



Why Joe Biden Should Leverage The Abraham Accords To Bring Stability To The Middle East

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This week's announcement that a bipartisan group of House and Senate members have created an Abraham Accords Caucus to encourage more Arab-Israeli normalization agreements reminds us that the accords have the potential to reshape the region's politics, economics, diplomacy, and military relationships.

The question is whether, in the months to come, the Biden administration will view the accords as an opportunity to promote America's regional interests or as a distraction from its other challenges.

The accords – the U.S.-brokered normalization agreements that Israel signed with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain in late 2020 and subsequently with Morocco – are having a noticeable positive impact on the nations involved and, as a result, are raising prospects for wider Israeli-Arab peace.

Airlines are flying back and forth from Israel to those Arab states, tourism and people-to-people exchanges are flourishing, and trade between Israel and the UAE, in particular, is soaring. In recent months, Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid attended the opening of Israel's new embassy in Manama; Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett visited UAE Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan in Abu Dhabi; Israel and Morocco signed an agreement to nourish security cooperation; and the UAE and Bahrain joined the United States and Israel in a naval exercise in the Red Sea.

These recent Arab-Israeli agreements enhance the chances that we'll see more of them, as prominent Arabs re-think their anti-Israeli animus in the interest of security or prosperity. More than 300 Iraqis met in Kurdistan in September to discuss "normalizing ties between Iraq and Israel." Meanwhile, Mansour Abbas, who heads the first Arab party to join a governing coalition in Israel, declared recently, "The State of Israel was born as a Jewish state, and the question is how we integrate Arab society into it."

To be sure, the Iraqis as well as Abbas faced a swift storm of criticism after their actions – the former from pro-Iranian militias who issued death threats, the latter from the Palestinian Authority and other Israeli Arab leaders who refuse to accept the reality of a Jewish-majority Israel. Nevertheless, the Iraqis and Abbas both broke an ideological dam, and that could set the stage for others to voice similar sentiments and, at some point, make change. It also could help nudge such regional nations as Saudi Arabia and Oman, which have informal ties with Israel, to formalize them.

The Biden administration has voiced support for strengthening and expanding the accords. But the president faces opposition from within the Democratic Party, particularly from progressives, who believe that by benefiting Israel, the accords reduce pressure on the Jewish state to make concessions for Israeli-Palestinian peace.

That's not right. The accords are an opportunity, not a burden. The Biden team should leverage them to promote Israeli-Palestinian peace as well as to revive or re-write the 2015 global nuclear deal with Iran.

On the Israeli-Palestinian issue, the accords put the lie to a longstanding piece of conventional wisdom about the region – that Israeli-Palestinian peace was the gateway to broader Arab-Israeli peace because Arab nations would not pursue the latter in the absence of the former. Now, Palestinian leaders who reject the very notion of Israel existing, or existing as a Jewish state, are more isolated in the Arab world.

In its outreach to Palestinians, Washington can promote the economic benefits that the accords are extending to Arab nations – and that a two-state solution (with a Jewish state alongside a Palestinian one) could extend to them. Perhaps the Palestinian people, who suffer under a terrorist leadership in Gaza and an autocratic leadership in the West Bank, will provide more grassroots pressure for peace. The alternative is more Israeli-Palestinian conflict and more Palestinian isolation.

In a sense, the same goes for the Iranian nuclear negotiations. A driving force behind the accords was the shared fears among Israel and the Arab nations of a hostile, expansionist, and potentially nuclear Iran. The more that Arab nations make peace with Israel, the more isolated Iran will be in the region.

Washington should exploit that reality. In its negotiations with Tehran over nuclear weaponry (and, hopefully, over Iran's ballistic missiles, terror sponsorship, and regional destabilization efforts), Washington should make clear that it will actively seek to expand the accords to include other Arab nations, which will strengthen the region's anti-Iran contingent. That, alone, will not force a U.S.-Iranian agreement, but it may give Tehran one more reason to see the potential benefits of a deal.

A wise Washington would not only expand the accords, but also leverage them to confront its other regional challenges.

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