



Presentation by H.E. Akiva Tor, Israel Ambassador to ROK

Thank you to Seoul National University Asian Center for organizing and hosting this event. His Excellency Ambassador Abdullah Saif Al-Nuaimi and myself appeared in a similar forum at the PyeongChang Peace Forum not long ago. I said there at the outset as I say also here – there is no greater honor for an Israeli emissary than to appear together with an esteemed Arab colleague with whom we have made peace. Ambassador Abdullah Saif is a fine man, a fabulous ambassador and a gracious host, and it has been an honor to share in the shade of your home.

Definition of the Abraham Accords

The Abraham Accords refer both to the Peace Agreement between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, and collectively to the agreements signed between Israel and UAE and Israel with Bahrain in August and September 2020 with the active diplomatic participation of the United States. The Accords are named for our joint progenitor Abraham, the father of Isaac and Ishmael and hence the father of the Jews and the Arabs, whom we call in Hebrew – Avraham, and in Arabic – Ibrahim. As we have one father, we are one humanity. These peace treaties led to further breakthroughs in the region: Normalization of relations between Israel and the Kingdom of Morocco in December and with the Republic of Sudan in January. Doubtless additional countries – Arab and Muslim – will join this historic trend in the coming months and years.

Why did the Abraham Accords happen now?

Maturation of the region: Israel's previous peace agreements were with Egypt (1979) and Jordan (1994). The Oslo Accords between Israel and the PLO were signed in September 1993. So more than a quarter century of semi-normalization of relations between Israel and the Arab world has passed. During this period, Israel also had interest offices in Tunisia and Oman which did not survive the political stress and test of time in the region – but which are conceivable and can return. This dynamic of acceptance of the legitimate presence of Israel in the Middle East has deepened – and with time and effort will deepen even more.

Convergence of strategic interests: There is an aggressive Shiite power in the region which seeks regional domination and weapons of mass destruction. 1800 kilometers separate Israel and Iran and we have no actual issues of conflict between us, and yet we feel their hostile power projection every day and in the decades long quest to achieve nuclear weapons – which must not be allowed by the international community. The entire Arabian peninsula is also menaced by Iran, as well as the international energy shipping lanes – as you well know. Before the aggression of the Islamic Republic of Iran we cannot afford to stand alone, and hence we stand together. This alliance will deepen and become wider, because in the Middle East one must see things as they are, not as one would wish them to be.

Strong US leadership: It was applied to achieve this goal. US leadership is desirable, though not essential, for the furtherance of Israeli – Arab peace. The Oslo Accords were negotiated in secret directly between Israel and the Palestinian leadership, but they were ultimately signed – like the Abraham Accords – on the White House lawn. In the peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan, Presidents Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton were heavily involved. The Trump administration made the advance of peace between Israel and the states of the Arabian Gulf a priority, and devoted to this cause very significant time and diplomatic capital. We owe them a debt of thanks.

Courageous national leadership: Peace is required by leaders to address public opinion and regional pushback. Recently on Algerian television's popular discussion program, the participants agreed that they could not condemn the involvement of an Algerian national in the Munich massacre of Israeli Olympic athletes. A key reason that Israel and the Palestinian Authority have not progressed to a formal peace treaty is the division and weakness of the Palestinian leadership. Unlike in the UAE and Bahrain, in Egypt and Jordan the peace with Israel is not tolerated by the public. The Israeli ambassador is not welcome at any university campus, and an event like this one is impossible. Making peace requires leadership that is willing to lead the public, not only to follow it.

Solidifying the peace

The Importance of people to people: Engagement between the societies, and not only the governments, is essential to override political difficulties when they inevitably occur. This was perhaps the deep mistake of the Oslo process. Chairman Yasser Arafat saw people to people as a concession rather than as a means towards achieving the peace. We were wrong and short-sighted not to insist. In the case of the Abraham Accords, this mistake is not being repeated:

- 130,000 Israeli tourists and investors have visited Dubai and Abu Dhabi since the signing of the accords.

- Hebrew classes have become popular in UAE and are swamped by Emiratis interested in studying in Israel or doing business there.
- Israel's Mekorot national water carrier has signed a large desalination deal with Bahrain.
- The United Arab Emirates announced the launch of a \$10 billion strategic Israel investment fund to invest alongside Israel in energy, manufacturing, water, space, solar and green energy, healthcare and agri-tech.
- This is the opportunity to congratulate His Excellency on UAE's successful entry of the al-Amal spacecraft into Mars orbit. Perhaps we will yet land there together! In'sha'allah.
- Thomas Friedman wrote last week in the NYT: "the UAE – Israel axis brings together the most successful Arabstate with most successful non-Arab state (in the Middle East), it's radiating a lot of energy." We need to do this even with states that are not the most successful – so that we can all of us succeed. It helps that both countries are future oriented, forward looking. We believe in history, but not in becoming history's victim. Bitterness is a very poor investment.

The Abraham Accords are also a big opportunity for Korea which I hope will be embraced.

- Trade with Israel and with the Arab states is not a zero sum game. It can pursued in parallel. There is political room for a much deeper synergy between Israel's innovation economy and Korea's technological manufacturing and marketing genius. We are very good friends with ROK, but there is room for a deeper political engagement.
- This is also the time to think creatively – imagine a UAE – Israel – ROK green technology alliance which matches UAE's financial and investment capacities, Israeli tech innovation, and Korean production and manufacturing prowess. There is surely an opportunity here to be realized. Opportunity belongs to those who can imagine and see it.

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