



## Israel Gulf Expansion Within Regional Security Complex Theory: The Effect Of The Abraham Accords On The Power Balances In The Region

Dilek YAMAN\*

Levent YİĞİTTEPE\*\*

### Abstract

With the 2020 Abraham Accord the United Arab Emirates (UAE) recognized Israel as a third Arab state after Egypt (1979) and Jordan (1994). It is of historical importance that the Arabs, who have been in conflict with Israel for a long time over the Palestinian issue, want to turn the intra-regional power balance in their favor due to the Iranian threat, which has increased its influence in the region, and that mutual cooperation steps are taken with Israel in this direction. In this study, the transformation of intra-regional threats and fears with the Abraham Accord was analyzed within the framework of Buzan's Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT). As a result of the study, in the Middle East RSCT, the Palestinian issue has become a secondary concern for the Arabs. They prioritize self-determination, and the treaty is important not only because of the Iranian threat in the region but also because of their support for the defense industry. It has been concluded that Iran's signing of a normalization agreement with Saudi Arabia can be seen as a reflection of the sense of siege it has been exposed to due to the Abraham Accord.

**Key Words:** Abraham Accords, Regional Security Complex, Security, Israel-Gulf Relations.

**Type of Article:** Research Article

## Bölgesel Güvenlik Kompleksi Teorisi Kapsamında İsrail'in Körfez Açılımı: Abraham Antlaşmalarının Bölgedeki Güç Dengelerine Etkisi

### Öz

2020 Abraham Antlaşmasıyla Mısır (1979) ve Ürdün'den (1994) sonra üçüncü bir Arap devleti olarak Birleşik Arap Emirlikleri (BAE) İsrail'i devlet olarak tanımıştır. Filistin meselesi nedeniyle İsrail ile çok uzun zamandır anlaşmazlık içinde olan Arapların, bölgede etkisini arttıran İran tehdidi nedeniyle bölge içi güç dengelerini lehlerine çevirmek istemeleri ve bu doğrultuda İsrail'le karşılıklı işbirliği adımları atılmasıyla tarihi bir öneme sahiptir. Bu çalışmada Abraham Antlaşmasıyla bölge içi tehdit ve korkuların dönüşümü Buzan'ın Bölgesel Güvenlik Kompleksi Teorisi (BGKT) çerçevesinde analiz edilmiştir. Çalışmanın sonucunda ise, Ortadoğu BGK'sında Filistin meselesinin Araplar için ikinci bir mesele haline geldiği, Arapların self determinasyonu öncelikleri ve antlaşmanın sadece bölgedeki İran tehdidi nedeniyle değil savunma sanayi konusundaki desteklerinde önemli itici sebepler olduğu, İran'ın Suudi Arabistan'la normalleşme antlaşması imzalamasının Abraham Antlaşması nedeniyle maruz kaldığı kuşatılmışlık hissinin bir yansıması olarak görülebildiği sonuçlarına ulaşılmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Abraham Antlaşmaları, Bölgesel Güvenlik Kompleksi, Güvenlik, İsrail-Körfez İlişkileri

**Makale Türü:** Araştırma Makalesi

\* PhD Candidate, Karamanoğlu Mehmetbey Üniversitesi, İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi, Siyaset Bilimi ve Uluslararası İlişkiler Bölümü, [dkyamann@gmail.com](mailto:dkyamann@gmail.com), ORCID iD: 0000-0001-5854-5132.

\*\* Assoc. Prof. Dr., Karamanoğlu Mehmetbey Üniversitesi, İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi, Siyaset Bilimi ve Uluslararası İlişkiler Bölümü, [lyigittepe@kmu.edu.tr](mailto:lyigittepe@kmu.edu.tr), ORCID iD: 0000-0002-2508-5501.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

After the disintegration of the bipolar system, the states that are left alone with the problems among themselves, create a complex with mutual security dependence, along with the threats they perceive against each other in terms of security and cooperation. The emphasis here is that these states are not at far distances but in neighboring or close geographies. According to the theory, the mutual trust, cooperation, and threat perceptions of the states close to each other are more intense than the geographies far from each other. For this reason, they form "Regional Security Complexes" with intense mutual security dependency.

With the Abraham Accord signed between Israel and the UAE under the witness of Trump, a Gulf state officially recognized the state of Israel for the first time. The ground of this agreement, which is seen as a normalization step between Israel and the states of the region, was prepared through secret and open negotiations. Despite the reaction from both some Arab states and the Palestinian administration, the parties to the treaty think that they cooperate in a mutual win-win situation. On the other hand, as a reward for the agreement with Israel, they received a promise of support from the USA on various issues. This agreement, which can be seen both as a gain in this way and as cooperation against the Iranian threat in the region, also contributed a lot to the influence of the USA in the region. While it is an important step for Israel's aim of establishing good relations with the states of the region, it also contributes to Israel's regional superiority. In addition, it is of particular importance that the UAE will receive weapons aid from the USA and that it cooperates with Israel in a commercial sense.

The main purpose of this study is to analyze the effects of the Abraham Accord, which is a historical treaty, on the balance of power in the Middle East within the framework of RSCT. In addition, one of the aims of the study is to understand the alliances of the states of the region, important breaking points during this process, and to interpret Buzan's theory by adapting it to today's conjuncture with the findings obtained.

The study seeks to answer the question of "why the Abraham Accords can affect the balance of power in the Middle East regional security complex, particularly in the Levant and Gulf sub-complexes." It also aims to address questions such as "why Israel wants to improve its relations with the Gulf states, why the Abraham Accord was made in this context, and how the Abraham Accord, which is a historical treaty within the framework of the RSCT, influences the balance of power among the regional states while taking into account the influence of the USA in the region".

The theoretical framework of the study is based on Barry Buzan's RSCT. The study employed a case study approach, which is one of the qualitative research designs. In the analysis process of the study, the Abraham Accord was examined, with a focus on the primary parties involved: Israel, the UAE, and the USA as a global power. The USA, in addition to being a global power, is viewed as a state capable of influencing the balance of power in the region and a driving force behind the treaty. The study examines the gains and losses of these states, illustrating how they can affect the balance of power in a cause.

While security and threat perceptions are limited by Buzan's theory in the study, the Middle East Regional Security Complex evaluations and inferences will be made, but mainly within the framework of the Levant and Gulf Regional Security Sub-Complex, which is two of the three sub-complexes (the other one is the Maghreb Regional Security Sub-Complex).

In light of the limited research on the RSCT in the literature and the rare focus on the landmark Abraham Accords, this article's examination of power dynamics in the Levant and Gulf sub-complexes through the lens of the agreement is a noteworthy contribution. Furthermore, the article provides

different perspectives to the literature by tabulating Buzan's theory and the utilized terms and conducting a detailed analysis. It establishes a robust theoretical framework for the Abraham Accords and evaluates their impact on regional power dynamics through Buzan's RSCT, making significant contributions to the literature.

The study first explains the increase in the importance of regional security and the scope of RSCT. Buzan's work was used as it formed the framework of the study and was the theory's creator. The second part explains the Gulf security issues, Israel-Gulf relations, and the Iranian threat. In the last part, the content of the Abraham Accord and its effects on the balance of power were analyzed in this context.

## **2. THE RISE OF REGIONAL SECURITY AND THE REGIONAL SECURITY COMPLEX THEORY**

After the Cold War period, in which the state-centered and power-oriented security approach was dominant, the emergence of new threats on a global scale, and the most dominant realist security approach was insufficient to explain new threats, the need to develop new security approaches emerged. Social and economic issues to which realism attaches secondary importance, and the emergence of cross-border security threats with the development of technology, it has been seen that the goal of protecting borders based on military power is no longer sufficient to ensure the security of states. Accordingly, the dimensions of the threats have also become globalized in the more globalizing world, and transboundary threats have increased the mutual security dependency between states.

At this point, Stephan Walt poses the following question to discipline. "Will regional powers take more aggressive steps to improve their position, as Iraq tried to do by invading Kuwait, or will they be more cautious in the absence of superpower support?" (Walt, 1991: 226). The question Walt asked in 1991 signals that regional security will come to the fore with the decline of US-Soviet rivalry after the Cold War. It is hardly surprising that Walt tries to make such a distinction in a conjuncture such as the Cold War, which can at least include clear policies in general.

However, neither the support or influence of global powers on the regions has decreased, nor have the states implementing regional security policies do this entirely independently of global powers. For example, the presence of the signature and, therefore, the appreciation of the President of the United States along with these states under the text of the Abraham Accord declaration is an important indicator of this. In other words, just as global powers cooperate with the states in their target region and make arms agreements, they can increase their influence by intervening in the policies of state groups from different aspects, even if the policies of global powers change their cover today.

According to Buzan and Waever, with the collapse of the two polar systems mentioned, the importance of regional security has increased (Buzan and Waever, 2003: 480). RSCT, one of the Copenhagen School's approaches to security studies, which began with the idea of redefining the scope of security (Bakan,2018: 147), emphasizes the importance of regional security. The framework of the theory was first drawn in Buzan's work *People, States and Fear* (Buzan,2003: 140).

RSCT distinguishes between the system-level interaction of global forces, whose capabilities enable them to cross distances, and the subsystem-level interaction of smaller forces, whose main security environment is their local region. The main idea here is that since most threats move more easily over short distances than long distances, mutual security interdependence is shaped in regional-based clusters, and this is called security complexes (Buzan and Waever, 2003: 14).

According to Buzan, RSCT cannot be applied to any country group. For a region to qualify as RSCT, a group of states or actors must have mutual security dependency. This is necessary to distinguish

it from the surrounding security zones (Buzan and Waever, 2003: 47). We can deduce that the interdependence of security that Buzan mentioned is different from the definition of "interdependence" (Keohane and Nye, 1973) by Robert O. Keohane and Joseph Nye in international relations. While Keohane and Nye's "interdependence" describes a more positive interchange that enhances the cooperation potentials of states, Buzan here uses the interdependence of security to express both the relations of friendship and hostility and rather the intersection of perceptions of mutual threat.

The interactions that arise as a result of the anarchic structure and its effects on the balance of power, on the other hand, the pressures of local geographical proximity, cause the emergence of RSCTs. The security interaction between physically close neighbors is greater than between states located in different regions. The reason why adjacency is more effective in terms of security is that many threats move more easily over short distances than over long distances. Anarchy, distance effect, and geographical diversity form a pattern of regionally-based clusters, as security interdependence is more intense among states inside such complexes than outside states (Buzan and Waever, 2003: 46). We can formulate Buzan's regional-based clusters in the formation of RSCTs as follows.

**Table 1.** Describing Buzan's regional-based clusters in the formation of RSCTs

Anarchy + geographic proximity = security interdependence ⇔ regional-based clustering model (Buzan and Waever, 2003)
--

According to the table created above; when the state of anarchy in a region combines with geographical proximity, a natural mutual security dependence arises within that geography. This mutual security dependence, in turn, exclusively forms an example of a regional-based clustering model.

The region can be redefined or generated depending on who or what is securitized. At this point, the aim is to examine security discourse and practices instead of regional discourses and practices of actors (Buzan and Waever, 2003: 48).

Buzan mentioned three essential components for the formation of a security complex =>

- Organization of units and differentiations within themselves.

The expression of differences within themselves indicates that two adjoining states with no accounts receivable cannot form a regional security complex. However, it can be concluded that this situation is actually a natural process since it goes against the nature of the states that they are geographically close and do not establish security dependency.

- Friendship and hostility patterns.

The effort of a group of adjoining states to gain regional superiority in their region, the secret-open exchanges made in this direction, the alliances formed, and the friendship-enmity structure are both the cause and the result.

- Distribution of power among the main units.

In order to affect the power balance with the aforementioned friendship-enmity patterns, the fluctuations of power between the main units lead us to the dynamic structure of this component and show the importance of the concept of power balance in complexes. The basis of security complexes is the establishment of common interests of states and the creation of positive relations. The regional security complex can take shape according to the conditions of the time and allow new complexes with it. The security formations created in the regions may also contain sectoral differences (Yiğittepe, 2022:

95). In this context, some regions may have political-military formations, while others may prioritize economic-social security-focused formations.

Significant changes in any of these require a redefinition of the RSCT. This approach enables regional security to be analyzed in both static and dynamic terms (Buzan, 2003: 143). In this context, in order for a region to form a regional security complex, there must be a certain geographical boundary separating this complex from other regions; two or more actors are included in the said regional security complex, and these actors are geographically close to each other, and security perceptions in terms of hostility and friendship relations must be determined. It is necessary to be connected with each other, that is, the existence of solid relations, including defense, neighborliness, interest, suspicion, fear, or threat (Cavlak and Gök, 2021: 2134).

According to Alagöz and Kandemir, RSCT is actually securitization becoming practical in global politics (Karagöz and Kandemir, 2015: 114). As a matter of fact, according to Buzan, an RSCT must necessarily include securitization dynamics (Buzan and Waever, 2003: 11). It can be concluded that securitization is the leading creator of these complexes for the regional complexes, which Buzan refers to as a group of states whose security perceptions cannot be considered separately.

This generally means that actors in the region securitize each other (Buzan and Waever, 2003: 56). The UAE's securitization of Iran in order to cooperate with Israel in the Gulf sub-complex has made us conclude that "securitization" can be a legitimizing tool in the regional complex as well as in the policies of states. In addition, securitization elements make states part of a RSCT. However, there is a situation where the most important driving force here is the elements of the balance of power rather than securitization. At this point, while the state of the power balance in the region includes the most inclusive elements that enable the formation of an RSCT, securitization can only be a means of disrupting (trying to turn in its favor) or protecting the balance of power.

However, sometimes, even if there are patterns of friendship and hostility, a RSCT may not occur in the region. According to Buzan, there are two conditions that explain why an RSCT may not be available. The first of these is the inability to structure. In some areas, the capabilities of local forces are so limited that their power only goes within their own borders. There is not enough security interaction between them and locally directed security views that these units have to create RSCT. This is also true for places with large ocean expanses where interaction is difficult due to geographic isolation, such as New Zealand (Buzan, 2003: 143-144).

The second situation is when the direct presence of foreign powers in a region is strong enough to suppress security relations between local peoples. This situation is known as overlay. It is a large deployment of soldiers of foreign states intervening in the region. However, intervention often enhances local security dynamics, subordinating them to the broader pattern of great power competition, and can even destroy them. Local security dynamics are uncertain during the overlay period; therefore, a local RSCT cannot be defined. Prolonged armed conflicts of the great power result in the alignment of local states according to the competition of the great power (Buzan, 2003: 143-144).

According to Gerald Helman and Steven Ratner's hypothesis (1992), weak states can pose a serious security threat. These weaknesses of states, whose survival is threatened by internal pressures and political instability, have the potential to create conflicts that can spread to other states, thus causing serious security threats (Helman and Ratner, 1992). The fact that weak states have a very low level of survivability makes them more vulnerable to foreign interventions. It causes the concept of sovereignty to remain at a minimum level enough for them to exist (Helman and Ratner, 1992). In the last case, we can develop Helman and Ratner's weak states hypothesis and come up with an expression as follows.

**Table 2.** Describing Helman and Ratner's Weak States Hypothesis

Increasing intra-state conflicts + Political instability → Decreased ability of states to resolve internal threats → Foreign intervention → The situation where the concept of sovereignty has become problematic in practice (Helman and Ratner, 1992)

This table explains the situation that emerged as a result of the increase in intra-state conflicts and political instability. In this case, the ability of states to resolve internal threats decreases and the possibility of external intervention increases. As a result of these external interventions, the concept of sovereignty becomes problematic in practice. That is, internal instability and conflicts lead to external interventions and sovereignty problems.

This is consistent with the shift in focus of most security interactions from the global to lower levels within the international system (Buzan and Waever: 2003). In this case, it explains why global powers prioritize their penetration policies and attach great importance to their long or short-term infiltration attempts (such as military support, trade agreements and willingness to mediate in the region). While this approach highlights the importance of dividing security into more minor parts, it demonstrates its compatibility with Buzan's regional security complex, which explains these security groups in terms of their interactions among themselves and also with outsiders.

Helman and Ratner's hypothesis supports Buzan's approach. According to Buzan, if a state is strong, most of its security threats come from outside, but if a state is weak, most of the threats come from within, which damages the concept of national security. States exposed to external influences often struggle to distinguish their internal problems from those generated by external influences. The anarchic structure of the international system, when combined with a large number of weak states, threatens international security as it increases the risk of internal conflict and interstate conflict (Buzan, 1991: 100-107). This brings us to the concept of regional security in the Middle East RSCT, where many weak states coexist. In the Middle East region, characterized by numerous weak states, intricate relations of friendship and enmity, and a complex web of threats, it serves as an example highlighting the significance of regional security shaped by the policies and threat perceptions of the states in the geography close to each other.

Below, Buzan's approach to reflecting internal conflicts on the international system, which we quoted above, has been developed and extended to the regional level by merging it with the “weak states” hypothesis.

**Table 3.** Combining Helman and Ratner's Hypothesis and Buzan's Approach To The Reflection Of The Internal Conflicts with Region Level

International security threat = Anarchic structure of the international system + Presence of many weak states in the region + Increased risks of internal (domestic politics) and intraregional or interstate conflicts (Buzan,1991; Helman and Ratner,1992)

According to this table created above; when Buzan's statement that the threat to a weak state is more open to external influences is combined with Helman and Ratner's hypothesis that the weakness of weak states also weakens the surrounding states, it states that states within a regional security complex infect each other with the risks of conflict among themselves and in domestic politics. Accordingly, it shows how increasing mutual security dependency is formed within the region. As a result, when these factors come together, also the risk of international security threats increases.

On the other hand, the capabilities of global powers are quite wide-ranging and have significant effects. For this reason, the logic of geography and neighborhood in security relations is largely overcome by the superpowers. Therefore, great powers can exert their influence regardless of territorial proximity. However, small forces with limited capabilities and security interests tend to overpower them. Great powers can extend their influence throughout the international system, often by intervening in a few strategically important areas. The distinguishing point here is that regional states may engage in security interactions with geographically distant great powers, but this does not create mutual security dependency (Buzan and Waever, 2003: 46). The influence of great powers can manifest indirectly through various forms of support and assistance offered to a state or directly through the participation of foreign military forces or economic support (Buzan, 1991: 213).

For this reason, as RSCTs are formed by regional actor groups, they play an important role in the relations among their members. On the other hand, they determine how foreign powers can enter the region (Buzan, 2003: 142). According to Buzan, the penetration policy links the distribution of power model among the global powers to the regional dynamics of the RSCTs. Opportunities and demands for great powers to penetrate the region arise from competition among regional states. Local competitors are naturally encouraged to seek outside assistance, and this mechanism links local competitive patterns with global ones (Buzan and Waever, 2003: 46). This mechanism determines the balance of power between both regional and global powers.

The sub-complexes that Buzan uses as "miniature anarchies" (Buzan, 2003: 143) have the same definition as RSCTs. The difference is that a subcomplex is embedded within a larger RSCT. Subcomplexes, which represent distinctive patterns of security interdependence, help us define an RSCT as a whole and construct a broader model. Subcomplexes are not a necessary feature of RSCTs, but the device of subcomplexes eliminates most of the situations that can arise from the actions of overlapping actors. For example, if the Gulf and the Levant were seen as separate RSCTs, Iraq would be a member of both. However, Iraq is considered a member of both the Gulf subcomplex and the broader Middle East complex (Buzan and Waever, 2003: 51-52).

RSCT provides an essential tool for understanding regional conflicts and cooperation efforts. This theory, which serves to analyze the relations between the security concerns of international actors and states that have formed alliances as a result of interdependence for regional security. It sheds light on numerous historical situations that define the Middle East RSCT.

### **3. GULF SECURITY ISSUES AND ISRAEL-GULF RELATIONS**

Regional insecurity dynamics in the Middle East show a rather complex picture. The conflict between Palestinians and Jewish immigrants rose to the level of states after the official establishment of Israel in 1948 and led to many interstate wars.

The transformation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict into the Israeli-Arab world conflict, with a focus on the transnational characteristics of Arab nationalism, has strengthened the Middle East RSCT and defined it as a complex. According to Buzan, small and medium-sized powers that lack common cultural ties and are geographically distant, such as Morocco and Oman, are unlikely to address their national security concerns using a single model of security interdependence. The most fundamental factor connecting the Middle East security dynamics over long distances is the common symbols of Arabism and Islam and their focus on the conflict with Israel (Buzan and Waever, 2003: 191). For the most fundamental reason for this, Buzan gives us the following answer; "Jerusalem, the third holiest place in Islam, was embroiled in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, garnering broader and deeper support for Palestinian organizations as a symbol of Arab oppression" (Buzan and Waever, 2003: 195). For this

reason, the Israeli-Arab conflict, which emerged with the support of the Arabs, is one of the most critical power balances in the region (Zarghami, Zekerian and Barzegar, 2013: 352). As an element of this power balance, it has been a significant factor defining the Middle East regional security complex. This dynamic enhances our understanding of the complexity and significance of the power balance in the region.

Egypt's official recognition of Israel in 1979 can be considered as a result of polarization and ideological differences in the Arab world (Sayigh, 1997: 55-58). This move of Egypt weakened its position in the Arab world and was criticized by other Arab states (Schiff and Ya'ari, 1995: 177-180). However, Egypt's signing of a peace treaty with Israel was seen as an important step in challenging the long-standing anti-Israel opposition in the Arab world (Telhami, 1990: 91-94). Because it opened the door to questioning this anti-Israel sentiment.

According to another vital view, Egypt's recognition of Israel created a road map for other Arab states. These states, seeing that it is possible to make peace with Israel, have started to follow the path followed by Egypt (Black and Morris, 2018). In particular, the conclusion of a peace treaty between Israel and Jordan in 1994 meant ending the official hostility between the two states and establishing diplomatic relations. This situation has been evaluated as an important example showing that a peaceful solution is possible in the Middle East (Rubenberg, 2003: 259).

In this way, the situations that developed based on the Arab-Israeli conflicts that developed due to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the ideological rivalries, and the conflicts among the Arab states, together with the Cold War period and the Arab Cold War in particular, affected the balances of the Middle East. On the other hand, it has also defined a complex known as the "Single Middle East RSCT" and the "Levant sub-complex".

The second sub-complex of Buzan, the Gulf sub-complex, focuses mainly on the tripartite rivalry between the Gulf Arab states led by Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia. The hostility between Iran and Iraq stems from various border disputes, rivaling power ambitions of leaders in both countries, problems with Kurdish minorities, and the fate of the Shiite population in Southern Iraq. In addition, the universality of Islam and the fact that the 1979 revolution in Iran added a prominent ideological element to the leadership rivalries also affected the situation of intra-regional balances (Buzan and Waever, 2003: 192).

According to Buzan, the Iranian threat is the most obvious example of regional states securitizing each other in a regional security complex (Buzan and Waever, 2003: 6). The Iranian threat in the region stems from various reasons. The "Iranian Threat," which has almost become a term, expresses the concerns of other states regarding Iran's activities, such as military, nuclear, ballistic missile, and terrorism, as Iran gains regional and international power. Iran's increasing regional influence and support to groups in neighboring countries have increased the security concerns of other states in the region.

In this region, a dispute with any Arab neighbor risks becoming a conflict with all Arab neighbors for Iran as well as for Israel (Buzan and Waever, 2003: 189). In particular, the end of the monarchy in Iran and the establishment of an Islamic Republic of Iran were seen as threats by Saudi leaders and other Gulf states. The fact that they came together under the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) roof during the Iran-Iraq war (Dar and Presley, 2001) indicates this.

On the other hand, the role of the USA and Russia in the Middle East can affect the balance of power in the regional security complex. During the Cold War, a balance of power in the Middle East was shaped by the military, diplomatic, and economic influences of the USA and the USSR in the region.



By supporting Israel, the USA formed a strong ally in the Middle East and provided military aid to other regional states. The USSR, on the other hand, increased its military aid and economic support to Arab states and supported Palestinian resistance movements against Israel (Gelvin, 2016: 156-160).

The Gulf Wars, on the other hand, affected some basic structures and component sub-complexes of the Middle East RSCT (Ehteshami, 2016: 45). The war caused the US to increase its military presence in the region and to become a decisive element of the US's Middle East policy. This situation impacted the balance of power in the region, and Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states began to rely more on US support against Iran. (Fawcett, 2013). This situation continued until Saddam Hussein was invaded by a US-led coalition force in 2003.

The US invasion of Iraq and the Second Gulf War once again caused changes in the balance of power in the region. In this process, the Baath regime in Iraq was overthrown, and instability and a power vacuum emerged in Iraq. The Baath regime was based on a Sunni Arab population and thus could balance with Iran, which has a Shiite population. However, with the overthrow of the regime, the weight of the Shiite population increased, thus increasing Iran's influence in the region. In addition, the instability and power vacuum in Iraq caused various groups, such as terrorist organizations, to gain influence in the region. This situation has also worried other states in the region, and these states have become more dependent on the USA as before to ensure their own security (Ehteshami, 2016: 46). This approach strengthened the position of the Western powers, especially the USA, in the GCC states, making them protectorates. The USA's transition to the "dual containment" policy of Iran and Iraq, instead of the unsuccessful balancing policy in the Gulf, caused global factors to play a more significant role in the security dynamics of the Gulf (Buzan and Waever, 2003: 201). This transformation illustrates the ever-shifting nature of the power balance in the region and how global factors can significantly impact regional security dynamics. Additionally, the instability and power vacuum in the region have increased the influence of groups like terrorist organizations and made regional countries more dependent on the USA for their security.

The Arab Spring (2011), on the other hand, includes important developments for the Middle East RSCT and important results that affect the balance of power (El-Nawawy and Khamis, 2012). Especially the regime changes in Bahrain, Egypt, Libya, Syria, and Yemen caused a serious change in the balance of power in the region. First of all, the uprisings in Bahrain caused Saudi Arabia to intervene, claiming that Iran was increasing its influence in the region. While this intervention increased the influence of Saudi Arabia in the region, it also increased the tension between Iran and Saudi Arabia (Salloukh, 2013). The Arab Spring is a consequence of escalating instability in the Middle East, as it reconfigures the dynamics among regional powers and further complicates the balance of power in the region.

During this period, Russia's influence in the Middle East experienced a significant boost as it actively engaged in the Syrian civil war, while its demand for energy resources from the region continued to grow. Simultaneously, China's presence and influence in the Middle East have become increasingly apparent, driven by its mounting energy resource demands. China has expanded its economic footprint in the region, notably through investments facilitated by financial institutions such as the Regional Development Bank (Fawcett, 2013: 168-169). This shift in the influence of global powers like Russia and China further underscores the complex and evolving nature of the Middle East RSCT, as it navigates the interests and actions of both regional and global actors.

Looking at Israel's relations with the Gulf states, there has been no formal relationship for a long time due to historical hostilities. However, there were some contacts nonetheless. Especially from the late 1970s to the 1990s, secret intelligence and commercial relations existed between Israel and some

Gulf states. For example, there are allegations of some collusion attempts between Israel and the UAE in the 1980s. However, these secret contacts were not recognized as official relations, and these states generally denied their relations with Israel. Due to Israel's conflicts with the Palestinians and the Arab-Israeli conflict, Gulf states have reservations about establishing open relations with Israel (Guttstadt, 2013).

For this reason, it is known that relations are usually not officially disclosed and remain confidential. For example, during the 1973 Yom Kippur War, some Gulf states were alleged to have secretly supported Israel, but it was never officially confirmed. However, some reports claim that these states provided secret materials and equipment to Israel and even directly supported the Israeli army (Bergman, 2018: 397). The intensity of covert support and contacts reflects the challenging navigation of diplomatic relations in the region, representing only the visible surface of the complex diplomatic maneuvers taking place in the Middle East.

The main reason behind the Gulf states' support of Israel stems from the disruption of the power balance in the Arab world caused by Israel and the need to counterbalance regional rivals such as Iran. Therefore, some Gulf states have provided covert support to Israel and, for example, assisted in Israel's victory in the war (Yom Kippur) (Sayigh, 1997).

The revelation of the Gulf states' secret support for Israel through WikiLeaks documents has caused a great disappointment among the Arab world and especially the Palestinians. This situation was perceived as Israel gaining more superiority over the Arab world, and the Palestinian cause getting weaker. On the other hand, it also caused Israel to become more acceptable in the Arab world (Fawcett, 2013). The WikiLeaks revelation sheds light on the complex and often contradictory dynamics of Middle East politics. While it exposed secret support for Israel by some Gulf states, causing dismay among Palestinians and others in the Arab world, it also highlights the evolving geopolitical landscape where pragmatic interests sometimes transcend historical grievances, ultimately reshaping regional alliances and perceptions.

The Gulf War indirectly influenced Israel's relations with the Gulf states as Israel openly supported the US-led coalition forces during the conflict. In addition, the fact that the US-led coalition forces had more significant influence in the region after the war strengthened Israel's position in the region (Gresh, 2020). The Gulf War not only altered the dynamics of Israel's relations with the Gulf states but also underscored the intricate interplay of regional geopolitics in the Middle East.

However, a potential for cooperation between the Gulf states and Israel has also emerged. During the war, Iraq fired ballistic missiles at Israel, but the Patriot missile defense systems established by the US-led coalition destroyed the missiles, preventing Israel's direct intervention. This demonstrates Israel's strong position in the region and its military technology. Israel's military and technological superiority in the region has encouraged Gulf states to cooperate with Israel in security and intelligence. This situation formed the basis of future normalization between Israel and the Gulf (Jones and Guzansky, 2020: 23-27). The Gulf War served as a catalyst, indirectly pushing Israel and the Gulf states towards potential cooperation, driven by shared security concerns and the recognition of Israel's military prowess in the region.

Israel's proven military and technological superiority in many cases, along with Iran's growing influence in the region, has further encouraged Israel and the Gulf states to deepen their cooperation. In particular, the relations between Israel and the UAE, the primary parties of the Abraham Accords, date back to the 1979 Iranian Revolution. The strongest element that brings both states together is their struggle with Iran (Dikmen, 2020). The UAE's decision to normalize relations with Israel is based on

the opinion of Mohammed Bin Zayed, Prince of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. It aims to initiate cooperation with Israel on security issues, especially in cyber issues, and to engage in influence diplomacy with the United States (Dazi Heni, 2020: 4). This rapprochement is a significant development that could fundamentally alter the political dynamics and alliances in the region.

Meetings between Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni and UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah Ibn Zayed in 2015 helped moderate Israeli-Gulf relations. As a result of this meeting, it was decided that there would be more cooperation between the two states on intelligence sharing and other issues (Jones and Guzansky, 2020). These diplomatic meetings and agreements highlight the evolving nature of Israel's relations with Gulf states, driven by shared interests in regional security and technological collaboration.

The meeting between Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and UAE Foreign Minister Mohammed Bin Zayed resulted in the decision to take a stronger stance against Iran. In 2018, Israeli Minister of Culture Miri Regev visited the UAE. This meeting aims to make the contacts between the two states more visible and to analyze the response from the Arab states. In an interview with the Yedioth Anhronot newspaper in 2020, UAE Ambassador to Washington Yusuf Al Utayba stated that they are willing to improve relations with Israel and also said that what Hamas did was wrong and that Hezbollah is a terrorist organization. These policies, on the other hand, were evaluated as attempts to lay the groundwork for the Abraham Accord (Şahin and Güzel, 2021: 20). This process has led to closer cooperation, especially between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, against Iran.

For Israel, the Gulf region has a strategic importance. First, most states in the Gulf region are at enmity with Israel's greatest enemies, such as Syria and Iran. Israel aims to reduce the security threats it may face by establishing better relations with the states in the region. Israel aimed to reduce Iran's influence in the region by cooperating more closely with these states. Gulf states, on the other hand, aim to benefit from Israel's military and technological capacity to develop their defense systems. This could increase Israel's influence in the region, as well as provide economic opportunities. Secondly, the Gulf is strategically important as it provides a significant amount of oil to the world economy. By establishing close relations with these countries, Israel can take essential steps to diversify its energy resources, increase its energy independence and establish economic cooperation. Finally, the Gulf region is also of military importance to Israel. Israel can access the region through US military bases and other military installations in the region and protect its security interests through military cooperation (Ulrichsen,2016).

As a result, many factors are behind the normalization process between Israel and the Gulf states. Israel is a state specializing in technology and innovation. Economic cooperation between the two sides can present great opportunities for both Israel and the Gulf states. Ultimately, factors include security, stability, defense cooperation, and economic opportunities. These factors have helped to replace historical hostilities and tensions with the process of cooperation and normalization.

Power relations are fluid, and order is rare in the highly dynamic and unstructured regional system of the Middle East. Inevitably, the fluidity of power and the absence of regional hegemonic powers open an invitation to foreign intervention. Beyond that, the dynamism of the region causes this subsystem to re-divide into sub-regions and creates opportunities for small but rich Arab states to play a more effective role in the regional power balance (Ehteshami, 2014: 29). With the reflection of the effects of the Arab Spring on the alignments in the Middle East, it sharpened the division of the Middle East into status quo and revisionist ranks. This paved the way for the Gulf states to become not only players but also the leading powers in the region, paving the way for the Abraham Accords (Yossef, 2020). In the face of the sharpening of the ranks of the Middle Eastern states, the Gulf states were mostly

excluded from the bloc as they were unwilling to be included in these ranks. For this reason, it paved the way for them to be more effective in the region in order to affect more comfortable political moves and the balance of power.

#### **4. ABRAHAM ACCORDS AND NEW BALANCES IN GULF SECURITY**

In September 2020, the Abraham Accord was signed between the UAE and the state of Israel. Thus, after Egypt and Jordan, the UAE became the third Arab state to recognize Israel and the first state in the Gulf to recognize Israel. For this reason, the Abraham Accord was seen as a turning point in the geography of the Middle East. A short time later, Bahrain also joined the Abraham Accords (Hincks, 2020). They joined the agreements in Sudan and Morocco in October and December 2020, respectively.

Before the agreements, Israel's political relations with these states were not the same. Relations range from open hostility (e.g. Sudan) to a lack of diplomatic relations (e.g. UAE and Bahrain) to short-term diplomatic relations at the liaison office level (e.g. Morocco, 1995–2000). However, the historical significance of this treaty comes from the fact that it is the third example of normalization between Israel and its Arab neighbors (after Egypt in 1979 and Jordan in 1994) and the occasional abandonment of hostilities in the often conflict-torn Middle East (Yossef, 2021: 3). Undoubtedly, the Abraham Accords signify a remarkable transformation in Middle East geopolitics, offering new prospects for peace and cooperation in a historically tumultuous region.

Its full name is the Abraham Accord: Treaty of Peace, Diplomatic Relations and Full Normalization between the UAE and Israel. Reaffirming their joint commitment to normalize relations and promote stability through diplomatic engagement, increased economic cooperation, and other close coordination, pursuant to the Abraham Accord ratified by the United States; Recognizing that the Arab and Jewish peoples are the descendants of a common ancestor, Abraham, and in this spirit, it was made to nurture a reality in which Muslims, Jews, Christians and people of all faiths, sects, creeds, and nationalities live in the Middle East (The State of Israel and The United Arab Emirates, 2020).

In the agreement with Bahrain, another Gulf state that signed the agreement, they expressed their consensus on opening a stable and secure environment in the Middle East region with similar expressions. They also stated that they would take the initiative to establish full diplomatic relations and advance the peace by avoiding threats and using force. The two states will increase their cooperation in economic, commercial, tourism, cultural, and educational fields. It was also stated that the agreement could set an example for other states in the region and create an opportunity for a more comprehensive network of peace and cooperation in the region (The State of Israel and Bahrain Declaration, 2020). The Abraham Accord's emphasis on promoting peaceful coexistence among different faiths and nationalities in the Middle East reflects a unique diplomatic approach in a region historically marred by conflicts.

The Abraham Accord is considered as an important turning point that could impact the balance of power in the Middle East region. Israel's normalization process with the Gulf states is a situation that may affect the power equation in the region. In 2009, an Israeli diplomat said that "Gulf Arabs believe in Israel's role because of their perception of Israel's close relationship with the United States, as well as their feeling that they can trust Israel regarding Iran," and said that in general, Gulf Arabs believe in Israel (Black, 2019: 3). The Abraham Accord represents a transformative development with the potential to recalibrate Middle East geopolitics, especially given Gulf Arabs' faith in Israel's role, founded on its robust US ties and their perception of trustworthiness regarding Iran.

In addition to promoting bilateral economic and technological cooperation between the parties, the Abraham Accords' US presence in the Middle East as well as arms sales and Iran's hegemonic ambitions in the region, as well as the effects of the agreements on US security in the Middle East and

the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, It is essential to understand how the cooperation network will be affected or reshaped. Because this agreement is one of the latest examples of alliance-building efforts in the region since the 1990s (Yossef, 2021: 3). As a matter of fact, by reminding Egypt and Jordan's recognition of Israel in the text of the declaration, it was also pointed out that the UAE signed an important and historical agreement in the Middle East in this sense.

Nevertheless, the motivation factors of the Israel-Egypt (1978) and Israel-Jordan (1994) peace agreements, which are based on the principle of peace in return for the land occupied by Israel in 1967, are quite different from the Abraham Treaties. Unlike the 1970s and 1990s treaties, the Abraham Accords significantly ignore the Palestinian question. It is an agreement that deals with the security interests of the Iranian problem and brings the parties of the Gulf states closer to Israel and, therefore, to their economic and strategic interests (Dazi Heni, 2020: 2).

This treaty represents an important change in regional relations in this sense, as it started the normalization process between Israel and the Arab states. On the other hand, Israel is accepted as a strong state in terms of military and technology, and with this normalization process, Israel can become more effective in the region. It gives Israel direct access to the Persian Gulf and Arabian Peninsula like never before. On the other hand, the Abraham Accord may also affect relations with Iran in the region. Israel and the Gulf states take Iran's influence and threats in the region seriously. This agreement is a step taken to limit and balance Iran's influence in the region.

On the other hand, the Iranian government strongly criticized the Abraham Accord and stated that the normalization step with Israel was a big mistake. Iran believes that the treaty will increase the presence of Israel in the region and the influence of the USA in the region (Wintour, 2020: 1). Iran's strong criticism of the Abraham Accord reflects its concerns about the growing influence of Israel and the USA in the region.

Especially since the beginning of the 2010s, the increasing instability in the Middle East has been working in favor of Iran. This means the growth of Iran's power or influence in the region. On the other hand, the GCC has been permanently split since 2017. Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt implemented diplomatic relations and economic embargoes on 5 June 2017, accusing Qatar of supporting terrorism. This action created division among the GCC member states and led to a region-wide crisis (Dazi Heni, 2020: 3). The increasing instability in the Middle East and the GCC split have created a complex and evolving regional dynamic, with Iran's influence on the rise and a deepening divide among Gulf states, challenging the traditional power structures in the region.

The Obama administration (2009-2017) initiated a shift towards disengagement from Middle East conflicts. Again in 2015, an international action plan was signed for Iran's nuclear program. In this way, it was aimed to limit Iran's nuclear weapons and to control them by the international community. The Trump administration (2017-2021) left this agreement in 2018. This means the re-imposition of sanctions. Following the US withdrawal from Iran's nuclear program, uncertainties arose about the future of the agreement and Iran's nuclear activities. These developments posed challenges for the remaining parties to the deal (the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Russia, and China) to maintain Iran's commitments. Additionally, the upcoming US presidential elections with the US withdrawal from the region, along with the sharp divisions that emerged within the GCC due to the Qatar crisis, encouraged the Gulf to quickly normalize its relations with Israel (Dazi Heni, 2020: 3). Indeed, the Gulf states' swift normalization of relations with Israel can be understood as a pragmatic response to the changing dynamics in the Middle East.

"This relationship with Israel would have been very open and welcomed because we needed their military equipment and technology," said a former UAE diplomat. Jamal al-Suwaidi, the founder of the government-backed Emirati Center for Strategic Studies, put this more bluntly: "The Palestinian cause is no longer at the forefront of Arab interests, as it has been for many years; in the light of the difficulties, threats, and problems faced by the countries of the region, it has sharply lost its priority." Similarly, he also said that the Israeli problem could not be compared with "threats posed by Iran, Hezbollah and terrorist groups" (Black, 2019: 5). For this reason, Israel, the UAE, and Bahrain have significantly converged on security issues with the Abraham Accord, establishing cooperation and alliances against common security threats. These collaborations serve as a collective response to counterbalance Iran's influence in the region (Dazi Heni, 2020: 3). The Abraham Accord marks a significant shift in regional priorities, with security cooperation against common threats taking precedence over historic issues.

On the other hand, according to Ian Black, Netanyahu's game plan is to improve relations with the Gulf and beyond, thereby marginalizing and oppressing the Palestinians (Black, 2019: 2). Considering the Gulf's view of the Palestinian cause, the Abraham Accords seem to have contributed to this view.

According to Dazi Heni, Israel is motivated by gains from economic and technological cooperation rather than any political will to find a peaceful solution. By largely ignoring the Palestinian issue, the Abraham Accords are creating a new divide in the geopolitics of the region, not by advancing the peace process, but by allowing Israel unprecedented access to the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf. This cooperation encompasses joint projects and investments in areas such as technology, energy, tourism, and trade, potentially stimulating economic growth in the region. The UAE and Israel have planned to invest in tourism and infrastructure projects, especially in Socotra, connecting Haifa and Eilat on the Red Sea coast (Dazi Heni, 2020: 6). Furthermore, the Abraham Accords have the potential to reshape regional geopolitics and economic growth.

When we examine the economic aspect, the trade volume of Israel with the Gulf countries is increasing. However, it can be said that there are many opportunities for cooperation in technology, particularly in fields such as cybersecurity, medical supplies, irrigation, and diamonds (Black, 2019: 6). The Abraham Accord now allows these implicit ties to grow on more comfortable ground.

Buzan sees economic ties as a backup fortress for the continuation of ties in case the measures taken against international terrorism lose their effectiveness (Buzan, 2003: 154). This situation also shows how the Abraham Accord can become a tool for the future role or task it will assume.

The potential of the Abraham Accord to increase stability in the region stems from these reasons. The normalization process between Israel and Arab states can reduce tensions by strengthening diplomatic engagement and dialogue. This, in turn, can contribute to increasing regional stability and reducing the risks of conflict. The agreement brings a new dimension to regional diplomacy and provides the opportunity for direct contact and cooperation between the Gulf states and Israel. This may affect the political, military, and economic balances in the region. The issue of selling spare parts for defense industry equipment to the Gulf states by Israel is also an important factor in terms of the balance of power. This sale could affect military capacities in the region and further strengthen Israel's military superiority.

In addition, as a result of the agreement, purchase contract negotiations were held between the USA and the UAE regarding F-35 warplanes. With the signing of the Abraham Accords, the UAE has taken a commitment from the USA to deliver F-35 fighter jets by 2027. The access of Gulf countries

such as the UAE to advanced weapon systems like the F-35 may change the regional security balance. The founding partner countries of the F-35 fighter jet project are the USA, the UK, Turkey, Italy, the Netherlands, Canada, Australia, Denmark, Norway, South Korea, Japan, and Israel. Among them, Japan, South Korea, and Israel are software partners (Yiğittepe, 2018: 284). Later, due to the diplomatic crisis with the USA, Turkey was excluded from this project as a result of the Caatsa sanctions.

In addition, the sale of the F-35 could force other countries in the region to engage in military technology competition. This might prompt other states to make efforts to develop or acquire aircraft with similar capabilities (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2018). This technological competition could reshape the regional military landscape and potentially lead to increased arms acquisitions and defense research and development among neighboring states.

From the perspective of Bahrain, it is seen that Bahrain has clarified the order of priority for its survival. Bahrain's Minister of Interior said: "If Palestine is our Arab cause, then Bahrain is our existence." Similarly, some experts have said that "The Gulf is also an Arab cause." It is seen that Iran's threat to the Gulf is more critical. Accordingly, as a result of the Gulfization of the Middle East, Gulf issues take priority over other issues in the Middle East (Palestine case). It is seen that the Arab-Israeli conflict, which connects Arab and Islamic states with its symbolic intensity, has become a secondary position (Yossef, 2021: 11). The prioritization of Gulf-related matters suggests a recalibration of regional focus and an emphasis on addressing the perceived threat from Iran and the broader security and stability concerns in the Gulf region.

There has been no conventional war between Israel and an Arab state since 1982. In fact, during the 2006 Second Lebanon War, most Arab states condemned Hezbollah. However, the greatest threat to Israeli security comes from the Iranian-led "Axis of Resistance" for three decades. Despite all its economic and military might, Israel remains a psychologically small and besieged state. Iran, on the other hand, is making extensive efforts to turn this threat perception into a strategic reality. This includes building a large military infrastructure in Syria, reaching out to radical Palestinian groups in the West Bank and Jordan, conducting cyberattacks against Israeli infrastructure and supporting Hezbollah and Hamas, among other actions. Due to its small size, historical disadvantages, and extreme vulnerability to casualties, Israel's strategic doctrine emphasizes preemptive strikes against potential threats before they become existential. This strategy has been evident in Israel's actions in Syria over the years. Iran waged a war of attrition with its allies to open a new front against Israel and prevent it from establishing a military base there. It is no coincidence that Saudi Arabia and the UAE have pursued the development of nuclear weapons in the past decade, fearing Iran's acquisition of nuclear capabilities. Gulf leaders aim to reach a level of deterrence vis-à-vis Iran, even in the absence of direct U.S. involvement (Kenneth, 2020). In this complex geopolitical landscape, the pursuit of security and deterrence against Iran remains a central focus for Israel and its Gulf neighbors.

Buzan and Waeber's 2003 interpretation of Israel and the Gulf still retains some validity today in the context of the Abraham Accord. According to Buzan, even if at some point in the future Israel is not presumed to be existentially threatened by Arab states and is only a strong player in a dynamic balance of power system, its much higher level of development than any other, with US support, would still instill fear in its neighbors. Revolutions or critical political changes in the Gulf countries can easily cause them to lose their positions in the Gulf, as seen in Iran and Egypt before. Leadership changes can make a significant difference, as most of the players in this subcomplex, the Gulf, are weak states. Nevertheless, it is evident that the security dynamics of the Levant and Gulf sub-complexes are becoming increasingly interconnected (Buzan and Waeber, 2003: 256). In a way to serve this view, the

Abraham Accord has strongly linked the security of the Levant's main element, Israel, and the Gulf states, as seen in the areas of cooperation outlined in the declaration texts.

On the other hand, this cooperation points to the vital interests of the region's people. Unlike in the past, it is quite significant that the agreements received little popular criticism in the Arab world. This means that in today's Middle East people are no longer primarily seeking pan-Islamic or pan-Arab unity but are instead looking for improved public services, such as social welfare, education, and healthcare, as well as more economic opportunities, innovation, and the rule of law (Frisch, 2020). The Abraham Accord reflects a shift in the Middle East where practical interests and regional stability are taking precedence over historical ideological divides.

On the political basis of the “Abraham breakthrough”, it's essential to consider the American pressure that led to the transformation of long-standing implicit relations between Israel and the Gulf states into open and direct relations. President Trump's political and economic needs, along with the interests of the US arms industry, aligned with the military requirements of the Gulf states. In the face of events such as direct attacks on Saudi Arabian oil facilities organized by Iran-backed forces and the Yemen war, in which Iran-supported forces are fighting against Saudi Arabia, the USA's distant and disengaged behavior, as well as its lack of interest in these provocations, became apparent. It has been one of the driving reasons for the Gulf. Behind all the talks about advanced technology exchange and economic cooperation, they started to think that it might be useful to announce to the public that they have a new nuclear-powered, formidable ally like Israel, sharing the determination of the Gulf states to rein in Iranian aggression. Geopolitically, the expectation of Israel's Gulf allies is to increase its deterrence against a nuclear Iran. As the US moves away from the region, the relative weight of Israel in the growing regional alliance is expected to increase (Sandler, 2020). The Abraham Accords, driven by American pressure and shared geopolitical interests, mark a significant shift in the Middle East's political landscape.

In addition, the Arab-Israeli normalization process suits both Republican and Democratic parties (Dazi Heni, 2020: 7). The new US President, Joe Biden, has stated his commitment to fulfilling the agreements related to this treaty. Indeed, close to the election process, before Biden's presidency was finalized, he approved extensive arms sales to the UAE. Additionally, as a promise to Sudan, the USA removed Sudan from the list of states supporting terrorism, and for Morocco, the USA recognized its sovereignty over Western Sahara (Yossef, 2021: 16). The bipartisan support for the Arab-Israeli normalization process and the continuation of key agreements under President Joe Biden's administration highlight the enduring significance of the Abraham Accord in American foreign policy.

In Washington, this new geopolitical axis consisting of Israel and the Gulf states is seen as a means to reduce Iran's influence in the region. It is also believed to act as a counterbalance to China's growing presence there (Dazi Heni, 2020: 7). Moreover, in Washington, this emerging geopolitical alignment involving Israel and the Gulf states is perceived as a strategic tool to diminish Iran's regional influence and to counterbalance China's expanding presence in the Middle East.

In this context, it is crucial that China was chosen as the guarantor for the mediation of the agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia in April 2023. A normalization agreement was signed between Iran and Saudi Arabia on this date. Additionally, Iran took the significant step of appointing an ambassador to Saudi Arabia after a prolonged period of strained relations. Faced with the challenges of selling its oil amidst sanctions, Iran's pursuit of new opportunities through its long-discussed 'East View' policy and its desire to improve its international standing in light of domestic political unrest since September 2022 (Caner, 2023: 2) Saudi Arabia's efforts to mend ties with Iran provide Iran with an exit opportunity. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia, which received less support from the United States during the



Biden administration, seeks to alleviate tensions arising from political instability due to proxy conflicts with Iran and recurrent drone attacks.

China, which has challenged a superpower like the USA, continued to buy oil from Iran despite the US sanctions. Likewise, Saudi Arabia is the second country from which China buys oil the most after Russia (CNBC, 2023). From this perspective, the stability between these two states serves China's way of becoming a superpower in the Middle East.

The Gulf states' agreement with Israel and their inclusion in the Abraham Accords eventually strengthened their position in the Gulf. The USA's commitment to supporting the UAE in the defense industry and the exchange of spare parts in missile systems between Israel and the UAE, facilitated by this agreement, are factors that weaken Iran's position in the Gulf sub-complex. This agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia could also affect the regional implications of the Abraham Accords. Conversely, this agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia is a consequence of the Abraham alliance formed by Israel and the Gulf states, serving as an indicator of its regional influence. For Iran, it is clear that the Abraham Accord was an anti-Tehran alliance. Therefore, Iran has taken advantage of the loneliness of Saudi Arabia, which has been neglected by the United States, and has opened a path to its own advantage by improving its regional relations.

Iran's agreement with Saudi Arabia also demonstrates that the Abraham Accord serves as a deterrent for Iran on a regional scale. As a matter of fact, very recently, in March 2023, Iran made a visit to Bahrain after Saudi Arabia, indicating its desire to improve its relations with Bahrain, which signed the Abraham Accord with Israel.

Israel, being highly disturbed by the Iran-Saudi agreement, showed a stance that their "anti-Tehran" plans fell through. For this reason, Israel was concerned that Iran's attempting such an alignment would damage the Gulf states' high dependency on Israel. Paradoxically, a distorted Gulf with Iran actually works for Israel. Thus, Israel sees Iran as a threat but is also disturbed by the Arab states' softening of relations with Iran. It is possibly worried about being marginalized in the long run as the threat from Iran to Arab states decreases, and the Iranian threat remains specific to Israel. Because, in the face of the conflict between Hezbollah and Israel, the Arabs getting on well with Iran and softening their relations is something Israel does not want.

Immediately after the Saudi Arabian and Iran agreement, the UAE froze the purchase of some equipment planned to be bought from Israel, as well as the news that relations will be frozen, the US has recently reduced its support for the Netanyahu government in Israel (Caner, 2023: 4), on the one hand, the Gulf states while it showed that the most important driving reason for the agreement with Israel was the support of the USA, on the other hand, it also showed that the Abraham Treaty could be damaged.

However, the withdrawal of the USA from the region has encouraged the regional actors to get along with each other more. The Gulf states that made an agreement with Israel in the absence of the USA, and Saudi Arabia, which did not receive sufficient support during the Biden administration, reached an agreement with Iran after six years and tried to improve its relations. This context contains an important finding; because of that, if a regional complex includes mutual security dependency, weakening the influence of global power in the region also shows that the mutual security dependency of regional actors increases.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND EVALUATION

Considering today's developing technology and constantly changing conditions, the meaning of the concept of security in international relations gradually expanded in the post-Cold War period. In this sense, the Copenhagen School, after the Cold War, defended the idea that regional security came to the fore and said that the effects of the Regional Security Complexes, which are formed by the clustering of geographically close states with mutual security commitments, are more decisive than the global powers. In the years when Buzan defined the RSCT approach, the effect of ideological, religious, and ethnic integration was more significant especially in the Middle East RSCT compared to today, and the boundaries of regional complexes are more evident. Today, however, it can be determined that the increase in the fragility of the RSCT borders is directly proportional to the decrease in Arab nationalism and the increase in ethnic and religious permeability in the region compared to the past.

One of the essential elements defining the Middle East RSCT is the Arab-Israeli conflict. This also defines the Levant, which Buzan calls the first subcomplex. The Palestinian cause, which started with the establishment of Israel in 1948, became an ideological element for the Arabs to unite against Israel. At the same time, the Arabs took their share of the ideological divisions brought by the Cold War, and the attempts of global powers to penetrate the region increased by selling weapons and equipment to the conflicting states due to intra-regional problems.

On the other hand, the Shiite-Sunni sectarian conflict and the complex alignments that developed with the cooperation of organizations such as Hezbollah and Hamas, along with the fear of Iran in the regional states that emerged after the 1979 Revolution, increased their mutual security dependency. On the other hand, the Gulf states in Buzan's second sub-complex have not been very supportive of the hostile attitude projected against Israel due to the Palestinian cause, again out of fear of the Iranian threat's military superiority with both its sectarian and nuclear power. However, recognizing Israel officially, as Egypt and Jordan did in the past, has not been easy due to the reactions from Muslim Arabs.

In 2020, Abraham Accords were made with the articulation of the UAE-Israel, then Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco, in the witness of Trump. Accordingly, the UAE became the third state to recognize Israel among Arabs and the first in the Gulf. This was followed by other states parties to the agreement. In signing this treaty, the promises these states received from the United States were an important driving force. The Abraham Accords have been an opportunity for the UAE, which has long wanted to acquire F-35 warplanes. They have received various promises in Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco.

It is clear that the cooperation between the Gulf states and Israel is an anti-Tehran alliance. For this reason, increasing deterrence in the face of Iranian threats and gaining a stronger position in the Gulf is among the priority targets. However, it also opened up an unprecedented space for Israel in the Gulf. On the other hand, it left Iran in a state of siege. However, Iran's move, which made a deal to normalize its relations with Saudi Arabia with the mediation of China a few years later, can also be seen as a step towards getting rid of the siege brought by Abraham (except for economic reasons). It has given China significant opportunities to fill the gap left by the USA in the region.

For this reason, it is essential for the USA to strengthen its relationship with the Gulf states and also to contribute to its presence in the Gulf. According to Buzan and Waever: As long as the oil has made the Gulf a prize for decades, the internal consensus in the US to maintain a strong military presence there will likely remain intact (Buzan and Waever, 2003: 203). Looking at the present day with the foresight that Buzan says is possible, the Abraham Accord can also be seen as a result of the United States' effort to the Gulf.

The US support of Israel and the securitization of Iran is another example of its penetration into the region. Again, with the Abraham Accords, its influence in the region increased to the size of the Gulf. Because the 1979 revolution in Iran caused the USA to lose an important ally in the Gulf. Therefore, it has become more essential for the US to develop links with other Gulf states by approaching the Gulf to strengthen its position in the region after its withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan. The conclusion of the Abraham Accord was important for the United States for this reason.

On the other hand, the production of advanced weapons with superior technology paved the way for their instrumentalization in security policies. With the Abraham Accord, the US arms agreements with the Gulf states, or its promises in this sense, or indirectly the agreement of these states with Israel, contributed to the US's policy of influence. Israel's security goals of getting along with its neighbors and opening up to the Gulf have been facilitated by arms deals. At the same time, the balance of power in the region's security has been in their favor compared to the other states in the Gulf states that have agreed with Israel and the USA.

Looking at the Abraham Accord, when it comes to security, regional dominance, and balance of power, states have shown that they can moderate some religious or ethnic issues. The most significant factor in this is the intra-regional threats and their desire to ensure that the power scales favor their side to establish dominance in the region.

A few years after the Abraham Accord, which is obviously an anti-Iranian alliance, in April 2023, Iran's signing of a normalization agreement with Saudi Arabia, whose relations have not improved for years, can be seen as a reflection of Iran's sense of siege due to Abraham Accord.

As can be seen, while regional alliances are intertwined with global politics, they have also affected the actions of global powers. The turbulent politics of the Middle East geography, along with the slipperiness of alliances in the Regional Security Complexes, have therefore linked their domestic and foreign policies. Contrary to their history, since ideological elements are less important in the Middle East RSCT and Arabs now prioritize self-determination more, collaborations with a Jewish state, Israel, have begun to be announced. The conclusion of the Abraham Accord, after a very long time, has been the clearest proof that the balance of power in the region has changed. As a result, it is seen that the idea that the issue of security in international relations cannot be separated from the issue of regional security is manifested in the Abraham Accord. In this context, it is plausible to suggest that similar agreements may be reached within the realm of regional security in the future.

Therefore, it is critical that all stakeholders in the region focus on collaborating more and solving problems through dialogue. Additionally, it is important to evaluate how such agreements may affect global and regional balances of power and develop policy options accordingly. It should be noted that in the future, similar agreements have the potential to provide greater stability and security.

### **Ethics Statement**

“Israel Gulf Expansion Within Regional Security Complex Theory: The Effect Of The Abraham Accords On The Power Balances In The Region” during the process of writing and publishing the study titled Research and Publication Ethics rules were followed and no distortion was made in the data obtained for the study. Ethics committee permission was obtained for the study.

### **Contribution Rate Declaration**

All authors in the study contributed to all processes from writing the study to creating the draft and read and approved the final version.

Yaman, D. & Yiğittepe, L. (2023). Israel Gulf Expansion Within Regional Security Complex Theory: The Effect Of The Abraham Accords On The Power Balances In The Region. *KMU Journal of Social and Economic Research*, 25(45), 879-901.

### **Conflict Declaration**

This study did not lead to any individual or institutional/organizational conflict of interest.

### **REFERENCES**

- Alagöz, B., and Kandemir, E. (2015). 11 Eylül Sonrası Dönemde Bölgesel Güvenlik ve İran'ın Afganistan Siyaseti. *Türkiye Ortadoğu Çalışmaları Dergisi*, 2(2), 109-140.
- Bakan, S., and Şahin, S. (2018). Uluslararası Güvenlik Yaklaşımlarının Tarihsel Dönüşümü Ve Yeni Tehditler. *The Journal of International Lingual Social and Educational Sciences*, 4(2), 135-152.
- Black, I., and Morris, B. (1991). *Israel's secret wars: a history of Israel's intelligence services*. Grove Press.
- Black, I. (2019). Why Israel is quietly cosying up to Gulf monarchies. *The Guardian*, 19.
- Bergman, R. (2018). Rise and Kill First: The Secret History of Israel's Targeted Assassinations. *Random House*.
- Buzan, B. (1991). People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post Cold-War Era. Second Edition. Boulder, Colorado: *Lynne Reiner Publishers*.
- Buzan, B. (2003). Regional security complex theory in the post-Cold War world. *In Theories of new regionalism*, ss. 140-159, Palgrave Macmillan, London.
- Buzan, B. and G., Waever, (2003). Regions and powers: the structure of international security (Vol. 91). *Cambridge University Press*.
- Caner, M. (2023). İran-Suudi Arabistan Normalleşme Anlaşması Sebepleri ve Sonuçları. *Setav*, sayı.365. <https://www.setav.org/perspektif-iran-suudi-arabistan-normallesme-anlasmasi-sebepleri-ve-sonuclari/>, (07.05.2023).
- Cavlak, Ç. M., and Gök, Ali (2021). Arap Baharı Sonrası Dönemde Bölgesel Güvenlik Kompleksi Bağlamında İran'ın Lübnan Siyaseti. *Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli Üniversitesi SBE Dergisi*, 11(4), 2131-2145.
- Center for Strategic and International Studies, (2018). F-35 Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) Program, <https://www.csis.org/programs/international-security-program/f-35-joint-strike-fighter-jsf-program>, (17.05.2023).
- CNBC, (2023). Iranian oil exports end 2022 at a high despite no nuclear deal, <https://www.cnbc.com/2023/01/15/iranian-oil-exports-end-2022-at-a-high-despite-no-nuclear-deal.html>, (17.05.2023).
- Dar, H. A., and Presley, J. R. (2001). The Gulf Co-operation Council: A Slow Path to Integration? *The World Economy*, 24(9), 1161–1178. doi:10.1111/1467-9701.00405.
- Dazi-Héni, F. (2020). The Gulf States and Israel after the Abraham Accords. *Arab Reform Initiative*.
- Dikmen, Ö. (2020). Arap-İsrail İlişkileri: İsrail'in Körfez Ülkeleri ile Normalleşme Süreci ve Stratejik Değerlendirmeler. *Selçuk Üniversitesi Hukuk Fakültesi Dergisi*, 42(2), 625-642.
- Ehteshami, A. (2014). Middle East middle powers: Regional role, international impact. *Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi*, 11(42), 29-49.
- Ehteshami, A. (2016). The international politics of the Middle East. *Manchester University Press*.

- Yaman, D. & Yiğittepe, L. (2023). Israel Gulf Expansion Within Regional Security Complex Theory: The Effect Of The Abraham Accords On The Power Balances In The Region. *KMU Journal of Social and Economic Research*, 25(45), 879-901.
- El-Nawawy, M., and Khamis, S. (2012). Political Activism 2.0: Comparing the role of social media in Egypt's "Facebook Revolution" and Iran's "Twitter Uprising." *CyberOrient*, 6(1), 8-33.
- Fawcett, L. (2013). *International Relations of the Middle East*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Frisch, Hillel (2020). The Israel-UAE Agreement's Greatest Achievement, *Little Arab Protest*, Perspectives Paper no. 1,729.
- Gelvin, J. L. (2016). *The modern Middle East: A history*. Oxford University Press.
- Gresh, G. F. (2020). *Gulf Security and the US Military: Regime Survival and the Politics of Basing*. Stanford University Press.
- Helman, G. B. and Ratner, S. R. (1992-1993), Saving Failed States." *Foreign Policy* (89), ss. 3–20.
- Hincks, Joseph (2020). Will Saudi Arabia Be Next to Normalize Relations with Israel? Do not Hold Your Breath, Experts Say, <https://time.com/5890151/saudi-arabia-israel-abraham-accords/>, (09.05.2023).
- Jones, C. and Guzansky, Y. (2020). Fraternal enemies Israel and the Gulf monarchies. Hurst, <https://www.hurstpublishers.com/book/fraternal-enemies/>,(09.05.2023).
- Rubenberg, C. (2003). The Palestinians: In search of a just peace. *Lynne Rienner Publishers.Khamissf*
- Kenneth M. Pollack, (2020). It's Not a Peace Deal. It's a Powder Keg, *Foreign Policy*, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/08/21/its-not-a-peace-deal-its-a-powder-keg/>,(09.05.2023).
- Keohane, R. O., and Nye Jr, J. S. (1973). Power and interdependence. *Survival*, 15(4), 158-165.
- Salloukh, B. F. (2013). The Arab uprisings and the geopolitics of the Middle East. *The international spectator*, 48(2), 32-46.
- Sandler, S. (2020). The Abraham Accords: The Strategic Aspect. *BESA Center Perspectives, Paper No, 1*.
- Sayigh, Yezid. (1997). Armed struggle and the search for the state: The Palestinian national movement, 1949-1993. *Oxford University Press*.
- Schiff, Z., and Ya'ari, E. (1995). Israel's Lebanon War. *Simon and Schuster*.
- Şahin, G., and Güzel, S. (2021). Ortadoğu Güvenliğinde Yeni Açılımlar Ve İbrahim Antlaşması. *Mehmet Akif Ersoy Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, (34), 15-28.
- Telhami, Shibley. (1990). *Power and leadership in international bargaining: The path to the Camp David Accords*. Columbia: Columbia University Press.
- The State of Israel and The Kingdom of Bahrein. (2020). Abraham accords: Declaration of peace, cooperation, and constructive diplomatic and friendly relations, [https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Bahrain\\_Israel-Agreement-signed-FINAL-15-Sept-2020-508.pdf](https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Bahrain_Israel-Agreement-signed-FINAL-15-Sept-2020-508.pdf), (15.05.2023).
- The State of Israel and The United Arab Emirates. (13 Ağustos 2020). Abraham accords peace agreement: Treaty of peace, diplomatic relations and full normalization between The United Arab Emirates and The State of Israel, [https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/UAE\\_Israel-treaty-signed-FINAL-15-Sept-2020-508.pdf](https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/UAE_Israel-treaty-signed-FINAL-15-Sept-2020-508.pdf), (15.05.2023).
- Ulrichsen, K. C. (2016). *Israel and the Arab Gulf states: Drivers and directions of change*.

- Yaman, D. & Yiğittepe, L. (2023). Israel Gulf Expansion Within Regional Security Complex Theory: The Effect Of The Abraham Accords On The Power Balances In The Region. *KMU Journal of Social and Economic Research*, 25(45), 879-901.
- Yiğittepe, L. (2018). NATO ve Rusya Arasında Türkiye'nin Güvenlik Algılaması: S-400 Krizi Örneği, *Yönetim ve Ekonomi Araştırmaları Dergisi*, Cilt 16, Özel Sayı, Ss. 276-289.
- Yiğittepe, L. (2022). *Uluslararası İlişkilerde Güvenlik: Kavramsal Analiz ve Teorik Yaklaşımlar*, 2.Baskı, Ankara: Nobel Akademik Yayıncılık.
- Yossef, A. (2020). Gulfization of the Middle East: The Arab Spring's Systemic Shift, in *The Regional Order in the Gulf Region and the Middle East: Regional Rivalries and Security Alliances*, (Ed.) Philipp O. Amour, *Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan*, 61–94.
- Yossef, A. (2021). The regional impact of the Abraham Accords. *Modern War Institute*, 2(1).
- Walt, S. M. (1991). The Renaissance of Security Studies. *International Studies Quarterly*, 35(2), 211. doi:10.2307/2600471
- Wintour, P. (2020). Israel and UAE agree to full diplomatic ties in Trump-brokered deal. *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/aug/13/israel-and-uae-agree-to-full-diplomatic-ties-in-trump-brokered-deal>, (15.05.2023).
- Guttstadt, Corry, (2013). *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust*. Lanham: Lexington Books.
- Zarghami Khosravi, S., Zakerian Amiri, M., Barzegar, K., & Kazemi Zand, A. A. (2019). Israeli-Arab Relations; from Dream to Reality. *International Journal of Political Science*, 9(1), 61-73.

---

**Extended Abstract**

---

**Israel Gulf Expansion Within Regional Security Complex Theory: The Effect Of The Abraham Accords On The Power Balances In The Region**

---

The Abraham Treaty, which is a historical turning point in the Middle East, is of great importance as it is the third Arab state in which the UAE officially recognized Israel. The agreement is a reflection of the efforts of the regional states to shift the balance of power in their favor in the face of the increasing Iranian threat, despite the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This study examined how intra-regional threats and fears were transformed by the Abraham Treaty within the framework of Buzan's RSCT.

According to the theory, states in the post-Cold War period perceive mutual security threats with neighboring states in nearby geographies. This situation creates a more intense security dependence and cooperation compared to states in distant geographies. Neighborhood and geographical proximity strengthen the understanding of security, cooperation and threat perception, creating "Regional Security Complexes".

The situations that developed due to the Arab-Israeli conflicts, stemming from the Israeli-Palestinian discord, ideological rivalries, and internal conflicts within Arab states, along with the Cold War period affected the balance of power in the Middle East. Simultaneously, they delineated the singular Middle East BGKT and the Levant sub-complex as distinct entities within this complex.

The clearest example of regional states securitizing each other in a regional security complex is the Iranian threat. The Iranian threat in the region arises from various reasons. The "Iran Threat", which has almost become a term, expresses the concerns of other states about Iran's activities such as military, nuclear, ballistic missile and terrorism, as Iran gains regional and international power. Iran's increasing regional influence and support for groups in neighboring countries have increased the security concerns of other states in the region.

In the article, the influence of the great powers involved in the issues in the region and the transformations experienced in the historical process are evaluated together. In this context, the effects of the USA, Russia and China on the region, the Gulf wars and the Arab Spring process were also examined. The interests of the regional states and, accordingly, the interests of the great powers were evaluated one by one. As a result, there are many different factors behind the normalization process between Israel and the Gulf states. Israel is a state that specializes in technology and innovation. Economic cooperation between the two sides could offer great opportunities for both Israel and the Gulf states. Ultimately, there are factors such as security, stability, defense cooperation and economic opportunities. These factors helped historical hostilities and tensions to be replaced by a process of cooperation and normalization.

The analysis of the agreement shows that the Palestine issue has become a secondary issue for the Arabs, that it prioritizes the self-determination of the Arabs, and that the agreement is not only related to the Iranian threat, but also that the support for the defense industry is an important factor. The motivation of Arab states to make these agreements with Israel stems from their desire to reshape the balances and security perceptions in the region and to create a common front against a regional power like Iran. A few years after the Abraham Treaty, which was clearly an anti-Iran alliance, in April 2023, Iran signed a normalization agreement with Saudi Arabia, which can be seen as a reflection of the feeling of siege that Iran was exposed to because of Abraham.

When we look at the Abraham Treaty; states have shown that they can soften some religious or ethnic issues when it comes to security, regional dominance and balance of power. The biggest factor in this is due to intra-regional threats and their desire to ensure that the scales of power outweigh their side in order to establish more dominance in the region.

This study was conducted to understand the impact of the Abraham Treaty on the balance of power in the Middle East by using the RSCT. The analysis focused on Israel, the UAE and the USA, the first addressees of the agreement, and discussed the gains and losses of these states with a cause-effect focus. While the agreement served the purpose of strengthening Israel's relations with the regional states and reinforcing its regional superiority, it also brought about results such as the arms aid the UAE received from the USA and commercial cooperation with Israel.

While the study deals with security and threat perceptions within the framework of the RSCT, it particularly focuses on the balance of power in the Levant and Gulf sub-complexes. By eliminating the deficiencies in the literature, adding a new dimension to the rare studies on the Abraham Treaty, it analyzed in detail the impact of this treaty on the balance of power in the region. Another contribution of the article is that the terms used by Buzan are formulated and shown in a table. In addition, it offers a different perspective to the literature by combining Buzan's analysis with Helman and Ratner's "weak states" hypothesis and formulating and analyzing it in a table. It was concluded that the agreement was an important milestone that led to the reshaping of security complexes in the region and the change of the balance of power. This analysis goes beyond traditional assessments in the social sciences and offers an in-depth look at the political and security dynamics in the Middle East.

---