

**Undeclared Diplomatic Interactions:
Secret Arab-Israeli Relations**

التفاعلات الدبلوماسية غير العلنية: العلاقات السرية العربية الإسرائيلية

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Abstract:

The article discusses the secret relations between Israel and the Arab countries in the context of what is known as secret diplomacy or undeclared foreign interactions. This is through many economic and security issues that have become imposed by calculations of history, geography, and the pressures of American power, especially in the era of former US President Donald Trump, or for the purpose of barter. This type of diplomacy in the Arab region is considered normalization, and most regimes have found justifications for it, all of which fall under the heading of “betraying” the Palestinian cause. This diplomacy comes within the framework of the Arab street’s rejection of these normalization agreements, which “Israel” considered as a kind of strategy, and Tel Aviv’s vision and approach to resolving the “Palestinian issue,” which is based on concluding bilateral agreements with Arab countries as a primary goal, regardless of the development of the course of negotiations with the Palestinian side. Taking advantage of the surge in American support for this path.

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Keywords: Secret diplomacy, Arabs, Israel, Normalization, Palestine.

ملخص:

يناقش المقال العلاقات السرية بين إسرائيل والدول العربية في إطار تحريك ما يعرف بالدبلوماسية السرية أو التفاعلات الخارجية غير المعلنة. وذلك من خلال العديد من القضايا الاقتصادية والأمنية التي أصبحت تفرضها حسابات التاريخ والجغرافيا وضغوط القوة الأمريكية خاصة في حقبة الرئيس الأمريكي السابق دونالد ترامب أو لغرض المقايضة. إذ يعد هذا النوع من الدبلوماسية في المنطقة العربية تطبيعا وجدت له أغلب الأنظمة مبررات كلها تقع في طائلة "خيانة" القضية الفلسطينية. تأتي هذه الدبلوماسية في إطار رفض الشارع العربي لاتفاقيات التطبيع تلك التي اعتبرتها "إسرائيل" كنوع من الإستراتيجيات ورؤية تل أبيب ومقاربتها لحل "القضية الفلسطينية"، التي تقوم على عقد اتفاقيات ثنائية مع الدول العربية كهدف أساسي بغض النظر عن تطور مسار المفاوضات مع الجانب الفلسطيني، مستغلة في ذلك طفرة الدعم الأمريكي لهذا المسار.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الدبلوماسية السرية - العرب - إسرائيل - التطبيع - فلسطين.

Introduction

During his speech to the United Nations General Assembly on September 27, 2018, the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned the international community against Iran's nuclear and regional ambitions. He noted that the Agreement of Vienna on Iranian nuclear power, also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) had an unexpected consequence for Israel: "This may surprise you, but I must admit that the agreement with Iran had a positive consequence, an unintended but nevertheless positive consequence. In restoring vigor to Iran, he brought closer than ever before Israel from many Arab countries, [...] with an intimacy and friendship that I had never seen

throughout my life and which would have been unimaginable just a few years ago. And you know, when a friendship is born around a threat, we quickly see the emergence new opportunities, not only in terms of security, but also in terms of means to bring new life to our populations, where Israel can and wants to help. Israel deeply values these new friendships and I hope the day will come soon when Israel will be able to expand peace, an official peace, beyond Egypt and Jordan to other Arab neighbors, notably the Palestinians. I look forward to working with the President Trump and his team with this objective».

Thus, Netanyahu highlighted, in front of representatives of States from around the world, the rapprochement and the emerging friendship between the Hebrew State and Arab countries, in the face of the perception shared sense of an Iranian threat. Normalization of relations between Israel and the Emirates United Arab Emirates (UAE) on August 13, 2020 created a surprise in the geopolitical landscape of the Middle Orient while resonating with Netanyahu's speech. The following month, the Kingdom of Bahrain follows suit in the UAE. On September 15, Israel formalized the normalization of its relations with the UAE and Bahrain during an official ceremony in Washington under the auspices of American President Donald Trump. The three countries sign the Abraham Accords Declaration. On October 23, Sudan, then on December 10, Morocco announced the normalization of their relations with the Jewish state. (Affairs, 2018)

This series of recognitions of Israel by Arab countries raises questions about their strategic and political reasons. It also allows us to question the perception of Israel by Arab leaders and on the perception of Arab States by state leaders Hebrew. Indeed, since the creation of Israel in 1948, the relationship with Israel has been a very delicate, sensitive and taboo. Are we moving from mutual aversion to a relationship of partnership?. It also allows us to be interested in the political and geopolitical dynamics that led to these standardizations. Are Iran and the armed Islamist groups it supports become a common threat to Israel and the Gulf countries? Finally, it allows us to examine the historical roots of bilateral relations between Israel and Arab countries, largely dominated by secret diplomacy. Indeed, before the year 2020, only two countries Arab countries, Egypt and Jordan, as well as the Palestinian

Authority, had recognized officially the Jewish state. Can we identify a global dynamic in Arab-Israeli relations?.

Maintaining relations with the Jewish state has been and still is a taboo in the Arab world, because of the delicate Palestinian question and the Israeli-Arab conflicts which followed the creation of the Hebrew State (in 1948-1949, 1956, 1967 and 1973). Therefore, most of the relationships Israeli-Arab diplomatic relations were established and maintained in a secret manner. The direction Tevel of Mossad (the foreign intelligence services) was thus responsible for establishing and to maintain exchanges with countries that do not have official relations with Israel (David, 2014). This underground diplomacy is advantageous for the Jewish state as well as for the Arab countries, because being discreet by nature, it is not subject to media controversies and limits costs policies for states. For Ephraïm Halévy, former director of Mossad, the secret services external forces are “the secret and vital weapon of Israel’s foreign policy (Elfrain, 2006)”. If the four countries cited above normalized their diplomatic relations with Israel in 2020, the The first links were established several decades ago. Thus, Morocco has maintained particularly active relations with Israel in the 1960s (Joseph, 2015). Israel created ties with a major Sudanese political party, Umma, between 1956 and 1958 (Yehudit, 2013). Relations with the Emirates United Arabs, more recent, were initiated by the Madrid conference in 1991 and continue to deepen through converging security and economic interests (Benjamin, 2020).

This article aims to study Israeli-Arab relations, dynamics of rapprochement, the geopolitical, security and cognitive developments which have leads these countries to come closer, coexist, cooperate and even normalize their relations. To study Israeli-Arab relations in their historical depth shed light on the dynamics current geopolitical, security and diplomatic issues in the Middle North Africa region East. According to a senior Israeli official quoted by Le Monde, “[Israel’s] contacts with pragmatic Sunni states are stronger than ever. This is a silent revolution, of a mushroom diplomacy. Mushrooms grow in the dark. If we turn it on, their growth will be disrupted (Piotr, 2015)». Israeli-Arab relations therefore seem to be part of a global dynamic in full swing.

Therefore, it has become important to focus on the nature of the historical and political precedents of Arab-Israeli relations, especially at their undeclared levels as a type of silent interactions, in order to facilitate the process of understanding the background and justifications for the qualitative leap of some Arab countries in their normalization with this entity, whether in its cooperative forms as one of the outcomes of Arab subjugation. Economic, or in its form of political maneuvering, as one of the outcomes of the American pressure exerted on the majority of the countries of the Arab region, so that we realize how these precedents can affect the nature of the process of normalization of Arab-Israeli relations, which turns the political-diplomatic nature of those interactions into a kind of secret historical politics due to the decisiveness. The outcomes and the seriousness of the circumstances of time and place, and this is what always manifests itself in the form of regional dilemmas through which secret diplomacy holds the keys to understanding and interpreting them, often with historical and intelligence inputs.

Accordingly, we face the following problem:

What are the repercussions of the secret Arab-Israeli interactions on the reality of the Arab geopolitical scene?

This problem is related to three variables of the study, which are as follows:

The First variable: relations: we mean all bilateral and multilateral interactions between Israel and the Arab States. These relationships can be official, discreet or secret. By example, they can take the form of meetings between politicians, negotiations between diplomats, cooperation between intelligence services, officially or secret. They can also take the form of the creation of embassies, offices bilateral commercial relations or permanent representations within institutions international.

The Second variable: Arab countries: The term “Arab countries” or “Arab States” refers to all the countries that share in common the Arabic language and an Arab cultural substrate. Arab states can be grouped into five regional areas (Jean-Paul, 1995): the Fertile Crescent made up of Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority; the Arabian Peninsula including Saudi Arabia, the Yemen, Oman, the

United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain and Kuwait; the Greater Maghreb bringing together Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya; the Nile Valley made up of Egypt and Sudan and finally the Horn of Africa which includes Djibouti, the Somalia and the Comoros Islands. Our research will address existing or former relationships between Israel and: Jordan, Morocco, Egypt, Sudan, Yemen, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Syria, Authority Palestinian Authority, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain.

The third variable: Clandestine Israeli-Arab diplomacies:

Following the creation of the State of Israel on May 14, 1948, neighboring Arab countries refuse the partition of Mandatory Palestine and go to war against the new state. Four wars between Israel and Arab countries punctuate the first thirty years of existence of the State Hebrew, perceived as a threat and an enemy. However, contacts are established between Israel and some Arab countries in a secret manner. Israel's secret diplomacies investigated in a work supervised by Clive Jones, professor of Middle Eastern studies and international politics at the University of Leeds, and Tore Petersen, professor of history at Norwegian University of Science and Technology: *Israel's Clandestine Diplomacies* (Jones Clive, 2013). For Clives Jones, it is necessary to understand that “the Israeli approach to diplomacy was shaped by the pre-state institutions of the Jewish community in Palestine (Jones Clive, 2013)”. notably the Jewish Agency, “which adopted clandestine diplomacy as a means of attract the favors of the main players in the region (Jones Clive, 2013)». For Amnon Aran, the culture of Secret diplomacy continues to “shape and dominate Israeli approaches to business international (Jones Clive, 2013)”. Clive Jones prefers to speak of “discreet diplomacy (Jones Clive, 2013)” since “such diplomacy rarely escapes the attention of the media or even the parties for long interested parties – both state and non-state – who have an interest in the final outcome (Jones Clive, 2013)”.

Given the difficulty of dismantling the above problem, and this is due to many considerations that contributed to the complexity of the equation of secret diplomatic relations between the Arab and Israeli parties, the study starts from the following hypothesis:

The greater the area of Arab-Israeli diplomatic interactions, the more the geographical margin of sovereignty and authority of the Arab decision-maker shrinks in the face of the expansion of the other.

1. The Mossad, serving discreet relations between Israel and Arab countries

This diplomacy, by secret necessity, involved Israeli secret services. For Eric Dénécé, doctor in political science and director of the French Research Center on Intelligence, and David Elkaïm, researcher in geopolitics, the secret services are “at the heart of the security strategy of the Jewish state since its origins and none of the governments which have succeeded one another has not called this central place into question. (David, 2014)”. The two researchers insist on the fact that the geographical position of Israel and the hostility of neighboring countries brought the State Hebrew from its creation to set up effective intelligence services allowing know in advance the actions of its neighbors and adversaries. Researchers distinguish Aman, the Israeli military intelligence service which reports to the Ministry of Defense, Shin Beth, the service responsible for the fight against terrorism and counter-espionage in the territory Israeli which depends on the Ministry of Public Security, and the Mossad, the security service foreign intelligence and action abroad, reporting directly to the Prime Minister (David, 2014). At within the Mossad, one direction will attract my full attention during our reflection, the division Tevel, “in charge of political action and international liaisons. She manages relationships and joint operations with friendly services, but also exchanges with countries which do not do not have official relations with Israel (David, 2014)”.

Since 1948, the security paradigm in the Middle East has evolved and the Jewish state “is now faced with asymmetric threats, on its territory, on its borders and abroad (David, 2014)”. Also, Eric Dénécé and David Elkaïm identify five types of threat: Palestinian extremists (Hamas and Islamic Jihad in the Palestinian Territories) and Jewish religious extremists likely to take violent action, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Al-Qaeda in Egyptian Sinai and Iran's intention to acquire atomic weapons. The threat Iranian and Islamist non-state actors (Hezbollah, Al-Qaeda)

will retain our attention during our research, since they are a factor of rapprochement between Israel and some Arab countries.

2. Arab perceptions of Jews, Zionists and Israelis:

The perception of Jews, Zionists and Israel by Arabs (Arab-States and Arab individuals) was studied by Ronald Nettler. He states that before 1948, during the decades of pre-state development of Zionism, “Arab writings express Arab feelings emerging ambivalence, dismay, confusion and ultimately, anger at what was in ultimately perceived as a serious threat... And then, most of them testify of clear hostility, devoid of any ambivalence or uncertainty (L, 1989)”. The construction of animosity towards the Jews can be seen, for example, in Egypt at the exit from the Second World War. The al-Thaqafa newspaper, the main cultural weekly Egyptian of the time, published articles alluding to deep Jewish animosity towards the Arabs (L, 1989). In Al-Risala, another influential weekly, Sayyid Qutb, the leader spirituality of Sunni political Islam, constructs the image of the Jew as the ultimate enemy of Muslims (L N. R., 1987). The Zionist project is seen as a Western colonial project. The fight against Zionism thus becomes a major component of political discourse in Arab countries and of national identity (T, 1994). Zionism is seen as an existential challenge for leaders Arabs.

3. The Israeli “iron wall” strategy

In his work *The Iron Wall. Israel and the Arab world* (Avi, 2007), Avi Shlaim, professor of international relations at the University of Oxford, addresses the origins of Zionism and traces sixty years of face to face between Israel and the Arab countries. He explains that the doctrine of the “wall of iron” formulated by Ze’ev Jabotinsky (Lenni, 1984), revisionist Zionist leader, and adopted by the most Israeli political leaders, has shaped a rigid and intransigent posture of Israel towards Arab countries and Palestinian demands. This doctrine aims to build an “iron wall” facing the Arab States thanks to Jewish strength and military superiority in order to preserve the existence of Israel. Jabotinsky envisages two phases in the change in the Israeli-Arab relationship. At first, the Arabs would eventually abandon all hope to destroy the Jewish State in the face of its power and to become more moderate and realistic. Then in a second, Israel could negotiate with the Palestinians about their

status and their national rights. According to Jabotinsky, coexistence between Arabs and Jews would be possible only after the construction of this dissuasive force. However, it is useful to remember that for Jabotinsky, the “iron wall” is not an end in itself, but a means to break the Arab resistance against the forward march of Zionism and to reach a solution satisfactory to the conflict between Zionism and Palestinian and Arab nationalism. Avi Shlaim notes that the main political currents of the right (Likud) and the left (Labor) adopted this strategy.

4. The Israeli doctrine of the periphery

The “iron wall” strategy was accompanied by the doctrine of the periphery, which consisted for Israel of creating and maintaining relations or even alliances with the countries of the Middle East least hostile to Israel in order to counterbalance the hostility of Arab States neighbors. In his book *Periphery: Israel’s Search for Middle East Allies* (Yossi, 2015), Yossi Alpher, former senior Mossad official and former director of the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, explores this strategy theorized by David Ben-Gurion who wanted to counter the aversion of countries Arabs by creating links with alternative regional powers and potential allies. There doctrine of the periphery thus makes it possible to conceptualize the strong relations established by Israel with non-Arab countries like Turkey and Iran or non-Muslim minorities like the Maronite Christians, the Kurds or the Druze, in the 1960s and 1970s.

The periphery doctrine ran out of steam in the late 1970s and early 1980s. After the hopes and failures of the peace process in the 1990s, sources academics explain that from the 2010s a redefinition of threats in the Middle Orient has helped to strengthen ties between Israel and certain Arab countries, notably the Arabian Peninsula. The rapprochement with the Gulf countries was analyzed by Clive Jones, and Yoel Guzansky in their book *Fraternal enemies: Israel and the Gulf monarchies*. They claim that ties between Israel and many of its Gulf counterparts are now more dynamic than one might think and that they constitute a tacit security regime (RTS), which does not exclude competition in other areas. Ultimately, a “perception common threat” and “the paramount importance of protecting national security”, “pushed the Gulf States and Israel towards an RTS”. Also Clive Jones concludes that “the RTS that emerged between Israel and the Gulf States could well become a model for understand changes in regional

security that challenge how we now understand the very nature of alliances throughout the Middle East”.

5. For a constructivist and cognitive approach to Israeli-Arab rapprochements

This research work aims to study the overall trajectory of Arab-Israeli relations, while studying national specificities. Constructivist and cognitive approaches appear to be interesting methods for trying to understand the weight of ideologies, perceptions, political and strategic calculations. The constructivist approach admits that state interests direct policy foreign but she adds that the actors of international relations, in particular States, do not are not only and always selfish and rational and that the international system is before a whole set of ideas, thoughts and norms (Alexander, 1999).

Alexander Wendt, leading thinker of constructivism in international relations summarizes his approach as follows: “No one denies that States act on the basis of interests perceived, and few would deny that these interests are often selfish. It's not certainly not my case. To this extent I am a realist, but interests should not not be considered as an exclusively “realistic” variable. What matters is the way in which we think that interests are constituted (Alexander, 1999)». Constructivism, by asserting that norms shape interests, is therefore a “complementary and non-competing approach to realism, liberalism or even transnationalism (Martha, 1996)».

In addition to the constructivist approach, understanding perceptions and cognitive processes appear essential for understanding aversions, connections or cooperation between Israel and Arab countries. One of the founding works of this approach is Perception and Misperception in International Politics by Robert Jervis (Robert, 1976) which “highlights evidence of the cognitive constraints weighing on decision-making processes: the influence of personality of decision-makers in understanding events and decisions that ensue, and errors which are sometimes due to a misunderstanding of the intentions of others” (Jeangéne Vilmer, 2020). Robert Jervis elaborated on his approach in his book How Statesmen Think: The Psychology of International Politics (Robert, How Statesmen Think: The Psychology of International Politics, 2017) where he shows that political expectations

and needs and psychological are the main drivers of perceptions in international politics.

How the perception of threats and interests by Arab and Israeli leaders does it shape relations and rapprochements between their States? And in the background, how the opposition of Arab states to Israel has gradually dissolved into breaches of opportunities when the stability and security of the State were at stake?

6. The diversity of modalities of relations with Israel in the face of reconfigurations geopolitics of the Middle East

During the 1990s, an overlapping of geopolitical events and changes in Perceptions resulted in three rounds of intense secret negotiations and two peace agreements. Systemic-structural and domestic political factors are necessary conditions but insufficient to understand developments in Israeli-Arab relations. The study of cognitive perceptions is one of the keys to understanding decisions and reversals in foreign politic.

However, the dynamic of peace and compromise during Rabin's mandate is a parenthesis in the political history of the Middle East. The assassination of Rabin in 1995, the outbreak of the second intifada in 2002 and the Israeli refusal of the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 bury the Oslo Accords and the peace process. New dynamics are taking place in the Middle East at the start of the 21st century. There revelation of Iran's nuclear ambitions in 2002 and the Arab Spring of 2011 are two structuring events of the new geopolitical disorder in the Middle East. Iran has meddled in power rivalries through its support for various militant armed groups. In 2011, Arab dictators fell in Tunisia and Egypt. Other countries have engulfed in a civil war, in Syria, in Yemen, in Libya. The Gulf States, thanks to their abundant financial resources and their central position in the networks transnationals, emerged almost unscathed from the revolutionary wave, which does not mean that they remained spectators (Mark, 2018). They either encouraged the revolutionary movement like the Qatar through its Al-Jazeera news channel, or have engaged in a counter-revolutionary posture like Saudi Arabia and UAE.

These different strategies of the Gulf countries are part of a competition for regional leadership opposing Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Iran. Two alignments have emerged: a “counter-revolutionary” axis around Saudi Arabia and the Arab Emirates united, a “pro-revolutionary” axis around Qatar, Iran and Turkey (Amr, 2020). The dispute Arab-Israeli is relegated to the background and Israel takes the opportunity to improve its ties with the counter-revolutionary Arab countries (O, 2017).

6.1. A perception of common threats between Israel and some of the States arabs

For around ten years, academic researchers have highlighted a connection Israel's strategic relationship with the Gulf countries and a secret diplomacy shaped by interests and common threats. Clive Jones and Yoel Guzansky (Clive, 2020) affirm the links between Israel and part of the Gulf countries are dynamic and constitute a tacit security regime particularly to counter Iran's regional and nuclear ambitions.

6.1.1. The shared perception of an Iranian threat

Iran is seen as a common threat to Israel and the countries of the peninsula Arabic. Indeed, the Iranian nuclear program, revealed in 2002 by an opponent of regime (Monde.fr, 2013), then assumed in 2006 with the lifting of the seals placed by the International Agency for atomic energy (IAEA) worries its Arab neighbors as much as Israel. According to Yoel Guzansky, Gulf Arab states view Tehran as their number one defense problem (Yoel, 2015) while official Israeli discourse considers Iran's nuclear ambitions as a “existential threat (Samy, 2010)”. WikiLeaks cables revealed that Saudi King Abdullah urged the United States to cut off the head of the “Iranian snake” in 2010 (Guardian, 2010). The same year, the Emirati ambassador to the United States has made it clear that his country "cannot live with a nuclear Iran (Ian, 2010)”. In February 2021, the Saudi Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud, reaffirmed his kingdom's concerns towards Iran: “The development of Iran's nuclear program and their ballistic missile project endanger the entire region (Hayom, 2021). In Israel, the displayed hostility of the mullahs' regime towards the Jewish state is of great concern to the political and military establishment (Samy, 2010). The Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu recalled this in

March 2021: “Iran is the biggest enemy of Israel and I am determined to stop him, we will strike him everywhere in the region. More Most importantly, Iran will not have nuclear weapons, whether with a deal or not. (international, 2021)”.

The common perception of the Iranian threat has shaped according to Clive Jones and Yoel Guzansky a tacit security regime between Israel and the Gulf countries (Jones Clive G. Y., 2017). This diet is part of Israel's secret diplomacy with Arab countries. The first testimonies of Shared strategic interests between Gulf Arab states and Israel lie in cables American diplomatic documents published by Wikileaks, which revealed how concerns Mutual discussions regarding Iran resulted in intelligence cooperation between Israel, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain (Barak, 2010). The concern is particularly strong with Saudi Arabia. During Israeli-Saudi meetings, Saudis reportedly agreed to allow Israel to use Saudi airspace and help a theoretical strike against Iran by cooperating on issues related to drones, rescue helicopters and tanker planes (Times, 2010). Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said in 2018 that "Saudi Arabia considers Israel a partner serious potential, both militarily and economically (Elie, 2018)”.

On the other hand, Iran's networks of influence developed through its support for several armed groups (Hezbollah) in Lebanon, Hamas in Gaza, Houthi rebels in Yemen, Shiite militias in Iraq and Syria) constitute an additional object of common concern. The head of Saudi diplomacy denounces “the support [of Iran] towards armed militias who sow chaos and division within many countries Arabs (Hayom, 2021)”. Saudi Arabia is directly confronted with this phenomenon in Yemen where it is waging a war against Iran-backed Houthi rebels. During the last years, the threats made by the Houthis towards Israel have multiplied and the threat is taken seriously serious because they have drones and long-range missiles (Seth, 2021). The Jewish state is directly confronted with Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon, two organizations fundamentally hostile to Israel, supported and financed by Iran (Ely, 2005). During the Arab Spring, Iran, already the leader of Shiite Islamism, sought to extend its influence by intervening in Syria, directly (through the Revolutionary Guards) and by proxy (through Shiite militias) alongside Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, by

supporting the Houthi rebels (Thomas, 2016) and the protest of the Shiite minority in Bahrain, and by providing aid to the Polisario Front when Saudi Arabia moved closer to Morocco (Rubin, 2018).

The “double Iranian strategy of protecting the territory and consolidating regional influence (Benjamin, Between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, the emergence of a new strategic axis, 2020)” therefore constitutes a factor of strategic rapprochement between Israel and in particular the Gulf trio (Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain). Those countries believe that the 2015 Iranian nuclear agreement was not binding enough, especially more than it was accompanied by any limitation to curb the missile program and the Iran's regional ambitions.

6.2. Maintaining relations today with Israel, different modalities depending on the contexts and cost-benefit calculations of Arab political leaders

6.2.1. The Abraham Accords and the strategic calculations of leaders

The Abraham Accords, signed on September 15, 2020 at the White House in Washington, are composed of: a “peace treaty” between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, a “declaration of peace” between Israel and Bahrain, as well as a trilateral declaration of the three country, the Abraham Accords Declaration to which Donald Trump appended his signature in as a witness. These documents constitute a normalization of relations between Israel and these two Gulf countries. For Elisabeth Marteu, this is a turning point because the countries which have normalized their relations with Israel are based on the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002, according to which all normalization of relations with Israel was conditional on a comprehensive peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians, which would lead to the creation of a Palestinian state.

As we have studied, these normalizations are rooted in secret relationships that are already established. We are witnessing a formalization of relationships that already existed, a coming-out. But these agreements have political and international effects and are part of a strategy specific to each leader.

- **The calculation of Mohammed bin Zayed (MBZ)**

The interests for the leader of the UAE are strategic (facing Iran) and economic. Benjamin Barthe summarizes the points of convergence between MBZ and Netanyahu as follows: “the aversion to Iran, the dependence on the United States, the undifferentiated rejection of Islamism, disdain for Arab democratic demands, a taste for operations clandestine and muscular, the obsessive primacy of security, all-out investment in cybertechnology (Benjamin, *Between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, the emergence of a new strategic axis*, 2020)».

The UAE leader believes the price he will pay domestically for opening your country to Israel is less than the expected gains. Recent opinion polls indicate that Emirati public opinion is mainly concerned about the threat Iranian, while the Palestinian question is almost at the bottom of the agenda (Pollock David, 2020). Furthermore, the agreement is legitimized by the UAE as a diplomatic victory aimed at helping the Palestinians, and as a reasonable price to pay in exchange for defeating the plans of Israel aimed at applying sovereignty over the territories of the West Bank. Gold, Benyamin Netanyahu then said he would not abandon his promise to annex part of the Palestinian territories, and that he only wanted to postpone his project (L'Obs, 2020). But according to MBZ, the normalization of relations with Israel not only preserves the relevance of the solution to two States, but also contributes to stability in the Middle East. The sale of aircraft fight F-35 by the United States in the UAE, while the only current beneficiary in the region is Israel, came to confirm its decision (Mazzerti Mark, 2020).

According to Hussein Ibish, researcher at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, “The normalization process between the Emirates and Israel is moving forward at full speed, and it is unique in its kind (Benjamin, *Between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, the emergence of a new strategic axis*, 2020)». Indeed, various cooperation agreements were signed following the agreements of Abraham. The Institute for National Security Studies, the main Israeli think tank in international relations, has established a partnership with the Emirates Policy Center, its counterpart Emirati. The Weizmann Institute of Science, one of the best research institutes fundamental in the world and the Mohamed Ben Zayed University of Artificial Intelligence have

made likewise (MBZUAI, 2021). Emirates NBD Bank, a leading Emirati banking group in the MENA region, signed a memorandum of understanding with Hapoalim Bank, one of the largest banks of Israel (Varun, 2020).

- **The specificity of Bahrain**

Bahrain reacted positively to the agreement between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, becoming the first Arab nation to signal its support. At first, Manama rejected the idea to move towards normalization itself. But the king probably changed his mind announcing its intention to rejoin the Abraham Accords in September 2020. It is likely that American pressure played a role in the Bahrainis' change of heart on this issue (Guzansky Yoel, 2020). For Hussein Ibish, researcher at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, “the real interest [for Bahrain] to move closer to Israel is strategic and entirely centered around the issue Iranian, considered an existential threat (Soulayma, 2020)”. Bahraini leaders, from the Sunni minority, are all the more concerned about the Iranian threat as the majority of the population is Shia.

- **Netanyahu's political gain**

Benjamin Netanyahu's strategy is to encourage rapprochement with the Arabs in order to marginalize the Palestinians and ultimately push them to accept all demands Israeli. The normalization agreements also allow the Israeli Prime Minister, indicted for corruption, abuse of power and embezzlement, to restore his political image by Israel. Netanyahu, just like Donald Trump, attempted to translate this “diplomacy announcement” in domestic policy gains.

6.2.2. Agreements with Sudan and Morocco and transactional diplomacy

The Abraham Accords created momentum for normalization with other Arab countries. Indeed, although these are not the first agreements signed between Arab countries and the Hebrew State, they reduced the external cost of such an agreement vis-à-vis opinions public generally attached to the Palestinian cause. By normalizing with Israel, the Sudan and Morocco have thus not taken the risk of being isolated within the Arab-Muslim world. However, the agreements with Sudan and

Morocco do not have the same mechanisms as the Abraham Accords: they relied on transactional diplomacy where the United - States cover the cost. Sudan won a removal from the US list of countries supporting terrorism for Sudan (Mohammed, 2020) and Morocco obtained recognition by the United States of Moroccanness of Western Sahara (Fadwa, 2020). For both countries, economic interests are important. The removal of the blacklist of states supporting terrorism will a priori allow the Sudan to encourage foreign investment. Morocco, for its part, signed six agreements cooperation and investments with Israel and the United States (Galia, 2020).

- **The specificity of Sudan with the Emirati presence in the background**

The UAE, along with the Saudis, supported the Sudanese security apparatus (the services intelligence and military forces) when he turned against Omar al-Bashir during of the revolution in 2020 (Reuters, 2019). The UAE played a leading role in bringing the Sudan and Israel in order to reduce the international political blow of the Abraham Accords. They have a close relationship with Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, the chairman of the Military Council of transition, and organized a meeting between the latter and Benjamin Netanyahu in February 2020 (Press, 2020). It is therefore also the extension of the sphere of influence of the monarchies of the peninsula Arabic in the Horn of Africa which explains the integration of Sudan into this game diplomatic (Ferey Amélie Mahe, 2020).

- **Moroccan specificity**

For Morocco, normalization with Israel constitutes the culmination of already existing ties for decades as we were able to study in the first part. He also confirms the pro-Western orientation of Moroccan diplomacy (Frédéric, 2020). This is also a coming out because Israeli-Moroccan relations are anchored in history and shaped by the community Moroccan Jew or of Moroccan origin. The diplomatic gain is important for Morocco: the recognition by the United States of Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara, a territory of 260,000 km² rich in mineral (phosphate) and fishery resources (Yves, 2011), and fractured between a western zone administered by Morocco and an eastern zone administered by the Polisario Front separatists. By

recognizing this territory as Moroccan, the United States Unis ne sont plus neutres sur la question sahraouie, ce qui est un gain considérable pour la monarchie marocaine.

Conclusion

We began our reflection by asking ourselves what interests, what threats, what political and psychological developments have led Israel and certain Arab countries to bring together, cooperate, negotiate, conclude peace or normalize their relations.

The perceptions of Israeli and Arab leaders are a key to understanding fundamental to understanding the types of relationships and the history of Arab-Israeli rapprochements.

The study of Israeli-Arab relations confirms that national interests and the survival of political regimes take precedence over Arab unity and the Palestinian question. Tacit relationships or official, compromises and Israeli-Arab agreements are based on common interests (territorial, financial, political, strategic) and/or common threats (movements armed forces, political ideologies, expansionist desires) defined by the perception of leaders states. The constructivist and cognitive approach allows us to better understand geopolitics of the Middle East, where decisions are made by a limited number of people. The study of clandestine Israeli-Arab relations finally allows us to realize that a large part of the Israeli-Arab diplomatic work was done between secret services.

This research work focused primarily on the perceptions of managers Israeli and Arab politicians. An extension of this reflection could be established in studying the perceptions of populations. According to the results of a survey published by Arab Barometer in October 2020, "Arab public opinions are not in phase with actions of some of their governments. Arab audiences remain strongly supportive of the Palestinian cause, which means that without a viable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the vast majority are unlikely to support peace or normalization with Israel."

Overall, if normalization with Israel appeared as an income strategic for Arab leaders, the Arab populations do not yet seem ready to accept normalization with the Jewish state as long as the Palestinian question is not resolved. The resurgence of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in May 2021 confirms the hypothesis that opinions Arab public authorities remain attached to this cause while most of their leaders, in especially those who recognize Israel, are in an uncomfortable position. Polls in the Gulf countries, which must be taken with distance from the authoritarian views of the governments and the repression of dissenting opinions, show a greater acceptance supported standardization agreements. According to a Washington Institute poll published in August 2020, 41% of Saudis view the Abraham Accords as “development positive” and a narrow majority (54%) describes the agreements as negative. Zogby's investigation Analytics also suggests the proportion of 41% of Saudis supporting the Abraham Accords and 56% for Emiratis.

It is interesting to note in the Arab Barometer study that in “Lebanon, attitudes regarding the Abraham Accords vary considerably from one community to another; there half of Christians are in favor of the agreements, compared to only 11% of Druze, 6% of Sunnis and less than 1% Shiites. » Also, an in-depth study of Arab perceptions towards Israel, could be an exciting project to carry out in order to grasp, beyond the specificities national, differences in perceptions according to feelings of ethnic belonging and religious, according to income level, level of education, or even according to generations.

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