

United Arab Emirates-Israel agreement cements US-led alliance against Iran

By Jean Shaoul
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US President Donald Trump announced Thursday that the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is to “normalise” relations with Israel in a deal to be known as the “Abraham Accords.”

The agreement makes the UAE the first Gulf state and the third Arab nation to reach such a deal, after Egypt in 1979 and Jordan in 1994. The UAE, along with most other Arab nations, has until now not recognised Israel and has no formal economic relations with it.

Lauded by Trump as a “historic peace agreement between our two GREAT friends,” the agreement is another sordid betrayal of the Palestinians by an Arab regime. It is a death certificate for the Arab Initiative, launched by Saudi Arabia in 2002 and endorsed by the Arab League, offering a normalization of relations with Israel in exchange for a full withdrawal from the occupied territories, a “just settlement” of the Palestinian refugee problem based on UN Resolution 194, and the establishment of a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The Abraham Accords supposedly makes recognition of Israel dependent upon Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu halting plans to annex swathes of Palestinian land in the West Bank occupied since the June 1967 war. The aim is to side-line the fate of the Palestinians, which for decades defined the Arab states’ attitude towards the Zionist state, in order to cement an alliance between the Sunni petro-monarchies and Israel against Iran.

The UAE claimed publicly that its decision was a way of encouraging peace efforts and taking Israel’s planned annexation of parts of the West Bank off the table, arguing that relations with Israel should be tempered with “realism.” Netanyahu rejected this, insisting that he had only agreed to “delay” the annexation, with the plan remaining “on the table.”

The agreement is in reality bound up with the Trump administration’s “maximum pressure” sanctions regime

targeting Iran, tantamount to a state of war, aimed at overturning its government and installing a client regime that would reinforce US hegemony over the resource-rich Middle East and strengthen Washington’s position against China.

The announcement is the result of years of backroom talks on issues ranging from trade and security to intelligence-sharing that included Israel’s opening of an office in 2015 in Abu Dhabi. Its timing meets the needs of all three parties. It comes as Israel’s economy is unravelling in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and as Netanyahu’s trial proceedings on charges of bribery, corruption, and breach of trust in three separate cases move to the evidence hearings set for January. It gives the beleaguered Netanyahu, who heads a fractious coalition and faces increasing opposition from his support base among far-right forces, the chance to pose as Israel’s master statesman.

It likewise enables Trump, who is trailing in the polls against Joe Biden, the Democrats presidential candidate, to claim a diplomatic “triumph” after his administration’s draft Security Council resolution extending a UN ban on arms sales to Iran, due to expire in October, was defeated, paving the way for Iran to purchase arms from other major powers.

The UAE is seeking Washington’s approval for its request to purchase the US F-35 advanced combat aircraft and armed unmanned aerial vehicles, reversing its previous reliance on French fighter jets and Chinese drones. It is also seeking US support for major concessions from Qatar—in exchange for lifting the UAE’s, Saudi Arabia’s and Bahrain’s three-year long blockade of Qatari airspace and land crossings.

The UAE-Israel agreement comes in the wake of Netanyahu’s proposal to annex the settlements and the Jordan Valley, the most fertile part of the West Bank, equal to 30 percent its territory and encircling what

remains of the Palestinian areas, making even a mini-statelet unviable.

Trump had originally indicated his consent to Netanyahu's annexation plans, which play well with his evangelical Christian base as November's presidential elections approach. But facing opposition within his administration, including from his son-in-law and advisor Jared Kushner, who is close to Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, he pulled back.

Bin Salman, along with the European and regional powers, had opposed the move for exposing the mirage of a Palestinian state. Allowing the annexation to go ahead would have created a furor, jeopardising the plans to build an anti-Iran alliance that included Israel.

Kushner has indicated that other states would follow the UAE, with Oman and Bahrain, which hosts the US Sixth fleet, in line to do so, and even suggested that Saudi Arabia would follow suit in the not too distant future. Riyadh has so far remained silent on the agreement but has steadily built covert links with Israel in recent years.

Israeli Intelligence Minister Eli Cohen, in an interview with Army Radio, said he anticipated "additional agreements, both with more Gulf countries and with Muslim countries in Africa," a reference to a likely peace deal with Sudan. The UAE, along with Saudi Arabia, was instrumental in instigating last year's pre-emptive military coup in Sudan that ousted long-time ruler Omar al-Bashir, who was close to Qatar and Turkey.

While the details of what "normalisation" of relations means in practice are unclear, the UAE has opened a direct phone line to Israel and unblocked Israeli news websites. This follows a deal between an Abu Dhabi-based firm to conduct research and development related to COVID-19 and two Israeli firms. Other deals including travel, trade, embassies and security cooperation are expected in the coming weeks.

The European powers, Egypt and Jordan, have all welcomed Israel's pullback from annexing the settlements and the Jordan Valley.

Mahmoud Abbas, the President of the Palestinian Authority (PA) that controls the West Bank, said in a statement, "The Palestinian leadership rejects and denounces the UAE, Israeli and US trilateral, surprising announcement," which was a "betrayal of Jerusalem, Al-Aqsa and the Palestinian cause."

The Islamist Hamas movement, which controls Gaza, likewise rejected the US-brokered deal, saying it did not serve the cause of the Palestinians.

Turkey's foreign ministry called the UAE's behaviour hypocritical and said that the Palestinian people and the PA were right to react strongly against the agreement. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said that Turkey might suspend diplomatic relations with the UAE, already strained over Libya and the Horn of Africa.

Iran's President Hassan Rouhani denounced the deal as a "betrayal of the Palestinian cause" and warned that by lining up with Israel the Emirates now faced "a dangerous future." He said, "[The UAE] better be mindful. They have committed a huge mistake, a treacherous act. We hope they will realize this and abandon this wrong path."

In a further indication of the political course of the Arab states, on Sunday, the Gulf Cooperation Council, representing Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, issued a statement condemning Rouhani's "threats" against Abu Dhabi. Secretary-General Nayef Falah M. Al-Hajraf warned, "Iran must adhere to the UN Charter and refrain from interfering in the domestic affairs of other nations," while the UAE gave Iran's charge d'affaires in Abu Dhabi a "strongly worded memo" over the president's remarks.

The sordid deal between Israel and the UAE deepens the treacherous role of the Arab bourgeoisie, which has now formally buried its own "two state" solution, and confirms that the nationalist agenda championed by all sections of the Palestinian bourgeoisie provides no way forward for the decades-long struggle of the Palestinian workers and oppressed masses.

A resolution of the terrible situation of increasing poverty and imminent war confronting Palestinian and Israeli workers, as well as workers throughout the Middle East, cannot be left in the hands of the region's ruling classes and the imperialist powers. Workers must unite with their class brothers and sisters across the region and internationally in a struggle to put an end to capitalism and war and re-organise society on a socialist basis.

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