

Israel Palestine Conflict: Implications of the Political Dynamics in the GCC

Moyosore Olalekan Mohammed, Abdullahi Ayoade Ahmad

Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Faculty of Law & International Relations

Abstract: This study examines the Israel-Palestine conflict with regards to the political dynamics in the Gulf Cooperation Council. Especially issue that deals with the GCC new diplomatic relation with Israel and its implication. Strategically, Israel has been able to gain much rapport with the GCC states as such alliance have successfully tied their security interest and concern towards Iran as a regional foe. On the other hand, Palestinian perceived such development as counterproductive for her political cause as Israel remains and occupying power in the Palestinian territories. Apparently, Israel is using the Palestinian plight as a leverage to increase its relations with the Arab monarchs as the GCC states also encountered overlapping interest with regards to their policy towards Israel and Palestine. The study argues that the relations between Israel and the GCC states will continue to flourish as the latter becomes more dependent on the former in the area of economic and regional security interest. Also, Palestinian would hold a negative perception of the GCC with regards to her national interest. It therefore recommends that the GCC states should imbibe a collective policy towards the Palestinian interest and resolve the crisis within the in order to enjoy relative peace and regional stability.

Keywords: Conflict, Diplomatic relations, Political dynamics, Cooperation, Normalization

I. INTRODUCTION

Globally, the Israel-Palestine conflict stand as a major issue, specifically when looking at the relations between the West and the Islamic world [Rane, 2009]. It also remains a strategic issue and a protracted war undermining peace, security and political stability in the modern history of the Middle East, apparently since the aftermath of World War II [Baranovich & Moorthy, 2020; Okechukwu, 2018]. Especially, political stability in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and the success of the Arab unity. This conflict which emerged since 1948 has been identified as a milestone event in the political affairs of the Arabs, the GCC states in her relation with Israel. Indeed, after several years of war and failed peace efforts since the United Nations General Assembly resolution 181 in 1947 [Amina, 2019; Demirel, 2006] the Zionist Jews appear to have systematically dominated the Arab – enshrined in their age long nationalistic ambition resulting to the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian [Pappé 2019; 2014].

In recent years however, what became a priority for the Palestinian is to achieve their long awaited national aspiration of a sovereign 'State'. To the Israeli, the survival of her state against the continuous resistance from its Arab neighbors,

thereby aspiring for the status of a regional leader tying up the equation of self-determination and state security between both actors [Frimer, Maoz, & Ron, 2020].

Apparently, the Israeli occupation and settlement on the Palestinian territories since the 1967 war remains a subject of wide debate yet to be resolve despite the growing relations between Israel and the GCC. The GCC who have stood politically weak to aid the Palestinian cause and still further extends its normalization with Israel [Rabi & Mueller, 2017]. This volatile political dynamic has created a vacuum in the GCC as some states prefers to maintain a close relation with Israel, others do not on the condition for a consensus towards the Arab peace initiative strongly linked to the Palestinian cause.

Surprisingly, the declaration of UAE, Bahrain, and Sudan to establish a full diplomatic relation with Israel brokered by Washington stand as a novel development which attracts several controversies enshrined in the GCC political dynamics. More predominantly after the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced to further annex over 30 per cent land in the occupied West Bank [Eldar, 2020]. Indeed, an issue of serious concern for the Palestinians and a backlash to the Arab peace initiative. Alas, it was not long ago Washington declared Jerusalem as the capital of Israel in 2017 at the centenary of the Balfour declaration and later proclaimed Jerusalem as the undivided capital of Israel [Selzer, 2020]. Staring up polemics in the international communities and still was even followed by the U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's announcement that the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories is no longer in conflict with international law. That Israel has the right to determines it land in historical Palestine [Aljazeera 10, Aug. 2020]. Even though such move by Israel is explicitly stated to have violated international law according state territorial sovereignty.

Although, such position was challenged by the United Nations Secretary General Antonio Gutierrez in a meeting with the UN security council as he was quoted to have mentioned that: "If implemented, annexation would constitute a most serious violation of international law, grievously harm the prospect of a two-state solution and undercut the possibilities of a renewal of negotiations, ... "I call on the Israeli Government to abandon its annexation plans," (Nichols, 2020). Such position does not give a good impression for peace neither optimism for the long years awaited resolution in the garb of the 'the

deal of the century' engineered by President Trump son in-law Jared Kushner [Balf, 2020]. Either ways, the status quo still remains.

In a geopolitical standpoint however, the Israel-Palestine arena and the Gulf arena are regarded as distinguish from one another. Yet, the Gulf monarchs are however indirectly involved in, and influenced by, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. More than ever, Israel too is influenced by the political dynamics in the Gulf, and the developments there as having an impact on its vital national security interest which propel the need to forge a security alliance with the Saudi led regime [Beck, 2020]. From both political and ideological standpoints, the Arab Gulf states of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates view the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as destabilizing, though their main security threat is perceived from another regional leader Iran [Guzansky, 2011].

Going by this equation, the tacit alliance between Israel and the GCC states will continue to rise and fall as a result of this regional issue (Israeli-Palestinian) conflict. As it is in line with Gulf Arab states' perceptions of their own security and the need for the region's stability and protection from external threat [Rabi & Mueller, 2017]. This inevitably could lead to a long term political instability as the Gulf states repugnant approach toward the conflict as a regional matter is dynamic. On the other hand, Palestinian feels betrayed by the GCC capitals having established a diplomatic relation with Israeli. Consequently, result to an obstacle toward the success of her national aspiration. The study therefore examines the implications of the new diplomatic alliance between the GCC (UAE and Bahrain) and Israel. It also studies the political dynamics in the GCC towards regional issue like the Israel-Palestine conflict.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Several literatures has discussed extensively on the Israel-Palestine conflict and the failures of several peace process. Studies like that of Pappé [2014, 2019] and Demirel [2006] which examined the conflict from a nationalistic ethnic cleansing or genocide point of view and strongly opines that Israeli government have longed had a plan towards this objective which is to dominate the Palestinian Arab as a nationalistic agenda for her survival. Also, Okechukwu [2018] investigated the intractable nature of the conflict and identifies some of the key challenges obstructing a final resolution. Issues such as the continuous disagreement over territorial dispute, refugee crisis, status of Jerusalem, shared resources between the two actors and the role of the super powers interest from Britain to the United States have created a vacuum in the peace process. Amina [2019] equally examined the un-captured role of the United Nations in the conflict since inception and its effort to establish peace between parties. The findings from these studies posit that the failure to reach a final consensus is attributed to the weakness of the United Nations who is a major mediator in the conflict as it continues to suffer tremendously from the aggressive and dominating

role of the United States in the security council.

Rane [2009] also provides an analysis of the UNSC resolutions in regards to the Palestinian question and argues that they possess a practical alternative to reaching an agreement in the context of just peace in compliance with international standards that is (self-defense and self-determination). He further assert that the Palestinian non-violent approach if adopted could lead to the attainment of just peace for both actors. Although this study takes a different position on the subject. Arguing that regardless of the position of the Palestinian, Israel's behavior does not seem ready for peace with a two-state solution from an historical standpoint.

Furthermore, Guzansky [2011, 2015], Furlan [2019], Rabi & Mueller [2017] also examines the tacit relations between Israel and the GCC. Arguing that the covert relation between the GCC and Israel is towards more contending issue which is the need for regional security and stability against Iran's threat even though the GCC leadership offered Israel a negotiation for peace and the recognition of the Palestinian right to self-determination. Similarly, Ulrichsen [2018, 2020] assert that the GCC have formed a geo-political alliance with Israel towards strategic issue such as the security threat from Iran and the Muslim brotherhood and has embarked on a changing position leading to the Palestinian side line.

However, few literatures have investigated the position of the GCC in the conflict with recent event as some of the GCC members (Bahrain, UAE) declared a full diplomatic relation with Israel brokered by Washington. As such development is likely to have a number of consequences in the Israel-Palestine conflict.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the qualitative research method. Secondary method of data collection was used to collect data for the study which includes; journal articles, newspapers, books and internet materials. Content analysis was used to analysis documents with a view of finding logical sequence.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. *United Arab Emirate-Bahrain Diplomatic Relations with Israel*

In an unprecedented move in the history of the GCC capitals, the UAE on August 13, 2020 declared its interest to enter into a diplomatic alliance with Israel brokered by Washington following years of clandestine relations. The move is considered as a necessary shift in the GCC state's policy towards the Middle East peace process by the so called Pragmatic and Moderate Muslim who sees the need for a progressive relation with Israel. Rather than a deadlock and unfruitful eon of peace process [Falk, 2020]. Alas, there is yet to be any tangible peaceful agreement and the recognition of the Palestinian right to self-determination with the continuous Israeli settlement and annexation project in the West Bank.

The deal which is also considered as “Abraham Accord” or put differently “peace for peace” rather than “peace for land” giving the usual rhetoric of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. It also serves as a window for other Arab and Muslim states to enter into a diplomatic relation with Israel after the 60-nation conference that was held in Warsaw aimed to promote “the future of peace and security in the Middle East”. The meeting which was attended by high level Arab officials which includes Saudi Arabia, Morocco, UAE, Bahrain, and Oman (Falk, 2020). Whether this new development will change the attitude of Israel towards the Palestinian remain obfuscate because the Israeli government issued a threat to annex more of the occupied territories. Does this move call for the true peace it preaches? Perhaps we redefine the term peace in an Israeli context or re-examine the scriptures that teaches it.

According to opinion columnist Thomas L. Friedman, it is a “Geopolitical Earthquake” in the Middle East. Something I would prefer to describe as a “Diplomatic Missile” for the Palestinian. However, he further added that “... the plan basically called for Israel and the Palestinians to make peace, with Israel being able to annex some 30 percent of the West Bank, where most of its settlers were, and the Palestinians getting to establish a demilitarized, patchwork state on the other 70 percent, along with some land swaps from Israel” [Friedman, 2020]. Unfortunately, the Palestinian denounced the offer which is usually the case as there was no negotiation between them. This can only mean an imposition in real sense.

In the aftermath of the UAE-Israel diplomatic relation, it came not much as a surprise when Bahrain also declared to commit itself to a diplomatic relation with Israel. An alliance that many thinks will be a potential force to counter Iran’s regional influence [Aljazeera, Sep. 15, 2020]. This new paradigm shift in policy is indeed a huge achievement as proclaimed by Trump, which is mostly so for Israel in any case.

Israel would now have to patiently await the move to be supported by other U.S. allies in the GCC which Saudi Arabia is a potential candidate given its recent unofficial rush hour dialogue with Israeli officials as Trump administration enters it end. Although it is yet to be recognize by all GCC capitals which attracts a reason to locate where their loyalty lies.

B. Political Dynamics in the Gulf Cooperation Council Towards Geo-Political Interest

According to Macaron [2018] four major events plays a crucial role prior to, and after the creation of the GCC; serving as a yardstick for her regional interest and policy. First was the Iranian revolution of 1979 which ultimately birth the creation of the GCC in 1981 for cultural and economic interest. In essence, leading to a diverse interest in foreign policy and security issue. Hence, throughout the 80s, the GCC foreign policy was to avoid the spillover of the Iran-Iraq war 1980-1988. Second event was the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq in 1990, exposing the GCC’s security weakness and its over-

reliance on the U.S. for security and protection. Thus the need for the emancipation of Kuwait followed by the diplomatic intervention of the United Nations as well as the United states which dominates the 90s. Third event is the 9/11 attack on the United States influx with several controversies globally which was followed by the U.S. declaration of war on terrorism paving way for her 2003 invasion of Iraq. The last event which is the emergence of the 2011 Arab Uprising leading to the rethinking of GCC leaders towards geo-political interest. As this event pose a formidable threat either for the annihilation of the GCC or its survival as a regional organization. These events particularly the Arab spring and the security threat from Iran still today, plays a major role in the GCC foreign affairs among other issues like the Israel-Palestine conflict, war in Yemen, Syria and Libya.

Going by this logic, this ultimately will serve as an indication for the emergence of subsequent events in the pursuit of regional interest particularly in relation to the Israel-Palestine conflict as argued by Ulrichsen [2016]. Meanwhile, in the view of Professor Juan Cole – Professor of History and the director of the Centre for South Asian Studies at the University of Michigan, he posits that the new annexation plan from Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, threatens United States effort to establish a de facto alliance between the GCC and Israel [Cole, 2020]. However, in retrospect, it is unlikely that the annexation plan will jeopardize the GCC-Israel regional interest above all other matters, as a new dawn in their relation has just emerge. Both having a deep concern for Iran’s security threat is enough reason for convergence within such parameters. Thus, shifting their policy focus away from the Palestinian plight. Indeed, a momentous diplomatic victory for both U.S. and Israel with the success of such schism.

C. Divergent and Convergent Position in the Gulf Cooperation Council

The GCC normalization with Israel stands to be one of the major subject of divergent and convergent interest among the Arab states shaping their policies. It is no surprise that states such as Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Syria, Libya, and Yemen among others in the past all entered a reservation for not recognizing the state of Israel were as some others do not [Rabi & Mueller, 2017]. Apparently, recent event has shown where their top interest lies. More Arab states continue to shift their fundamental diplomatic position from non-alliance to a diplomatic relation with Israel as Iran is being caught in the web as an enemy. However, Kuwait remains the only GCC states with clear disinterest in having no relation with Israel. As a show for its position in 2014, it boycotted a regional conference on renewable energy on the hint that top ranking delegate from Israel would participate [Macaron, 2018].

Even though Saudi Arabia and UAE emerged to be the big players in the GCC, their poor relations with Qatar differing over foreign policy and struggle for regional power continue to impede their confrontation toward common issue [Rabi, 2009]. Regarding the Palestinian interest, the influence of

Qatar in Gaza could be put into use by moderating the views of Hamas and moving Palestinian reconciliation forward. However, considering Cairo's role in the talks between Fatah and Hamas, Qatari-Egyptian relations might not help in this regard. For certainty, a peace process between Israel and Palestine is unlikely to be effective outside reunifying the West Bank and Gaza under a cohesive Palestinian leadership (Macaron, 2018). In cooperation with the GCC if there is a consensus in their policy.

Moreover, the gulf states have equally hold a different ground in their foreign relation with the Palestinians, different from what it used to be in the early years at the height of the conflict. Their relationship took a drastic turn in the aftermath of the October 1973 war as they gradually begin to establish friendly policy towards Israel. More predominantly after the Madrid Conference of 1991 on Arab Israeli peace and the Post-Arab Spring of 2011 [Ulrichsen, 2018].

Interestingly, since the Gaza war of 2008 and the outbreak of the Arab uprising in 2011, both Doha and Riyadh have pursued a different foreign policy in relations to regional issues like the Israel-Palestine conflict due to the widespread influence of the Muslim brotherhood, Hamas and Qatar relation with Iran which Riyadh does not tolerate. These differences in ideological perception brings about a threat to the unity and functionality of the only cohesive Arab unit – the Gulf Cooperation Council. More so, the challenge posed by the Muslim brother in relations to its affiliation with Palestinian Hamas, Hezbollah have become a major issue for the GCC states security thus drawing a division among two major competitors for the leadership in the region Qatar who is trying to overcome its smallness against Saudi-Emirati coalition [Khlebnikov, 2018]. For Riyadh, the major issue is Doha's consolidating ties with Palestinian Hamas, Muslim brotherhood, and Iran; which fundamentally threatens the cooperation of the Sunni camp dominated by Riyadh. To Riyadh, it is a trilateral alliance overtly hostile to Saudi Arabia with its capacity to obstruct its desire to become a regional hegemony as a balance to counter Iran's influence in the gulf [Furlan, 2019].

D. Diplomatic Fall-out within the Gulf Cooperation Council over Strategic Matters

Against this backdrop, in 2014, Bahrain, UAE and Saudi-Arabia declared their intention to withdraw their foreign officers (ambassadors) from Qatar. This action is perceived to have emanated as a response to Qatar's political and financial support given to Hamas and the Muslim brotherhood. All the groups blacklisted by Saudi as a terrorist group. On the other hand, Qatar's critical anti-government broadcast of the Gulf states through it Al-Jazeera media network. However, by April 17, 2014, the GCC foreign officers converged in Riyadh summit for a dialogue which resulted to the decisive policies of non-interference with the security, and interests of member states. In November 16 of the same year, UAE, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia agreed to return their ambassadors to Qatar as

the latter agreed not to intervene into the affairs of the member states via media criticism [Nuruzzaman, 2015].

Hence, in spite of this friction, it appears that GCC members are still able to find a common approach to withstand new challenges, despite the fact that this might – in the past – be just a provisional settlement. Bearing in mind that the nature of the friction is related to regional dynamics and the balance of power, any complete resolution of the issue is a matter of future determination with the right leadership. Be that as it may, the rift among the Gulf states depicts a novel season in their affairs which Qatar and Saudi Arabia has already began [Khlebnikov, 2018].

Against this backdrop, the sudden embargo placed on Qatar by its other GCC members emerged out of the already existing tension in the Gulf. This became manifest on June 5, 2017 when key member states like Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, UAE cut off their economic and diplomatic relations, closing their borders, airspace, and flight from Qatar later supported by Egypt. Thus, prolonging the dispute within the GCC [Miller, 2019; Zafirov, 2017].

This was done on allegation that Qatar was in support of the Muslim brotherhood and Hamas, propagating and broadcasting against its GCC allies and maintaining a close tie with Iran who is considered a threat to the GCC states, holding a Turkish military base and not fighting against financing terrorism. Meanwhile, Qatar still maintained its aligned geopolitical logic in regional issues and policy which deals with the Palestinian struggle dissimilar from the perception of other GCC states like the Saudi-Emirati coalition. Following the boycott, Qatar was issued a 13-point ultimatum sanction which was later reduced to six; excluding the shutting down of its Turkey military base and Al-Jazeera news network [Aras & Akpınar, 2017; Honniball, 2020].

Following the fallout between Doha and Riyadh, it is possible that Qatar will distance itself from the so-called Sunni bloc at the cost of consolidation along the Ankara–Moscow–Tehran axis [Zafirov, 2017]. Leaving the future of their diplomatic contact in disarray. Something that is likely to have great implication on regional and geo-political matters, evident in the case of the Palestinian interest. As commitment toward their national struggle from the GCC will be negatively affected following the diplomatic fallout with Qatar who is a long standing supporter of Palestine.

View differently, even though it is perceived that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a fundamental issue causing instability in the Arab world, yet in recent years GCC strategic interest has been on the top priority with Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and UAE entering a strategic alliance with Israel which the populace outrageously disagree with the position of their government. Thus, presenting a fear of what seem to be the rise of dictatorship among their leaders [Mabro, 1992; Ya'alon & Friedman, 2018].

As far as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is concerned, there is an existing change in the behavior of the Gulf states, and a conflict of interest among its leaders. Israel now has a strong economic, security ties with countries like UAE, Saudi-Arabia, Bahrain, Oman, and Qatar. Making the Gulf states response a soft one against Israel; evident in their policymaking with disregard to the people's opinion and interest. Yet, the Israeli admit that there is little to her recognition by the GCC states. Meanwhile, this has not in any way shattered the common area of interest between Gulf political engineers and Israel. Rather all parties viewed Iran as the formidable threat to the Middle East stability in collaboration with the Muslim Brotherhood for the continuous war in Yemen as well as Syria. It is no surprise that in 2016 Morocco failed to hold the Arab summit on the ground that it was a false unity existing within the Arabs [Ya'alon & Friedman, 2018; Ulrichsen, 2018b].

More so, it appears difficult for the Saudi-Emirati coalition who has diplomatic and security alliance with the U.S. to become an anti-Israeli state. After all, they are all U.S. proxies in the Middle East. A good reason to form an alliance against Iran. As Saudi and Iran have also underneath played a proxy game with the Israel-Palestine conflict over the struggle for regional power which leaves their commitment even more doubtful [Beck, 2020].

The uncertainty, and overlapping interest among the GCC states towards Israel-Palestine conflict will in no small measure continue to impact and influence regional dynamics in the Middle East, and the GCC in particular. Even though, the Palestinian remains at the weak side with the sudden change in the GCC policy. Its agitation for self-determination will remain a long walk to freedom, and can only be determined by a policy consensus in GCC.

E. Gulf Cooperation Council Relations with Israel and Palestine

Up until 1979, there was no diplomatic relation between Israel and any Arab states. What seems to be present was a Pan Arab boycott of Israel for the recognition of an independent Palestinian state peacefully. However, as a result of certain dynamics in geo-political setting, the Camp David Accord resets the flow of event in the Israeli-Palestine conflict as Israel was able to enjoy a cooperative agreement with Egypt in 1979, and Jordan in 1994 [Laskier, 2004]. Indeed, after the creation of GCC in 1981, the incapacity of Gamel Abdel Nasser's Egypt to lead the front line in the dispute gradually shifted power to the Gulf monarchs, a testimony with the discovery of Oil after the 1973 war. Saudi Arabia afterward took the position of a leader in the dispute.

In the years that followed Saudi Arabia led a peace initiative offering Israel normalization in exchange for the creation of a Palestinian state in line with the pre-1967 borders including East Jerusalem, Palestinian refugees right to return and a compensation for those who wishes not; putting an end to the Khartoum declaration of no peace, no negotiation and no

reconciliation with Israel [Rabi & Mueller, 2017]. Unfortunately, it was never fruitful. Why? Because Israel wants more than it should have.

As unprecedented as it might look, it was assumed to have occurred due to the GCC strategic interest, enshrined in what became the "Fahd Plan" [Furlan, 2019] with the conditions that until Israel ends its occupation and settlement on the Palestinian soil will it be recognized to exist peacefully in the region [Beck, 2020]. To some others, it was perceived to be a trial and a show-off as the pronouncement of the plan was made by the crown Prince Abdul-Aziz and not the King himself. Therefore, such plan might later be withdrawn if need be as the power to guarantee peace is only conferred on the United Nations Security Council established in Article 7. Thus, Saudi's effort was only to make a consensus in the GCC being the leading pioneer without the power to implement the plan. Neither can it within its prowess to coerce Israel to do so [Guzansky, 2015].

This lack of inconsistent political will among actors to reach a consensus could further threaten peace between Israel and Palestine which could in the long term continue to remain an issue of concern for regional stability and security. One thing that is however certain is that the GCC have attempted to establish a deal with Israel since 1990s although separately. Yet, publicly agreed in their interest for the right of the Palestinian to exist incorporated in the United States mediating role for peace between both players as an avenue for their close link with Washington and a common interest against Iran's regional influence [Macaron, 2018].

In the aftermath of the 2008 Gaza war, the crown Prince of Bahrain Sheikh Salman bin Hamad Khalifa spoke on the need for new thinking if the Arab peace initiative is to be effective which unnecessarily impoverish Palestinians and threatens the security of Israel. To this end, Saudi's head of intelligence Turki Faisal explains that the 2002 Arab Peace Plan should be the major point of negotiations. Emphasizing on the Kingdom's novel comprehensive commitment to negotiating regional settlement as it opposes the continuous agitation of Arab Peace plan serving as an end to any form of negotiation with Israel. On the other hand, Qatar in 2012 urged for the reconsideration of the peace plan too. The Qatari position postulated that the GCC members divergent approach in her policy toward Israel, independent of Saudi's position or authority depicts the frustration and impediment in the peace process. However, this was later presented by the Qatari foreign minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem al-Thani exclaiming that peace between Israel and Palestine is to be a strategic choice for the entire Arab states [Guzansky, 2015].

Alas, the Saudi Crown Prince of Riyadh Muhammad bn Salam (MBS) declared in a meeting with Jewish leaders that Israel has a right over the Palestinian territory as there is a fair provision for distribution of resources between Israel and Palestine [Yossef, 2020]. It was also reported that the Saudi Crown Prince stated that the Palestinian should accept the proposal from President Donald Trump and stop complaining

and that the Jewish community have a right to obtain their own land [Yellinek, 2019]. Although, such proclamation was met with several criticisms from the Palestinian camp, it depicts the Kingdom's lack of willingness to embark on the Palestinian cause. Perhaps, it is time for national interest above regional matters.

This contested position in view of a diplomatic relation with Israel vis-à-vis Palestinian interest among other issues led to the difference in the GCC member's foreign policy. Indeed, Qatar and Oman had a partial relation with Israel outside the consensus of the GCC making the two states to pursue a different foreign policy in relation with Israel after some diplomatic visit. Yet, this does not prevent Qatar from maintaining its close relations with Hamas without any breath in its broadcast of Israel's treatment of Palestine with its popular Aljazeera news network. This undoubtedly brought about a diplomatic fall out between (Israel and Qatar). Despite the unfriendly atmosphere, Doha's Emir is described to have mentioned that Qatar would be willing to maintain a diplomatic tie with Israel 'as long as it is serious about peace process' as it continues to play a close mediating role between Israel and Lebanon [Cooper & Momani, 2011].

In 2012 at the Doha forum, the Emir of Qatar also proclaimed that the shifting dynamics ongoing in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) should be seen as an opportunity for Israel to reach a negotiation with Palestine as the new leadership in the GCC would use such avenue to relate with Israel. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is also recognized to have tacit relations with Israel as both states foreign minister enjoys good and personal relations i.e. Israel foreign minister Tzipi Livini and his UAE counterpart Abdullahi ibn Zayed which could also open ways for a consensus in the peace process [Guzansky, 2015].

On the other hand, Saudi Arabia and UAE who also shared tacit relation with Israel towards a regional issue to contain Iran's threat thus weakening the Palestinian interest over Saudi policy [Ulrichsen, 2016]. In 2010, both Saudi Arabia and Israel extended their cooperation to contain Iran despite the failure of any peace resolution with Palestine. In view of the past, the leadership in Riyadh looks to be more flexible in contrast to Israel-Palestine peace negotiation paving way for a covert normalization with Israel despite the shortcomings in reaching a holistic peace deal. Hence, the clandestine tie between Israel and Saudi Arabia is putting Israel at an advantage over the Palestinian interest [Rynhold & Yaari, 2020].

Going by past and recent events, it is not hard to come by that the GCC have lost their collective voice in the Israel-Palestine conflict. And as a consequence have decided it is time to prioritize national interest over regional interest especially the Palestinian interest. Meaning to say that it is unlikely that the Palestinian interest will serve as a roadblock for the GCC-Israel relation for many years to come.

F. Economic and Technological Benefits

Not only did Israel enjoy tacit relation with the GCC, it equally maintains an economic tie. Between 2003 – 2011, it is reported that the GCC stands to be Israel's third largest market in the Middle East after Turkey and the Palestinian authority. In which, Israel's economic activities is conducted with the GCC through several third party European company with an estimated amount of above \$500 million yearly [Guzansky, 2015].

In the area of technology, virtually all Gulf states benefit from Israeli technology specifically in dealing with security, with GCC forces receiving training from Israel security companies. This also includes trade in security devices like electronic fences, surveillance cameras and sensors for monitoring strategic facilities. Israel also maintain strategic ties with the GCC through its expertise in medical tourism, desalination as well as irrigation technologies which is recognized to be important to the GCC states [Guzansky, 2011]. At the beginning of 2011, Israel sold military equipment worth \$300 million to UAE. It is indeed obvious that Israel's technological prowess, as placed her at a strategic advantage above its Palestinian counterpart as she benefits more from both security, and economic development with the GCC [Kouam, 2020]. Hence, making it difficult for the divorce of such alliance. And on the other hand making Israel an indispensable rival to the gulf monarchs [Zureik, 2020].

Another significant economic progress between the GCC and Israel was the summit that was held between 25-26 of June, 2019, in Manama the Bahrain's capital. The key theme of the summit was to introduce the economic plan of President Trump in the art of the controversial deal of the century. Sending a message which declares the strong link between GCC-US-Israeli strategic interest. Meanwhile, it is also a novel signal to the Palestinians indicating that the assistance they received from both Qatar and Iran will be nothing compared to what would be receive if they accept the peace deal. An offer imbedded in Saudi's attempt to use Bahrain as the backdoor portraying itself as a power that is committed to the Palestinian cause in opposition to the position of Iran and Qatar [Yellinek, 2019].

Furthermore, the national airline of UAE Etihad Airways (Boeing 787 Dreamliner aircraft) in company with the Maman Group became the first GCC airline to operate to and from Israel commercially carrying cargo agents, corporate leaders, travel agent, and tourism industry leaders. A historic and landmark event in the GCC-Israel relation. Especially since her recent declaration of a diplomatic relation with Israel. The Chairman of the Etihad Aviation Group Mohamed Mubarak Fadhel Al Mazrouei is quoted to have stated that: "Today's flight is a historic opportunity for the development of strong partnerships here in the UAE, and in Israel, and Etihad as the national airline, is delighted to be leading the way. We are just starting to explore the long-term potential of these newly forged relationships, which will be sure to greatly benefit the economies of both nations, particularly in the areas of trade

and tourism, and ultimately the people who call this diverse and wonderful region home” [India Strategic, 15, Nov. 2019].

Undoubtedly, the growing diplomatic alliance between the GCC and Israel holds some fascinating events that is yet to unfold. At the same time, it is likely to have a long term implication in the Israel-Palestine conflict, as the GCC capitals pursue their strategic interest independently and in isolation of the Palestinian national aspiration.

V. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The Israel-Palestine conflict continue to stand as a regional issue that affects the relationship of the Arabs and Jewish communities in the Middle East. With Israel’s continuous settlement in the occupied territories, and the change in the status of Jerusalem at Israel’s advantage, it is clear that resolution for peace is subjective to a change in Israel’s attitude with the emergence of the new alliance. If Israel truly seeks a final solution to the protracted conflict. In addition to that, the paradigm shift in the GCC’s policy and diplomatic alliance with Israel could also serve as a yardstick for progress in the dispute resolution or a hardline in negotiation if Israel and the United States does not open up its policies to be fair towards the Palestinian. The GCC’s attitude towards Israel can be seen as a framework for progress although the Palestinian feels otherwise as Israel proves to show no remorse in its oppression of the Palestinian. Evidence since the Egyptian and Jordanian cooperative alliance for peace with Israel.

Looking at our discussion so far, there are numerous logical reasons as to why the GCC have decided to embark on this new journey. First is the convergent security interest it has with Israel to help counter the regional influence of Iran and its proxy states in the region. Second is the growth and development in the area of economy (agriculture, trade, tourism, and technology) to further protect the region from its geographical shortfall and over reliance on oil as a dominant source of state revenue. Last but not the list is to further strengthen her relation with the United States giving its overwhelming diplomacy and foreign policy in the Middle East as a super power. Meanwhile, it is unlikely whether Iran would be silent or neutral about this allied threat to her regional interest without a respond. Especially after the killing of its supreme military commander Qassim Suleiman by Washington and the recent assassination of its nuclear scientist Moshen Fahkrizadeh with allegation on Israel.

In the GCC camp, as far as the Israel-Palestine conflict is concerned, it would be difficult for the GCC capitals to eat its cake and have it. A divergent interest on regional and strategic issue will continue to hunt her foreign policy interest especially now that she enjoins a diplomatic relation with Israel amidst a diplomatic fall out with Qatar. Such bond with Israel however cannot be easily broken, neither will common interest be outweighed by lesser issues.

If that is the case, the Palestinian interest have been overshadowed by the GCC-Israeli interest towards strategic issue. The new diplomatic alliance showed that the Palestinian statelessness as a regional issue is no longer an impediment for the GCC and Israel relation. Such will be negatively received by the Palestinian leadership. With a view as being counterproductive to her national struggle. Within this confinement, Palestinian has already been stripped off their future capital as Washington declares Jerusalem as the undivided capital of Israel. Which was followed by the subsequent declaration that the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories as no longer in conflict with international law. Such development again is a setback for the Palestinian interest. More awful and worrisome is the declaration of further annexation of Palestinian land (West Bank) by the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu which was meant with political silent in the GCC capitals. Only to have dramatically unveiled their diplomatic relation with Israel.

The study finds that the new diplomatic relations between Israel and the GCC states is towards common interest as the latter becomes more dependent on Israel in the area of economy and regional security all tied to Washington’s diplomacy, and against threat from Iran. Also, Palestinian would hold a negative perception of the GCC with regards to her national interest as it feels threatened by this diplomatic alliance. Additionally, it would be difficult for all the states to come to terms with Israel even though such possibility is not completely over-ruled. Thus, the GCC capitals will continue to one way or another pursue their interest simultaneously and divergently especially as state like Qatar is unlikely to live under the shadows of Saudi dominance. Neither is Kuwait ready to recognize Israel as it failed to end its occupation and settlement on the Palestinians territories. Such inconsistency and divergent interest will continue to implicate the Palestinian making her more vulnerable to Israel. And the GCC in trying to survive under single policy and approach.

VI. CONCLUSION

The focus of this paper is to examine the implications of the new diplomatic alliance between the GCC and Israel and the political dynamics in the GCC toward regional issue like the Israel-Palestine conflict. The Israel-Palestine conflict is an intricate issue affecting the political strands in the GCC and the entire Middle East. Its implications are overwhelming and cannot be overemphasized. It stands to be a major strategic issue among others for the GCC now that it has reframe its policy toward Israel for official diplomatic contact. How did we get here?

Firstly, is the security alliance between Israel and the GCC as a response to counter Iran’s influence in the region. Such containment could allow Israel to muscle up other states and spread its imperial agenda as long as the GCC are willing to accept her offer as depicted by the present status quo. With Israel standing on its same old-style aggressive foreign policy.

Secondly, Palestinian will often see it as a threat to the existence of their future state. It is a reality which I believe every observer would acknowledge. Since the Arab monarchs are delighted about economic prosperity and material success which Israel has shown itself to be relevant in developing, and providing necessary resources, and equipment to facilitate that. Indeed, it is perhaps only a matter of time before the GCC states finally establish a full diplomatic alliance with Israel. The Palestinian unfortunately remains the victim in the zero sum game. It will always feel a sense of betrayal from its gulf counterpart who looks to have neglected her struggle for their national interest. Among the GCC states, Qatar is looking to overcome its smallness and strive to survive beyond Saudi's dominance. Such an ambition will not be happily received by Riyadh except a consensus is reached.

Lastly, the GCC states need to provide a comprehensive approach to address the Palestinian plight with this new development. Such should have been the case rather than an open bargain with Israel, excluding any of the Palestinian interest. That way, Palestinian might likely embrace the reality of the Arabs weakness to triumph over the indispensable arch rival – Israel.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The study strongly recommends that the GCC, Israel and Palestine should reach a consensus towards the conflict, thereby finding a common ground to adopt policy framework that addresses key issues.
2. Other GCC capitals who have severed bilateral and diplomatic relations with Qatar should endeavor to reconstruct their diplomatic contact with Qatar to have a harmonious understanding in the pursuit of their strategic interest.
3. Israeli-Palestinian diplomats and policy makers should engage in further negotiation in line with the provisions and resolutions of the United Nations Security Council.
4. The GCC should adopt a comprehensive policy to address the Israel-Palestine conflict with the new official diplomatic relations with Israel. Such that, it will end the continuous hostility between them for peace-cooperation and relative stability.
5. Future study should examine the position of GCC states like Saudi-Arabia, Oman, Kuwait and Qatar who are yet to declare their diplomatic relation with Israel.

REFERENCES

- [1] Aljazeera News (2020). Pompeo: Annexation of occupied West Bank ultimately up to Israel. Retrieved November 4, 2000, from <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/4/22/pompeo-annexation-of-occupied-west-bank-ultimately-up-to-israel>
- [2] Aljazeera News (2020). Israel, UAE and Bahrain sign US-brokered normalisation deals. November 4, 2000, from <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/9/15/israel-uae-and-bahrain-sign-us-brokered-normalisation-deals>
- [3] Amina, A. S. R. (2019). The United Nations Un-Captured Peace Process: The Case of the United Nations in the Israel-Palestine Conflict (1948-2012) (Doctoral dissertation, United States International University-Africa).
- [4] Aras, B. & Akpınar, P. (2017). Turkish Foreign Policy and the Qatar Crisis. August, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203502037>
- [5] Balf, N. (2020). Rejecting the "Deal of the Century"-A Reflection of Millennial Attitudes. *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics, and Culture*, 25(1/2), 77-83.
- [6] Baranovich, N., & Moorthy, R. (2020). Human Security and the Israel-Palestine Conflict: External vs. Internal Perspectives. *Journal of International Studies*, 6, 82-96.
- [7] Beck, M. (2020). The Aggravated Struggle for Regional Power in the Middle East: American Allies Saudi Arabia and Israel versus Iran. *Global Policy*, 11(1), 84-92.
- [8] Cole, J. (2020). Will the Gulf-Israel rapprochement be derailed by annexation? Retrieved from <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2020/8/2/will-the-gulf-israel-rapprochement-be-derailed-by-annexation/>
- [9] Cooper, A. F., & Momani, B. (2011). Qatar and expanded contours of small state diplomacy. *The International Spectator*, 46(3), 113-128.
- [10] Demirel, I. (2006). The Failure of Peace Processes in the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: The Clash of Arab Nationalism and Zionism (Issue December).
- [11] Eldar, A. (2020, June 27). Annexation in Palestine and Netanyahu's calculus. Retrieved October 10, 2020 from <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2020/6/27/annexation-in-palestine-and-netanyahus-calculus/>
- [12] Etkes, H., & Zimring, A. (2015). When trade stops: Lessons from the Gaza blockade 2007-2010. *Journal of International Economics*, 95(1), 16–27. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jinteco.2014.10.005>
- [13] Falk, O. (2020). The Middle East Accords: An Israeli Perspective. *American Diplomacy*, 1-9.
- [14] Friedman, T. L. (2020, August 13). A Geopolitical Earthquake Just Hit the Mideast. *The New York Times*. Retrieved November 4, 2020, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/13/opinion/israel-uae.html> (Accessed, Nov. 2020).
- [15] Frimer, C. G., Maoz, I., & Ron, Y. (2020). The People, the Land and the Law: Jewish-Israeli Religious Zionists in Dialogue Groups with Palestinians. In *Jews in Dialogue* (pp. 80-101). Brill.
- [16] Furlan, M. (2019). Israeli-Saudi Relations in a Changed and Changing Middle East: Growing Cooperation? *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs*, 13(2), 173-187.
- [17] Guzansky, Y. (2011). Tacit Allies: Israel and the Arab Gulf States. *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs*, 5(1), 9-17.
- [18] Guzansky, Y. (2015). Israel and the Arab Gulf states: from tacit cooperation to reconciliation?. *Israel Affairs*, 21(1), 131-147.
- [19] Honniball, A. N. (2020). Port states, coastal states and national security: A law of the sea perspective on the 2017 Qatar-Gulf crisis. *Marine Policy*, June 2019, 103817. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2020.103817>
- [20] India Strategic, (2020, October 24). Historic GCC Commercial Flight: Israel and UAE Link Up Via Etihad Airways. Retrieved October 28, 2020, from <https://sldinfo.com/2020/10/historic-gcc-commercial-flight-israel-and-uae-link-up-via-etihad-airways/>
- [21] Jabr, S., & Berger, E. (2016). The survival and well-being of the Palestinian people under occupation. In *The state of social Progress of Islamic societies* (pp. 529-543). Springer, Cham.
- [22] Khlebnikov, A. (2018). The New Ideological Threat to the GCC: Implications for the Qatari-Saudi Rivalry. *INSS Strategic Assessment*, 21(2), 9-27.
- [23] Kouam, H. (2020, August 17). The GCC and Israel: An Unholy Alliance. Retrieved October 10, 2020, from <https://www.paradigmshift.com.pk/gcc-israel/>
- [24] Laskier, M. M. (2004). Israel-Moroccan Relations and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1977-2002. *Israel Affairs*, 10(3), 41-73.
- [25] Mabro, R. (1992). The Political Instability of the Middle East, and Its Impact on Oil Production and Trade. *Energy Studies Review*, 4(1), 45-50.

- [26] Macaron, J. (2018). GCC Divisions and Regional Challenges. The GCC Crisis at One Year: Stalemate Becomes New Reality, 101-108.
- [27] Mejcher, H. (2004). King Faisal ibn Abdul Aziz Al Saud in the arena of world politics: a glimpse from Washington, 1950 to 1971. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 31(1), 5-23.
- [28] Nichols, M. (2020, June 25). U.N. chief calls on Israel to abandon West Bank annexation plan. Retrieved October 10, 2020, from <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/world/2020/06/25/un-chief-calls-on-israel-to-abandon-west-bank-annexation-plan>
- [29] Nimni, E. (2020). The Twilight of the Two-State Solution in Israel-Palestine: Shared Sovereignty and Nonterritorial Autonomy as the New Dawn. *Nationalities Papers*, 48(2), 339-356.
- [30] Nuruzzaman, M. (2015). Qatar and the Arab Spring: Down the foreign policy slope. *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, 8(2), 226-238.
- [31] Okechukwu, A. T. (2018). Appraisal of the Politics of Israeli and Palestine Conflict using Intractable Conflict Theory.
- [32] Rabi, U. (2009). Qatar's relations with Israel: challenging Arab and gulf norms. *The Middle East Journal*, 63(3), 443-459.
- [33] Rabi, U., & Mueller, C. (2017). The Gulf Arab states and Israel since 1967: from 'no negotiation' to tacit cooperation. *British Journal of Middle eastern studies*, 44(4), 576-592.
- [34] Rynhold, J. & Yaari, M. (2020). The transformation of Saudi-Israeli relations. *Israel Affairs*, 1-20.
- [35] Pappé, I. (2014). The 1948 Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine. *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (Autumn 2006), Pp. 6-20.
- [36] Pappé, I. (2019). The Israeli Nationality Law: A Blueprint for a Twenty-First Century Settler-Colonial State. *Journal of Holy Land and Palestine Studies*, 18(2), 179-191.
- [37] Rane, H. (2009). Trading Rockets for Resolutions: Restructuring Palestinian Resistance in the Context of International Legal and Political Dynamics. 1–26.
- [38] Selzer, A. (2020). Building the capital: thoughts, plans, and practice in the process of making West Jerusalem the capital city of the State of Israel, 1948–1967. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 1-15.
- [39] Ulrichsen, K. C. (2016). Israel and the Arab Gulf States: Drivers and Directions of Change.
- [40] Ulrichsen, K. C. (2018b). Palestinians Sidelined in Saudi-Emirati Rapprochement with Israel. *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 47(4), 79-89.
- [41] Ulrichsen, K. C. (2020). Evolving Narratives of Political Contestation and Geopolitical Rivalry in the Persian Gulf. In *Political Narratives in the Middle East and North Africa* (pp. 71-91). Springer, Cham.
- [42] Ya'alon, M., & Friedman, L. (2018). Israel and the pragmatic Sunni camp: a historic opportunity. *INSS Strategic Assessment*, 21(2), 9-27.
- [43] Yellinek, R. (2019). Israel's Budding Relationship with the GCC. BESA Center Perspectives Paper No. 1,263, August 25, 2019. Retrieved from <https://besacenter.org/perspectives-papers/israel-gulf-states-relations/>
- [44] Yossef, A. (2020). Gulfization of the Middle East Security Complex: The Arab Spring's Systemic Change. In *The Regional Order in the Gulf Region and the Middle East* (pp. 61-94). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.
- [45] Zafirov, M. (2017). The Qatar Crisis—Why the Blockade Failed. *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs*, 11(2), 191-201.
- [46] Zureik, E. (2020). Settler Colonialism, Neoliberalism and Cyber Surveillance: The Case of Israel. *Middle East Critique*, 1-17.