



Situation Normal: The Normalizing Arab States and the May 2021 Israel-Hamas War

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Overview

In late 2020, four Arab states—the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco—agreed in close succession to normalize relations with Israel in a series of U.S.-backed agreements. This marked a high point for the Trump administration and the Israeli government’s preferred “outside-in” approach, prioritizing Israel’s ties with Arab governments located farther afield at the expense of the Palestinians. The normalizing Arab states prefaced their relationships with Israel in starkly different terms; the UAE pointed to Israel’s withdrawal of annexation plans in the West Bank as the basis for the Abraham Accords, and the other states maintained nominal commitments to the Palestinian national cause. Still, the effect was the same, reversing decades of near-consensus Arab foreign policy, including the Fahd Plan of 1981 and the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002, which made a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict a prerequisite for Arab states recognizing Israel.

The May 2021 eleven-day war between Israel and the Palestinian Islamist terror group Hamas, and the crises in Jerusalem that preceded it, delivered an ugly reminder that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict could not be written off so easily. Critically, this crisis presents a window into the nature of the normalizing Arab states’ approaches to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and whether, if at all, their newly official relations with Israel made any impact on their respective foreign policies. In particular, it is worth examining whether any of the normalizers are willing or capable of taking on a role comparable to the U.S.-supported mediation efforts of Egypt and Qatar.

From Israel-Hamas Wars to Normalization

During the three previous Israel-Hamas conflicts (2008-9, 2012, and 2014), the broad strokes of Arab state foreign policy constituted calls for a ceasefire, symbolic statements of solidarity with the Palestinian people and condemnations of Israeli aggression, and support for the internationally recognized Palestinian leadership (the Palestine Liberation Organization and Palestinian Authority, both dominated by Hamas’s domestic rival, the Fatah party). This can be attributed in part to Arab state ambivalence toward Hamas over its Muslim Brotherhood origins and association with states with revisionist foreign policy agendas like Iran, Qatar, and Turkey.

Among the normalizing states, there are two key exceptions to this rule. First, the UAE, despite defending Fatah’s position in 2009, has experienced a strained relationship with the PLO/PA because of the Emirati leadership’s ties with Mohammad Dahlan, an exiled political opponent of Mahmoud Abbas. Secondly, Sudan actively supported Hamas politically and by facilitating arms transfers prior to the 2019 uprising that unseated Omar al Bashir.

The United Arab Emirates

During the 2008-9 Gaza war—the first conflict between Israel and Hamas since the latter wrested control of the Strip from the Palestinian Authority—Hamas publicly positioned itself as

a potential alternative to the Palestine Liberation Organization, the internationally recognized representative of the Palestinian people.¹ While plans to take the PLO's place may have been little more than political posturing in order to place pressure on Fatah, the UAE nevertheless joined other Arab governments in opposing Hamas maneuvering against the official Palestinian leadership.² The UAE hosted a meeting in Abu Dhabi, attended by Emirati Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed and officials from several other Arab states, as well as Palestinian Authority Foreign Minister Riyad al Maliki, to reaffirm support for the PLO/PA and internationally supported political parameters including the two-state solution, the Arab Peace Initiative, and Egyptian efforts to mediate a truce between Israel and Hamas.³

By the time of the next Israel-Hamas conflict in November 2012, relations between the UAE and PA had been largely cut off.⁴ This came as a result of the Emirati government's decision in the previous year to host Mohammad Dahlan, the exiled Palestinian security official who led the PA's ultimately failed battle against Hamas in Gaza in 2007 and who had recently fallen out of favor with President Mahmoud Abbas and banished from Fatah. Dahlan remains in the UAE today as a close confidant of Crown Prince and de facto ruler Mohammad bin Zayed, and his presence in the Gulf monarchy continues to be a source of tension between Abu Dhabi and the Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority.⁵ Despite the strained UAE-PA relationship, the Emirati authorities issued statements of solidarity with the Palestinians, albeit with little actionable basis behind them.

The 2014 Gaza war remains the longest and deadliest of the four major military campaigns waged over the Palestinian enclave. Yet the UAE's relative inaction led some Israeli analysts to consider Abu Dhabi neutral or even tacitly supportive of Israel's position in the conflict.⁶ The 2014 war also occurred in the context of a diplomatic dispute between several Arab states, including the UAE, on one side, and Qatar, a patron of Hamas, on the other. In early March of that year, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain recalled their ambassadors from Doha over alleged Qatari failure to meet security commitments under the Gulf Cooperation Council.⁷ The three states' envoys would only be returned in November, several months after the Israel-Hamas

¹ Jim Zanotti, et. al., *Israel and Hamas: Conflict in Gaza (2008-2009)* (Washington: Congressional Research Service, 2009): 23.

² *Ibid.*, 28.

³ "U.S.-allied Arab states seek unity, back Abbas," *Reuters*, February 3, 2009, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-palestinians-israel-emirates-sb/u-s-allied-arab-states-seek-unity-back-a-bbas-idUSTRE5126DW20090203>.

⁴ Amira Hass, "Israel-UAE Normalization Deal Reveals Failure of Palestinian Diplomacy," *Haaretz*, August 16, 2020, <https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/palestinians/.premium-israel-uae-normalization-deal-reveals-failure-of-palestinian-diplomacy-1.9076411>.

⁵ Neri Zilber, "The Talented Mr. Dahlan," *New Lines Magazine*, November 11, 2020, <https://newlinesmag.com/reportage/the-talented-mr-dahlan/>.

⁶ David D. Kirkpatrick, "Arab Leaders, Viewing Hamas as Worse Than Israel, Stay Silent," *The New York Times*, July 30, 2014.

⁷ Eman El-Shenawi, "Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, recall envoy to Qatar," *Al-Arabiya*, March 5, 2014, <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2014/03/05/Saudi-Bahrain-UAE-recall-envoys-to-Qatar>.

conflict subsided,⁸ although this would not be the last time a diplomatic dispute undermined relations between Qatar and its Gulf neighbors, as seen in the 2017-21 Qatar crisis.

The UAE has also supported humanitarian aid to the Palestinians. The UAE pledged emergency assistance in the wake of crises like the 2014 war,⁹ as well as providing funding through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Emirati contributions to UNRWA sharply dropped off in 2020, the year the UAE established formal relations with Israel, when it provided just \$1 million;¹⁰ as of late April of this year, the UAE had not yet pledged any amount for 2021.¹¹ This represents a marked departure from previous Emirati policy. Emirati contributions to UNRWA fluctuated somewhat in recent years, but the overall trend had been one of increased funding, from \$5.3 million in 2008 (the year the first Gaza war began),¹² to nearly \$17 million in 2014,¹³ and reaching over \$50 million in 2019, when the UAE was the Palestinian refugee agency's fourth highest individual state donor.¹⁴

Bahrain

Bahrain's positions in previous Israel-Hamas conflicts have tracked largely with the status quo policies adopted by the UAE, albeit without the complications arising from close Emirati ties with Mohammad Dahlan. Bahrain sent a delegation to the Abu Dhabi meeting between Arab state and Palestinian officials to express support for the PLO/PA against Hamas in 2009.¹⁵ Just four months before the 2014 Gaza war, Bahrain also joined Saudi Arabia and the UAE in recalling its ambassador from Hamas-friendly Qatar over Doha's alleged failure to fulfill GCC security obligations.¹⁶

Bahrain notably plays host to a far more active anti-normalization movement than the UAE. The country's authoritarian Sunni monarchy is particularly wary of the political opposition and the Shia majority, leading to government repression and insecurity vis-a-vis countries like Iran and Qatar. The 2012 Gaza war took place a year-and-a-half after a Saudi-led military intervention

⁸ "Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Bahrain end rift with Qatar, return ambassadors," *Reuters*, November 16, 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-gulf-summit-ambassadors/saudi-arabia-uae-and-bahrain-end-rift-with-qatar-return-ambassadors-idUSKCN0J00Y420141116>.

⁹ "UAE Pledges \$200 Million for Gaza Rebuilding," *United Nations*, October 13, 2014, <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-202211/>.

¹⁰ "Overall Donor Ranking," *UNRWA*, December 31, 2020, https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/2020_overall_donor_ranking.pdf.

¹¹ "2021 Total Confirmed Pledges and Funds Received Toward UNRWA's Programmes," *UNRWA*, April 26, 2021,

https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/2021_confirmed_pledges_and_receipts_26_april_2021.pdf.

¹² "Total Contributions to UNRWA, 2008," *UNRWA*, December 31, 2008, <https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/Total%20Contributions%20to%20UNRWA%202008%20-%20All%20Categories%20of%20Funding.pdf>.

¹³ "Pledges to UNRWA for 2014," *UNRWA*, December 31, 2014, https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/2014_overall_pledges.pdf.

¹⁴ "2019 Pledges to UNRWA's Programmes," December 31, 2019, https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/2019_overall_donor_ranking.pdf.

¹⁵ Zanotti, et al., *Israel and Hamas*, 28.

¹⁶ Eman El-Shenawi, "Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, recall envoy to Qatar," *Al-Arabiya*, March 5, 2014, <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2014/03/05/Saudi-Bahrain-UAE-recall-envoys-to-Qatar>.

suppressed a popular uprising against the Bahraini government and mere weeks following the passage of a Bahraini law banning protests.¹⁷ During that conflict, the Bahraini authorities rejected permit requests for pro-Palestinian demonstrations, citing the anti-protest legislation.¹⁸ Bahrain also saw pro-Palestinian protests during the 2014 war.¹⁹ Demonstrations again took place during the eleven-day war in 2021, this time including slogans condemning the previous year's Israel-Bahrain normalization deal in addition to Israeli military actions in Gaza.²⁰

Morocco

Morocco shared closer de facto ties with Israel before 2020 than the UAE, Bahrain, and Sudan, with connections in cultural heritage, trade, tourism, and security.²¹ Whereas the Emirati and Bahraini decisions to normalize with Israel were influenced in large part by a more recent shared threat perception regarding Iran, Rabat's relationship with Israel goes back several decades, including a brief period of semi-official relations following the 1990s Israeli-Palestinian peace process.²²

Morocco enjoys good relations with the Gulf Arab states and is opposed to Iranian adventurism. However, the North African kingdom is geographically removed from many of the GCC states' diplomatic and security conflicts. Rabat has even offered to mediate between the Gulf states and Qatar.²³ Morocco's political system is slightly more open than the UAE and Bahrain, and its elected government has been led by the Islamist Justice and Development Party since 2011.²⁴ This makes the Moroccan authorities less reflexively wary of Hamas than their counterparts in other Arab countries. In 2017, former Hamas politburo chief Khaled Mashaal visited Morocco as a guest of the kingdom's Prime Minister Saad-Eddine El Othmani during an outreach tour through North Africa and the Middle East on behalf of the Palestinian group;²⁵ a similar visit would be highly unusual in Abu Dhabi or Manama. Finally, Morocco plays a special role given King Mohammad VI's chairmanship of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation's al Quds (Jerusalem) Committee, a position the monarch inherited from his father, Hassan II. The

¹⁷ Kareem Fahim, "Citing Violence, Bahrain Bans All Protests in New Crackdown," *The New York Times*, October 31, 2014,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/31/world/middleeast/bahrain-bans-all-protests-in-new-crackdown.html>.

¹⁸ "Bahrain Bans Pro-Gaza March," *The Daily Star*, November 18, 2012,

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2012/Nov-18/195433-bahrain-bans-pro-gaza-march.ashx#axzz2ClanIS44>.

¹⁹ "Gaza violence sparks global protests," *The Guardian*, July 26, 2014,

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/gallery/2014/jul/26/gaza-violence-sparks-global-protests-in-pictures>.

²⁰ "Dozens rally in Bahrain in support of Palestinians," *The Times of Israel*, May 20, 2021,

https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/dozens-rally-in-bahrain-in-support-of-palestinians/.

²¹ Einat Levi, *Israel and Morocco: Cooperation Rooted in Heritage* (Tel Aviv: Mitvim, 2018): 14.

²² Daoud Kuttub, "Why Palestinians found Moroccan normalization easier to take," *Al-Monitor*, December 21, 2020, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2020/12/uae-normalization-morocco-palestine-israel.html>.

²³ Levi, *Israel and Morocco*, 2.

²⁴ Samia Errazzouki, "Morocco's King Names PJD's Othmani as Prime Minister," *Reuters*, March 17, 2017,

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-morocco-politics/moroccos-king-names-pjds-othmani-as-prime-minister-idUSKBN16O1WU>.

²⁵ Adnan Abu Amer, "Hamas' Meshaal re-emerges with Maghreb tour," *Al-Monitor*, January 12, 2018, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2018/01/hamas-meshaal-visit-morocco-mauritania-relations.html>.

committee, which aims to coordinate the Muslim world's position on Jerusalem, is headquartered in Rabat.²⁶

Although these features set Morocco's relationships with Israel and the Palestinians apart from those of the other normalizing Arab states, Rabat's conduct during previous Gaza conflicts has generally followed the same script as the UAE and Bahrain. Morocco was represented at the 2009 Abu Dhabi meeting supporting the PLO/PA.²⁷ The country's Islamist officials have used harsher language than their counterparts in the UAE and Bahrain, with then-Foreign Minister El Othmani deriding Israel as "the Zionist entity"²⁸ (a term he continues to use today) during the 2012 war. The North African country also saw major protests during previous Israel-Hamas conflicts,²⁹ including demonstrations supported by Moroccan officials,³⁰ marking a distinction from the approach taken by the Emirati and Bahraini governments. However, this has made little material difference in Morocco's policy toward Israel-Hamas conflict and did not prevent partial normalization with Israel in late 2020.

Sudan

The case of Sudan is especially important because unlike the other three governments that established relations with Israel in 2020, the Sudanese had actively supported Hamas in previous wars with Israel. The Sudanese government provided safe haven to Hamas leaders, offered Hamas agents training and education, and facilitated the transfer of weapons, including small arms, ammunition, and missiles, from Iran to Hamas overland via Egypt's Sinai Peninsula.³¹ Israel also carried out airstrikes against Hamas-linked targets in Sudan in 2009 and 2012.³² Because of this, the Israel-Sudan normalization deal is the only one of the four such accords between Israel and Arab states announced last year that could accurately be described as a peace agreement.

Ties between Hamas and Sudan even outlasted the 2016 diplomatic breakup between Khartoum and the Palestinian terror group's Iranian patrons.³³ However, the Sudan-Hamas

²⁶ "Standing Committees," *Organisation of Islamic Cooperation*, https://www.oic-oci.org/page/?p_id=172&p_ref=58&lan=en#ALQUDS%20COMMITTEE.

²⁷ Zanotti, et. al., *Israel and Hamas*, 28.

²⁸ "Moroccan FM Condemns Attacks of 'Zionist Entity' on Gaza, Calls for Action," *Morocco World News*, November 17, 2012, <https://www.morocroworldnews.com/public/2012/11/65624/moroccan-fm-condemns-attacks-of-zionist-entity-on-gaza-calls-for-action>.

²⁹ Gavi Barnhard and Adam Rasgon, "Gaza Demonstrations Around the World," *Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, July 24, 2014, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/gaza-demonstrations-around-world>.

³⁰ Alexis Arieff, *Morocco: Current Issues* (Washington: Congressional Research Service, 2011): 21.

³¹ Muhammad Shehada, "Why Hamas Is Mourning the Downfall of Sudan's Dictator," *Haaretz*, April 15, 2019, <https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/.premium-why-hamas-is-mourning-the-downfall-of-sudan-s-dictator-1.7114213>.

³² Ian Black, "'Israeli Attack' on Sudanese Arms Factory Offers Glimpse of Secret War," *The Guardian*, October 25, 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/oct/25/israeli-sudanese-factory-secret-war>.

³³ Shehada, "Why Hamas Is Mourning the Downfall of Sudan's Dictator."

relationship would not survive the dramatic events that took place inside the North African country in 2019, when longtime dictator Omar al Bashir was overthrown and replaced with a military junta, and later a transitional government, under the leadership of General Abdel Fattah al Burhan.

With an eye toward rebuilding relations with the United States, the new regime moved quickly to close the Sudanese offices of Hamas, as well as the Lebanese Shia terror group Hezbollah.³⁴ Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President al Burhan met in Uganda in January 2020, and a normalization process was announced in October with the support of the Trump administration, which removed Sudan from the U.S. government's list of State Sponsors of Terrorism and the list of Countries of Particular Concern for International Religious Freedom.³⁵ Sudan formally acceded to the Abraham Accords in January 2021.³⁶

Having achieved many of its diplomatic objectives with the United States by withdrawing support for Hamas and opening up relations with Israel, it is unlikely that Sudan will revert to the previous foreign policy pursued under al Bashir's government anytime soon.

Egypt and Qatar Between Israel and Hamas

Prior to opening of official relations with Israel, none of the recent Arab state normalizers were especially good candidates to conduct U.S.-backed diplomacy between Israel and Hamas.

By contrast, Egypt and Qatar each fit certain important criteria, as the U.S. itself does not have contact with Hamas. Egypt was, until recently, one of only two Arab states to have formal ties with Israel. While the Egyptian government is no friend of Hamas due to the latter's Muslim Brotherhood roots, geography has assigned Cairo an active role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: Egypt shares a border with the Palestinian enclave in the northern Sinai Peninsula. Qatar, for its part, is a close American strategic partner, which hosts the forward headquarters of United States Central Command (CENTCOM); is a major financial benefactor in the Gaza Strip and backer of Hamas; and has a history of semi-official ties with Israel.³⁷

Egypt helped mediate ceasefire negotiations during each of the four major conflicts between Israel and Hamas in Gaza since 2008, including in 2012, when the country was led by its own short-lived Muslim Brotherhood government. Qatar has also positioned itself as a mediator and as a leading donor state in Gaza. In 2018, Qatari officials began making regular cash deliveries

³⁴ Laura Kelly, "Sudan closing Hamas and Hezbollah offices in bid for U.S. sanctions relief," *The Hill*, December 16, 2019, <https://thehill.com/policy/international/474806-sudan-closing-hamas-and-hezbollah-offices-in-bid-for-us-sanctions-relief>.

³⁵ "U.S. Relations With Sudan," *United States Department of State*, January 12, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-sudan/>.

³⁶ "Sudan joins Abraham Accords to recognize Israel," *Al-Monitor*, January 6, 2021, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/01/sudan-israel-abraham-mnuchin-debt.html>.

³⁷ Clive Jones and Yoel Guzansky, *Fraternal Enemies: Israel and the Gulf Monarchies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019): 59.

to the Strip³⁸ amounting to roughly \$20 million per month.³⁹ These included direct payments to Gaza families,⁴⁰ funding for civil servants' salaries,⁴¹ and a portion which inevitably remains with Hamas itself. The Qatari cash payouts have the quiet support of the Israeli government despite its ongoing blockade of Gaza.⁴² The Israeli aim in facilitating these payments is to forestall future conflicts over Gaza, delay further social and humanitarian collapse in the Strip, and leave the burden of directly administering the territory on Hamas. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reportedly also justified the Qatari cash in political terms, noting that shoring up Hamas keeps the Palestinians politically divided between the West Bank and Gaza, thus preventing the establishment of a viable independent Palestine.⁴³

The Normalizing Arab States and Jerusalem

Whereas each of the normalizers has its own complicated relationships with Hamas and its state sponsors, events in Jerusalem compel a degree of Arab unanimity. The succession of crises in Jerusalem in the weeks immediately preceding the May 2021 eleven-day war, including rioting by far-right Israeli agitators, pending evictions in Sheikh Jarrah, and confrontations between Israeli Police and Palestinians at the al Aqsa mosque, among others, elicited negative responses from each of the normalizing states. The governments of the UAE,⁴⁴ Bahrain,⁴⁵

³⁸ "Mossad said to ask Qatar to keep funneling cash to Gaza in deescalation effort," *The Times of Israel*, August 12, 2020, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/mossad-said-to-asks-qatar-to-keep-funneling-cash-to-gaza-in-deescalation-effort/>.

³⁹ "Qatar pledges \$360 million in aid to Hamas-ruled Gaza," *Associated Press*, January 31, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/world-news-israel-qatar-militant-groups-gaza-strip-49a1591f50b183920b5d4310c2098683>.

⁴⁰ "Qatari official said to arrive in Gaza to deliver cash payments," *The Times of Israel*, October 25, 2019, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/qatari-official-said-to-arrive-in-gaza-to-deliver-cash-payments/>.

⁴¹ Nidal al-Mughrabi, "Qatar pay Gaza salaries to ease tensions; Israel says money's not for Hamas," *Reuters*, November 9, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-palestinians-gaza/qatar-pays-gaza-salaries-to-ease-tensions-israel-says-moneys-not-for-hamas-idUSKCN1NE1ET>.

⁴² "Mossad said to ask Qatar to keep funneling cash to Gaza in deescalation effort," *The Times of Israel*, August 12, 2020, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/mossad-said-to-asks-qatar-to-keep-funneling-cash-to-gaza-in-deescalation-effort/>.

⁴³ Lahav Harkov, "Netanyahu: Money to Hamas part of strategy to keep Palestinians divided," *The Jerusalem Post*, March 12, 2019, <https://www.jpost.com/arab-israeli-conflict/netanyahu-money-to-hamas-part-of-strategy-to-keep-palestinians-divided-583082>.

⁴⁴ "UAE calls on Israel to de-escalate situation in Al-Aqsa and Sheikh Jarrah," *UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation*, April 26, 2021, <https://www.mofaic.gov.ae/en/mediahub/news/2021/5/8/08-05-2021-uae-israel>.

⁴⁵ "Kingdom of Bahrain condemns Israeli forces attack on worshippers in Al-Aqsa Mosque," *Kingdom of Bahrain Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, May 8, 2021, <https://www.mofa.gov.bh/Default.aspx?tabid=7824&language=en-US&ItemId=16021>.

Morocco,⁴⁶ and Sudan⁴⁷ each issued statements rebuking the Israeli government's conduct in Jerusalem, although their actions have not yet gone much further than that. The Moroccan government also mulled convening the OIC's al Quds Committee.⁴⁸

The Normalizing Arab States and the 2021 Israel-Hamas Conflict

When Hamas began firing rockets at Israel on May 10, leveraging events in Sheikh Jarrah and al Aqsa as a *casus belli*, the center of gravity of the Israeli-Palestinian crisis moved from Jerusalem to Gaza. As Hussein Ibish has noted, this relieved some pressure from the normalizing states.⁴⁹ Still, public sentiment in the Arab states toward Israel remains generally negative, including in the countries that have established relations with Israel, although opinion is somewhat more divided in the UAE.⁵⁰ Domestic concerns were borne out in anti-Israel/pro-Palestinian protests in Bahrain, Sudan,⁵¹ and Morocco.⁵² The Arab public response on social media was also broadly supportive of the Palestinian cause, including Hamas actions, and condemned Israel and the Arab states that normalized relations with it.⁵³ A joint statement from Bahraini opposition groups demanded the cancellation of ties with Israel and the expulsion of the Israeli ambassador from the kingdom.⁵⁴

Despite their newly official relationships with Israel, the actions of the normalizers during the latest Gaza war once again remained confined mostly to the realm of statements of varying rhetorical intensity. Each of the normalizers again supported the Egyptian brokered, U.S.-backed ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, although none played an active role in facilitating it.

⁴⁶ "The Kingdom of Morocco has followed with deep concern the violent incidents in Al Quds Asharif and Al Aqsa Mosque," *Kingdom of Morocco Ministry of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation, and Moroccan Expatriates*, May 9, 2021, <https://www.diplomatie.ma/en/statement-morocco-follows-deep-concern-violent-incident-al-quds-asharif-and-al-aqsa-mosque>.

⁴⁷ "International condemnation of Israel grows over Jerusalem violence, evictions," *The Times of Israel*, May 10, 2021.

⁴⁸ Hamza Guessouss, "Turkish FM Talks With Bourita to Arrange Al-Quds Committee Meeting," *Morocco World News*, May 11, 2021, <https://www.morocoworldnews.com/2021/05/341901/turkish-fm-talks-with-bourita-to-arrange-al-quds-committee-meeting>.

⁴⁹ Hussein Ibish, "Hamas' Intervention Lets Gulf Countries Off the Hook, But for How Long?" *Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington*, May 14, 2021, <https://agsiw.org/hamas-intervention-lets-gulf-countries-off-the-hook-but-for-how-long/>.

⁵⁰ Alexander Brakel and Mitchell Barak, *A Multi-Country Study Measuring the Attitudes of Citizens in Israel, UAE, Bahrain, Palestinian Authority, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Morocco, United States, and Germany Towards the Israel-UAE-Bahrain Peace Accords*, (Berlin: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2020): 6.

⁵¹ Vivian Yee and Mona El-Naggar, "'Social Media is the Mass Protest:' Solidarity With Palestinians Grows Online," *The New York Times*, May 18, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/18/world/middleeast/palestinians-social-media.html>.

⁵² "Israeli Jets Stage Heavy Airstrikes in Gaza City," *Associated Press*, May 16, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/united-nations-gaza-middle-east-business-race-and-ethnicity-6c7b05bf4a9adf33d877b3c9f7dfa344>.

⁵³ Kristin Smith Diwan, "Abraham Accords Face Early Test," *Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington*, May 24, 2021, <https://agsiw.org/abraham-accords-face-early-test/>.

⁵⁴ Alwahdawi_bh, Twitter post, May 12, 2021, 9:56pm, https://twitter.com/Alwahdawi_bh/status/1392554410191036426.

Rabat took what was probably the most publicly pro-Hamas stance among the normalizers. Morocco's Islamist Prime Minister El Othmani spoke directly with Hamas's Qatar-based leader Ismail Haniyeh during the fighting⁵⁵ and later sent a letter congratulating the group on "victory" over the "Zionist entity"⁵⁶—a continuation of the more inflammatory rhetoric El Othmani and others had used prior to normalization. David Govrin, the head of the Israeli liaison office in Rabat, tweeted—and later deleted—a criticism of the prime minister for his comments.⁵⁷ Govrin reported on Twitter that he was leaving Morocco and returning to Israel for family reasons less than a week prior to the ceasefire announcement.⁵⁸

On the humanitarian assistance front, Morocco announced that it would send 40 tons of medical and food aid to Gaza.⁵⁹ The UAE reportedly conditioned future assistance to Gaza upon Hamas maintaining "calm" with Israel,⁶⁰ although the potency of such a threat remains to be seen given the Emiratis' recent cuts to UNRWA funding and lack of prior broader involvement in the Strip. The UAE is also said to be unwilling to contribute to any international mechanism for Gaza reconstruction unless it receives assurances that funding does not support Hamas rearmament.⁶¹

Conclusion

With the exception of Sudan, which shifted from a pro-Hamas position to normalizing relations with Israel, the overall trajectory of the normalizing Arab states' positions on Israel and Gaza has remained fairly steady for more than a decade. None of the four actively back Hamas over the Fatah-led PA (although the UAE's position is complicated by its own support for Mohammad Dahlan and Morocco's Islamist government has offered rhetorical support). They have neither

⁵⁵ Safaa Kasraoui, "Israel Envoy Deletes Tweet Criticizing El Othmani After Backlash," *Morocco World News*, May 25, 2021, <https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2021/05/342588/israel-envoy-to-morocco-criticizes-el-othmani-for-congratulating-hamas>.

⁵⁶ "Moroccan PM congratulates Hamas on 'victory' over Israel in recent fighting," *The Times of Israel*, May 24, 2021, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/moroccan-pm-congratulates-hamas-on-victory-over-israel-in-recent-fighting/>.

⁵⁷ Safaa Kasraoui, "Israel Envoy Deletes Tweet Criticizing El Othmani After Backlash," *Morocco World News*, May 25, 2021, <https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2021/05/342588/israel-envoy-to-morocco-criticizes-el-othmani-for-congratulating-hamas>.

⁵⁸ David Govrin, Twitter post, May 15, 2021, <https://twitter.com/DavidGovrin/status/1393523008317362180>.

⁵⁹ "Morocco to send 40 tons of aid to Palestinians," *Al Arabiya*, May 15, 2021, <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2021/05/15/Morocco-to-send-40-tons-of-aid-to-Palestinian>.

⁶⁰ "UAE said to warn Hamas planned infrastructure projects are in danger," *The Times of Israel*, May 15, 2021, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/uae-said-to-warn-hamas-planned-gaza-infrastructure-projects-are-in-danger/>.

⁶¹ Jacob Magid, "Can U.S. help rebuild Gaza without rehabilitating Hamas?" *The Times of Israel*, May 26, 2021, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/can-us-help-in-gaza-reconstruction-without-rehabilitating-hamas/>.

enthusiastically defended Israeli military action in Gaza nor called for serious penalties against Israel, which, for the time being, is probably the best diplomatic result the Israeli government will achieve. Despite their recently established formal ties with Israel, none of the normalizers have yet tried to supplant the role of Egypt and Qatar in Gaza, although some Israeli officials want to revisit Doha's involvement.⁶²

Unlike its predecessor, the Biden administration supports a two-state solution and humanitarian assistance for the Palestinians. The United States can try to encourage the normalizers to undertake a more active role in rebuilding Gaza and mediating between Israel and Hamas in order to demonstrate that ties with Israel need not be mutually exclusive with Palestinian welfare. Of the four normalizing states, the UAE is the most independently wealthy and not reliant upon external support, theoretically making it the most suited to a sustained donor role in Gaza. The UAE's fraught relationship with the PA may make it open to playing a donor role in Gaza: after the West Bank-based Palestinian leadership rejected Emirati COVID relief twice in 2020, Abu Dhabi had Israel transfer the aid to the Strip.⁶³ On the other hand, the UAE does not share the same relationship with Hamas that Qatar and Egypt do and its recent drawdown in aid to UNRWA suggests that it was not seeking a greater role in Gaza prior to the most recent fighting. Indeed, the normalizers' present backseat approach to Gaza is broadly consistent with their respective foreign policies since the first Israel-Hamas war began over twelve years ago.

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⁶² Kan Hadashot, Twitter post, May 25, 2021, https://twitter.com/kann_news/status/1397246118581481478?s=20.

⁶³ Ahmad Melhem, "Palestinians reject aid from UAE again," *Al-Monitor*, June 16, 2020, al-monitor.com/originals/2020/06/palestinian-authority-reject-uae-aid-israel-normalization.html.