NORMALIZATION WITHOUT RESOLUTION? REGIONAL PEACE INITIATIVES

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the dynamics of "normalization without resolution" as manifested in the 2020 Abraham Accords to assess the extent to which regional peace initiatives can serve as instruments of stability in the Middle East or instead deepen internal fragmentation in Palestine. Using a qualitative method based on analytical case studies and John Galtung's conflict resolution theoretical framework, this study examines the shift from the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative consensus, which emphasized the principle of land for peace, to a realpolitik paradigm driven by security calculations in the face of Iran, economic interests, and US support. The results show that the Abraham Accords have only produced a transactional cold peace at the state level, creating a negative peace in the form of the absence of direct inter-state violence, but failing to achieve a positive peace based on structural justice. This normalization has effectively marginalized the Palestinian issue, weakened its bargaining position in international diplomacy, and exacerbated the political divide between Fatah and Hamas. Furthermore, the neglect of core issues such as refugee rights shows that this initiative reproduces historical inequalities. In conclusion, normalization without resolution reflects the paradox of hybrid peace: fragile elitist stability that ignores the need for substantive reconciliation. The implications of this study confirm that sustainable peace can only be achieved through inclusive transformation that places Palestinian national unity and structural justice as key prerequisites.

Keywords: Abraham Accords; Arab Peace Initiative; Cold Peace; Palestinian–Israeli Conflict; Normalization Without Resolution

INTRODUCTION

Since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, the Arab-Israeli conflict has been one of the most persistent sources of international tension, with the Palestinian issue at the center of political, moral, and legal debates. Despite decades of multilateral and bilateral diplomacy, efforts to resolve the conflict have produced only partial results, failing to address the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state and the recognition of Palestinian rights. Although Egypt (1979) and Jordan (1994) signed peace agreements with Israel, most Arab countries maintained that normalization could only occur after Israel withdrew from the occupied territories and accepted a two-state solution, a principle formalized in the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative (API) (Terms, 2020).

The 2020 Abraham Accords marked a significant paradigm shift, introducing a model of normalization without resolving the Palestinian issue, signaling both a strategic

transformation in Middle Eastern geopolitics and a potential challenge to long-standing Arab consensus.

The Abraham Accords, signed by Israel, the UAE, Bahrain, and later Sudan and Morocco, reflect a recalibration of regional priorities, emphasizing economic opportunities, security cooperation, and political support from the United States ahead of the 2020 presidential election (Espín Ocampo, 2022). Departing from the "land for peace" logic of Camp David (1979) and Oslo (1993), the accords operate under a "peace for peace" framework, where normalization no longer depends on resolving the Palestinian conflict. While some observers celebrate this as a diplomatic achievement marking the dawn of a "new Middle East," Palestinians perceive it as a betrayal of their struggle for sovereignty, as it bypasses historical commitments and undermines the prospects for Palestinian self-determination (Terms, 2020).

Normalization narratives are actively constructed to maintain domestic legitimacy. Hallward and Biygautane (Hallward & Biygautane, 2024) argue that the four Arab states that joined the Abraham Accords ignored the historical conditions of the API, instead framing the agreements through economic, geostrategic, and cultural lenses. UAE and Bahrain promote technological cooperation and investment with Israel, whereas Morocco emphasizes cultural heritage and Abrahamic ties. These strategies demonstrate that normalization is not only an elite-driven calculation but also a mechanism to shape public perception. Yet, this approach has significant implications for Palestinian national consolidation, as the political fragmentation between Hamas in Gaza and Fatah in the West Bank weakens Palestine's bargaining power in both regional and international diplomacy (Hallward & Biygautane, 2024). Without domestic reconciliation and institutional strengthening, regional agreements risk sidelining Palestinian actors as primary stakeholders in peace.

From a theoretical perspective, peace studies distinguish between negative peace, the absence of direct violence, and positive peace, which emphasizes justice, freedom, and structural reconciliation (Roger Mac Ginty, 2022). The Abraham Accords largely achieve negative peace by reducing the likelihood of interstate escalation but fail to address the structural inequalities between Israel and Palestine. Comparing this case with ASEAN, (Acharya, 2021) highlights that sustainable regional security depends on the internalization of non-violent norms and collaborative problem-solving within the community. Applied to the Middle East, Israel–Arab normalization without integrating Palestinian interests risks generating pseudo-stability rather than a durable, normatively legitimate security community, illustrating the limits of elite-driven strategic calculations in achieving substantive peace.

Finally, global perspectives reinforce that Israel–Arab normalization is embedded in broader geopolitical dynamics and not necessarily aligned with the pursuit of justice for affected communities. Bakare (Bakare, 2024) demonstrates that international public perception often regards normalization as reflecting power asymmetries and the

shortcomings of multilateral mechanisms to uphold norms of justice, marginalizing Palestinian concerns. Considering these intersecting dimensions, regional strategic interests, domestic legitimacy, structural inequalities, and international perceptions, this research addresses a critical question: can post-2020 Israeli-Arab normalization serve as an instrument of regional peace without resolving the Palestinian conflict, or does it risk deepening Palestinian fragmentation and structural injustice? Within the frameworks of international political economy and peace studies, this study examines normalization as a geopolitical stabilization strategy that overlooks substantive justice, questioning the sustainability and normative legitimacy of the "peace without resolution" mode.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

John Galtung formulated his theory of conflict resolution through the concepts of negative peace (the absence of direct violence) and positive peace (the elimination of structural and cultural violence), which became an important framework for assessing regional peace initiatives in the Middle East. Normalization without resolution, as seen in the Abraham Accords, has resulted in negative peace between Arab countries and Israel, but has failed to address the dimension of positive peace related to structural justice for Palestine. Galtung asserts that sustainable peace can only be achieved when the structural roots of injustice are addressed, rather than simply postponing conflict through elitist compromise (Woodhouse, 2010).

Furthermore, Galtung's theory of conflict resolution rejects approaches to conflict management that merely reduce violence without transforming relationships. In the Palestinian context, regional normalization operates within the framework of conflict management by stabilizing inter-state relations, while the need for a comprehensive resolution, particularly with regard to the right to self-determination, is sidelined. Recent literature shows that elitist peace initiatives, such as the Abraham Accords, tend to reproduce structural inequality rather than promote inclusive reconciliation (Coleman, 2018). Thus, Galtung's theory reminds us that normalization without the substantive involvement of Palestinian actors is nothing more than a frozen conflict that delays, rather than resolves, the core issues (Seul, 2019).

In addition, Galtung introduced the idea of *structural violence*, which is relevant to explaining the internal fragmentation of Palestine after normalization. The exclusion of Palestine from regional negotiations reinforced the legitimacy gap between external and local actors, thereby weakening the impetus for national reconciliation. Saikia's (2011) study on the narratives of war victims asserts that true conflict resolution requires recognition of the suffering and restoration of the dignity of victims (Saikia, 2011). In the case of Palestine, the absence of this dimension in regional agreements indicates that structural violence continues even though direct violence has decreased

Galtung also emphasizes the importance of *cultural peace*, namely the transformation of norms and collective identities that support violence. Normalization without resolution actually replaces traditional Arab solidarity towards Palestine with

state pragmatism, thereby strengthening cultural fragmentation and deepening the delegitimization of the Palestinian struggle. As pointed out by Levitt (Levitt, 2019) and Kastner (Kastner & Roy-Trudel, 2019) Peace agreements that exclude vulnerable groups, including women, civil society, and those directly affected, not only reinforce the dominance of political masculinity but also weaken the foundations of social justice in peace. Galtung argues that cultural violence persists even when formal stability exists.

Finally, Galtung's conflict resolution theory offers a critical framework for understanding why regional peace initiatives often result in short-term stability but undermine the prospects for long-term peace. Normalization without resolution confirms what Richmond and Mac Ginty refer to as the hybrid peace paradox, where elitist stability coexists with local suffering (Daffern, 2022). Thus, the application of Galtung's theory shows that the path to sustainable peace can only be achieved through structural, cultural, and relational transformations that fully involve Palestinian actors as subjects, not objects, of the peace process.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a Qualitative Method with an Analytical Case Study approach to examine the relationship between regional peace initiatives (specifically the Abraham Accords) and Palestinian political fragmentation. This approach allows for an in-depth analysis of diplomatic documents, official statements from key actors, and relevant literature, with a focus on interpreting meaning and power dynamics. Secondary data were analyzed using a combination of Content Analysis and Discourse Analysis, which aimed to reveal the normative shift from the Palestine-centered Arab consensus (API) to the new paradigm of "sovereignty pragmatism" (Abraham Accords) and its impact on the strategies of Palestinian factions.

The analysis of findings is based on the framework of Conflict Resolution Theory. Specifically, this study applies concepts from conflict resolution theory to explain how exclusive agreements that ignore key stakeholders (Palestinians) tend to delegitimize the peace process and perpetuate internal instability. Through this theoretical lens, we explore the paradox that normalization without resolution, while producing inter-state stability, actually reinforces divisions and fragmentation between Fatah and Hamas, ultimately giving rise to what is known as a fragile and unsustainable "cold peace."

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The Abraham Accords and the Transformation of Arab-Israeli Diplomacy

The Abraham Accords, announced in September 2020 and involving Israel, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan, represent a fundamental paradigm shift in Arab-Israeli diplomacy, breaking with the historical prerequisite of "land for peace" that has long been the mainstay of the Arab Peace Initiative (API) (Terms, 2020) Unlike previous peace agreements with Egypt (1979) and Jordan (1994), these agreements are normalization without resolution of the Palestinian conflict, but

rather driven by unilateral national interests and realpolitik calculations (Sevilla, 2024). This transformation shows that instead of trying to resolve the root causes of the conflict, the region's focus has shifted to forming strategic alliances based on security needs and functional benefits. The agreement opens up opportunities for extensive cooperation in the economic, technological, and military sectors, confirming that Israel is no longer considered an actor that must be isolated, but rather a strategic partner in facing regional threats together (Harutyunyan, 2025).

Analysis of the findings shows that the Abraham Accords primarily function as a transactionalist conflict management tool, whereby normalization is exchanged for tangible strategic gains. For the Gulf states, the main motive is to counterbalance Iran's growing influence in the region and secure advanced technology transfers and political support from the United States (Sevilla, 2024). This agreement has effectively marginalized the Palestinian issue, changing the order of priorities in the region. The Palestinian issue, which for decades has been a casus belli and a de jure prerequisite for Arab normalization, has now been replaced by the motives of threat alignment and national capacity building as the main drivers of foreign policy (Terms, 2020). This shift marks the success of diplomacy that prioritizes security pragmatism over the idealism of conflict resolution, a phenomenon that demonstrates the resilience of sovereign state interests against the pressure of pan-Arab solidarity.

The most significant implication of the Abraham Accords is on the regional security architecture. This agreement has the potential to shape a new security configuration in the region, where bilateral relations between Israel and the Gulf monarchies are deepening in the spectrum of military and intelligence cooperation. Clive Jones (Jones, 2025) argues that this dynamic could lead to a complex regional security, although not yet fully mature, Regional Security Complex (RSC), characterized by more liquid alliances driven by aligned perceptions of the threat posed by Iran (Jones, 2025). The Accords' innovation lies in the use of normalization as a strategy for balancing power in the region. This is a transition from a model of regionalism driven by ideological unity (pan-Arabism) to a model driven by pragmatic coalitions based on geopolitical risk calculations and economic opportunities (Arabia, 2025). This ends the old consensus, creating a fragmented, integrated order.

The resilience of the Abraham Accords was dramatically tested by the escalation of major conflicts, particularly the outbreak of the Israel-Gaza War in October 2023. Although the conflict triggered an intensification of strong anti-Israel sentiment among the Arab public and significantly hampered the pace of further normalization (such as with Saudi Arabia) (Harutyunyan, 2025), none of the signatory countries officially canceled or suspended the agreement. The stability of the Accords in the face of this large-scale crisis validates their state-level interest orientation, which has proven capable of withstanding waves of public pressure. This confirms the finding that the agreement is rooted much more in the strategic calculations of the political elite than in grassroots consensus or the resolution of core conflict issues (Terms, 2020). This stability shows

that the security interests embedded in the new alliance framework are more resilient than previously believed.

The Abraham Accords exemplify "Normalization Without Resolution" by enabling diplomatic and functional cooperation (economic, security) without addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Terms, 2020). While they create partial state-level stability, they risk reinforcing a "one-state reality" marked by continued occupation and unequal rights for Palestinians, revealing a tension between realpolitik-driven stability and traditional peace theory, which argues that lasting peace requires comprehensive conflict resolution and a rethinking of conflict approaches (Sevilla, 2024).

Marginalization of the Arab Initiative

The 2002 Arab Peace Initiative (API) represents the most progressive Arab consensus offering full normalization with Israel, provided that Israel withdraws from the 1967 occupied territories, recognizes the establishment of a Palestinian state, and reaches a just solution for refugees. However, findings show that the API has been consistently ignored by Israeli administrations (Hallward & Biygautane, 2024), which reject the comprehensive "land for peace" framework underlying the initiative. This disregard constitutes a rejection of comprehensive conflict resolution, signaling that the prospect of collective Arab peace has become a lost opportunity due to the lack of an official response from the Israeli side.

The marginalization of the API reached a critical point with the signing of the Abraham Accords in 2020. This agreement, involving several Arab countries (the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco), was a normalization without resolution, as it was carried out without the prerequisite of Israel's withdrawal from the occupied territories (Hallward & Biygautane, 2024). This move effectively sidelined the API from the foundation of Arab foreign policy, transforming it from a binding collective principle into a standard that can be set aside in favor of bilateral interests. This shift indicates a regional trend toward partial, rather than comprehensive, peace-making that prioritizes the interests of the participating regimes.

Comparative Table: Arab Peace Initiative (2002) vs. Abraham Accords (2020)

Comparison Criteria	Arab Peace Initiative (API) 2002	Abraham Accords (2020)
Prerequisites for Normalization	Land for Peace: Israel must withdraw from the 1967-occupied territories, recognize the State of Palestine, and resolve the refugee issue as a condition for normalization	Peace for Peace / Normalization Without Resolution – Normalization can be achieved without resolving the Palestinian issue, with no territorial preconditions

Basic Logic / Approach	Arab collective consensus, rooted in pan-Arab solidarity and anti-occupation ideology.	Pragmatic realpolitik; based on national interests, anti-Iran security alliances, and US incentives.
Main Focus	Comprehensive resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (refugee issue, Jerusalem, borders, sovereignty).	Geostrategic interests, regional security, technological-economic cooperation, US political support.

Source: compiled by the author from various literature Terms, (2020); Hallward & Biygautane, (2024); Espín Ocampo, (2022); Sevilla, (2024)

The comparison in the table makes it clear that the Arab Peace Initiative (2002) is based on the principle of collective consensus and the requirement for a comprehensive resolution of the Palestinian issue, while the Abraham Accords (2020) mark a shift towards a realpolitik approach that negates these preconditions. The shift in logic from land for peace to peace for peace shows that the Palestinian issue is no longer the main foundation of regional diplomacy, but has been replaced by more pragmatic strategic considerations. This fundamental difference is key to understanding how the Arab signatory states then built their foreign policy justifications based on geostrategic and economic calculations.

The justification used by Arab countries that signed the Abraham Accords centers on geostrategic (e.g., shared concerns about Iran) and economic (e.g., trade and investment) benefits, which are strategically positioned to justify a reversal of historically unpopular policies (Hallward & Biygautane, 2024). This analysis highlights that normalization is driven by national interests that override historical commitments to Palestinian demands, thereby calling into question the validity of the concept of "positive peace" that encompasses justice and rights. The agreement only results in a "cold peace" or "negative peace," that is, the absence of armed conflict without a fundamental resolution of the conflict.

The marginalization of the Arab Peace Initiative and the adoption of the Abraham Accords reflect a regional shift, where Arab states' geopolitical interests outweigh Arab solidarity (Roger Mac Ginty, 2022) Contemporary peace processes tend to be partial and limited, involving only select actors and issues. This bilateral focus weakens the collective Arab pressure for resolving the Palestinian issue.

The most significant impact of this marginalization of the API is on Palestinian unity. The regional decision to normalize without resolving the core conflict is considered by many in the region as a betrayal of the Palestinian struggle. This stance deepens existing political divisions among Palestinian factions and dims hopes for a strong Arab consensus. As seen in the broader context of Arab-American political activism, where ethnic unity can be divided due to differences in political focus, Arab-Israeli

normalization without preconditions risks reinforcing political fragmentation in Palestine by signaling that their demands for statehood have become a secondary issue for most countries in the region (Roger Mac Ginty, 2022).

Impact on Palestinian Unity

Regional normalization initiatives, particularly those facilitated through the Abraham Accords, have created conditions that fundamentally undermine Palestinian national unity efforts (Abdullayev, 2024). These agreements are viewed by the Palestinian people as a "stab in the back" because they unilaterally prioritize the security and technical-military interests of the Arab signatory states with the United States, rather than demanding the prerequisites for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Abdullayev, 2024). This situation has effectively worsened the unfavorable conditions for the realization of a sovereign and unified Palestinian state, while also providing passive legitimacy to Israel's accelerating annexation agenda in the occupied territories (Veen, 2025).

These external dynamics exacerbated internal political divisions between the main factions that had been ongoing since 2007, which were the main structural factors hindering unity (Alijla, 2019). Hamas' victory in the 2006 parliamentary elections, which opposed the Oslo peace process, was immediately followed by rejection and boycotts from the international community, including the United States and the European Union, which then effectively blocked the faction from achieving its electoral victory (Alijla, 2019). This stance by the international community, embodied in the Quartet, directly thwarted early attempts at accommodation and power sharing, strengthened Fatah's hegemony over the Palestinian Authority (PA), and entrenched internal disputes over institutional legitimacy (Veen, 2025).

The immediate consequence of this prolonged political division has been a sharp decline in generalized trust among the Palestinian public at large. Since 2007, society has experienced deep polarization due to widespread distrust of the political system, exacerbated by deteriorating public services such as health and education, high unemployment, corruption, and human rights violations in both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. This fragmented social environment has created an increasingly hybrid and divisive society, making it difficult to form a cohesive national consensus as a basis for confronting regional initiatives that exclude Palestine (Alijla, 2019)

The ongoing failure to achieve a peaceful resolution and strengthen normalization without preconditions has prompted the younger generation of Palestinians (aged 15–21) to adopt increasingly hardline ideological positions and reject compromise. Significantly, the survey shows that more than 40 percent of Palestinian youth identify with Islamic ideological views, which correlate strongly with a harder stance on peace and compromise with Israel. Although the data shows low contact between the two sides in this age group, this trend toward hardening indicates that the prospects for conflict resolution and trust-

building in the future will face increasingly significant and difficult challenges (Kurtzer-ellenbogen & Scheindlin, 2021).

Ideological Identification of Palestinian Youth and Attitudes toward Compromise (Post-Normalization)
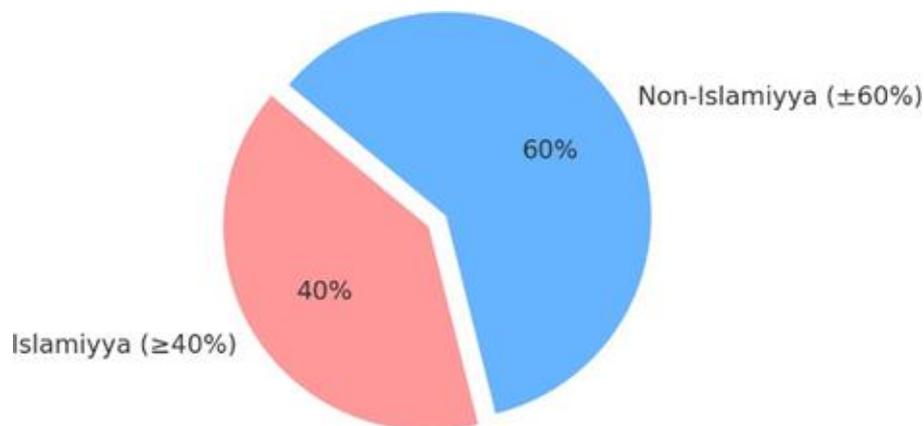
Source: compiled by the author (2025) from Kurtzer-ellenbogen & Scheindlin, (2021)

The visualization shows that the ideological tendencies of the Palestinian youth generation are increasingly leaning toward a hardline stance against compromise, reflecting the direct impact of the normalization process that marginalizes the agenda of substantive justice. This ideological fragmentation not only weakens the basis of Palestinian internal unity, but also opens space for Israel to take advantage of weakened regional solidarity. With reduced Arab collective pressure, Israel has become increasingly free to consolidate its domestic political power, a condition that is then manifested in a policy of de facto annexation in the occupied territories.

In essence, normalization initiatives such as the Abraham Accords serve as enablers for the continuation and acceleration of Israel's annexation agenda in the Palestinian territories. With key Arab countries establishing diplomatic and economic relations without any meaningful preconditions for a two-state solution, Israel can leverage its growing military dominance to change the reality on the ground through settlement expansion. This weakening regional support removes Palestine's leverage to force substantial concessions, thereby strengthening the ultra-nationalist and extreme right-wing factions that dominate Israeli politics, which view annexation as a right or a path to short-term security (Veen, 2025).

Addressing the fragmentative effects of regional normalization requires shifting the strategic focus from PA positions and resources to restoring inclusive national institutions. Compromise between factions often fails due to entrenched bureaucratic interests and international refusal to recognize legitimate elections. Sustainable unity depends on integrating key resistance movements, including Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, into the PLO under a consensual national political program (Veen, 2025). Palestinian unity is thus at odds with normalization without resolution; regional stability

cannot rely solely on economic-military integration. Ongoing conflict in Gaza damages Israel's image and undermines the credibility of the Abraham Accords (Abdullayev, 2024), while strong popular sentiment across Arab societies shows that the Palestinian issue remains central and that national unity is an existential demand for the Palestinian people (Veen, 2025).

Normalization, Refugees, and the Peace Process

The regional normalization initiative known as the Abraham Accords in 2020 marked a fundamental shift in Arab foreign policy, prioritizing geopolitical and economic interests over the old consensus that demanded the resolution of the Palestinian conflict as a key prerequisite. Participating Arab states were driven by the primary incentive of deepening security and technical collaboration with the United States, which simultaneously granted Israel regional recognition and integration. This strategic shift clearly sidelines the Palestinian issue in favor of geopolitical gains, making it a project oriented toward regional collective security rather than comprehensive conflict resolution (Abdullayev, 2024).

The Palestinian refugee issue is one of the core conflicts that has failed to be resolved through various efforts since 1948 due to the complexity of internal and regional political obstacles, including the issues of borders, Jerusalem, and security. Although the Abraham Accords aim for stability, the agreements explicitly do not touch on the root causes of the refugee problem. The sui generis status of millions of refugees continues to be a major source of insecurity, a fact that has been overlooked by the push for normalization, which has focused more on the interests of the signatory nation-states (Goldstein, 2022).

For the Palestinian leadership and people, this wave of regional normalization is widely interpreted as a "stab in the back" that drastically weakens their bargaining position in future negotiations. The agreement effectively ends the long-held principle that Arab consensus must be based on Palestinian rights, thereby reducing regional incentives for Israel to offer substantive concessions. This reaction reflects the collective failure of regional parties to maintain a unified approach to the Middle East Peace Process (Wildeman & Swan, 2021).

The persistent obstacles to resolution, particularly with regard to the refugee issue, stem from the Palestinians' absolute demand for the "right of return" to Israeli territory. Israel has consistently rejected this demand on demographic and existential grounds, arguing that the influx of large numbers of refugees would undermine the Jewish character and national security of the state. This fundamental difference in national vision, in which refugee rights are viewed as a demographic threat, creates psychological and political barriers that are nearly insurmountable in reaching a mutually acceptable solution (Wildeman & Swan, 2021).

From the perspective of conflict resolution theory, the Abraham Accords are an attempt to achieve conflict containment through the alignment of interests driven by the

struggle for power and security. The main motivation for this agreement is rooted in the signatories' survival interests, prioritizing regional integration and confrontation against common threats, rather than resolving the underlying territorial conflict. This approach inherently results in a non-resolutive political project for the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (Abdullayev, 2024)

On the other hand, external initiatives focused on development, such as China's Belt and Road Initiative, offer an alternative path to stability, focusing on economic cooperation and development. This development approach contrasts with the security focus of the Abraham Accords and is believed to promote peace and stability in the Middle East because it is based on consultation and mutual benefit, especially given that the escalation of conflict increases regional security risks (Jin, 2024).

Although it has so far failed to deliver a peaceful resolution, the long-term view is that the Abraham Accords could produce a new political vision that forces the conflicting parties, including Palestine, to accept a "fair, agreed, equal, and realistic" resolution tied to a comprehensive peace package. However, the sustainability of normalization remains vulnerable; violent conflict could seriously damage Israel's image in the Arab world and reduce the relevance of the agreement. This ultimately complicates efforts to unite Palestinian factions as they must adapt to the new reality of regional alliances (Goldstein, 2022).

Toward a "Cold Peace"?

The normalization of relations between Israel and a number of Arab countries, which came about through the Abraham Accords in 2020, has given rise to a new regional order that can be characterized as a "Cold Peace," a condition in which diplomatic relations and cooperation between countries are established without being based on a substantive resolution of the core Palestinian-Israeli conflict. This paradigm of normalization without resolution essentially challenges the basic assumptions of conflict resolution theory, which emphasizes that true peace requires addressing core issues, such as refugees, borders, and the status of Jerusalem. This shift in Arab foreign policy indicates that national, geopolitical, and economic interests have definitively replaced ideological pan-Arab solidarity, forming a politically stable but socially fragile status quo in the Middle East (Abdullayev, 2024).

The most significant policy deviation is the explicit disregard for the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative (API), which has long served as the collective Arab consensus to offer full normalization only in exchange for Israel's withdrawal from the 1967-occupied territories and the establishment of a Palestinian state. The signatories to the Accords, such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain, chose to abandon their decades-long foreign policy and negotiate based on pragmatic calculations, in which the Palestinian conflict was seen as a negotiable obstacle to more pressing goals. This decision reflects a de facto recognition that regional political and economic forces now

dominate over historical and ideological ties to the Palestinian issue (Hallward & Biygautane, 2024)

This normalization initiative is primarily driven by geostrategic imperatives and the need to form a cohesive regional security architecture against common threats, particularly Iran or the Axis of Resistance. Deep military and technical cooperation between Israel and the Gulf states, dubbed The New (Dis)Order, is a key driver, going beyond mere diplomatic relations (Dana, 2023). The desire of these Arab states to strengthen their defense capabilities, particularly through US facilitation to gain access to advanced military technology such as F-35 fighter jets, is the primary incentive transforming bilateral relations into a regional anti-Iran strategic alliance (Abdullayev, 2024).

The United States' involvement as the main facilitator of the Abraham Accords is based entirely on its own strategic interests, not as an altruistic effort to promote a just peace. US foreign policy in the Middle East has always centered on regional stability, securing oil and energy interests, and balancing power to maintain Israel's security (Zazai & Jamili, 2025). Thus, the Accords are an effective geostrategic instrument for securing its objectives, such as strengthening pro-Western alliances and shifting focus away from the need to promote democratic reform in the region.

To justify this radical reversal of foreign policy to the public and the international community, the Arab signatory states to the Accords collectively adopted an official narrative that consistently focused on economic, geostrategic, and potential sociocultural benefits. The UAE government, for example, highlights opportunities for investment, technological innovation, and extensive tourism cooperation with Israel, positioning normalization as a progressive and future-oriented policy for domestic welfare (Hallward & Biygautane, 2024). This narrative carefully sidesteps debates about occupation and Palestinian rights, emphasizing the transactional nature of peace for prosperity over the traditional land for peace formula.

The most significant consequence of this 'Cold Peace' is the increasing marginalization of the Palestinian issue from the collective regional Arab policy priorities. By removing the main condition contained in the API, the signatory countries have effectively reduced collective diplomatic pressure on Israel to end the occupation, which has historically been the Arab world's greatest bargaining chip (Abdullayev, 2024). This normalization gives Israel a strategic advantage, allowing it to establish state-to-state relations while internally maintaining and even expanding its control over the disputed Palestinian territories.

Regional environmental changes create structural dilemmas that exacerbate divisions and hinder Palestinian unity efforts. Palestinian factions are caught between the need to consolidate internally and the strengthening of Israeli relations with Arab countries, which should be their main supporters. Regional policies prioritizing the stability of the status quo and security integration implicitly weaken the motivation of

Palestinian factions to achieve internal reconciliation, as the regional focus shifts from mobilizing support for liberation to accepting new conditions (Abdullayev, 2024). Although elite policy has shifted toward normalization, there is a significant gap between elite decisions and public sentiment in many Arab countries, indicating widespread reluctance toward Israel. Public opinion polls consistently show low support for normalization, exacerbated by insecurity and ongoing conflict. The absence of people-to-people peace and persistent anti-Israel sentiment indicates that the social foundations of this 'Cold Peace' are highly vulnerable to crisis, suggesting that normalization is merely an agreement between regimes, not a reconciliation between societies (Benstead, 2023).

The toughest test of the resilience of this 'Cold Peace' model occurred during the escalation of the Israel-Gaza conflict in October 2023, which triggered a huge wave of anti-Israel sentiment among Arab communities across the region. The intensity of Israeli military operations in Gaza reignited the Palestinian issue as an emotional casus belli and a powerful mobilizing force, proving that even though the elites have made peace, the Palestinian issue remains at the heart of regional politics. This crisis effectively undermined the narrative of peace for prosperity and suspended many socio-cultural and economic cooperation initiatives among the signatories of the Accords (Harutyunyan, 2025).

Dominant Factors in the Resilience of the Abraham Accords Post-Gaza Conflict 2023
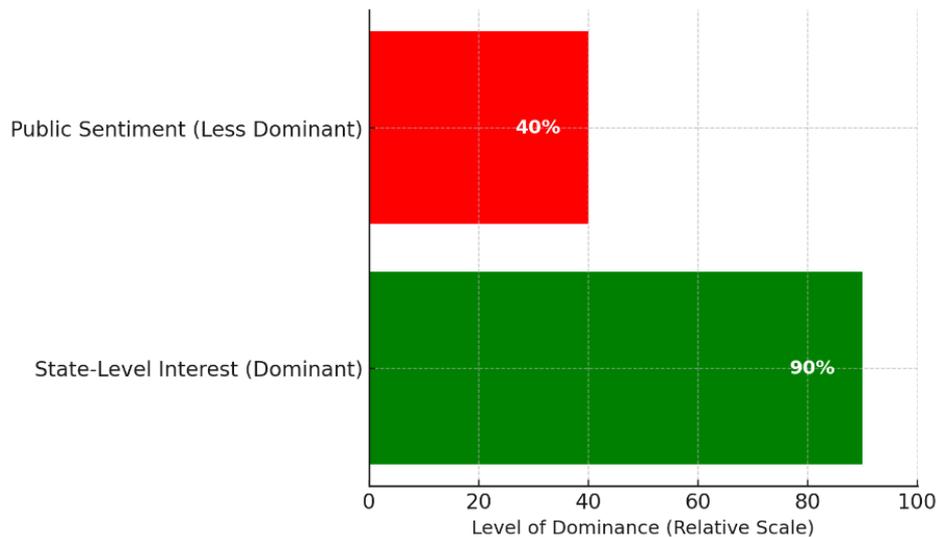
Source: compiled by the author (2025) from Harutyunyan, (2025); Hallward & Biygautane, (2024); Sevilla, (2024); Espín Ocampo, (2022)

The visualization above emphasizes that although the 2023 Gaza escalation triggered a huge wave of pan-Arab public solidarity, this factor remained less dominant than strategic interests at the state level. The graph shows that the stability maintained by the political elite and long- term security calculations were far more decisive in determining policy direction than fluctuating mass sentiment. Thus, the resilience of the

Abraham Accords cannot be understood solely as a reflection of social support, but rather as a political construct that places state interests above the collective aspirations of Arab societies. This finding paves the way for further analysis of how the agreement has proven resilient at the state level despite widespread public pressure.

However, a crucial analytical finding is that despite widespread domestic public pressure, a sharp increase in regional tensions, and delays in several bilateral agreements, no signatory to the Abraham Accords has politically revoked or suspended their normalization agreements (Harutyunyan, 2025). This diplomatic resilience confirms that long-term strategic interests, including the need for security cooperation with Israel and the United States within the framework of the West Asia Security Complex (Ali Adami, 2024), are far more dominant and permanent than Arab solidarity or momentary public outrage. Thus, this "Cold Peace" has proven resilient at the state level and functions as a structural barrier that systematically prioritizes regional elite stability over the requirements of a just resolution of the conflict for Palestinian unity (Abdullayev, 2024).

CONCLUSION

The 2020 Abraham Accords represent a form of normalization without resolution, creating fragile state-level stability (cold peace) while neglecting core issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including refugee rights, the status of Jerusalem, and Palestinian sovereignty. Driven by realpolitik, security concerns, and US geopolitical incentives, the agreement perpetuates structural injustices and Palestinian fragmentation despite the absence of interstate violence.

This aligns with John Galtung's theory that sustainable peace requires positive peace, involving structural, cultural, and relational transformations with full participation of affected actors.

Regionally, normalization without resolution strengthens elite interests over pan-Arab solidarity, delegitimizing Palestine and creating a false stability vulnerable to conflict escalation, as seen in the 2023 Israel-Gaza War. Achieving just and sustainable peace requires inclusive approaches centered on Palestinian rights and national unity. Future research should focus on public perceptions in the signatory countries and the interaction between regional normalization and Palestinian domestic politics to explore prospects for substantive conflict resolution.

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