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## **The Abraham Accords and Their Legacy. A Fresh Approach to a Solution for the Middle East Conflict – from Trump to Biden**

### **Porozumienia Abrahamowe i ich dziedzictwo. Nowe podejście do rozwiązania konfliktu na Bliskim Wschodzie – od Trumpa do Bidena**

**Keywords:** Abraham Accords, Arab countries, Joe Biden, Middle East conflict, Donald Trump, two-state solution, USA

**Słowa kluczowe:** Joe Biden, Bliski Wschód, państwa arabskie, porozumienie abrahamowe, rozwiązanie dwupaństwowe, Donald Trump, USA

#### **Abstract**

The Middle East conflict, or more specifically, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been destabilizing the region for many decades now. With time it became transparent that the bilateral talks of the conflicted actors were not realistic, and a mediator was necessary. Due to the unfolding events of the Cold War and US global domination as a result, the following American Presidents were attempting to bring Israel and Palestine to the negotiation table and resolve the conflict. The efforts have failed. In this paper I will analyze a new idea for the Middle East proposed by Donald Trump and continued by Joe Biden – The Abraham Accords. The new strategy aims at building a bilateral platform for cooperation between Israel and the Arab states of

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the region. While the initial target for the authors of this initiative was to normalize Israeli-Arab relations and as a consequence, stabilize the region. This paper analyzes the place of Palestine in this Middle East stabilization attempt and its future. In light of the American Abraham Accords initiative, the outcome of a final solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is bleak since it only addresses certain issues like development and promoting living standards (which might be accomplished by building Israeli-Arab relations), but, in the foreseeable future, fails to address the most crucial issues – the future of Jerusalem, Israeli settlement building and the Palestinian refugee crises.

### **Streszczenie**

Konflikt izraelsko-palestyński (wcześniej bardziej ogólnie konflikt izraelsko-arabski) destabilizuje rejon Bliskiego Wschodu od dekad. Z czasem skala antagonizmu i animozji pomiędzy skonfliktowanymi stronami wykluczyła jakiegokolwiek bilateralne rozmowy pokojowe. Roli mediatora pomiędzy Izraelem a Palestyną musiałby podjąć się trzeci aktor, który miałby zdolność oraz zasoby doprowadzenia i utrzymania zainteresowanych strony przy negocjacyjnym stole. Tym aktorem okazały się Stany Zjednoczone, które po zakończeniu zimnej wojny dysponowały zarówno siłą militarną, ekonomiczną, jak i dyplomatyczną. Dominująca rola USA na przełomie wieków oraz szeregu amerykańskich inicjatyw pokojowych okazały się niewystarczające, aby wypracować z Izraelem i Palestyną zakończenie konfliktu. Podejmowanie się kolejnych prób jest niejako wpisane w agendę kolejnych gospodarzy Białego Domu. Również Donald Trump przedstawił swój pomysł na Bliski Wschód. Jego inicjatywa pod nazwą porozumienie Abrahama, miała na celu normalizację relacji Izraela z arabskimi państwami regionu, promowanie współpracy i budowanie relacji gospodarczych. Inicjatywa ta jest również kontynuowana przez obecną administrację i prezydenta Joe Bidena. Poniższa praca analizuje wysiłki zarówno Trumpa, jak i Bidena w celu zaprowadzenia pokoju na Bliskim Wschodzie poprzez porozumienie Abrahama – nowy format współpracy i integracji regionalnej. Jednakże zakres współpracy partnerów bliskowschodnich w obrębie tego porozumienia nie angażuje bezpośrednio strony palestyńskiej, stąd, co będzie poniżej omówione, nie należy traktować porozumienia Abrahama jako natychmiastowej recepty na konflikt izraelsko-palestyński, a raczej doszukiwać się perspektywicznego efektu tej inicjatywy.

Israel, as a new state in the Middle East, has been established since 1948. This event marked the beginning of an Israeli-Palestinian conflict raging in the Middle East region for over seven decades now. For some period, it was a more general Israeli-Arab conflict and with time it became more evident that the key actors of

the conflict are Israel, Palestine and Palestinian non-state proxies. The reason for this fact is that the Palestinians are directly affected by the establishment of Israel in the region and its growth that is the result of building new Israeli settlements on occupied territories since the Six-Day War in 1967. While other Arab neighboring states of Israel such as Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon, while suffering losses, maintained sovereignty, Palestine did not. Today it is still geographically ununited and also politically divided internally, without strong leadership and unsuccessful in being self-reliant and self-governed. Among other challenges, the facts presented above pose a serious obstacle to peace negotiations between Israel and Palestine.

The pivotal issues at stake between Israel and Palestine are the three main ones: the city of Jerusalem, Israeli settlements on occupied territories and the future of Palestinian refugees<sup>1</sup>. These are the three main problems which can be treated as discrete, especially during negotiations but which are strongly interdependent of each other. Jewish settlements are being built on annexed Palestinian territories which is further impeding the challenge of future of Palestinian refugees. And Jerusalem, being home to the three main monotheistic religions including the Jewish and Arab ones (in addition to Catholicism), is at the heart of both conflicted parties, both seeing it as holy and/or diplomatically vital. All of the main areas of the conflict affect Arab countries but not as directly as the Palestinians. New Israeli settlements create new waves of refugees that flood neighboring Arab countries and the fact that the holy sites to Islam in Jerusalem are practically beyond full control of Muslims is a disgrace to them. Yet, among the Arab states, the Palestinians are at heart of the of the conflict.

Because of the complexity of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, third party actors and non-regional actors, must act as intermediaries. The country that, historically, has had the resources and most potential to foster Middle East peace has been the USA. There are a few factors that make the United States possibly the most effective and potent broker of the Middle East peace process. For a long time, the United States had the strongest soft power (understood as culture, economy, freedom, democracy, values, and morale) which attracted other actors<sup>2</sup>. Because of a strong economy, the USA could be a sponsor of peace deals. And, among other reasons, it had (and still has) leverage over Israel. While other

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<sup>1</sup> K. Bojko, M. Góra, *Wybrane aspekty polityki Izraela, Stanów Zjednoczonych i Unii Europejskiej wobec Palestyńskiej Władzy Narodowej 2000–2007*, Kraków 2007, p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> J. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, New York 2005, p. 111–114.

brokers of peace like Norway or the Middle East Quartet (the United States, Russia, the United Nations and the European Union) have been also active, yet, it has been the United States that has been the most visible as a third party attempting to bridge the conflicted actors.

American interference with the Middle East conflict has a long history. The region has been of central importance to Washington in order to secure a set of interrelated goals – securing energy resources, limiting Soviet and Iranian influence, the survival and security of Israel, countering terrorism, and promoting freedom and democracy. The Israel-Palestinian conflict is both directly and indirectly linked to many of the above. Actions taken by the following presidents and administrations at times were peace-oriented and periodically, not directly, fueling the conflict (understood as economic, diplomatic and military support to Israel). Among the initiatives aimed at finding solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, possibly the most spectacular, was bringing both sides of the conflict to the negotiation table by President Bill Clinton at Camp David in 2000. While the bilateral talks between Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat in Camp David ended in failure, the measures taken by Clinton were momentous. President Clinton's invitation to Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Yasser Arafat on July 5, 2000, to come to Camp David was symbolic since the Camp David Accords (where President Jimmy Carter was able to successfully bring to the negotiation table, Egypt, represented by President Anwar Sadat, and Israel, represented by Prime Minister Menachem Begin) were also signed in this American Presidents' retreat in Maryland.

Until today, American and international efforts and advocacy to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have failed. Different third parties and the following American Presidents did not manage to persuade the conflicted sides to settle the conflict and end the decade-lasting violence and disruption. At times, the reasons for the lack of peace in the region were different. Yet a solution that is a leading option to end the fighting and violence between Israel and Palestine resulting in a chance for development for both is the two-state solution. The origins of the idea date back to the 1937 Peel Commission report. Later it was again proposed in the 1947 UN Partition plan and over the years it was accepted both by Israel and Palestine since it assumed the creation of a legitimate and self-governed two states.

While discussing the role of third parties, the importance of regional neighbors of the conflicted sides must be assessed. Arab and Muslim countries of the region are indirectly affected by the conflict, capable of sponsoring peace treaties,

and also culturally and religiously akin to one side of the conflict – Palestine. Yet, historically, they have also been conflicted with the other side of the conflict – Israel. The day after Israel was created as a state on the 14<sup>th</sup> of May in 1948 and declared its independence, a military coalition of Arab states (Egypt, Transjordan, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and the Palestinians) attacked Israeli forces and Jewish settlements as well. The motto and attitude towards Israel by the Arab states, for a number of decades, was best coined by Hassan Banna (an Egyptian teacher, imam and founder of the Muslim Brotherhood): “If the Jewish state becomes a fact, and this is realized by the Arab peoples, they will drive the Jews who live in their midst into the sea”<sup>3</sup>. This credo was in effect throughout the period of intensive Arab Israeli fighting with two significant wars – the Six-Day War (1967) and the Yom Kippur War (1973). Over time, the Arab states grew less interested in fighting Israel in open full-scale wars and engaging significant resources in an attempt to realize Hassan Banna’s vision. With time it became clear that Israel was a well-organized, well-functioning and strong state that will not only stay in the Middle East but will only grow stronger.

With time, and global and local events happening, the nature of the Israeli-Arab relationship has been changing. With significant effort of third parties, Israel has begun to root itself in the region and the necessity of regulating relations with its Arab neighbors meant predictability of the region. Diplomatic efforts have successively softened years-long complex conflicts and hostility among Israel and some of its Arab neighbors. The development of Israeli-Arab positive relations has been long, difficult, and also strongly correlated with the events on the global chessboard – mainly the Cold War where the global superpowers perceived local conflicts as proxy wars.

The first positive development in Israeli-Arab relations took place in 1979, when Israel signed a peace treaty with Egypt. Egypt becoming the first Arab country to officially recognize Israel’s right to exist in the region, was preceded by president Carter’s administration and was initiated by the President of Egypt. Anwar Sadat, transforming the relationship with a visit to Israel in 1977<sup>4</sup>. Since signing the Camp David Accords by Israel and Egypt the overall relationship between the two countries, despite occasional tension, has remained relatively

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<sup>3</sup> D. Adams Schmidt, *Aim to oust Jews pledged by Sheikh; Head of Moslem Brotherhood Says U.S., British ‘Politics’ Has Hurt Palestine Solution*, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1948/08/02/86751512.html> [access: 23.08.2023].

<sup>4</sup> D. Ross, *The Missing Peace*, New York 2005, p. 27–29.

stable. Following Egypt, was the Palestinian Liberation Organization, which signed the Oslo Accords in the 1990's, leading to a peace agreement with Israel. The Oslo Accords signed in 1993 (and the Oslo Accords II signed in 1995) were significant for the region since by that time Israel, as a state, was firmly established in the Middle East but relations with the Palestinians were tense for three main reasons: 1) building new Israeli settlements on occupied territories, 2) the future of Palestinian refugees and 3) the future of Jerusalem. Tension between Israel and Palestine had been continuous since 1948. While the Oslo Accords were significant for starting bilateral talks, with time it was revealed that the signatures on the document were not followed by action on the ground. Mutual recognition was undermined with distrust of true intentions, sense of betrayal by both parties, and the lack of fulfilling the terms of the treaty and even the security violations<sup>5</sup>. Mutual distrust between Israel and Palestine, often leading to violent actions and reactions, is continuing till today. There have been numerous attempts to bridge the two conflicted sides bilaterally but mostly by third parties such as the USA, the EU, or the UN, yet no conclusive solution has been found till today. Therefore, from the American perspective, peace brokerage between Israel and Palestine, since it is clear the two sides need a mediator, has been inherited by the following presidents. The *Abraham Accords* proposed by President Trump and in some form continued by President Biden might be treated as another attempt to reshape the Middle East into a more peaceful region.

Following Egypt and to some extent the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), Israel managed to strengthen relations also with Jordan. The peace treaty with Jordan was signed in 1994 which allowed the two states to establish diplomatic relations and resolve territorial disputes. These fragile bilateral relations are at times strained due to periodic escalations of violence and military clashes between Israel and Palestine. Outbreaks of tension between the two, together with continuous Israeli settlement construction has resulted in the increasing problem of Palestinian refugees. Palestinian refugees, due to limited economic power, flee to neighboring Arab countries out of which Jordan is the most popular destination. As seen from the map below the number of Palestinian refugees in Jordan is by far the largest from the neighboring Arab countries of Israel<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> D. Makovsky, D. Ross, *Myths, Illusion, & Peace*, London 2009, p. 139–140.

<sup>6</sup> N. Citino et al., *Generations of Palestinian Refugees Face Protracted Displacement and Dispossession*, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/palestinian-refugees-dispossession> [access: 23.08.2023].

**Figure 1:** Map of Palestinian Refugees, by Country of Residence, 2022



Source: N. Citino et al., *Generations of Palestinian Refugees Face Protracted Displacement and Dispossession*, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/palestinian-refugees-dispossession> [access: 23.08.2023].

Despite the fact that the refugee camps and centers are heavily sponsored and run by the UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East), this phenomenon causes domestic unrest in Jordan. Palestinian refugees became an illegal labor force, leave the camps and often engage in criminal activity becoming a burden to the host state. Despite the fact, Israeli Jordanian relations are at a satisfactory, cooperative level.

As stated earlier, as a third party, the United States plays a unique role in bridging the conflicted sides since it has all the necessary tools – hard power and more importantly soft power, that is values, resources and democratic traditions. The history of American presidents' engagement into finding peace between Israel and Palestine is long, yet it must be assessed as unsuccessful. While certain objectives of peace talks have been met, long lasting peace or a final solution to the conflict is passed on to the following presidents. This challenge has been also inherited by president Trump and the current president Joe Biden. The two differ very much in their vision of the Middle East and not only. Donald Trump early

in his presidency violated one of the cornerstones of peace plan for the conflict-ed parties, mainly the future of Jerusalem. On December 6, 2017, Trump officially recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and declared readiness to move the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem (to avoid unrests in the region, this act was skillfully delayed by former American presidents)<sup>7</sup>. This action was merely executing the 1997 Jerusalem Embassy Act, the act that recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. But Donald Trump also asserted, that the final Israeli Palestinian border will be a subject of negotiation between the sides, which at the same time confirmed American support for the two-state solution. Trump's action was widely criticized, yet the UN was not able to pass a resolution condemning the USA due to their veto right<sup>8</sup>. Yet, this decision should be assessed a great success of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's policy, and the pro-Israeli lobby in Washington. Palestinians declared the decision as disqualifying the U.S. as a future peace broker and radical Palestinian politicians called for a third intifada. While Trump did not exclude the creation of a Palestinian state in the future, his decision concerning Jerusalem imparts the American vision of the future of the conflict. A vision which is shaped by Israel with American assistance despite international law.

Trump's policy towards the conflict and the actors strongly favored Israel. In January 2020 Trump's administration outlined a strategy called Peace to Prosperity. The plan consists of two sections: a political framework and an economic one. One of the key assumptions of the team that shaped the plan was to omit the two-state phrase. As Jared Kushner (Trump's special envoy to the Middle East) claimed, it is differently understood by the Israeli and the Palestinian side. Yet, creation of two states is the final goal of the proposal. When it comes to the land, the plan puts little pressure on Israel to discontinue annexation of the West Bank. Yet, it recognizes Palestinian right to about 70% of the West Bank, part of the Negev Desert would be joined to Palestine, together with 10 towns, today in the Israel Triangle Zone<sup>9</sup>. This proposal gives Palestinians less territory than previous proposals and parts of the territories offered would be disconnected from other parts of the Palestinian state, joined only by tunnels and highways. The

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<sup>7</sup> M. Huczko, *Uwarunkowania polityki USA wobec konfliktu izraelsko-palestyńskiego w okresie intifad (1987–2005)*, Warszawa 2019, p. 330–331.

<sup>8</sup> M. Wojnarowicz, *Konsekwencje decyzji Donalda Trumpa w sprawie Jerozolimy*, [https://pism.pl/publikacje/Konsekwencje\\_decyzji\\_Donald\\_Trumpa\\_w\\_sprawie\\_Jerozolimy](https://pism.pl/publikacje/Konsekwencje_decyzji_Donald_Trumpa_w_sprawie_Jerozolimy) [access: 23.08.2023].

<sup>9</sup> *Peace to Prosperity. A Vision to Improve the Lives of the Palestinian and Israeli People*, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/peacetoprosperity/> [access: 23.08.2023].



plan, as seen on the map below, recognizes the Israeli right to the entire Jordan Valley<sup>10</sup>. The Jordan Valley is considered by Israel as militarily strategic and by the Palestinians, as their access to water and is of high agricultural importance to them. The terms of the plan were unacceptable for the Palestinians who perceived the U.S., again, not as an honest broker but as an interfering actor promoting interests of one side of the conflict, the Israeli one.

The Abraham Accords, presented by Trump's administration on September 15, 2020, was the president's vision for the Middle East. Despite the fact that, as I will discuss below, it was more an economic plan for the region, it can also be assessed as a long run peace establishing initiative. The Abraham Accords (full name: Abraham Accords Peace Agreement: Treaty of Peace, Diplomatic Relations and Full Normalization Between the United Arab Emirates and the State of Israel and Abraham Accords: Declaration of Peace, Cooperation, and Constructive Diplomatic and Friendly Relations) is an initiative aiming at normalization initially between Israel, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain in 2020. Morocco and Sudan signed the document in the following year and Saudi Arabia is expected to join in as a rule of domino effect. According to the document the signatories agree on the establishment of peace and diplomatic relations; establish embassies (or other diplomatic representations); recognize peace and stability as fundamental pillars; mutual recognition and co-existence; cooperate with the United States and other parties to expand regional stability and prosperity<sup>11</sup>. The above goals are expected to through diplomatic talks but also economic cooperation (investments, tourism, direct flights, telecommunication, technology, healthcare just to name the main ones) regarding the environment<sup>12</sup>. It must be underlined that prior to the Abraham Accords, Israel and Arab countries (signatories) did have cooperation at different levels, but these were at business levels not official ones. The official level of this diplomatic agreement also aims at sending a clear message to any radical, terrorist organizations or individuals that the signatories are ready for a new peaceful beginning. The Abraham Accords were a historical and turning point in Israeli-Arab relations since until then, since before the Arab nations had made it clear they would not negotiate with Israel until Palestinians received an independent state of their own.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>11</sup> *The Abraham Accords Declaration*, <https://www.state.gov/the-abraham-accords/> [access: 23.08.2023].

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem.

This broad and ambitious project not only is difficult for many reasons but also economically demanding. It requires different investment, new employment and maintenance resources. Therefore, with American assistance and input, a fund was established. The Abraham Fund declaratively sponsored by the UAE and the State of Israel with the United States was aiming at mobilizing more than \$3 billion to promote regional economic cooperation and prosperity in the Middle East and beyond with regards to the natural environment, mainly water<sup>13</sup>. Other states were welcomed to join in and participate in this platform. The office of this trilateral initiative was planned to be based in Israel and be people focused in order to build a stronger civil society by increasing the standard of living, safety and security. As Adam Boehler (the CEO of the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation) coined: “The Abraham Fund will tackle challenges facing the region and increase economic opportunity for everyone. We are excited to take this historic partnership to the next level to promote shared prosperity”<sup>14</sup>. High expectations, generous declarations and bold plans of this trilateral platform not only were promising but also realistic.

As mentioned above, the Abraham Accords were very promising for the region since they were addressing key challenges of the region and were multilateral, engaging previously conflicted states. Yet, there were also shortcomings of this initiative. The most vital one concerned lack of engagement of the Palestinians and lack of immediate offer for a solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. And, without a binding agreement between Israel and Palestine the Middle East will continue to be unstable to a certain extent. But before, during and after his term in office, Trump has on many occasions stated that he would be, and was, the most pro-Israel president ever. In social media, he posted that that no president has done more for Israel than him<sup>15</sup>. Undoubtedly, Trump’s policies, decisions and actions have been supportive of Israel. Trump’s Abraham Accords should also be perceived as such. Possibly this is the leading criticism of the Accords that it excluded the Palestinian issue. Which is part of the Middle East problem and must be part of solution. The Abraham Accords were focused on bilateral relations building between Israel and individual Arab states, without addressing the broader

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<sup>13</sup> U.S., *Israel, UAE Announce Establishment of Abraham Fund Following Accords Commitment*, <https://www.dfc.gov/media/press-releases/us-israel-uae-announce-establishment-abraham-fund-following-accords-commitment> [access: 23.08.2023].

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>15</sup> A.D. Miller, *Trump Was Far From the Most Pro-Israel U.S. President Ever*, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/10/19/trump-pro-israel-truth-social-netanyahu-abraham-accords/> [access: 23.08.2023].

and urgent Palestinian question which is critical for the Middle East. In the light of the following Arab states normalizing and warming relations, with Saudi Arabia to be next, Palestinians, in gross majority (80%) describe their feelings towards the Accords as: treason, abandonment and insulting<sup>16</sup>. This further isolation of the Palestinians is destructive for them at two levels, that is fading hope for a sovereign state but also not participating in the increasing quality of life initiatives. With all the potential of the Abraham Accords, the Palestinians and their expectations should also be addressed. Leaving out such a key actor for the Middle East peace will most surely result in destabilization of the region and growth of violence.

Yet, having in mind Trump's pro-Israeli stance the Abraham Accords should be analyzed more as a business or territorial transaction (with potential regional peace as a side effect) rather than a new, original approach to securing peace in the region. Trump simultaneously grants Jerusalem to Israel and seals bilateral deals of Israel and Arab countries. These assumptions based on evidence makes it transparent that peace in the region was not at heart for Trump. Israeli PM Netanyahu believes that Israel's participation in the Accords allows him further settlement building on annexed territories, the UEA was rewarded through the signing of a \$23 billion arms deal, Bahrain leaders benefited by muffling US concerns about its domestic human rights violations, Sudan for its initial steps towards the Accords was rewarded by the Trump administration's delisting Sudan from the list of countries supporting terrorism, removing sanctions and opening up trade and investment opportunities for the country, and Morocco, for establishing formal relations with Israel, was given sovereignty over the Western Sahara<sup>17</sup>. Even indirect benefits for Palestine are nowhere to be found. As underlined, the Abraham accords might have indirect but long-term benefits for the Palestinians. While Trump's administration was open about supporting Israel on many levels, it was also clear about the necessity of continuing efforts towards the two-state solution. State Department spokesman Ned Price clarified in early 2021 that while peace between Israel and Palestine is a priority, the Abraham Accords should not have been perceived as such an attempt: "While we support normalisation between Israel and countries in the Arab world, it's also not a sub-

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<sup>16</sup> R. Perper, *The Arab World Reacts to The Abraham Accords*, <https://globalaffairs.org/commentary-and-analysis/blogs/arab-world-reacts-abraham-accords> [access: 23.08.2023].

<sup>17</sup> *IMEU Policy Analysis #5: Abraham Accords Isolate Palestinians, Solidify Israel's Apartheid Rule*, <https://imeu.org/article/imeu-policy-analysis-5-abraham-accords-isolate-palestinians-solidify-israel> [access: 23.08.2023].

stitute for Israeli-Palestinian peace, and that's very important"<sup>18</sup>. Therefore, at this point it must be underlined that Trump's administration did not offer any solution that was acceptable for both sides of the conflict as a frame for bridging their differences, making the Abraham Accords proposal, in the light of the Middle East peace, merely a hypothetical and long term development.

Shaping new frames for Israeli Palestinian talks leading to peace in the region became a challenge for Joe Biden who replaced Donald Trump in the White House in 2021. The new president was given a chance to win the ultimate prize in diplomacy: a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Yet, Biden, unlike Barack Obama who made a clear stance in his A New Beginning at Cairo University declaring his interest in the conflict, did not declare his assistance in negotiations between Israel and Palestine. Joe Biden did not name a special envoy to the Middle East like his predecessors did, nor did he organize a conference or a peace summit for the conflicted parties. Restoring moderate aid to the Palestinians through U.N. agencies which was withheld by Trump, and resuming contact with Palestinian leaders was the only initial action the new president took<sup>19</sup>. The immediate reasons Biden was reluctant to wade into the peace process were that the election results in Israel were seen as unclear, upcoming elections in Palestine and the continuing belligerent relations with China, which were treated with priority. Also, to the Americans, at this stage, neither Israel nor Palestine appeared as ready for serious dealing. Therefore, while Biden recognized the importance of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, initially his administration did not take an active approach to forcing a solution. Biden's administration has focused American foreign policy on countering China and Russia, and rebuilding alliances in Europe. This approach had to be modified by the White House in early May 2021, when the Israeli Palestinian crises escalated. This event once again forced the conflict into the forefront of international and American attention. The crises which lasted 11 days had its flashpoint in Gaza but also at holy sites in Jerusalem. During this short, yet violent crises, Biden talked on numerous occasions with Prime Minister Netanyahu. In one of them, he condemned the attacks by Hamas and reaffirmed Netanyahu of American support for Israel to defend

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<sup>18</sup> *Normalisation deals with Israel no 'substitute for peace', US State Department says*, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/normalisation-deals-not-substitute-israeli-palestinian-peace-state-department-says> [access: 23.08.2023].

<sup>19</sup> M. Spetalnick, S. Farrell, *U.S. restores assistance for Palestinians, to provide \$235 million in aid*, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-palestinians-usa-blinken-idUSKBN2BU2XT> [access: 23.08.2023].

itself and underlined the importance of a two-state solution<sup>20</sup>. Yet over the following days Biden's rhetoric's became stiffer towards Israel. In the next talk with Netanyahu, Biden signaled that he expects a significant de-escalation allowing for a ceasefire<sup>21</sup>. This signaled a reversal from the Trump administration's approach towards Israel and indicated that American patience was running out.

With time and mutual Israeli-Palestinian distrust it became clear to Biden's administration that direct talks, negotiations and even peace brokerage by the White House will not bring any satisfactory results. While certain Trump policies were discontinued by Biden (rejoining the Paris Agreement), Biden decided to support and continue the Abraham Accords initiative. Not only did Biden decide to support these deals but he also actively expanded the reach of it to include other countries especially Saudi Arabia. Biden signaled his expectation by completing his flight directly from Israel to Saudi Arabia as the first American President since Saudi Arabia decided to open its airspace for a flight from Israel<sup>22</sup>. Recognizing the importance of normalizing relations in the Middle East, bring peace by cooperation and common goals of the states in the region, Biden decided also to be tough on the Palestinian issue. While his administration still awaits a clear signal from the conflicted actors that they are ready to open a new chapter in their negotiation, it decided to bring the element of Palestine into the Accords. US Ambassador to Israel Tom Nides demonstrated support for the initiative, but also touched on the subject of Palestine, declaring that Palestinians can also benefit economically from Israel's improved standing in the region and Nides requested that different working groups operating under the Accords will promote initiatives that benefit the Palestinians<sup>23</sup>. It was declared by Ambassador, that while Washington recognizes the complexity of the problem, it is determined to get possible economic benefits to the Palestinians from the Accords. Biden's direct support to the Palestinian people was pledging an additional \$100 million to hospitals in East Jerusalem as a signal that Palestine is a visible actor in the Middle

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<sup>20</sup> *Readout of President Joe Biden's Call with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel*, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/07/17/readout-of-president-joe-bidens-call-with-prime-minister-benjamin-netanyahu-of-israel-2/> [access: 23.08.2023].

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>22</sup> *Statement by President Biden Welcoming the Opening of Saudi Airspace to Israel*, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/07/15/statement-by-president-biden-welcoming-the-opening-of-saudi-airspace-to-israel/> [access: 23.08.2023].

<sup>23</sup> J. Magid, *Nides: Biden administration taking Abraham Accords 'from start-up to real operation'*, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/nides-biden-administration-taking-abraham-accords-from-start-up-to-real-operation/> [access: 23.08.2023].

East<sup>24</sup>. And while this decision was alongside of the Accords it signified that the US is engaged in the Middle East as general and that the Palestinians are recognized as a vital player and that the Abraham Accords will not undermine Palestinian aspirations.

The Abraham Accords, a Republican President's initiative which is being praised and continued by a Democrat in the White House signals that it is a cohesive and well-designed offer for the Middle East. One can criticize it and name it a purely business one, or that it directly does not involve the Palestinians yet, at a declarative level, it aims at bringing previously conflicted actors together. The pace and scope differ in case of each bilateral cooperation, but the goal is common for the whole region. A side effect of the Accords could be further isolation of Iran as a regional threat but also a state that supports Putin by selling its arms, mainly drones. While the blind spot of the Abraham Accords is that it indirectly undermines the long and internationally accepted solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – the two-state solution. While the Accords, for the Palestinians, might result in humanitarian projects, increasing living standards at the same time, it does not halt further Israel settlement construction of annexed territories adding to the Palestinian refugee crises. For today, not only the US but also the whole international community seems to be unable to put pressure on PM Netanyahu to withdraw from already built settlements, at best executing Israel's further construction of those. A status quo buys time for Israel in terms of the settlements but in the long run is contrary with the two-state solution proposal. The Abraham Accords, at best, will result in promoting living standards for the Palestinians but will not win them full sovereignty. Another blind spot of the Accords is the depth of execution of the bilateral deals sponsored by Washington. Arab countries joined the normalization agreements for specific benefits and are willing to invest in humanitarian projects (also Palestinian ones) for a certain return – which often is American military technology, which the US can satisfy but without threatening Israel's qualitative military edge<sup>25</sup>.

The Middle East chessboard is just as complex as it was years ago. The Abraham Accords should be assessed as a strongly positive, building initiative, especially

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<sup>24</sup> *Remarks by President Biden at East Jerusalem Hospital Network Event*, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/press-briefings/2022/07/15/remarks-by-president-biden-at-east-jerusalem-hospital-network-event/> [access: 23.08.2023].

<sup>25</sup> R. Wadi, *The Abraham Accords expose international hypocrisy over Palestine*, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20230126-the-abraham-accords-expose-international-hypocrisy-over-palestine/> [access: 23.08.2023].

in today's global developments, mainly the war in Ukraine. Cementing a region which has been unstable for decades, a region of strategic importance for its natural resources, is surely a stabilizing event in the light of instability in Eastern Europe. The transformation of the Middle East with American efforts is a long-term project but will be beneficial for all. Yet, it must be also confronted with realpolitik on the ground. The two-state solution seems to be only a paradigm and a new proposal for the decades long Israeli-Palestinian conflict must be shaped. In this matter the Abraham Accords even in the long run will not be a strategic edge, but if continued and executed diligently will be beneficial for the Palestinians.

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