

## **FOREIGN POLICY CHANGES OF THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES (UAE) IN THE NORMALISATION OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL**

**Rahmat<sup>1</sup>**

1. Program Studi Magister Hubungan Internasional Universitas Jenderal Achmad Yani, Cimahi, Indonesia

### **ABSTRAK**

Normalisasi hubungan diplomatik UEA dan Israel pada tahun 2020 merupakan peristiwa yang mengejutkan dunia internasional. Seperti kita ketahui bahwa UEA dan Israel memiliki sejarah yang kurang baik dalam hubungan internasional. Penelitian ini menganalisis kepentingan nasional Berdasarkan penelitian yang dilakukan, argumen utama penulis adalah normalisasi hubungan diplomatik yang dilakukan UEA dengan Israel tidak lepas dari kepentingan nasional UEA.

Kata Kunci: Normalisasi hubungan diplomatik, UEA, Israel, Kepentingan nasional

### **ABSTRACT**

The normalisation of diplomatic relations between the UAE and Israel in 2020 was a surprising event for the international community. As we know, the UAE and Israel have had a history of poor international relations. This research analyses the national interests involved. Based on the conducted research, the author's main argument is that the normalisation of diplomatic relations between the UAE and Israel is closely tied to the UAE's national interests.

Keywords: Normalization of diplomatic relations, UAE, Israel, National interests

### **INTRODUCTION**

The study of the Middle East region is indeed filled with conflictual conditions. According to Maarif struck and are still affecting the Arab world: civil wars, invasions by external forces, and a combination of both (Maarif, 2018). Internal factors contributing to instability in the Middle East include differences in sectoral interests between Middle Eastern countries that are poorly managed, leading to conflicts among Muslim nations in the region. This is evident in the ongoing escalation of conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia, which has persisted since the Iranian Revolution of 1979, in a bid to claim Islamic superiority (Mabon, 2016).

The most significant cause of conflict in the Middle East occurred when the state of Israel was declared in 1948 (Nor & Zakaria, 2009). Israel's establishment as a sovereign state in the Middle East has been a source of prolonged conflict in the region. Israel is considered problematic due to its annexation of territory already inhabited by Palestinians, and its continuous expansion by invading Palestinian land. Hinnebusch

affirms this, stating that there are two enduring causes of conflict in the Middle East: the struggle for oil fields and the establishment of Israel in 1948, which came at the expense of the indigenous Palestinian people (Hinnebusch, 2003). These two causes of conflict persist in the Middle East. The independence of Israel sparked Arab sentiments against Jews, grounded in shared identity.

Following the diplomatic normalization agreement between the UAE and Bahrain, other Arab countries, such as Morocco and Sudan, followed suit. The UAE is a federation of seven emirates, which has seen rapid development, becoming an important economic hub in the Middle East. The UAE-Israel relationship began to gain significance in 2016, when the UAE received Israel's Ambassador to the United Nations, Danny Danon, on an official visit to Dubai to discuss security issues with Iran.

The relationship continued in 2018 when Israeli athletes were allowed to participate in a judo tournament held in the UAE. Then, in 2020, the international community was stunned by a historic event: after years of conflict between Arab nations and Israel, the UAE took the step of signing a peace agreement for formal diplomatic relations with Israel on 13th August 2020, mediated by the United States under the presidency of Donald Trump. The two countries met at the White House in the United States, with the UAE represented by Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan and Israel by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The two leaders eventually agreed to normalize relations and establish diplomatic ties.

This normalization was a step from a joint agreement under the Abraham Accords, in which the UAE's diplomacy with Israel aimed to delay the annexation of the West Bank by Israel through this agreement. The normalisation would not have been possible without the mediation of then-US President Donald Trump. At the time, Trump's policy was focused on various economic aspects, including building trade relations with Middle Eastern countries like the UAE, with several plans in place, including this normalisation. The US acted as the mediator for both sides, with the hope that if several agreements were reached, significant economic trade relations would follow. For example, the US would supply weapons to the UAE, while the UAE, in turn, would shift its position towards cooperation with Israel, no longer as an enemy but as a friend in mutual interests.

The change in foreign policy adopted by the UAE reflects the dynamics of global politics. International politics is not static and is prone to changes in response to various factors, leading to shifts in foreign policy. The UAE's decision to normalise its relations with Israel has inevitably sparked much speculation about the underlying reasons for its decision to forge ties with a country that was once considered a common enemy of Arab nations in the Middle East. National interest is the fundamental basis for the agreement.

The change in foreign policy adopted by the UAE reflects the dynamics of global politics. International politics is not static and is prone to changes in response to various factors, leading to shifts in foreign policy. The UAE's decision to normalise its relations

with Israel has inevitably sparked much speculation about the underlying reasons for its decision to forge ties with a country that was once considered a common enemy of Arab nations in the Middle East. National interest is the fundamental basis for the agreement.

Geographically, Iran and the UAE are separated by a body of water, and their relationship has often been tense due to frequent regional conflicts. Moreover, Iran has significant influence in the region, seeking to rival Saudi Arabia's dominance in the Middle East by establishing a network of militant proxies, primarily consisting of armed Islamic political organizations. The presence of these organizations poses a potential threat to the UAE's domestic politics, as they aim to overthrow the government. The UAE frequently faces threats from such groups, including drone and missile attacks, one of which caused three deaths and a fire near the Abu Dhabi airport.

Despite the normalisation process with Israel, the UAE still sees the need for the presence of the United States in the Middle East to counter Iran's influence in the region. Another key reason is to enhance its military capabilities in response to attacks from several Arab countries such as Afghanistan, Yemen, and Libya. The UAE is among the countries that import a significant amount of US military equipment. With normalisation, Israel is likely to gain greater access to the UAE's military market. Previously, when the UAE sought to purchase F-35 fighter jets and armed drones, Israel objected, fearing it could threaten regional stability. With the normalisation of relations, the UAE hopes these transactions can proceed.

### **Research Question**

How has the foreign policy of the United Arab Emirates changed in the normalisation of diplomatic relations with Israel?

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **UAE's Foreign Policy Change Towards Israel: An Analysis of Diplomatic Relations**

A similar study was conducted by Kristian Fajar Zai, titled *The Change of UAE Foreign Policy Towards Israel: An Analysis of Diplomatic Relations*. This study was a thesis for the International Relations programme at Jayabaya University. The study employed a foreign policy approach with a focus on diplomatic relations and national interests. Using this concept, it became evident that a country's foreign policy is dynamic and can change due to internal factors such as social, economic, and security policies. Countries, by nature, depend on one another, particularly in today's contemporary international relations landscape. Building new relationships to meet national interests is a key driver for forging new ties.

The main difference between this research and Zai's lies in the focus of the analysis. Zai's study examines the UAE's overall diplomatic relations, whereas this research will concentrate specifically on the national interests behind the UAE's decision to normalise diplomatic relations with Israel.

**The Normalisation of UAE-Israel Relations: National Interest Versus Muslim Solidarity for Palestine**

Another related study was conducted by Raden Mas Try Ananto Djoko Wicaksono, titled *The Normalisation of UAE- Israel Relations: National Interest Versus Muslim Solidarity for Palestine*, which was published on Gadjah Mada University's website. This study used realism theory, focusing on the concept of national interest. The study primarily discusses the responses of other Muslim countries to the normalisation and the UAE's interests in doing so. The main difference between Wicaksono's article and this study lies in the focus on the national interests behind the UAE's diplomatic relations with Israel, particularly in comparison to the solidarity of Muslim countries for the Palestinian cause.

**The Role of the United States in the Normalisation of Israel's Diplomatic Relations with Middle Eastern Countries**

The final literature review is based on research conducted by Muhammad Alief Anshary, titled *The Role of the United States in the Normalisation of Israel's Diplomatic Relations with Middle Eastern Countries*. This research was a thesis for the International Relations programme at Hasanuddin University. Anshary's research focuses on the concept of normalisation and diplomatic relations. It explains the role of the US in facilitating the diplomatic ties between Israel and several Middle Eastern countries. The US has exploited the dynamics of the Middle East region through triangular diplomacy, connecting Israel with other Middle Eastern nations. This is evident in the US's efforts to balance interests and make offers to Middle Eastern countries, such as the UAE and Bahrain, resulting in their official normalisation of diplomatic relations with Israel through the Abraham Accords in 2020. The key difference between Anshary's study and this research lies in the focus on the UAE's national interest behind its decision to establish diplomatic relations with Israel.

In the pursuit and protection of national interests against a perceived threat, countries often cooperate with those deemed allies, even if it requires shifting foreign policy towards a former rival. Iran has emerged as a significant power opposing the status quo in the Persian Gulf and the Middle East. Its nuclear programme poses a geopolitical threat to the UAE, given the geographical proximity between the two nations. The UAE's move to establish diplomatic relations with Israel is seen as a strategic response to counterbalance a hegemonic power and mitigate fears of threats to its national security. In this context, normalising diplomatic relations with Israel serves as an effective diplomatic tool to achieve the UAE's key objectives, particularly in the fields of security and economics. Of particular importance is the UAE's desire to enhance its military capabilities, in light of threats from neighbouring Arab nations such as Afghanistan, Yemen, and Libya. The UAE is one of the major importers of US military equipment. Through normalisation, Israel stands to gain greater access to the UAE's military market. Previously, Israel opposed the UAE's attempt to purchase F-35 fighter jets and armed

drones, arguing that such weapons could destabilise the region. With the establishment of normalised relations, the UAE hopes to proceed with these transactions.

The purpose of this article is to examine, understand, and analyse in- depth the UAE's motivations for shifting its foreign policy towards Israel by agreeing to normalise diplomatic relations. This research specifically aims to understand and analyse the continuation of policies undertaken by Indonesia in its efforts to bring peace to Afghanistan following political changes in the country.

## **ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Constructivism**

In this research, the constructivist perspective is employed because it offers relevant ideas for the study of international relations. Firstly, constructivism believes that structures created by humans are shaped by shared ideas rather than material forces. Secondly, identities and interests of state actors are not solely determined by their own motives and interests, but are shaped by the interactions between individuals across political, social, economic, cultural, and other fields.

One of the most influential figures in the development of constructivism in international relations studies is Alexander Wendt, through his seminal articles "*Anarchy is What States Make of It*" (1992) and "*Constructing International Politics*" (1995). Wendt argues that the end of the Cold War was not the result of a victory by the United States but was instead due to a shift in ideas initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev, who no longer viewed the Western nations as enemies of the Soviet Union (Wendt, 1992). This suggests that constructivism focuses not on empirical events but on the preconditions that led to those events. These preconditions are intersubjective interactions between actors, influenced by shared ideas, identities, and interests, which ultimately form a mutual understanding.

Key points of constructivism, as outlined by Wendt and relevant to the topic at hand, include the idea that social structures are formed through shared understanding, expectations, and knowledge. For example, Wendt uses the notion of a "security community" as a group of states that share knowledge and trust, enabling them to resolve conflicts without resorting to war (Wendt, 1995). In their book *The Evolution of International Security Studies*, Barry Buzan and Lene Hansen argue that constructivism is part of critical theory, which can explain actions or decisions linked to historical developments. Constructivism focuses on ideas, norms, identities, and other non-material factors. Friedrich Kratochwil asserts that the construction of the international world is a process of interaction between actors, shaped by elements such as interests, identity, intentions, and values, which help actors define one another as friends or foes.

### **Foreign Policy**

Foreign policy, often referred to as "Action Theory" or "Foreign Policy," is the strategy of a nation aimed at achieving specific goals with other countries in line with its

interests. Essentially, foreign policy serves as a mechanism through which states determine values, attitudes, and directions to protect, secure, and promote their national interests within the context of international politics. Foreign policy, often referred to as "Action Theory" or "Foreign Policy," is the strategy of a nation aimed at achieving specific goals with other countries in line with its interests. Essentially, the foreign policy serves as a mechanism through which states determine values, attitudes, and directions to protect, secure, and promote their national interests within the context of According to Mark R. Amstutz, foreign policy can be understood as explicit actions and strategies by government officials designed to promote national interests beyond a country's territorial boundaries. He highlights three main focuses of foreign policy: *government action or strategy, the pursuit of national interests, and policies that go beyond territorial borders*. Foreign policy can be described as a series of decisions or a process that functions as a means for nations to protect their political interests. Some general functions of foreign policy include:

1. Ensuring national security by developing military capabilities and entering security alliances with other nations,
2. Strengthening economic power and national welfare by opening foreign markets for exports and attracting foreign investment.

Foreign policy is, therefore, the formulation of strategies or action plans by national decision-makers to deal with other states or political entities to achieve specific national objectives. Geopolitically, the UAE's proximity to Iran poses a significant threat, especially considering the diplomatic tensions between the two nations, which include disputes over territorial claims in the Strait of Hormuz. The UAE and Israel have sought to build cooperation in various sectors, including politics, security, and economics, due to their shared concerns over Iran's nuclear program. Both countries have also lobbied at international forums, including the United Nations, to halt Iran's nuclear weapons production, though Iran asserts that its nuclear programs are for domestic industry and energy research purposes.

### **National Interest**

The concept of national interest is a key principle in international relations, particularly within the realist school of thought. International relations scholars argue that the concept of security is "essential." The traditional realist approach defines security as a nation's ability to protect itself from military threats or its capability to safeguard its citizens from potential military or non-military attacks originating from external actors. According to Hans J. Morgenthau, national interest is the minimum ability of a state to provide protection and defend its physical, political, and cultural identity from interference by other nations. In essence, national interest can be defined as "threats to national and international security" stemming from the interactive processes between

state and non-state actors. Robert J. Jackson identifies various sources of power that contribute to a nation's ability, including:

1. **Economy:** A strong economy enhances a nation's military capacity and enables the formation of alliances.
2. **Geography and population:** The shape and location of a country can be both a strength and a challenge. Larger countries like the United States, China, and Russia have advantages in terms of population and natural resources, but they must also manage vast territories and long borders.
3. **Natural resources and technological capability:** Access to energy supplies is vital for a nation's development, particularly for advancing military and technological sectors.
4. **Military capability:** The level, structure, and quality of a nation's military are key indicators of its power.
5. **Soft power:** The ability of a country to achieve its national interests through diplomatic means, cultural influence, and strategic partnerships, without the use of force.

### **Geopolitics**

Geopolitics is a term frequently used by political analysts and practitioners to describe, explain, or analyse foreign policy issues. It refers to the relationship between geography, geopolitics, and geostrategy. Nations need to implement geopolitical protection strategies through foreign policy or geostrategic actions. The escalation of relations between the UAE and Iran has not improved due to several geopolitical conflicts, including the territorial dispute over three islands in the Persian Gulf: Abu Musa, Greater Tunb, and Lesser Tunb. Both countries claim sovereignty over these islands, which are strategically located near the Strait of Hormuz, a critical passage for 40% of the world's oil supply.

The competition over control of these islands is crucial for maintaining the balance of power in the region. Controlling the islands provides a geopolitical advantage in terms of influencing international political and economic stability. In recent years, Iran has increased its presence on the islands, even establishing military bases to assert control over maritime traffic routes passing through this vital area.

### **RESEARCH METHODS**

This research employs a qualitative research methodology, wherein the data gathered is descriptive, providing explanations regarding foreign policy decisions. Essentially, qualitative research aims to understand phenomena and events experienced by subjects during social interactions within society and to discover and interpret their meaning within that context. In qualitative research, the researcher seeks meaning, understanding, and explanations of an event, either directly or indirectly, and examines

it comprehensively. Qualitative methods are often referred to as natural methods because they seek to explain reality and the entirety of an issue, which cannot be understood separately from its context.

Therefore, in line with the explanation of qualitative research methods, the researcher aims to interpret the information obtained to extract meaning from this study. This research adopts a descriptive-analytical approach, which is useful for documenting and studying events in detail, based on the required data or information, using systematic data collection procedures. Accordingly, the researcher will gather data and information that reflect the reality of foreign policy issues to explore Indonesia's foreign policy on peace efforts in Afghanistan. Qualitative research involves discussions that prioritise or focus on the research topic, such as events, phenomena, and occurrences within the context of different relevant data, to demonstrate the potential and benefits of different research approaches or to discuss the researcher's perspective on various cases.

In this approach, the researcher's ability to conduct research, understand the various issues and aspects of the study, and other related matters is crucial. The qualitative approach will be a key element requiring careful attention to the researcher's skills and abilities. This data will eventually serve as essential material, supporting both qualitative and quantitative researchers in explaining the central question of the research. Arguments related to problems, issues, phenomena, or social events under discussion are also key.

Data collection techniques in qualitative research are critical for obtaining the necessary data for analysis. The researcher used data collection techniques involving the search for sources relevant to the research question, such as observing phenomena, interviewing informants, and conducting literature reviews. The researcher also used document sources such as journal articles and books. Data was then obtained via the Internet, for instance, from various related organisations, research institutions, and publishers naturally connected to one another. For data collection, two methods were employed: a literature review and document analysis.

This research uses data collection techniques through a literature review. The literature review in this study is based on academic works such as journal articles, books, dissertations, internet news articles, and government websites relevant to the research. The written works were selected by the researcher based on their relevance to the study. This research uses data collection techniques through a literature review.

The literature review in this study is based on academic works such as journal articles, books, dissertations, internet news articles, and government websites relevant to the research. The written works were selected by the researcher based on their relevance to the study. The systematic search and arrangement of data obtained from field notes, interviews, and other sources are known as data analysis techniques.

This process ensures that the data is easily understood, and the results can be shared with others. Qualitative analysis is used as a method of data analysis in this

research, applied interactively throughout the data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing stages. The data used in the research may not always be original, but a combination of different sources. Therefore, it is essential to filter and analyse the data from multiple sources to ensure all sources are used with high quality and reliability. The following are the data analysis techniques used in this research.

The data reduction process focuses on selecting, simplifying, and transferring data. It allows the researcher to determine which phenomena to discuss, which research questions to challenge, and which data to select. This process continues throughout the research until the results are finalized. This stage is integral to the overall analytical process. The goal is to refine, focus, categorise, and group the data until conclusions can be verified. Therefore, the researcher uses data reduction as one of the techniques to make the research more targeted.

The second step in data analysis is data presentation. The purpose of this step is to categorise and condense the data or information gathered to support the research conclusions. Based on this understanding, the process of data presentation is inseparable from the analysis process. It is, instead, part of the overall analytical work. At this stage, the data may be presented in matrices, charts, diagrams, or network formats. The researcher can select different data formats that are most appropriate for analysis. Conclusion Drawing this phase represents the final step of the research process. After the data collection process is complete and the data has been arranged according to the field notes and methods employed, data validation can be conducted. The data review phase is relatively short and combines the researcher's perspective, research notes, and the steps taken during the analysis process.

**DISCUSSION**

**Overview of the Middle East before UAE-Israel Normalisation**

The United States and Saudi Arabia played significant roles in the process of normalising relations between Middle Eastern Muslim countries and Israel. This diplomatic normalisation would not have been possible without full support from the US and the permissive stance of Saudi Arabia towards Israel in recent years (Imam Shamsi Ali, 11 February 2022). Several key events triggered the wave of normalisation between Middle Eastern Muslim countries and Israel. One such event was the Arab Spring, which spread across the region. The Arab Spring is widely seen as a pro- democracy movement that demanded changes in the political order of the Middle East (Machmudi, 2021).

The Arab Spring caused great concern among Middle Eastern leaders, as they feared that public movements demanding governmental reforms could spread from one country to another. In response, conservative regimes in the region sought allies to help maintain the status quo. Israel, with its advanced military and technological capabilities, became a potential partner for these regimes, providing support to help preserve their power.

The Arab Spring also intensified proxy wars in the region, leading Middle Eastern countries to strengthen their respective alliances. Israel, once considered the common enemy of all Arab nations, became part of Saudi Arabia's coalition (Nawaz, 2022). The prolonged conflict between Middle Eastern countries and the emerging proxy wars made it more likely for some nations, which already had informal ties with Israel, to officially declare their relationships. The role of identity was critical in shaping alliances during the Arab Spring. Iran, for example, consistently aligned itself with Shia factions, supporting the government of Bashar al-Assad in Syria, the Houthi opposition group in Yemen, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and Shia opposition groups in Bahrain (Gause, 2014). On the other hand, Saudi Arabia, aligned with Israel and the US, supported Sunni-majority opposition groups. The identity-based struggle during the Arab Spring drove the region further into proxy wars.

In line with the constructivist perspective, which believes that structures are shaped by shared ideas or viewpoints (Pramono & Purwono, 2010), the Arab Spring was interpreted differently by different stakeholders. What occurred in Syria, for instance, was viewed differently by Saudi Arabia and the US compared to how Iran perceived it. Saudi Arabia and the US justified the Syrian opposition, while Iran supported the Syrian government. To better understand the significance of identity in the Arab Spring, the researcher applies Wendt's constructivist framework, which outlines four types of identity, one of which is collective identity (Wendt, 2000). Collective identity refers to shared feelings and thoughts among countries. This shared identity forms from a series of interactions between states, resulting in a mutual understanding. In the context of the Arab Spring, Sunni Arab states and Israel developed a collective identity in perceiving Iran as a common threat. Consequently, throughout the Arab Spring, Iran was consistently viewed as a destabilizing force in the Middle East.

**Overview of the Middle East Prior to UAE- Israel Normalisation**

The United States and Saudi Arabia played significant roles in the process of normalising relations between Middle Eastern Muslim countries and Israel. This diplomatic normalisation would not have been possible without full support from the US and the permissive stance of Saudi Arabia towards Israel in recent years (Imam Shamsi Ali, 11 February 2022). Several key events triggered the wave of normalisation between Middle Eastern Muslim countries and Israel. One such event was the Arab Spring, which spread across the region. The Arab Spring is widely seen as a pro- democracy movement that demanded changes in the political order of the Middle East (Machmudi, 2021).

The Arab Spring caused great concern among Middle Eastern leaders, as they feared that public movements demanding governmental reforms could spread from one country to another. In response, conservative regimes in the region sought allies to help maintain the status quo. Israel, with its advanced military and technological capabilities, became a potential partner for these regimes, providing support to help preserve their power. The Arab Spring also intensified proxy wars in the region, leading Middle Eastern

countries to strengthen their respective alliances. Israel, once considered the common enemy of all Arab nations, became part of Saudi Arabia's coalition (Nawaz, 2022). The prolonged conflict between Middle Eastern countries and the emerging proxy wars made it more likely for some nations, which already had informal ties with Israel, to officially declare their relationships.

The role of identity was critical in shaping alliances during the Arab Spring. Iran, for example, consistently aligned itself with Shia factions, supporting the government of Bashar al-Assad in Syria, the Houthi opposition group in Yemen, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and Shia opposition groups in Bahrain (Gause, 2014). On the other hand, Saudi Arabia, aligned with Israel and the US, supported Sunni-majority opposition groups. The identity-based struggle during the Arab Spring drove the region further into proxy wars. In line with the constructivist perspective, which believes that structures are shaped by shared ideas or viewpoints (Pramono & Purwono, 2010), the Arab Spring was interpreted differently by different stakeholders. What occurred in Syria, for instance, was viewed differently by Saudi Arabia and the US compared to how Iran perceived it. Saudi Arabia and the US justified the Syrian opposition, while Iran supported the Syrian government.

To better understand the significance of identity in the Arab Spring, the researcher applies Wendt's constructivist framework, which outlines four types of identity, one of which is collective identity (Wendt, 2000). Collective identity refers to shared feelings and thoughts among countries. This shared identity forms from a series of interactions between states, resulting in a mutual understanding. In the context of the Arab Spring, Sunni Arab states and Israel developed a collective identity in perceiving Iran as a common threat. Consequently, throughout the Arab Spring, Iran was consistently viewed as a destabilising force in the Middle East.

This collective identity further manifested in the normalisation of diplomatic relations between Middle Eastern Muslim countries and Israel. This normalisation process exacerbated the region's longstanding conflicts. This situation benefitted the US and Israel, as the division among Muslim countries in the Middle East allowed them to further strengthen their hegemony. Even more striking is the fact that the US and Israel often remained behind the scenes during these conflicts, exerting influence indirectly.

A second factor that triggered the normalisation process was Iran's growing dominance in the region. Iran had become one of the dominant players shaping the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East, alongside the United States. The strained relations between the US and Iran further destabilised the region, as both countries viewed each other as existential threats (Jalalpoor & Sharfi, 2016). This mutual perception of threat is a key focus of constructivist analysis, as it illustrates how social constructions and material pacts are formed based on the intersubjective perceptions of actors. An example of how these intersubjective perceptions materialised can be seen in Bahrain. Although Bahrain has a majority Shia population, its ruling family, led by King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, is Sunni. During the Arab Spring, the political landscape of the region

was defined by the divide between Persia-Shia and Arab-Sunni (Mervin et al., 2013). Bahrain's government viewed its Shia population as a threat, believing them to be supported by Iran, which is seen as a representative of the Shia identity. Consequently, Iran was constructed as a primary threat, shaping Bahrain's foreign policy decisions. Bahrain aligned itself with countries that shared this threat perception, such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which also viewed Iran's influence as a danger to regional stability.

Arab identity played a significant role in Middle Eastern politics during this period. Saudi Arabia's King Salman, through his political doctrine, strongly emphasized Arab unity, which became a foundation for cooperation among Arab nations. King Salman's doctrine was rooted in the following principles:

1. The Arab world is capable of defending itself.
2. Iran is a threat to Arab unity and stability and must be countered.
3. Arab nations can offer alternatives to the regional status quo and Iran's influence.
4. What unites Arab nations is more important than what divides them.
5. Arab nations are capable of defining their own narrative and future (Shabaneh, 2015).

This doctrine positioned sectarianism as a central narrative to justify Saudi Arabia's foreign policy and distinguished Arab-Sunni identity from Persia-Shia identity. While the four Arab countries that formalised their diplomatic relations with Israel have made this move public, Saudi Arabia, despite not having formal diplomatic ties with Israel, has long maintained covert relations with the country. Saudi Arabia's primary concern is not the Palestinian cause but Iran's expanding influence in the region (Rynhold & Yaari, 2019). In fact, Saudi Arabia and the US actively mediated between other Middle Eastern Muslim countries and Israel, encouraging them to normalise relations. The driving force behind this mediation was the mutual understanding between Saudi Arabia, Israel, and the US that Iran posed the greatest threat to regional stability. This led to the diplomatic normalisation of relations through the Abraham Accords in 2020, with the US acting as a key facilitator of this process.

### **General Overview of the United Arab Emirates (UAE)**

The United Arab Emirates (UAE), officially known as *Dawiat al-Imarat al-Arabiyah al-Muttahidah*, is situated on the eastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula. The Middle East itself covers a vast region of about 83,600 square kilometres, extending from the Nile Valley to the Muslim countries of Central Asia, such as Morocco and Algeria. The term "Middle East" was popularised by the United States following World War II. The UAE is a federation of seven emirates: Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Dubai, Fujairah, Ras al-Khaimah, Sharjah, and Umm al-Quwain. It is led by a president, currently Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

**Picture 4.1 United of Arab Emirates Map**



**Source:** Akurat.com

During the reign of Sheikh Zayed, the founding president, the UAE prioritised education and social development, particularly following the discovery of oil. The oil resources provided the government with the means to invest heavily in public infrastructure, including education. Over the years, the UAE has made significant strides in education, with the literacy rate now approaching 90% for both men and women. This progress is seen as a key indicator of the country's development.

Despite its economic strength, the UAE lags in military capabilities. Rising tensions over Iran's nuclear programme have forced the UAE to align with Israel to receive military assistance from the United States, especially during Donald Trump's presidency. Unlike some of its GCC neighbours, the UAE has pursued a more flexible approach in its foreign relations, seeking opportunities both regionally and globally. Under the leadership of Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the UAE has optimised its national security strategy by promoting regional stability, religious tolerance, and economic growth, while maintaining close partnerships with other countries. The Abraham Accords, which normalised relations between the UAE and Israel, marked a strategic step to strengthen regional economic ties and build military alliances. By doing so, the UAE aims to counter Iran's regional influence and secure its national interests through cooperation with Israel and the US.

### **The UAE-Israel Diplomatic Normalisation Agreement through the Abraham Accords 2020**

Before the normalisation of diplomatic relations, the relationship between the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Israel was highly adversarial. Like other Arab nations, the UAE viewed Israel as a threat, given the historical context of the Arab-Israeli wars and ongoing conflicts over the decades. At its founding, the UAE deemed Israel a security threat and supported boycotts against the country in line with the Arab League's position. As part of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the UAE refused to recognise Israel's legitimacy, blocking Israeli air travel, telecommunications, and prohibiting Israeli nationals from entering the country. These policies reflected a united front with other Arab nations against Israel.

In 1973, during the Arab-Israeli War, when US President Richard Nixon supplied weapons to Israel, the UAE declared, "*Arab oil is not dearer than Arab blood*",

expressing its commitment to Arab unity against Israel. Israel’s nuclear capabilities and long-range missiles were also perceived as significant threats to regional security.

However, relations between the UAE and Israel began to shift even before the official change in foreign policy. Mutual concerns over Iran's nuclear ambitions played a significant role in fostering cooperation between the two nations. The UAE- Israel relationship became more evident when Iran’s nuclear programme escalated, triggering anxiety among regional actors. Even though the UAE’s Foreign Minister had previously stated that no alliances would be formed without progress in the Israel-Palestine peace process, the shared threat posed by Iran’s nuclear programme compelled the UAE to reconsider its stance.

The decision to normalise relations with Israel through the Abraham Accords reflects the complex geopolitics of the region, particularly the UAE’s concerns over Iranian influence and its desire for security guarantees. With US mediation, the UAE aimed to secure military support, particularly advanced weaponry, such as F-35 fighter jets and drones, in exchange for formalising its relationship with Israel. The Abraham Accords are a set of agreements that formalised diplomatic relations between Israel and several Arab nations, including the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan. The name “Abraham” was chosen as a symbol of shared heritage among the three major monotheistic religions— Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. While the formal signing took place on 13th August 2020, the Accords were announced publicly in September 2020 at the White House, where leaders from Israel, Bahrain, and the UAE participated in a historic ceremony mediated by the US.

The Accords were signed amidst rising regional insecurity, particularly related to the growing influence of radical Islamist groups and Iran’s regional activities. US regional partners, including the UAE and Bahrain, shared a common view that Iran was the primary destabilising force in the Middle East.

The UAE’s Ambassador to France, Ali Abdullah Al-Ahmed, explained that the normalisation with Israel was an effort to prevent Israel’s further annexation of Palestinian land. The UAE government also presented this decision within an Islamic framework, where the Emirati Fatwa Council declared the decision to normalise relations as serving the “maslaha” (public good) in Islamic law. Sheikh Abdullah bin Bayyah of the Fatwa Council stated that the agreement would prevent Israeli sovereignty over the West Bank and avert the threat of war amidst the pandemic while promoting peace and humanity.

Initially, the Abraham Accords were viewed as a move primarily aimed at enhancing security. For Israel, normalisation meant breaking its regional isolation and moving towards regional integration. For the UAE, the agreement represented an opportunity to benefit economically and collaborate on technological advancements.

After the Accords were signed, there were significant changes in the regional dynamics, particularly in the realms of economic and security cooperation. Although the Abraham Accords are still in progress, the agreement has already reshaped the regional landscape, offering a competitive edge and challenges to the influence of Iran and radical groups in the region.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion above, the researcher concludes that the normalisation of relations between the UAE and Israel, formalised under the Abraham Accords in 2020, was driven by considerations of identity, national interests, intentions, and values. The strong alliance between the United States and Israel shared common goals of exerting influence in the Middle East, and this mutual understanding was a key factor in their cooperative relationship.

Furthermore, the normalisation of relations between Arab nations, including the UAE, and Israel was largely motivated by national interests. These interests encompassed political, economic, and military considerations, among others. The involvement of the US, especially under President Donald Trump, was also influenced by identity politics. Trump's pro-Israel stance in his foreign policy, exemplified by his involvement in the Abraham Accords, his recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, and other Middle East initiatives, reflected his political alignment with Jewish- American interests ahead of the 2020 US Presidential Election. Trump's mediation in the normalisation agreements was also driven by a desire to bolster his support among Jewish- American voters who favoured his Middle East policies. For Palestine, the Abraham Accords represented a weakening of the long-standing solidarity among Arab nations in support of Palestinian independence. As a result, Palestinian leaders saw the Arab nations that signed the Accords as betraying their historic commitment to the Palestinian cause.

## REFERENCES

- Ahmadi, S. (2022). Normalisasi Hubungan Diplomatik Uni Emirat Arab – Israel Analisis Rasionalitas Kebijakan Politik Luar Negeri Uni Emirat Arab. *Journal: Pemikiran Politik Islam*, Vol , hal 8.
- Al-Akim Hasan H. (1989). *Kebijakan Luar Negeri Uni Emirat Arab*. London: Saqi Books, 175.
- Barak R. (2017). Exclusive: Netanyahu Secretly Met With UAE Foreign Minister in 2012 in New York. URL: <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2017-07-25/ty-article/netanyahu-secretly-met-with-uae-foreign-minister-in-2012-in-new-york>
- Buzan, B., Hansen L. (2009). *The Evolution of International Security Studies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 194.

- Creswell John W., J. David Creswell. (2018). *Research Design: Qualitative Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches 5th Edition*. Sage Publications.
- Danim S. (2002). *Menjadi Peneliti Kualitatif*. Bandung, Pustaka Setia. hlm. 45-47
- Dugis, V. (2016). *Teori Hubungan Internasional Perspektif – perskpektif Klasik*. Hal 45.
- Gunawan, I. (2015). *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif Teori dan Praktik*. Jakarta. Bumi Aksara. Hlm. 81.
- Hammond, A. (2012). *Analysis: Saudi Gulf Union Plan Stumbles as Wary Leaders Seek Detail*. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-gulf-union-idUSBRE84G0WN20120517#yXXzFWO86KSvvIPV.97>
- Istadiyantha. (2010). *Permasalahan Istilah Timur Tengah*. Jurnal Universitas Sebelas Maret Surakarta.
- Priyono, J., Yusgiantoro. P. (2017). *Geopolitik, Geostrategi, Geoekonomi*. Hal 4.
- Kratochwil F. (1989). *Rules, Norms, and Decisions: On the Conditions of Practical and Legal Reasoning in International Relations and Domestic Affairs*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p 20–23.
- Kristian Fajar Zai. (2021). *Perubahan Politik Luar Negri Uni Emirat Arab Terhadap Israel: Analisis Pembukaan Hubungan Diplomatik*. Skripsi. Universitas Jayabaya
- Lexy J. Moleong, (2006). *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, edisi Revisi*. Bandung hlm: 10.
- Mardalis. (1995). *Metode Penelitian Suatu Pendekatan Proposal*. Jakarta. Bumi Aksara, hal. 26.
- Matthew B., Miles. A.M. (2019). *Qualitative Data Analysis - A Methods Sourcebook*. Arizona USA: Sage Publisher.
- Muhammad Alief Anshary, (2021). *Peran Amerika Serikat Terhadap Normalisasi Hubungan Diplomatik Israel Dengan Negara-Negara Timur Tengah*. Skripsi. Universitas Hassabuddin
- Perwita. A.A. Ph,D.(2008). *Dinamika Keamanan Dalam Hubungan Internasional dan Implikasinya Bagi Indonesia*.
- Raden Mas Try Ananto Djoko Wicaksono. (2021). *Normalisasi Hubungan Uni Emirat Arab dengan Israel: Kepentingan Nasional Versus Solidaritas Negara Muslim terhadap Palestina*. Jurnal ICMES Vol 4, Nomor 2, 2020,
- Rita Uli Hutapea. (2022). *Houthi Serang Abu Dhabi, UEA Marah- Ancam Balas Serangan*. <https://news.detik.com/internasional/d-5902885/houthi-serang-abu-dhabi-uea-marah-ancam-balas-serangan>.
- Sugiarto Pramono Purwono. (2010). *Konstruktivisme Dalam Studi Hubungan Internasional*. Vol 7(2), 14
- Tahmi, A. R., Rosyidin, M. & Faiza, M. (2022). *Analisis Kepentingan Nasional Uni Emirat Arab Dalam Normalisasi Hubungannya Dengan Israel*. *Journal of International Relations*, 8(3), 325- 333, hal 2