

The Quantitative Basis, Geopolitical Motivation and Influence of the Qualitative Change in the Relationship between the United Arab Emirates and Israel

Yue Hanjing^{1*}

¹School of Government Management, Shanghai University of Political Science and Law, Shanghai, China

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*Corresponding author: Yue Hanjing

School of Government Management, Shanghai University of Political Science and Law, Shanghai, China

Abstract

Review Article

The United Arab Emirates and Israel have reached a peace deal, and the relations between the two countries have undergone a qualitative change. This kind of qualitative change has a relatively sufficient basis of quantitative change: The signing of the peace deal between Egypt and Israel, the conclusion of the Oslo Accords, the obvious warming of relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel after the “Arab Spring”, and the gradual warming of relations between the United Arab Emirates and Israel. The peace deal between the United Arab Emirates and Israel has a lot to do with the geopolitical changes in the Middle East in recent years. This is mainly manifested in two aspects: First, the geopolitical changes brought about by the rise of Iran’s power; second, Turkey’s Pan-Islamism diplomacy guided by the “new Ottoman” vision has promoted the geopolitical changes in the Middle East. These geopolitical changes have become important driving forces behind the peace deal between the United Arab Emirates and Israel. The peace deal between the United Arab Emirates and Israel has a certain impact on Palestine, the Trump administration and the Middle East, but the nature of the impact is different: It has a greater negative impact on Palestine; it has a certain positive impact on the Trump administration; it has both positive and negative effects on peace in the Middle East as a whole, but the overall impact is limited, and the negative impact is greater than the positive impact. It can produce a certain demonstration effect for Arab countries, but the demonstration effect for small Arab countries is greater than that for Saudi Arabia.

Keywords: United Arab Emirates; Israel; peace deal; United States; Iran; Turkey; Gulf States.

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INTRODUCTION

On August 13, 2020, with the mediation of US President Donald Trump, the United Arab Emirates reached a so-called peace agreement with Israel, which soon achieved the full normalization of relations between the two countries. The Peace Agreement is a sign of a qualitative change in the relations between the two countries. What is the basis of quantitative change behind this qualitative change, what is the motivation, and what is the impact? At present, the above questions have not been fully answered, for example, it seems that the “basis of quantitative change” still needs to be fully discussed; as for geopolitical motives, although many scholars emphasize the Iranian factor, they do not seem to pay enough attention to the Turkish factor; there are still different views on the impact, especially on peace in the Middle East. In view of this, this paper intends to try to answer the above questions.

I. The Quantitative Basis of Qualitative Change in the Relations between the Two Countries

The peace agreement reached between the United Arab Emirates and Israel is a sign of a qualitative change in relations between the two countries, and there is a relatively sufficient basis for quantitative change behind this qualitative change. The quantitative basis of this qualitative change can be reflected from the following four aspects.

(I) With the Signing of the Egypt-Israel Peace Agreement, the Arab-Israeli Contradiction Has Been Easing Day by Day

To a large extent, the Arab-Israeli contradiction stems from the “divide-and-rule” strategy of the British colonists--the use of Jews to restrict the resistance of the Palestinians and restrict each other. In 1917, when Britain occupied Palestine, Foreign

Minister Belfort issued the *Balfour Declaration*, expressing his support for the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. As a result of the two world wars, more and more Jews emigrated to Palestine, and the contradiction between Jews and Palestinians became more and more serious. Unable to resolve the violent confrontation between the two sides, Britain decided to extricate itself from the Palestinian trusteeship in 1947. In November of the same year, the United Nations General Assembly voted to adopt the *1947 United Nations Partition Plan*, which divides the Palestinian area into two states and Jerusalem is administered by the United Nations. But this was firmly opposed by the League of Arab States, which was founded in 1945. At midnight, the day before the end of the British trusteeship (May 14, 1948), the State of Israel was officially declared, but since then the prelude to the Arab-Israeli struggle also officially began [1].

From 1948 to 1973, there were four wars in the Middle East, which further intensified the Arab-Israeli contradiction. However, in 1979, Israeli Prime Minister Begin and Egyptian President Sadat signed a peace agreement in the United States, which greatly weakened the Arab-Israeli contradiction. According to the agreement, Israel fully withdrew its armed forces and civilians from the Sinai Peninsula occupied by the 1967 Six-day War, and Egypt agreed to turn the Sinai Peninsula into a demilitarized zone. The agreement also provides that Israeli ships can pass through the Suez Canal without hindrance [2]. As Egypt is the most powerful Arab country and the first Arab country to recognize Israel, the signing of the Egyptian-Israeli peace agreement is of real historical significance to Arab-Israeli peace--it has transformed the nature of the Arab-Israeli conflict from a large-scale regional conflict to a more local Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and the Arab-Israeli contradiction has since eased day by day.

(II) The Gulf War and the End of the Cold War Further Weakened the Arab-Israeli Contradiction, and the Palestinian-Israeli Contradiction Was Alleviated.

Because the Saddam regime in Iraq had actively supported the Palestine liberation movement for a long time, and Iraq was an important Arab country in the Middle East, the existence of this regime was an important obstacle to the further relaxation of the Arab-Israeli contradiction. In 1991, the US-led coalition launched a large-scale military strike against Saddam's regime and imposed severe economic sanctions on it

after the military operation, thus seriously weakening Iraq's strength. The substantial weakening of Iraq had not only reduced its support for the Palestine Liberation Organization, but also weakened the Arab forces against Israel, thus further easing the contradiction between Israel and Arab or Palestinian.

With the end of the Cold War and the emergence of an international pattern of one superpower and many powers, this relaxation process has been accelerated, and its important symbol is the conclusion of the 1993 Oslo Accords. However, due to the opposition of the extremist forces of Palestine and Israel, it has been very difficult to really implement the agreement. In 1994, Arafat returned to Palestine after 27 years of exile. In the same year, Jordan and Israel reached a peace agreement, and Jordan became the second Arab country to normalize relations with Israel. The Palestinian National Authority was established in 1996. In the 1990s and early 21st century, there was also basically a ceasefire between Israel and Syria and with Lebanon (except for the so-called second Lebanese War that broke out in 2006).

(III) The Arab Spring Has Once Again Weakened the Arab-Israeli Contradiction, and the Palestinian-Israeli Contradiction Has Been Further Marginalized

The "Arab Spring" had caused political earthquakes in many countries in the Middle East, intensified contradictions within Arab countries, and they were unable to take care of themselves, so the contradictions between Palestine and Israel had been further marginalized. At the same time, the contradictions between such non-Arab powers in the region as Iran and Turkey, and most Arab countries were increasing day by day. Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries believed that the intensification of internal conflicts in Yemen, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Syria and other countries were related to Iran, and Iran's participation in the affairs of Iraq, Syria and other countries and the resulting expansion of influence had made Saudi Arabia and Israel feel that the threat from Iran had increased. Under the influence of "Pan-Islamism", Turkey was actively involved in Middle East affairs in order to realize its "new Ottoman" concept. Turkey's "pan-Islamist" diplomacy threatened not only the interests of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and other Arab countries, but also the interests of Israel.

After the outbreak of the Arab Spring, geopolitical changes triggered by the regional policies of Iran and Turkey further promoted closer relations between Arab countries and Israel. In 2018, Riyadh quietly opened its airspace for the first time for passenger planes bound for Israel [3]. In February 2020,

³ Deborah Cole and Anuj Chopra, "Saudi Arabia Reaffirms No Israel Deal without Palestinian Peace",

¹ See Wang Shengzu, *History of International Relations (Volume 6)*, World Knowledge Press, 1995, 429-435; Wang Shengzu, *History of International Relations (Volume 7)*, 1995, pp. 260-270.

² Andrew Glass, "Egypt, Israel Conclude Peace Treaty, March 26, 1979", March 26, 2019, <https://www.politico.com/story/2019/03/26/egypt-israel-peace-treaty-1233742>.

the Arab Sudan and Israel announced their willingness to normalize relations, and soon Israeli aircraft were allowed to fly over Sudanese airspace [4].

(IV) Relations between the United Arab Emirates and Israel Had Gradually Warmed Up

In late November 2015, the Government of the United Arab Emirates formally approved the establishment of a diplomatic office by Israel in Abu Dhabi. In the first week of November 2016, the Israeli Ambassador to the United Nations, Danny Danon, secretly visited the United Arab Emirates to attend a meeting chaired by him as Chairman of the United Nations legal Committee. In October 2018, Israeli Minister of Culture and Sports Mili Regev paid the first visit by Israeli officials to the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi. The Shaikh Zayed Grand Mosque is the third largest place of worship in the Muslim world, after mosques in Mecca and Medina. On December 17, 2019, the White House hosted a secret trilateral meeting between Israel and the United Arab Emirates on coordinating the fight against Iran as part of the Trump administration's efforts to encourage normalization of relations between Israel and Arab countries. The United Arab Emirates and Israel have also launched a variety of cooperation in the fight against the COVID-19 epidemic [5]. This interaction between the United Arab Emirates and Israel has long been seen as a step towards normalizing relations.

To sum up, the conclusion of a peace agreement between the United Arab Emirates and Israel to achieve a qualitative change in relations between the two countries is based on sufficient quantitative changes. This quantitative change is mainly based on the signing of the peace agreement between Egypt and Israel, the conclusion of the Oslo Accords, the obvious warming of relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel after the "Arab Spring", and the gradual warming of relations between the United Arab Emirates and Israel. The process of the Arab-Israeli conflict shows that both "pan-Arabism" and "pan-Islamism" are vulnerable to "nationalism."

August 21, 2020,
<https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/08/21/saudi-arabia-reaffirms-no-israel-deal-without-palestinian-peace.html>.

⁴ "Israeli Aircraft Flies over Sudan for First Time in Sign of Growing Normalisation", 17 February, 2020, <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2020/2/17/israeli-aircraft-flies-over-sudan-for-first-time>.

⁵ See "Israel International Relations: Israel-UAE Relations", updated September 3, 2020, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/israel-uae-relations>.

II. The Geopolitical Motivation of the Peace Agreement between the United Arab Emirates and Israel

The peace agreement between the United Arab Emirates and Israel had a lot to do with the geopolitical changes in the Middle East. This is mainly manifested in two aspects: first, the geopolitical changes brought about by the rise of Iran's power; second, Turkey's "pan-Islamist" diplomacy guided by the "new Ottoman" concept had promoted the geopolitical changes in the Middle East. This geopolitical change was an important driving force behind the peace agreement between the United Arab Emirates and Israel.

(I) Geopolitical Changes Brought about by the Rise of Iran's Power

Before the war in Afghanistan, the Sunni Taliban regime was also challenged by Shiite forces in the country, so it had particularly friendly relations with Sunni Pakistan and Saudi Arabia and poor relations with Iran. The two countries came close to fighting over the killing of Iranian diplomats in Afghanistan in 1998. After the overthrow of the Taliban regime by the United States, the new Afghan regime had a good relationship with Iran, and Iran's influence in the country had expanded rapidly.

Compared with the war in Afghanistan, the Iraq war has played a greater role in promoting the rise of Iran. As we all know, the Saddam regime in Iraq was a Sunni regime and an old enemy of Iran. The United States launched the Iraq war to overthrow the regime and implemented the Western parliamentary representation system in Iraq. Since Iraq is a country with a Shiite Muslim majority, it is not difficult for Iraq's Shiite caucus to win a majority of seats in parliamentary elections, so the country's powerful prime ministers are generally elected from Shiites. Like the new regime in Afghanistan, the new regime in Iraq has maintained good relations with Iran. Due to religious, ethnic and other contradictions within Iraq, the political situation has been unstable, forming a certain dependence on Iran, and Iran has maintained a greater influence on the country. Back in 2004, King Abdullah II of Jordan called such a zone connecting Iran, Iraq, Syria and Hezbollah in Lebanon a "Shiite crescent". Iran is clearly the most important of these countries.

The emergence of the "Shiite crescent" and the growing influence of Iran have caused unease in many Arab countries, led by Saudi Arabia, and made Israel feel threatened. As a result, the United States continues to crack down on Iran under the pretext of the nuclear issue in order to weaken its regional influence.

After the outbreak of the so-called "Arab Spring" in 2010, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and other countries experienced political upheaval, the Shiite forces in Yemen rose, and the relationship between

Shiite forces and governments in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and other countries became tense. In March 2011, Saudi Arabia led GCC troops to Bahrain to help the country quell riots caused by Shiite people [6]. In Yemen, the Shiite Houthi insurgency led to a continuing civil war in the country, and Saudi Arabia and other countries sent troops to suppress it, but to no avail. Saudi Arabia and other countries believe Iran is behind the Shiite riots in many Sunni Muslim-dominated countries in the Middle East.

In May and June 2019, there were several tanker explosions in the Gulf, all near the waters between Iran and the United Arab Emirates. In September of the same year, two oil facilities in Saudi Arabia were attacked by drones and cruise missiles, causing explosions and fires [7]. Saudi Arabia and other countries strongly suspected and even publicly accused Iran of attacking oil tankers and oil facilities. On the one hand, they regarded Iran as a great threat, and on the other hand, they felt that they are unable to deal with this threat effectively.

Israel regards Iran as a great threat to its own survival and security, and it continues to carry out various types of attacks against Iran, such as assassinating Iranian nuclear scientists, creating computer viruses to destroy Iran's nuclear facilities, and repeatedly attacking Iran's military facilities in Syria. Israel's crackdown on Iran is in the interests of Saudi Arabia and other countries, but Israel is also unwilling to let these countries hitchhike casually. It continues to annex the occupied Palestinian territory, creating a fait accompli that makes Saudi and other countries dare to be angry and speak out, but dare not take substantive action.

In the face of the huge threat from Iran and unable to deal with it effectively, Saudi Arabia and other countries increasingly felt that the contradiction with Iran was greater than that with Israel. As a result, in response to the threat from Iran, they were increasingly closer to Israel in spite of Israel's illegal expansion. Dealing with the threat from Iran was one of the important drivers of a peace agreement between the United Arab Emirates and Israel.

⁶ Ethan Bronner and Michael Slackman, "Saudi Troops Enter Bahrain to Help Put down Unrest", March 14, 2011, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/15/world/middleeast/15bahrain.html>.

⁷ Anthony H. Cordesman, "The Strategic Implications of the Strikes on Saudi Arabia", September 16, 2019, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/strategic-implications-strikes-saudi-arabia>.

(II) Geopolitical Changes Brought about by Turkey's "Pan-Islamist" Diplomacy

The conclusion of the "peace agreement" was not only related to the geopolitical changes in the Middle East caused by the rise of Iran, but also related to the geopolitical changes caused by Turkey's "pan-Islamist" diplomacy in the Middle East.

In 2010, after the upheaval in the Middle East, Turkey accelerated its "pan-Islamist" diplomacy and began to be deeply involved in Middle East affairs in order to realize its dream of a "new Ottoman". Here, the "new Ottoman" is Turkey's overall diplomatic goal, and "pan-Islamism" is the main means.

From an internal point of view, the emergence of Turkey's foreign policy based on "Pan-Islamism" and "New Ottoman" orientation was related to the background of its ruling Justice and Development Party. In Turkey, if divided by ideology, there are two forces--the Kemalists and the Islamists. The Kemalists tried to reform ordinary people in accordance with western culture, implemented a series of secularization reforms, having greatly limited the role of religion, and took severe measures against religious activists and religious groups. Turkish Islamists believe that all post-colonial regimes in the Middle East, including the Kemalist regime in Ankara, pursue anti-religious policies and adopt foreign ideologies against Muslims. Many Turkish Islamists believe that all these countries are not the true representatives of their people. More crucially, Islamism began to believe that the repressive secular regimes of the 20th century artificially divided the Middle East, alienating and creating hostility among the people of the region, and undermined their brotherhood and friendship based on religion and culture [8].

Erdogan's Justice and Development Party, which came to power in Turkey in 2002, calls itself conservative and democratic. However, the party's leading cadres are Islamists. Given the huge influence of Kemalism in Turkey, it took nearly a decade for the Justice and Development Party to gradually dissolve the Kemalist institutions.

In the first decade (2002-2011), AK leaders were more or less loyal to Turkey's traditional foreign policy and struggled to join the European Union. On another level, however, AK pursues a rather subtle Islamist foreign policy, believing that Muslims are a country, ostensibly divided into ethnic and sectarian identities, and that Muslims should be determined to transcend any of their differences and strive to develop into a Muslim country. From 2002 to 2011, under the leadership of successive governments of the Justice and Development Party, Turkey's goal was to achieve this political ideal. Turkey's actions to achieve this goal

⁸ Birol Baskan, "Turkey's Pan-Islamist Foreign Policy", *Cairo Review*, No. 33, Spring 2019, pp.99-100.

were not obvious until 2010. Between 2010 and 2011, however, Islamists in Turkey began to speak out about AK's Islamist foreign policy goals, partly because of the outbreak of the Arab Spring and partly because the AK has almost eliminated the influence of Kemalism on the regime [9].

As a result, Turkey began to vigorously develop relations with the Muslim world. Its trade with the Muslim world had greatly increased. Turkey continues to finance mosques around the world, from Latin America to Europe, Africa and Asia. Erdogan himself often presides over the opening ceremony. In order to strengthen relations with Muslim-majority countries, Erdogan's Turkey has also worked with it to abolish visa requirements, establish a high-level consultation mechanism, participate in the mediation of some long-standing internal and inter-state conflicts, and participate in meetings held by regional organizations such as the Gulf Cooperation Council and the League of Arab States. Turkey is also paying attention to improving its relations with non-governmental organizations from the Muslim world. By strengthening its historical ties with the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamic religious movements, Turkey has become a centre for transnational Islamic religious opinion makers to meet and discuss common issues [10].

Turkey's "pan-Islamist" diplomacy was bound to make it embrace the "Arab spring" more than any other country. Turkey called the Arab Spring the normalization of Middle Eastern history and the democratization of Middle Eastern countries (Turkey believes that the coming to power of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt is a sign of democratization in the country). Turkey supports various forms of Brotherhood in the region and sometimes other Islamists. Turkey's Islamic-driven foreign policy is supported by Qatar. Turkey's policy was put into earlier practice in the Syrian conflict. Turkey tried to turn the Brotherhood into a real battlefield competitor in the Syrian civil war. Similarly, in Egypt, Turkey provided political and financial support to the Mohamed Morsi Brotherhood regime, which was overthrown in 2013. Turkey has also sought support for forces in Sudan, Tunisia and Gaza as part of a broader Brotherhood network. Hamas is actually the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. However, after the overthrow of Morsi, the Brotherhood faced a regional crackdown, which put Turkey and Qatar on the defensive. The

continuation and deepening of internal conflicts in Syria, Libya and Yemen have shown that the trend of history will not be as desired by Turkish Islamists.

Turkey's "pan-Islamist" diplomacy has threatened Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan and other countries because they advocate the maintenance of the status quo and oppose the expansion of the influence of Islamic forces such as the Muslim Brotherhood. Turkey's "pan-Islamism" is opposed to the nationalism and secularism (against political Islam) of Egypt, Saudi Arabia and other countries. Turkey's "pan-Islamist" diplomacy was bound to make its "zero-problem" diplomacy with its neighbors difficult to withstand the test of reality.

As a result, such a new pattern of confrontation had emerged in the Middle East: Turkey and Qatar, which support the Brotherhood and other Islamists, against Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan and other parties that oppose expanding the influence of Islamists such as the Brotherhood. This confrontation was most evident in the second civil war in Libya today.

Perhaps more threatening to countries such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia was Turkey's "new Ottoman" concept, which is consistent with its "pan-Islamism". Erdogan had repeatedly questioned the Lausanne Treaty, implying that Kemal had made too many concessions. Guided by the "new Ottoman" concept, Turkey aggressively violated Greek airspace and sea areas of the Aegean Sea, resulting in greater unity among Greece, Cyprus, Israel and Egypt. These countries were increasingly cooperating on energy issues, tourism and security, largely in response to Turkey's confrontations in the region. A "maritime border" agreement between Turkey and Islamists in Libya had also sparked outrage among key regional players Egypt, Israel and Greece [11].

In terms of its own relations with Turkey, the UAE had been threatened by Turkey. Turkey had earlier accused the United Arab Emirates of spending \$3 billion to support an attempted coup in Turkey in June 2016. In July, according to an interview released by Al Jazeera, Turkey's defense minister criticized the United Arab Emirates for "malicious acts" in Libya and Syria, vowing that Turkey would hold Abu Dhabi accountable [12]. Under such circumstances, it seemed

⁹ Birol Baskan, "Turkey's Pan-Islamist Foreign Policy", p.102.

¹⁰ Marwa Maziad, Jake Sotiriadis, "Turkey's Dangerous New Exports: Pan-Islamist, Neo-Ottoman Visions and Regional Instability", April 21, 2020, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/turkeys-dangerous-new-exports-pan-islamist-neo-ottoman-visions-and-regional>.

¹¹ Marwa Maziad, Jake Sotiriadis, "Turkey's Dangerous New Exports: Pan-Islamist, Neo-Ottoman Visions and Regional Instability", April 21, 2020, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/turkeys-dangerous-new-exports-pan-islamist-neo-ottoman-visions-and-regional>.

¹² "Turkey will Hold the UAE Accountable at Right Place and Time: Turkish Defence Minister", August 3, 2020,

understandable for the UAE to further deepen its relations with Israel.

In short, after the outbreak of the “Arab Spring”, Turkey pursued “pan-Islamist” diplomacy and strongly intervened in Arab affairs to serve its “new Ottoman” concept, which not only deepened its contradictions with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and other countries, but also deepened its contradictions with Israel. In a situation where the threat from Turkey was getting worse and worse, the peace agreement between the United Arab Emirates and Israel was to some degree meant to deal with the Turkish threat. Therefore, apart from Iran, Turkey had also contributed to the conclusion of the “peace agreement.”

III. The Impact of the Peace Agreement between the United Arab Emirates and Israel

The peace agreement between the United Arab Emirates and Israel had had a certain impact on Palestine, the Trump administration and peace in the Middle East, but the nature of the impact was different: it had a greater negative impact on Palestine; it had a certain positive impact on the Trump administration; it had both positive and negative effects on Middle East peace, but the overall impact was limited. It could have a certain exemplary effect on Arab countries.

(I) Seriously Harming the Interests of the Palestinians

The peace agreement between the United Arab Emirates and Israel has seriously harmed the interests of the Palestinians. After hearing the news of the peace agreement, the Palestinian National Authority immediately announced the recall of its ambassador to the United Arab Emirates, condemning the move and calling for an emergency meeting of the Arab League to discuss the peace agreement.

Normally, the normalization of relations between a country and other countries is within the scope of a country’s sovereignty, and other countries have no right to interfere. However, as an Arab country and an Islamic country, the normalization of relations between the United Arab Emirates and Israel has its own particularity and does harm to the interests of the Palestinians. This is mainly due to the following two reasons.

First, the peace agreement reached between the UAE and Israel violates the Arab Peace Initiative, which protects the interests of the Palestinians. The political goal of the Palestinians is to establish a sovereign and independent Palestinian state based on the borders before the third Middle East War in 1967,

with East Jerusalem as its capital. In 2002 the Arab Peace Initiative put forward by Saudi Arabia at the 14th Arab League Summit affirmed this demand of the Palestinians and called for a just solution to the issue of Palestine refugees in accordance with United Nations Resolution 194. In particular, it is worth noting that the initiative also makes it clear that Israel meeting the aspirations of the Palestinians is a prerequisite for Arab countries to sign peace agreements with them and normalize relations. It is clear that the Arab Peace Initiative shows respect for the legitimate rights and interests of the Palestinians and support for their aspirations, which is in the interests of the Palestinians. At a time when Israel still occupies Jerusalem, one of the Islamic holy places and uses it as its capital, and when the Israeli Knesset passed the Jewish Settlement Legalization Act in the West Bank in February 2017, [13] the peace agreement reached between the United Arab Emirates and Israel is a clear violation of the Arab Peace Initiative and a betrayal of the Palestinians.

Second, the peace agreement between the UAE and Israel is a disregard for Palestine as a political entity. Admittedly, although the goal of Palestinian statehood has its sufficient historical and legal basis, in view of the reality that Israel has controlled and operated the occupied territories for decades, and the huge gap in the balance of strength between Palestine, Israel and even the Arab and Israeli sides, it is indeed very difficult for the Palestinian side to truly achieve the above goals. For the Palestinians, the realistic approach should be to negotiate with Israel on issues such as settlements, borders and refugees in the direction of the two-state solution, which is widely supported by the international community. Trump also did not oppose the “two-state solution”, but in his “two-state solution”, an independent Palestinian state must be a state that recognizes Israel’s sovereignty over most of the West Bank as regards Jerusalem Israel’s “indivisible capital”. This was the core of the Israeli-Palestinian peace plan proposed by President Trump in January 2020. It is, of course, firmly opposed by the Palestinians. Trump’s Israeli-Palestinian peace plan had to run aground.

Against this background, the peace agreement between the United Arab Emirates and Israel seems to ignore Palestine. Because, the important condition for the UAE to reach a peace agreement with Israel is that Israel “suspends” its annexation of the West Bank. This is tantamount to the United Arab Emirates carrying Palestine behind its back and thinking that it represents Palestine, acquiesced in Israel’s sovereignty over at least the annexed territory. This is tantamount to the

¹³ Associated Press, “Israel Passes Law Legalizing Thousands of Settlement Homes”, February 6, 2017, <https://www.timesfreepress.com/news/national/international/story/2017/feb/06/israel-passes-law-legalizing-thousands-settle/411540/>.

UAE drawing a rough border with the United States and Israel for a future Palestinian state behind Palestine's back. This is tantamount to the United Arab Emirates putting aside Palestine and working with the United States and Israel to implement the Palestinian-Israeli peace plan proposed by President Trump but firmly opposed by Palestine.

In short, the peace agreement reached between the United Arab Emirates and Israel seriously harms the interests of the Palestinians because it violates the Arab Peace Initiative, ignores the political status of the Palestinian National Authority and may have an exemplary effect.

(II) The Negative Impact on Middle East Peace Is Greater than the Positive Impact

The peace agreement between the United Arab Emirates and Israel had a certain impact on peace in the Middle East, but both positive and negative effects were limited, and the negative impact was slightly greater than the positive impact

First, although the agreement was in line with Trump's Middle East policy objectives, Trump's Middle East policy itself was not to promote peace in the Middle East. Overall, the core feature of President Trump's Middle East policy was "extremely pro-Israel." Trump recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel in December 2017, recognized Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights in March 2019, and said in November of the same year that Israeli settlements in the West Bank were no longer considered illegal [14]. Others, such as "strengthening alliances with Saudi Arabia", "exerting extreme pressure on Iran", "proposing a century agreement", and policies in the Syrian conflict, although they had their independent policy motivation and goal orientation, but they all had an obvious incentive to favor Israel. The peace agreement between the United Arab Emirates and Israel brokered by Trump is also in line with Trump's extreme pro-Israel policy.

Given the deep-rooted contradictions between Israel and many Middle Eastern countries, Trump's extreme pro-Israel policy was not destined to bring peace to the Middle East, and had even exacerbated conflicts in the region. Earlier that year of 2020, Trump ordered the assassination of Iranian Revolutionary Guard General Soleimani, bringing the United States and Iran to the brink of war. The Trump administration had demonstrated the sense of presence and influence of the United States in Syria. Just after the implementation of the new sanctions bill, the Syrian Law on the

Protection of Civilians (also known as the Caesar Act), a new oil agreement was signed with the Syrian Kurdish local administration,[15] creating a new obstacle to peace in Syria.

Take Libya, another international hot spot, as an example. In the conflict in Libya, the Trump administration acted as an offshore balancer, constantly changing the object of support and opposition according to its own needs. Although the Trump administration inherited the position of the Obama administration and supported the government of national accord in western Libya, President Trump publicly supported the offensive a few days after the Libyan National Army in the east launched an offensive against the west in April 2019. And at about the same time, the United States blocked the passage of a draft United Nations resolution calling on Haftar to stop the offensive. But soon after, the United States began to oppose Haftar's attack. U.S. state Department officials reiterated this opposition in May 2020 and publicly criticized Russian intervention for the first time to support the Libyan government of national accord [16]. In the same month, with Turkey's military intervention and the government of national accord making more progress against forces in the east, the United States Embassy in Libya urged both sides to recognize that "there is no military solution to the Libyan crisis." [17] This was actually more of a warning to Turkey that "enough is enough", but the United States had not actively mediated, and the conflict in Libya had only been "frozen".

In other words, the Trump administration's Middle East policy was not peace-oriented, so the peace agreement reached between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, although in line with Trump's Middle East policy, was not conducive to peace in the Middle East.

Second, the negative impact of the peace agreement on peace in the Middle East outweighs the positive impact. First of all, the relationship between the Gulf states and Israel had become closer and closer, and the peace agreement between Israel and the United Arab Emirates was nothing more than a further deepening of this close relationship, and the United Arab Emirates being a small country, its peace

¹⁵ "Syria Says U.S. Oil Firm Signed Deal with Kurdish-led Rebels", August 2, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-oil-usa/syria-says-us-oil-firm-signed-deal-with-kurdish-led-rebels-idUSKBN24Y0FD>.

¹⁶ Nick Wadhams, "U.S. Accuses Russia of Deepening Libya's War with Haftar Support", May 8, 2020, <https://www.bloombergquint.com/politics/u-s-accuses-russia-of-deepening-libya-s-war-with-haftar-support>.

¹⁷ Samy Magdy, "Official: Libya's Tripoli Forces Take Key Base from Rivals", May 19, 2020, <https://apnews.com/6b36b84419aeced567e026be5b96fd9>.

¹⁴ Kali Robinson, "What Is U.S. Policy on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict?" *Backgrounder*, Last updated August 13, 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/what-us-policy-israeli-palestinian-conflict>.

agreement with Israel played a limited role in promoting relations between Israel and the Gulf states. Secondly, under the influence of changes in the international and regional pattern, the Palestinian-Israeli issue has long been marginalized, and the Palestinian-Israeli issue had had less and less impact on Middle East peace. Therefore, the improvement of relations between Israel and the Gulf states, including the conclusion of this peace agreement, had only very limited positive impact on Middle East peace. Third, the peace agreement itself contained the seeds of conflict. Since the agreement only requires Israel to suspend its annexation of the West Bank, it will sow the seeds of conflict in the future. How long does “pause” last? Perhaps the “pause” wishfully understood by the UAE is a permanent stop, while the “pause” understood by Israel is based on the future situation. Obviously, this “moratorium” gives Israel full control of the initiative, and even if it begins its annexation in the future, it is not easy to be accused of violating the peace agreement, because the timing of the “moratorium” is unclear. Finally, there is an Iranian and Turkish aspect to the peace deal that will exacerbate regional tensions. As Iranian officials tweeted: a peace agreement will not bring peace to the region [18]

To sum up, it can be seen that with Trump’s mediation, the peace agreement reached between Israel and the United Arab Emirates is not a “historic peace agreement” as boasted by the media in the West and other countries. It may be beneficial to Trump’s campaign, but its impact on peace in the Middle East is limited.

(III) It Will Have an Exemplary Effect on the Small Gulf Countries, but Saudi Arabia Will not Follow Suit at Least in the Short Term

After the news of the peace agreement between the United Arab Emirates and Israel was made public, despite the strongest condemnation of the agreement by non-Arab countries such as Pakistan, Turkey and Iran, apart from the strongest anger expressed by Palestine, many Arab countries remained silent, giving the impression that they did not oppose the agreement, while others publicly expressed their support. Saudi Arabia, for example, initially remained silent, while Bahrain, a close ally of Saudi Arabia, became the first country to congratulate the UAE on reaching an agreement. Oman also congratulated the United Arab Emirates shortly after Bahrain.

The peace agreement reached between the United Arab Emirates and Israel will have an exemplary effect on the small Gulf countries, especially those that

¹⁸ “Iran Official Says UAE-Israel Deal Will Not Secure Regional Peace: Tweet”, August 14, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-emirates-iran-official/iran-official-says-uae-isreal-deal-will-not-secure-regional-peace-tweet-idUSKCN2592UD>.

welcome the peace agreement. Because their national conditions are similar to those of the United Arab Emirates, and their historical background and realistic external threats are also similar. More importantly, these small countries are limited by their own strength and rely heavily on the United States for security, resulting in low diplomatic autonomy and extremely vulnerable to the influence of the United States. Coupled with its efforts to strive for diplomatic highlights in order to run for re-election, the Trump administration also exerted kindness and power on these Arab countries, prompting them to follow in the footsteps of the United Arab Emirates.

In the long run, Saudi Arabia is likely to normalize relations with Israel. But in the short term, Saudi Arabia is less likely to normalize relations with Israel.

First, if Saudi Arabia normalizes relations with Israel, it violates its own Arab Peace Initiative launched at the Arab League summit in 2002. This will damage Saudi Arabia’s international credibility and weaken its position in the Arab and Islamic world. Second, the United Arab Emirates is a “younger brother” of Saudi Arabia, and if it follows the “younger brother” and reaches a peace agreement with Israel soon, it will damage the image of Saudi Arabia as a regional power. Third, the peace agreement between the United Arab Emirates and Israel was a big gift from the two countries to Trump, and it was really what Trump urgently needs. Saudi Arabia must understand that while more such gifts are better for Trump, even for Biden, the “marginal benefits” of the first gift are the greatest.

In addition, after the UAE reached a peace agreement with Israel, Egypt, Bahrain, Oman, Jordan and other countries immediately expressed support or cautiously welcomed its success, while Saudi Arabia kept silent [19] This fact also shows that Saudi Arabia has a lot of scruples. More significantly, after a few days of silence, the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs publicly declared its support for the Arab Peace Initiative [20]. Therefore, it is unlikely that Saudi Arabia will normalize its relations with Israel in the short term.

¹⁹ “United Nations and Major States Praise UAE-Israel Accord”, *The National*, August 14, 2020, <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/united-nations-and-major-states-praise-uae-israel-accord-1.1063553>.

²⁰ “Saudi Remains Committed to Arab Peace Initiative for Israel Peace, Foreign Minister Says”, August 19, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-emirates-saudi/saudi-remains-committed-to-arab-peace-initiative-for-israel-peace-foreign-minister-says-idUSKCN25F1TQ>.

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CONCLUSION

The analysis of the peace agreement reached between the United Arab Emirates and Israel shows that the normalization of relations between the two countries that were originally enemies will not happen overnight, but will go through a long process of quantitative change. In this process, the two sides gradually change their policies toward each other in accordance with the changing international, regional and domestic environment, strengthen contacts and enhance mutual understanding, so as to lay a relatively solid foundation for the eventual normalization of relations.

The analysis of the peace agreement between the United Arab Emirates and Israel also shows that although the qualitative change is the inevitable result of the quantitative change, the external dynamic factors that promote the quantitative change to exceed the “degree” and realize the qualitative change are worthy of attention. As far as the conclusion of the “Peace Agreement” is concerned, the mediation efforts of the United States and the changes in the geopolitical pattern of the Middle East promoted objectively and subjectively by Iran and Turkey in recent years were all important external driving forces. The good offices of the United States are the pressure factor for the peace agreement, and the geopolitical changes in the Middle

East caused by Iran and Turkey are the common interests of the peace agreement. Of course, for the United Arab Emirates, the “peace agreement” reached with Israel has strong opposition from its brother Palestine, but the pressure of opposition from Palestine is not equal to that of the United States, not to mention the consideration of effectively confronting other countries. Since the “peace agreement” has the purpose of uniting one side against the other side, and the contradiction between them had already weakened, it can hardly promote the peace in the Middle East significantly.

The analysis of the demonstration effect of the “Peace Agreement” shows that other Arab countries have the inevitable conditions for normalizing relations with Israel similar to those of the United Arab Emirates, and in the short term, small countries such as Bahrain have also reached a peace agreement with Israel, but Saudi Arabia will not follow in the footsteps of the United Arab Emirates in the short term.

Brief introduction of the author

Yue Hanjing, professor, PhD, School of Political Science and Law, Shanghai University of Political Science and Law, majoring in foreign policy issues, Middle East Issues, etc.

Yue Hanjing contact information:

Email address: yuehanjing@sina.com.

Mailing address: School of Government Management, Shanghai University of Political Science and Law, 7989 Waiqingsong Road, Shanghai. Postcode, 201701