

Testimony of David M. Friedman

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House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on the Middle East and
North Africa

“Building a New Regional Security Architecture: The Next Phase of the
Abraham Accords”

July 22, 2026

Chairman Lawler, Ranking Member Sherman and Members of the
Subcommittee, thank you for affording me the opportunity to testify on the
subject of the Abraham Accords and their future prospects.

I would note at the outset that this is a subject near and dear to my heart. In
the summer of 2020, I participated in the negotiation and execution of these
historic agreements at the direction of President Trump and assisted by a few
members of his senior foreign policy staff. I take great pride in having been
awarded the National Security Medal by President Trump for my efforts.

Some think that the Abraham Accords spontaneously arose in August 2020 by
sheer providence or luck. The opposite is true. The seeds for the Abraham
Accords were planted on President Trump’s very first foreign visit to Riyadh,
Saudi Arabia in 2017. Speaking to nearly 50 Muslim nations, President Trump
made two things clear: 1) the battle against radical Islamism, in the first
instance, was theirs to fight, and 2) the fantasy of Israel’s demise was
completely counterproductive and needed to end.

Those guiding principles drove extensive discussions among many nations,
leading to the initial Abraham Accords. While the first deal surfaced in August

2020, the concept was in the works for much of the first Trump Administration. A premature leak would have ended the discussions, but our team was very small and closely knit.

Following the signing ceremony on September 15, 2020, on the South Lawn of the White House with regard to the first two of the Abraham Accords (with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain), I asked the foreign minister of the UAE what he saw as the greatest benefit of these historic agreements. His answer struck me as particularly astute. He said, and I am paraphrasing, that the Middle East had been beset by radicalism for nearly a century, bringing with it enormous suffering to the inhabitants of this troubled corner of the globe, whether Jew, Muslim or Christian. Critically, he said, the Abraham Accords were a victory of the moderates over the extremists. In his view, which I share, the advancement of moderate regimes in the Middle East is at the core of creating a more peaceful and prosperous region.

Several months later I traveled to Bahrain and had a similar conversation with its foreign minister. He put it in similar but more poetic terms. He said the region had been disserved for decades by radicals and fundamentalists causing many to lose hope. The Abraham Accords, he said, was King Hamad's decision to open a light at the end of the tunnel.

The Abraham Accords have brought enormous benefits to the participating nations; benefits that have been the subject of numerous reports and studies. Whether in the fields of trade, tourism, national security or mutual understanding, they are regarded on a bipartisan basis as an enormous success. They represent the courageous decision of all the relevant leaders to prioritize the future of their citizens over the grievances of the past.

Perhaps the best evidence of the strength and durability of the Abraham Accords is the fact that they remain in effect today after nearly three years of violent war in the region. Since October 7, 2023, Israel has been fighting for its existence against at least three Iranian proxies – Hamas, Hezbollah and the Houthis of Yemen. More recently, it has engaged in a war, together with the United States, directly against Iran itself. Public support for Israel unfortunately and unjustifiably has plummeted since then, with violent anti-Israel demonstrations becoming common place in Europe, South America, Australia, Canada and even the United States. Under these circumstances, it would have been understandable for Arab participants in the Abraham Accords to give up on these agreements to cultivate short-term approval from much of the world. But they didn't. Because, more than anyone else, these nations understood that when times get tough, it is even more important to remain aligned with moderate, democratic and powerful nations like the United States and Israel.

As the Biden Administration took over, we anticipated that the Abraham Accords would expand, provided that Trump's essential Middle East policies were maintained. But regrettably, the Abraham Accords have not expanded meaningfully. And the reasons for that are as clear as day. The Biden Administration dramatically shifted our foreign policy, doing violence to the foundational premise of elevating moderation over extremism. This mistake caused the region to plummet into unprecedented chaos, causing further diplomatic advancement to be untenable during the past five years.

At the outset of the Biden Administration, the State Department determined to shelve the term "Abraham Accords" in favor of the more nondescript and uninspiring "normalization agreements between some Middle East nations." Not an auspicious beginning. Over time, the Accords occasionally garnered faint praise from the Biden Administration, but they only became a serious

agenda item as President Biden's first term drew to a close and a diplomatic win was sought.

But far worse than Biden's diplomatic burial of the Abraham Accords were the actions which his administration took to empower terrorism and its sponsors – the very outcome that the parties to the Abraham Accords had sought to avoid.

The most critical example of this malpractice pertains to the Islamic Republic of Iran. To put this in the simplest terms, Iran was on the verge of bankruptcy in 2020, but President Biden came in and threw it a lifeline.

After withdrawing from the JCPOA nuclear deal in 2018, the first Trump Administration reimposed all lifted sanctions and degraded Iranian oil exports to almost zero. The Biden Administration took a different path from its beginning, adopting an extremely lax policy on sanctions enforcement. As a result, Iranian oil exports rose dramatically and Iran's ability to fund its terror proxies strengthened immeasurably. This result was the antithesis of all that motivated the Abraham Accords. Iran's restoration meant that the extremists were back in the lead.

To make matters materially worse, the Biden Administration provided more than \$1 billion in cash to UNRWA, the Hamas-supporting UN agency that was fully cut off by the first Trump administration. Notwithstanding the common knowledge that UNRWA was a supporter of Hamas incitement and extremism well before Trump took over in 2017, UNRWA was for many years the beneficiary of substantial US aid. Trump properly cut off that aid, but Biden restored it. In the aftermath of the October 7, 2023, massacre of Israeli civilians by Hamas, the full extent of UNRWA's depravity has been exposed.

Through UNRWA, the United States under Biden, albeit unintentionally, directly funded a terror organization that facilitated the murder of Jews. That is a harsh but true reality.

Further on the issue of UNRWA, I would like to compliment the bipartisan efforts of Chairman Lawler and Representative Gottheimer who have introduced a bill to dismantle this Hamas-supporting agency.

In addition to lubricating the forces of terror with cash grants or lax sanctions enforcement, when the Biden Administration finally got around to promoting the Abraham Accords, it did so as part of a diplomatic package that required Israel to agree to a Palestinian state – a very challenging sell to Israel before October 7, 2023, and a completely impossible sell thereafter. Why this additional condition was included is mystifying – the existing Abraham Accords do not include such a provision. It made Biden’s diplomatic efforts destined for failure; indeed, an Arab nation willing to enter the Abraham Accords in the absence of a Palestinian state – and I believe that such nations exist - could not refuse a Palestinian state if America itself was demanding one!

Some have criticized the Abraham Accords because they did not resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Some go so far as to argue that the October 7 massacre was planned and executed to prevent Saudi Arabia from joining the Accords. I don’t buy any of this.

In the first place, the October 7 massacre was in the planning stage well before US-Saudi discussions were even considered. In my view, the massacre was motivated solely by the insatiable desire of Hamas and other terror organizations to kill Jews. It could have occurred on any date over the past two

decades if Israel had let its guard down. Unfortunately, Israel indeed let its guard down on that tragic day, and the results speak for themselves.

If there is any lesson to be learned from October 7, it is that Israel has no margin of error when it comes to protecting its citizens. There are no days off and no risky diplomatic experiments to be tried when the consequences of failure are so great – even when those experiments are pushed, in good faith, by Israel’s friends.

The fact that the Abraham Accords did not resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a feature, not a bug, of the deal. The Accords sent a clear message to the Palestinians that the days in which they held the Middle East hostage had ended. The Middle East would embark on a path to peace and prosperity with or without them, and they were well advised to think about how to create a better future for their people.

Regrettably, the Palestinians did not internalize this message. Aided by a compliant Biden Administration, they continued to build terror tunnels, to fire missiles at Israeli civilians, to repress their own people, and even to continue the “pay for slay” program in which large financial rewards were provided by the Palestinian Authority to terrorists who murdered Jews.

I want to emphasize one point as we all struggle with the challenge of expanding the Abraham Accords: Israel already has done the two-state experiment and that folly almost destroyed the Jewish State. Israel left Gaza entirely in 2005. It handed the territory over to the exclusive control of the Palestinians. The world ran to throw money at this Palestinian-only enclave to help it succeed. But the residents of Gaza elected Hamas to power, which proceeded to deploy the Gaza funding for all the wrong malign activity which

has been extensively documented. When Hamas attacked Israel on October 7, the residents cheered and celebrated, as did the Palestinians in Judea and Samaria. Today, Hamas has retained and even expanded its popularity.

Talk of a Palestinian state in the halls of Congress or the palaces of Europe is just wildly out of touch with the realities on the ground. Importantly, all future Abraham Accords partners understand those realities well. As do middle class Palestinians living in Judea and Samaria. I know them. They do not want to be ruled by repressive, violent and corrupt leaders – which are the only leaders currently or foreseeably available.

A Palestinian state will not advance the Abraham Accords, it will destroy them. It will consume the region with even more conflict and violence.

These are some of the realities that impact the future of the Abraham Accords. But there are other realities as well, including the overriding reality that the Abraham Accords remain a lasting and singular example of ancient nations restoring peaceful coexistence with the help and guidance of the United States. Indeed, I believe that the Accords have a bright future with many more participants, provided:

- The United States continues its policy of zero tolerance with regard to radical Islamic terrorism, especially in connection with the Islamic Republic of Iran and its proxies.
- Israel remains, and strengthens, as a regional superpower. Israel's technological prowess is a powerful incentive for Arab nations to normalize.
- There continues to be no daylight between the governments of America and Israel. The Abraham Accords were preceded, and aided, by

unprecedented American diplomatic advancements in favor of Israel, including the move of the United States Embassy to Jerusalem and US recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights. These advancements did not push Arab partners away; rather, they brought the parties closer together under a “circle of trust.”

- The United States continues to reward moderate Arab nations and to provide appropriate incentives against radicalism.
- The Israeli-Palestinian conflict must continue to be addressed as a separate process, to include proposed solutions beyond the failed notion of a Palestinian state. I believe there are other “win-win” approaches that have merit and I encourage you to read my book on the subject, *One Jewish State: The Last, Best Hope to Resolve the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*.

My final point is that the America’s support for Israel has recently become the subject of intellectually dishonest politicization, in many cases bordering on, or even crossing the line into, antisemitism. For the Abraham Accords to have a future, this needs to stop. The Accords reflect the recognition by the moderate Arab world that Israel is a permanent ally of the United States and critical partner in regional national security. If that recognition is impaired, the Accords have no future.

Thank you for having me this afternoon, and I look forward to your questions.



Abraham Accords 2.0

American Leadership in Establishing a New Regional Architecture of Security, Prosperity, and Innovation

Prepared Written Testimony of

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Hearing before the House Foreign Affairs Committee

Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa

**“Building a New Regional Security Architecture: The Next Phase of the
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July 22, 2026



Chairman Lawler, Ranking Member Sherman, and honorable members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the critical role of U.S. leadership in shaping the future of the Abraham Accords and regional integration.

My central message is this: **The Abraham Accords can serve as the foundation for a new U.S.-led regional architecture that advances the vital national security interests of the United States and its allies. The historic agreements brokered by President Trump in 2020 produced a flourishing of diplomatic, economic, security, and people-to-people cooperation. Despite the multi-front war that followed Hamas's October 7, 2023 terrorist attack, the Accords have proved remarkably resilient. We nevertheless stand today at a critical juncture. Restoring the momentum of the Abraham Accords, building regional frameworks that advance U.S. interests, and expanding the circle of warm peace will require sustained American leadership. Congress can play a central role in providing that leadership and turning the potential of "Abraham Accords 2.0" into reality.**

From September 2020 to October 2023, the Abraham Accords opened the door to the rapid development of ties between Israel, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco, and, for a time, Sudan. Embassies were established, direct flights were launched, trade grew rapidly, and previously unimaginable commercial, technological, and civil society cooperation emerged. Partnerships were announced in artificial intelligence, space, cybersecurity, water, precision agriculture, energy, health, fintech, defense and many other fields. The Accords also contributed positively to Israel's ties with its traditional peace partners, Egypt and Jordan. More than sixty intergovernmental agreements, instruments, and MOUs were signed between Israel and its Abraham Accords and Arab peace partners.¹

This period also saw the emergence of Abraham Accords multilateral cooperation. In January 2021, the Trump Administration announced that Israel would be moved to CENTCOM's area of responsibility, enabling much enhanced cooperation with other American partners in the region. Under President Biden, the I2U2 framework (Israel-India-U.S.-UAE) and Negev Forum were established. In September 2023, the United States, India, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, the European Union, and other partners signed a memorandum of understanding to advance the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor, or IMEC.

Iran, Hamas, and other radical actors understood the implications of this trend. They viewed the emergence of a U.S.-aligned regional architecture, culminating in advanced U.S.-mediated negotiations toward Saudi-Israeli normalization, as a serious threat. While Hamas' October 7 attack had been planned over a number of years, evidence indicates that the acceleration of this regional alignment was one of the factors that led Hamas to launch the attack in October 2023.²

¹ The Heritage Foundation, *The Abraham Accords: A Five Year Report*, September 2025, https://static.heritage.org/-/2025/AbrahamAccords_Five_Year.pdf

² Avishai Karo, "The Israel-Saudi Arabia Normalization: A Motive for the October 7, 2023 Terrorist Attack Reflected in Documents from the Gaza Strip," The Amit Terrorism and Intelligence Research Institute, June 15, 2026, <https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en/the-israel-saudi-arabia-normalization-a-motive-for-the-october-7-2023-terrorist-attack->



The attack and ensuing multi-front war generated far-reaching regional tensions and strain. Many questioned whether the Accords would survive. Nearly three years later, it is clear that the strategic foundations of the Accords are more resilient than many skeptics predicted. Despite the intense regional conflict, the architecture of peace did not collapse. This resilience found expression in several ways.

First, formal diplomatic relations remained in place. Second, trade between Israel and the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, Egypt, and Jordan continued to grow. According to data from Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics, combined trade between Israel and its Arab and Muslim peace partners increased by approximately 15.4 percent in 2024 compared with 2023. It increased a further 0.8 percent year-over-year in 2025, a modest rise that is nevertheless impressive given the regional tensions and disruptions. During the first five months of 2026, trade was approximately 7.7 percent higher than during the same period in 2025.³ Indeed, Israel's cumulative trade with its Arab peace partners has risen every year since the Accords were signed. Combined trade rose from approximately \$1.97 billion in 2021 to approximately \$4.56 billion in 2025, an increase of roughly 131 percent.⁴

Third, air connectivity proved remarkably durable. Although international aviation to Israel faced severe disruption, Emirati airlines maintained service during periods when many Western airlines suspended flights. The UAE was the third most popular country for passengers traveling to and from Ben Gurion Airport in 2025 and again during the first six months of 2026.⁵

Fourth, defense integration advanced in the face of shared threats. In January 2026, CENTCOM announced the establishment of the Middle Eastern Air Defense-Combined Defense Operations Cell.⁶ The importance of this integration was demonstrated a month later with the launch of Operation Epic Fury. During the conflict Israel deployed an Iron Dome battery and other advanced systems to assist in defending the UAE. It marked an extraordinary development made possible by the Abraham Accords: An Israeli defensive system, developed in close partnership with the United States, helping protect an Arab partner under fire.

Military cooperation was not limited to Israel and the UAE. In January 2026, a senior Moroccan military delegation traveled to Tel Aviv and signed a strategic work plan with their Israeli counterparts.

[and-massacre-reflected-in-documents-from-the-gaza-strip/](#); Marcus Walker and Summer Said, " Hamas Wanted to Torpedo Israel-Saudi Deal With Oct. 7 Attacks, Documents Reveal," *Wall Street Journal*, May 18, 2025, <https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/hamas-wanted-to-torpedo-israel-saudi-deal-with-oct-7-attacks-documents-reveal-a70ec560>.

³ Israeli CBS trade data can be found here (Hebrew)- Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, "Monthly Bulletin of Foreign Trade Statistics," <https://www.cbs.gov.il/he/cbsNewBrand/Pages/Foreign-Trade-Statistics-Monthly.aspx>.

⁴ It is important to note that these figures cover trade in goods. They for the most part do not reflect trade in services, software, investment, or many defense transactions, meaning that the true volume of economic activity is significantly higher.

⁵ Israel Airports Authority, "Activity Reports," <https://www.iaa.gov.il/en/about/aeronautical-information/annualreport/>.

⁶ U.S. Central Command, "U.S., Regional Partners Open New Air Defense Operations Cell in Qatar," public release, January 13, 2026, <https://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/PUBLIC-RELEASES/Article/4376614/us-regional-partners-open-new-air-defense-operations-cell-in-qatar/>.



At the same time, we must not minimize the damage caused by the post-October 7 war. Public support for normalization declined across much of the region. People-to-people initiatives suffered, business and technology partnerships were paused or canceled, academic and scientific cooperation decreased, multilateral forums lost momentum, and the expansion of normalization slowed.

We therefore stand at a historic juncture. The Abraham Accords have the potential to shape a new regional architecture that supports crucial U.S. national security interests. Realizing this potential, and restoring positive momentum on the bilateral and multilateral levels, will require American leadership, commitment, and focus. Congress has an indispensable role in taking the Accords to the next level. **I will now present five areas in which Congress can make an invaluable contribution to Abraham Accords 2.0.**

1. Advance Concrete Steps to Realize the IMEC Vision

IMEC could become one of the most consequential infrastructure initiatives of our generation. Such an overland route could shorten transit times for goods between India and Europe by 51 percent, and between the UAE and Israel by 79 percent.⁷ However, IMEC's potential extends beyond freight. Energy infrastructure, digital connectivity, and data infrastructure could all form part of the corridor.

For the United States, IMEC is not simply a transportation project. It is an opportunity to strengthen supply-chain resilience, provide an alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative and routes dominated by Russia and Iran, increase demand for American technology and services, connect close U.S. partners, and reinforce a Western-aligned economic corridor extending from India to Europe.

Despite extensive diplomatic attention and rhetoric, there in fact has been relatively little detailed analysis of IMEC's likely economic benefits, costs, regulatory requirements, and commercially viable projects. Overcoming political, bureaucratic, and economic hurdles, and attracting public and private investment, will require a credible account of what the corridor could deliver for each of the countries involved, a detailed mapping of infrastructure needs and gaps, an analysis of the regulatory, customs, and security requirements for its success, and an assessment of the opportunities for public and private sector actors along the route.

Congress should therefore advance two complementary products.

⁷ Asher Fredman and Joseph Rozen, "The India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor: A Catalyst for Regional Integration and Global Prosperity," Misgav Institute for National Security, June 26, 2025, <https://www.misgavins.org/en/fredman-rozen-the-india-middle-east-europe-economic-corridor/>



First, it should seek an independent U.S. International Trade Commission assessment of IMEC's trade and economic implications.⁸ The assessment should examine potential employment, investment, trade, and growth effects for participating states and identify opportunities for American companies in engineering, logistics, cybersecurity, energy technology, and digital infrastructure.

Second, Congress should call upon the Department of Commerce, in coordination with the Departments of State, Treasury, Transportation, and Energy, together with the U.S. Trade Representative, the Trade and Development Agency, the International Development Finance Corporation, and the Export-Import Bank, to develop an actionable commercial roadmap that includes bankable projects, financing gaps, regulatory barriers, and investment opportunities. A central component should be identifying ways to provide technical assistance in harmonizing customs and data exchange procedures, so that goods can move efficiently from India to Europe.

Congress should also encourage the Treasury Department and the U.S. Executive Director at the World Bank to support complementary analytical work. The World Bank has extensive experience modeling major transport corridors, including projects associated with China's BRI. Comparable work on IMEC could add international credibility and help identify the steps needed to make the corridor viable.

In tandem with these studies, the United States should convene the IMEC signatories and the key transit and destination countries, including Israel and Jordan, to develop an implementation roadmap, measurable benchmarks, and a permanent secretariat for coordination, communication, and oversight.

Progress need not wait for a complete regional railway network. Existing and expanded trucking routes can demonstrate commercial value while rail infrastructure is developed. Congress should encourage engagement with Saudi Arabia and other partners on transit arrangements for goods originating from or destined for Israel. Where appropriate, U.S. financial support through the DFC and other mechanisms could be made available to qualifying regional partners for infrastructure projects.

As noted, IMEC should be viewed not only through the lens of trade but also through the lens of energy and digital connectivity. Saudi Arabia's East-West oil pipeline has demonstrated the strategic value of energy infrastructure capable of bypassing the Strait of Hormuz. At this stage, the energy component of IMEC should focus on natural gas, including pipelines from the Arabian Gulf to Israel's Mediterranean ports, which could then be transported to Europe through new pipelines in the eastern Mediterranean.⁹

⁸ A Tariff Act Section 332 investigation could be requested by the President, the U.S. Trade Representative, the House Committee on Ways and Means, or the Senate Committee on Finance.

⁹ Victoria Coates and Asher Fredman, "A New US-Led Architecture for the Middle East," *The National Interest*, June 12, 2026, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/middle-east-watch/a-new-us-led-architecture-for-the-middle-east>



2. Establish an Abraham Accords Critical-Technology Partnership

Technological leadership will increasingly shape the global balance of power and the national security of states. The United States, Israel, and key Arab and Muslim partners possess complementary capabilities that can strengthen U.S. and allied technological leadership.

The State Department's Pax Silica initiative provides a valuable global framework for cooperation with trusted partners on AI. Congress should complement this global effort with an Abraham Accords Critical-Technology Partnership focused specifically on regional projects and innovation ecosystems. This initiative could build on the United States-Israel Artificial Intelligence Center Act introduced by then-Senator and now Secretary of State Marco Rubio in 2021, while expanding the concept to include Abraham Accords partners and adding additional scientific fields such as quantum technologies, space, cybersecurity, and biotechnology.¹⁰

Such a Center should leverage resources from all of its members to support joint research, shared test beds, pilot projects, standards cooperation, fellowships, commercialization partnerships, and the deployment of emerging technologies that address shared regional challenges. Participation should depend on matching contributions and rigorous safeguards governing intellectual property, export controls, cybersecurity, and the exposure of sensitive technologies to adversarial nations.

3. Advance Regional Security Integration

Congress has already advanced and in some cases enacted important initiatives involving regional air and missile defense, maritime security, cybersecurity, space cooperation, and joint exercises. These efforts should be consolidated into a practical regional architecture that encompasses planning, interoperability, resilience, R&D, and manufacturing.

One realistic model for such an architecture is the Comprehensive Security Integration and Prosperity Agreement, or C-SIPA, signed by the U.S. and Bahrain in September 2023. C-SIPA establishes mechanisms for high-level consultation and coordination in response to external aggression, strengthens defense cooperation, and integrates security with trade, technology, and investment.¹¹

The United States should work to establish an Abraham Accords C-SIPA. Such a framework would not require an automatic commitment to use force. Rather, it could facilitate rapid senior-level consultations,

¹⁰ *United States–Israel Artificial Intelligence Center Act*, S. 2120, 117th Cong. (2021), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/2120/text>. ([congress.gov](https://www.congress.gov))

¹¹ U.S. Embassy in Bahrain, “U.S.-Bahrain Comprehensive Security Integration and Prosperity Agreement,” September 13, 2023, <https://bh.usembassy.gov/u-s-bahrain-comprehensive-security-integration-and-prosperity-agreement/>.



shared threat assessments, and consideration of coordinated political, economic, and defensive responses whenever a participant faces external aggression or coercion. Standing working groups could deepen cooperation in integrated air defense, counter-drone systems, maritime security, cyber defense, and defense industrial cooperation. Particular attention should be devoted to protecting the infrastructure upon which regional integration and economic prosperity depends, including ports, energy installations, data centers, desalination facilities, airports, and logistics hubs.

This architecture should be modular. Not every participant will take part in every aspect. The objective should be a flexible regional security architecture that strengthens deterrence, enhances resilience, and enables partners to coordinate responses to common threats while respecting different constraints.

4. Invest in the Human Foundations of Peace

Intergovernmental agreements and cooperation form the physical architecture of regional integration. But people-to-people relationships are its beating heart. Lasting peace will depend not only on agreements signed by governments, but also on entrepreneurs building businesses together, scientists conducting joint research, students studying side by side, and future leaders developing relationships of trust across borders.

The post-October 7 period demonstrated the danger of failing to build extensive public constituencies that understand, value, and benefit from regional cooperation. If the Abraham Accords are to become a durable and lasting foundation, they must be rooted in sustained engagement among the peoples of the region.

The United States already possesses highly effective tools for advancing this goal. Congress does not need to create new programs. Instead, it should expand and adapt existing educational, scientific, and leadership programs by establishing dedicated Abraham Accords tracks that bring together participants from the United States, Israel, and regional partners.

The State Department's International Visitor Leadership Program should establish recurring Abraham Accords cohorts that bring emerging leaders from Israel and Arab and Muslim partners to the United States as joint regional delegations. These cohorts could engage American counterparts while developing long-term professional networks focused on innovation, entrepreneurship, public administration, education, and economic integration. Similarly, the U.S. Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) should establish dedicated Abraham Accords groups within its existing leadership and entrepreneurship programs. Congress should also support an Abraham Accords-focused track within the Stevens Initiative for Virtual Exchange, bringing American and Abraham Accords member countries' classrooms, universities, and youth together for dialogue and shared projects.



Finally, Congress should enhance the Middle East Regional Cooperation (MERC) Program by creating expanded funding opportunities for multilateral research consortia involving Israel, the United States, and Abraham Accords partners in areas such as water security, agriculture, health, and AI.

5. Appoint and Confirm a Special Envoy for the Abraham Accords and Develop Country-Specific Strategies for Expanding Normalization

In the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024, Congress established within the Department of State the Office of the Special Presidential Envoy for the Abraham Accords, Negev Forum, and Related Integration and Normalization Fora and Agreements. The law provides for a Senate-confirmed envoy with the rank of ambassador who reports directly to the Secretary of State.

This office should be filled, staffed, and empowered. The envoy should have the recourses and access necessary to coordinate initiatives spanning the Departments of State, Defense, Commerce, Treasury, and other agencies, while working closely with the White House and other special envoys.

The envoy's mandate should encompass both deepening existing agreements and pursuing Abraham Accords expansion. Saudi Arabia is uniquely important, and the United States should continue working toward Saudi-Israeli normalization. But it should also be recalled that there are more than two dozen Arab and Muslim-majority countries that lack formal relations with Israel. Before October 7, 2023, progress was reportedly made towards the establishment of formal relations with a number of these countries.

The Special Envoy's Regional Integration Office should develop prioritized, country-specific strategies for a broad range of potential normalization partners. These strategies should begin with each country's national priorities. For one country, the central issue may be defense cooperation. For another, it could be access to American technology, water and food security, energy, investment, or diplomatic and sovereignty-related issues. The United States should identify where American, Israeli, and regional capabilities can help meet those needs, what mutually beneficial measures could pave the way for the expansion of ties, and what a roadmap towards gradual normalization would entail.¹² There should also be a concerted effort to return Sudan to the Abraham Accords framework, while countering the efforts of Iran and other hostile nations to expand their influence in the Sahel region in general and in Sudan in particular.

¹² For one example of such a roadmap, see Asher Fredman and Joseph Rozen, "Israel, Indonesia, and the Future of the Abraham Accords," Misgav Institute for National Security, May 11, 2026, <https://www.misgavins.org/en/fredman-rozen-future-of-the-abraham-accords/>



Conclusion

The Abraham Accords demonstrated how bold and innovative American leadership can produce outcomes that many believed impossible. However, without concerted U.S.-led effort, these agreements may fail to reach their full transformative potential.

The next phase will require active American leadership, focus, and a strategy that treats regional integration as a central instrument and goal of U.S. policy. Congress can help translate the vision into practical institutions and programs: an implementable IMEC, a trusted critical-technology partnership, a flexible regional security framework, stronger people-to-people networks, and a dedicated diplomatic effort to deepen and expand normalization.

Congress should also recognize that strengthening regional integration requires countering actors that seek to demonize and isolate Israel, and undermine the Abraham Accords model of advancing peace and prosperity. The United Nations is today perhaps the most globally influential actor working to delegitimize and promote boycotts of Israel, while whitewashing terror and rejectionism. The U.S. should not, on the one hand, work to integrate Israel and Arab allies, and on the other hand, fund an institution which seeks to isolate Israel and undermine U.S. national interests.¹³

It also must be recognized that the state-connected media platforms of some U.S. partners, such as Qatar's Al Jazeera, have consistently promoted anti-normalization and a strongly negative framing of the Abraham Accords, making the task of building a warm peace more difficult. American policy should support institutions and initiatives that advance regional cooperation, recognition, and coexistence, while opposing efforts to delegitimize the Abraham Accords.

The MENA region stands at a crossroads. Iran, the Muslim Brotherhood, rejectionist Palestinian factions, and others seek to steer the region down the path of extremism, instability, and terror. The Abraham Accords have provided an alternative path, one of tolerance, integration, and cooperation. The United States can play a key role in advancing the path of peace, prosperity, and partnership in ways that serve the vital interests of the American people.

¹³ See Asher Fredman and Gilad Erdan, "From UN Bureaucracy to American Global Leadership: A Strategy for Advancing American Interests by Disengaging from a Failed UN," Misgav Institute for National Security, June 17, 2026, <https://www.misgavins.org/en/fredman-un-bureaucracy-us-leadership/>

**Prepared Testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee
Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa**

Daniel B. Shapiro, former U.S. Ambassador to Israel, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of
Defense for the Middle East, Distinguished Fellow, Scowcroft Middle East Security Initiative,
Atlantic Council

*Hearing: Building a New Regional Security Architecture: The Next Phrase of the Abraham
Accords*

July 22, 2026

Chairman Lawler, Ranking Member Sherman, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today about the future of the Abraham Accords and the path forward for regional integration in the Middle East.

What the Abraham Accords Launched

As we approach the six-year anniversary of the signing of the Abraham Accords, it is worth taking a moment to appreciate what they represented. The agreements between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Morocco, shepherded by the first Trump administration, were the first normalization deals between Israel and Arab states since the 1994 peace agreement with Jordan. The Accords showcased that these Arab leaders would not be bound by a decades-old paradigm that said broader regional peace and integration could come only after a comprehensive peace agreement was reached between Israel and the Palestinians. They were determined to pursue their own national interests, which they viewed as being advanced by being in partnership with Israel.

The Accords were a laudable diplomatic achievement, born of leaders' willingness to formalize previously covert relationships forged on the basis of mutual security and economic benefits. They also catalyzed a series of additional steps toward regional integration in the following three years. Months after the Accords were signed, the Pentagon shifted Israel from the U.S. European Command (EUCOM) area of responsibility to that of the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM). The move was part of a larger project to build an integrated regional security architecture to complement the Abraham Accords and coordinate regional defenses against Iran. Although a formal regional security architecture remains aspirational, Israel's inclusion in CENTCOM has been an integral part of the security coordination required to defend against Iranian attacks, most prominently those aimed at Israel in April and October of 2024 and during the 12-Day War in June 2025. Since the war with Iran began on February 28, Israel deployed Iron Dome missile defense systems and personnel to the UAE, the first time the system had ever been deployed outside of Israel or the United States. Although Israel and the Emirates have long worked together on security issues out of the public view, this level of security cooperation would not have been possible absent the countries' diplomatic agreement.

In 2022, then-Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid worked with the Biden administration to launch the Negev Forum, a framework for regional cooperation that included Israel, the United States, the UAE, Egypt, Bahrain, and Morocco, which focused on shared challenges in the fields of education, health, tourism, food and water security, energy, and regional security. The initiative made genuine, albeit uneven progress at the working group level, and plans for a second ministerial meeting in Marrakesh, Morocco, to be held on October 19, 2023, were finalized at the UN General Assembly in September of that year. That ministerial was derailed by Hamas' brutal October 7th terrorist attacks and the regional turmoil that ensued, but the Forum's envisioned expansion at Marrakesh to include Jordan as a full member, senior Palestinian Authority representatives as session participants, and other Arab and Muslim states as observers, was a signal that the Abraham Accords could be the start of a broader regional transformation.

The September 2023 announcement of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) at the G-20 summit in New Delhi was similarly encouraging. The project, once implemented, will integrate transportation, energy, and digital infrastructure to create a corridor stretching from Mumbai to Marseille and transiting through the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Israel. Although this initiative remains stalled post-October 7th, the United States and regional leaders alike have worked to keep it alive. The disruptions to shipping through the Strait of Hormuz during the Iran War have only increased the salience of establishing alternative transportation and energy routes. Discussions at the Atlantic Council's IMEC conference last month reaffirmed all relevant parties' continued commitment to moving forward, especially in light of recent crises.

Tellingly, although the October 7th attacks managed to temporarily delay these follow-on integration efforts, they did not extinguish the Abraham Accords themselves. All bilateral relationships established by the Accords have withstood the enormous pressures of the last nearly three years. In addition to the UAE-Israel defense cooperation already mentioned, bilateral trade between Israel and its Emirati, Bahraini, and Moroccan partners, while subject to natural fluctuations in a complex security environment, has steadily expanded since the agreements were signed.

It remains very much in the United States' interests to expand the Accords. Such agreements provide the best path forward to broader regional integration, and the agreements have proven to be tangible steps toward the ultimate goal of peace and prosperity for participant states and their citizens. Expanding the Abraham Accords would entrench regional integration as an organic force to help stabilize the region through interdependence and partnership.

Challenges to Expanding Regional Integration

However, expanding the Accords and reviving other integration efforts will not be easy. Israel's defense against Hamas was legitimate, of course. But popular opinion in many Arab states, shaped by images of civilian casualties in Gaza — of which there were far too many, both due to Hamas' use of civilians as human shields and insufficient Israeli efforts to minimize them — has turned sharply negatively toward Israel and deeply opposed to normalization, even as there is keener awareness of the threat Iran poses. The ceasefire and hostage release deal signed last October has provided some respite to Palestinians in Gaza. But the stalled implementation of President Trump's twenty-point plan — caused by Hamas' refusal to disarm but also hampered by Israeli actions and sluggishness by Arab states — leaves the issue woefully unsettled, and Palestinian civilian suffering continues, in full view of the same publics that regional leaders must consider.

Israeli public attitudes present their own set of challenges. Israelis remain understandably fearful of a repeat of an October 7th-style attack, and accordingly they are supportive of a more proactive approach to dealing with security threats, including holding security zones in Lebanon, Syria, and Gaza — an unsustainable policy if regional integration is to be advanced. Furthermore, the statements and actions of Prime Minister Netanyahu and his far-right coalition, including support for annexation and aggressive settlement expansion in the West Bank, attempts to undermine the Palestinian Authority, and turning a blind eye to the terrorism against Palestinian civilians by Jewish extremists in the West Bank — stymie Arab leaders' efforts to make steps toward normalization more palatable to their publics. Many Gulf leaders cite these factors and other Israeli actions, including its September 2025 strike on Hamas leaders in Doha, Qatar and its advocacy for an Iran war that has brought ruinous destruction on their territories, as forcing them to weigh the promises of the benefits of security cooperation with Israel to deal with Iran and its proxies against the risks that Israel itself may pose as a destabilizing actor in the region.

The outcome of the upcoming Israeli elections will be a critical factor in how much progress can be made on regional integration in the near future. While Arab public opinion toward Israel may not be meaningfully moved if an opposition leader triumphs over Prime Minister Netanyahu in late October, regional leaders will likely find a partner with far less baggage who is easier for them to work with on a shared integration agenda. A new prime minister would similarly have a chance to arrest the deterioration of Israel's standing in the United States, be a useful partner to President Trump in his final two years in office, and could be central to securing the president an enduring second-term achievement of expanded integration in the region. Meaningful progress with Prime Minister Netanyahu and his coalition still in office would be incredibly difficult, and in the event that no leader can form a government and Netanyahu stays on as interim prime minister while repeat elections are held, virtually impossible.

In previous negotiations with the United States, Saudi Arabia has consistently predicated normalization with Israel on a credible pathway to Palestinian statehood, but the war in Gaza has drastically raised the standard for steps to satisfy this requirement. Significant movement by Riyadh will require much more meaningful progress on the Palestinian issue than would have been acceptable before the war in Gaza. Material progress on the president's twenty-point plan — which, indeed, calls for establishing a credible pathway to a Palestinians state — would certainly help create the right atmosphere for Israeli-Saudi progress. However, the Iran War has stalled the work of the Board of Peace in rallying regional support for empowering the National Committee for the Administration of Gaza (NCAG), establishing an International Stabilization Force, and advancing reconstruction to benefit Palestinian civilians.

The Iran War, a strategic blunder on many counts, severely complicates the outlook for regional integration. Despite ongoing security cooperation, including Israel's defense of the UAE, many of the Gulf states are reappraising the risk of allowing U.S. bases on their soil as they question the reliability of U.S. security commitments, the coherence of our approach to Iran, and American appetite for sustained confrontation with Tehran. Throughout the period since October 7th, CENTCOM has helped maintain communication between the Israel Defense Forces and Arab militaries. But depending on how the war ends, its ability to serve as an integrator for practical military cooperation may face significant limits. With Iran's regime intact and weaponizing the Strait of Hormuz as an enormously powerful form of leverage, and no indication that periodic escalations will abate, Gulf states may worry about signing up to regional integration initiatives at a time when Israeli and U.S. decisions, in their view, are contributing to regional instability.

An additional new challenge is the rift that opened up between Saudi Arabia and the UAE in late 2025, which persists to this day, even during a war in which Riyadh and Abu Dhabi share a common adversary. This dispute has little to do with Israel, deriving instead from political and economic competition, personal tensions between two ambitious leaders, and differing approaches to regional conflicts involving separatist groups and the Muslim Brotherhood. But both countries are using narratives about Israel, antisemitism, and Iran to exert pressure on other regional actors to align with their camp and to win support in Washington. Israel's close partnership with the UAE, and their shared interest in developments the Saudis oppose, such as the secession of Somaliland from Somalia, may create an additional hurdle to getting the Saudis, or others who seek Riyadh's support, to advance on normalization.

But Opportunities Remain

Although these countervailing factors present significant complications that will require delicate diplomatic work to manage, this moment also presents reasons for cautious optimism.

Leaders have emerged in Lebanon and Syria who have demonstrated their willingness to tackle difficult internal security problems and adopt a far more pragmatic approach toward Israel than their predecessors. Lebanese President Joseph Aoun and Prime Minister Nawaf Salam have expressed a steadfast commitment, with the United States' help, to set Lebanon on a path free of Hezbollah's decades-long grip on the Lebanese state. The framework agreement signed between Beirut and Jerusalem in late June is a promising step for which the administration and both parties deserve credit. President Aoun has stated that Lebanon seeks peaceful coexistence with Israel, and this objective should be celebrated and supported, even if it falls short of full normalization, while efforts proceed to implement the framework agreement that would disarm Hezbollah, fully deploy the Lebanese Armed Forces, and enable Israeli withdrawal.

The fall of the Assad regime has similarly created an opening for progress with Syria. President Trump's recent decision to remove Syria as a state sponsor of terrorism for the first time since 1979 is an important sign of the president's confidence in President Al-Sharaa's administration. The United States should adopt a "trust, but verify" approach to ensuring Syria lives up to its commitments. For both Beirut and Damascus, Israel's maintenance of buffer zones within Lebanese and Syrian territory is an affront to their national sovereignty. Although these security zones are a point of serious contention between Israel and its neighbors, they might also paradoxically serve as an incentive for steps toward normalization. Israel's peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan involved Israeli withdrawal from territory upon signing. For President Al-Sharaa, perpetually eager to demonstrate his government's credibility and sovereignty, the prospect of Israeli withdrawal is likely a motivating factor for continuing to seek security agreements with Israel that could benefit both countries.

Although the war with Iran further complicates regional integration, the repeated closure of the Strait of Hormuz since March leaves little room for doubt over the value of alternative energy routes and expanded infrastructure — a core pillar of IMEC and similar efforts. The conflict should also underscore to Saudi and other Gulf leaders the value of greater engagement with Israel, as further diplomatic engagement can unlock the kind of Israeli support which helped sustain the UAE's successful defense and high interception rate.

Recommendations for U.S. Policy

With the remainder of my time, I offer the following recommendations to ensure that foundational, even if incremental, work toward regional integration continues in the near-term.

First and foremost, work to bring the war with Iran to the earliest possible end, ensuring that the Strait of Hormuz remains open. Talks on the Iranian nuclear program should be postponed, and sanctions on Tehran should be maintained. The Trump administration should also

renew its support for the Iranian people's brutally suppressed quest for freedom, especially as post-war conditions exacerbate preexisting pressures on Iran's currency, industry, and electric and water systems.

Second, pursue active diplomacy to advance the president's twenty-point plan in Gaza, prioritizing Hamas' disarmament, but advancing other elements in parallel. Although the Abraham Accords demonstrated a willingness of some states to act independently to advance regional integration, the post-October 7th reality will demand material progress for Palestinians to realize key integration objectives, especially those involving Saudi Arabia. Arab and Muslim states should be central to Gaza reconstruction and efforts to reform Palestinian leadership, and their participation should be complemented, with U.S. encouragement, by steps toward normalization with Israel. Indonesia, for example, the fourth-most populous country in the world and the most populous Muslim-majority nation, appeared on the verge of normalizing its relations with Israel on the eve of the October 7th attacks; while normalization is on hold, Jakarta has joined the president's Board of Peace and pledged to contribute troops to an International Stabilization Force. Speaking at the UN General Assembly last year, President Prabowo Subianto both called for an independent Palestinian state and underscored the need to recognize, respect, and ensure Israel's security. The prospect of normalizing relations with Israel remains unpopular with the Indonesian public, but contributing to the establishment of a future Palestinian state via the deployment of Indonesian troops to participate in the ISF in Gaza could help make normalization politically credible. Stalled progress on the twenty-point plan similarly stalls the normalization that can accompany its implementation.

Third, insist on actions by Israel to lower tensions in the West Bank. These should include active law enforcement to shut down Jewish terrorist activity, transferring tax and customs revenue to the Palestinian Authority, and reducing settlement expansion, and ending expressions of ambitions for annexation. The Palestinian Authority has its own reform responsibilities to fulfill, and we should continue to insist on them as well. But Israeli actions will have the most impact — positive or negative — on the atmosphere for regional integration.

Fourth, resume normalization discussions with Saudi Arabia, beginning with a frank dialogue to understand what a new deal may look like given the monumental changes the region has experienced in the last three years. Normalization between Israel and the Kingdom would be the single most transformative diplomatic breakthrough to reshape the region. Cooperation with Israel, and greater access to Israeli technology, would help advance Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's ambitious Vision 2030 agenda, which has already narrowed significantly in the face of significant headwinds. American officials should engage with their Saudi counterparts to establish a clear set of conditions and a road map for normalization with Israel.

Fifth, continue to invite other nations to affiliate with the Abraham Accords, and develop joint projects and additional incentives to continuously raise the opportunity cost of not participating. Kazakhstan joining the Accords in November 2025 was easy to dismiss as symbolic, given longstanding diplomatic relations between Astana and Jerusalem, but the move helped demonstrate the Accords' continued vitality in a post-October 7th world.

Sixth, resist the temptation to see the Abraham Accords as the exclusive brand or vehicle for regional integration. While the Accords provide a useful construct to advance regional integration, other initiatives such as the Negev Forum, IMEC, and separate bilateral or minilateral groupings can all advance the broader goal. Regional integration should not even be considered limited to the Middle East and North Africa. Neighboring countries such as India, Ethiopia, Greece, Cyprus, and Central Asian states are all positioned to be partners in economic, infrastructure, energy, and security projects that can strengthen ties within and across regions. Indifference to integration efforts beyond the Abraham Accords could jeopardize the very progress that the Accords were designed to advance.

Seventh, upgrade and bring increased urgency to efforts to get IMEC off the ground. IMEC is the integration effort most immediately relevant to Gulf states' shifting security calculations in light of the Iran War. The work that the administration has already done to ensure the project remains on the agenda is important, and it should be intensified and receive greater focus from Cabinet-level officials to seize the opportunity that the Iran War presents.

Eighth, push forward on deals between Israel and Lebanon, and Israel and Syria. The U.S.-led negotiations between Jerusalem and Beirut that culminated in June's framework agreement represent a serious and productive diplomatic initiative to support a joint Israeli-Lebanese effort to disarm Hezbollah. The Lebanese government and Israel's shared objective of dismantling Hezbollah, if achieved, could usher in an unprecedented era of peace between the two neighbors. On Syria, U.S.-led negotiations between Jerusalem and Damascus on a security agreement showed promise in 2025, and should be resumed.

Ninth, appoint and confirm a Special Envoy for the Abraham Accords, a position Congress created in the FY2024 NDAA. This high-level appointment would underscore the administration's commitment to expanding the Accords and fostering regional integration and is essential to buttress the work being done by Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, who are spread too thin to provide the leadership this effort needs.

Tenth, renew and upgrade the work of the Congressional Abraham Accords caucuses. These caucuses' work is essential to draw on the expertise and jurisdictional focus of their diverse members and to convey the bipartisan commitment to expanding regional integration.

Especially as Iran's leaders have demonstrated their appetite to weaponize U.S. policy shifts in the region, emphasizing a bipartisan commitment to regional integration is critically important.

Eleventh, work to foster dialogue between Israel and Gulf states on cooperation on regional stability. As Washington seeks to shift our relationships in the region to emphasize partnership over dependency, working bilaterally with Israel and Gulf states and as a facilitator to bring the two sides together are both important avenues to bring about a post-war regional architecture that can stand on the merits of overlapping security interests, buttressed but not sustained by the United States. This should come in the form of both government efforts and complementary non-governmental initiatives to lay the groundwork for formal discussions. The Atlantic Council has been facilitating regional integration discussions since 2021, and our Program on Middle East Integration stands ready to assist with these efforts.

Twelfth, ensure that the bilateral U.S.-Israel relationship remains strong enough to advance broad regional integration efforts that include a Palestinian state living peacefully alongside a secure Israel. Regional integration serves the interests of all states who seek stability in the Middle East and prosperity for their citizens, and the U.S. plays an indispensable role in facilitating and encouraging these efforts. A severely degraded U.S.-Israel relationship would only diminish our ability to credibly lead on this issue, emboldening Iran, exacerbating Gulf anxieties, creating openings for our competitors, and dooming prospects for Israeli-Palestinian peace. Changes are coming to the U.S.-Israel relationship, as leaders of both countries have acknowledged. However, reflexively torpedoing the relationship would do significant harm to U.S. interests and influence in the Middle East.

The Abraham Accords were never envisioned as stand-alone achievements, nor was their signing in 2020 considered the completion of the regional integration project. Quite the contrary. The Accords were designed as a foundation and proof that Israel and Arab states could build mutually beneficial, functional, and public relationships. Six years later, and after nearly three years of the most severe stress test the region has faced in a generation, that foundation has held. The task before the administration and Congress today is to build on these achievements and ensure that the regional calculus continues to favor integration.

Thank you for your time and for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to your questions.