, the Trump administration announced that the United States would recognize Morocco’s sovereignty over the long-disputed territory of Western Sahara and open a consulate there.  

34 Morocco’s King Mohammed VI reportedly assured Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas that Morocco’s “commitment ‘to the Palestinian cause . . . remains unchanged.’”  


32 Id. at 4:36.  


34 White House Fact Sheet, supra note 33; White House, Proclamation on Recognizing the Sovereignty of the Kingdom of Morocco over the Western Sahara (Dec. 10, 2020), at https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/proclamation-recognizing-sovereignty-kingdom-morocco-western-sahara.  