



Modi: Relations with neighbors depend on security and trust

Dems seek to elevate Biden, Harris at unique online confab

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TEL AVIV: The city hall in this coastal city is lit up in the colors of the United Arab Emirates national flag on August 13, 2020. — AFP

UAE defends deal with Israel

Move to establish ties 'shake-up' of tired diplomacy

DUBAI: The UAE on Friday offered a muscular defense of its bombshell move to establish ties with Israel, saying it was designed to "shake up" the Middle East impasse and serve Emirati interests. The historic deal, the first for a Gulf state, sees Israel pledge to suspend its planned annexation of Palestinian lands but has been condemned by the Palestinian leadership as a "betrayal" of their cause.

Omar Saif Ghobash, assistant Minister for Culture and Public Diplomacy, rejected the charge, insisting the agreement had made progress in the absence of any other workable proposal from the Arab world. "I think we've demonstrated that we are able to enter a very staid and tired situation and to shake things up, and we look forward to seeing positive developments coming out of this real engagement," he told AFP in an interview.

The deal, announced by US President Donald Trump on Thursday, is only the third such accord Israel has struck with an Arab country, and raises the prospect of similar deals with other pro-Western Gulf states. But regional power Saudi Arabia, whose own efforts to induce Israel to withdraw from occupied territories have been effectively sidelined by the United Arab Emirates move, has

remained conspicuously silent.

"We didn't consult with anybody, we didn't inform anybody, and as a sovereign state we don't feel that we have the obligation to do that," Ghobash said, asked if long-time ally Riyadh was consulted in advance. "We are in the process now of informing our friends and partners and others in the region as to why we took the step" but "it's to be expected that not everybody will ... applaud or comment". "We have taken the decision as a sovereign state with our own interests and our own calculations in mind."

'We are not a gift'

The establishment of ties with Israel comes after years of quiet rapprochement, including the hosting of athletes and ministers from the Jewish state. Apart from the diplomatic implications, there are obvious economic benefits. The UAE, rich in oil and with big ambitions in space and technology, will be able to do business openly with Israel, which will have access to the modern cities of Dubai and Abu Dhabi as they attract talent and investment.

"We as a country are very globally connected and we do find that the connections are incredibly

lucrative and contribute to our GDP," Ghobash said, in an unusually candid assessment. "We are driven by pragmatic considerations." The UAE, which has sent a probe to Mars and pressed the button on a nuclear power program in the past month, is growing in prominence on the world stage.

Ghobash, a former ambassador to Russia and France, said the Israel deal demonstrated its diplomatic independence. "We are not a gift to be awarded to the Israelis at some stage if they satisfy Palestinian demands," he said. "We are very clearly stating that it is in our sovereign interest to make this move and therefore that sovereign interest will be served," he said. "We have spent the last 20 years developing relationships with all kinds of countries across the globe. We have an active foreign policy and we will make our own sovereign decisions."

No back-stabbers

Oman and Bahrain have welcomed the announcement as advancing the prospects for peace in the Middle East. But Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stressed the deal did not mean Israel was abandoning its plans to one day annex

the Jordan Valley and Jewish settlements across the occupied West Bank. "The primary gain is to take annexation out of the equation for the time being," Ghobash said.

The minister rejected criticism from the Palestinians, saying there was "no other plan on the table from our Arab side to suggest that some solution might be forthcoming". "I am trying to understand in what sense this is a back stab given that what we have done is actually open the door for a rethink on the Israeli side about annexation," he said. "We strongly believe in the rights of the Palestinians' cause and the rights of the Palestinians," said Ghobash. "So we have taken the step in accordance with these deeply held beliefs but also in accordance with the new reading of the region."

In 2002, Saudi Arabia sponsored the Arab Peace Initiative which called for Israel's complete withdrawal from occupied territories in exchange for peace and full normalization of relations. "We are now in 2020, so 18 years have passed and we haven't seen any outcome from the Arab Peace Initiative. "We believe that the way in which we should approach these questions is by dialogue and communication," Ghobash said. — AFP

Israel-UAE deal a Trump coup, but sights are on Iran

WASHINGTON: The Israel-UAE agreement gives the United States a rare diplomatic success in the Middle East - but it is Iran which President Donald Trump has in his sights, with a strategy that has already hit roadblocks at the United Nations. The White House has lavished praise on a foreign policy coup which was sorely needed by a president seeking re-election in November who has little to show on the diplomatic front.

"This is a dramatic breakthrough that will make the Middle East safer," chief US negotiator Jared Kushner told CBS. "It means less American troops will have to be over there." Under the US-brokered agreement, the United Arab Emirates and Israel agreed on Thursday to establish full diplomatic ties, making the monarchy just the third Arab country to recognize the Jewish state, following Egypt in 1979 and Jordan in 1994.

"Assuming the deal works, it's the first time Israel has established normalized relations with any Gulf nation and for that reason it's significant," said Aaron David Miller, a former diplomat who served as Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiator in Democratic and Republican administrations. But, Miller cautioned, "don't blow this out of proportion. I don't buy that it's on the same level of magnitude or accomplishment as Egypt or Jordan," said Miller, now a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

"This is the UAE we're talking about. This is not the Arab world's most powerful nation like Egypt. This isn't even a country that has



WASHINGTON: (from left, rear) Senior Advisor Jared Kushner, US Secretary of the Treasury Steven Mnuchin and National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien clap for US President Donald Trump after he announced an agreement between UAE and Israel to normalize diplomatic ties at the White House on Thursday. — AFP

a contiguous border with Israel." Barbara Slavin of the Atlantic Council, another Washington think-tank, described the agreement as a "good move" but "not earth-shaking in view of the covert ties the two countries have had for a very long time."

'Vision for Peace'

Since taking office, Trump has pledged to apply his self-proclaimed deal-making skills to resolving the intractable Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He charged Kushner, his son-in-law, with the daunting task of hammering out Middle East peace. But the Palestinians have refused to play along with an administration seen as staunchly pro-Israel, and rejected the US president's "Vision for Peace" unveiled in January.

Miller said the Israel-UAE normalization agreement does little to advance Trump's "vision" of overall Middle East peace.

What's more, he added, "the administration's motivation has nothing to do with Israeli-Palestinian peace." "It's about domestic policy," Miller said. "This is about making the president look good, demonstrating some measure of competency and fulfilling at least some degree of what the administration claimed it would do from the beginning - which is to make peace between Israel and the Arab world." Above all, Miller said, "it helps give rise to the image that there is an anti-Iran coalition." "But I'm not sure that's going to get very far," he continued, unless Trump can get other Arab countries such as Morocco, Bahrain and Oman to sign on. Trump has made it clear that his main objective in the Middle East is neutralizing Iran. He has called on several occasions for the creation of a NATO of Middle East nations, an alliance which has failed to come together. — AFP

After UAE-Israel deal, all eyes on Saudi Arabia

DUBAI: The historic UAE-Israel diplomatic deal may prompt other Arab nations to follow suit, but heavyweight Saudi Arabia will be cautious, with more complex political calculations to make, analysts say. The United Arab Emirates is the first Gulf state to normalize relations with Israel, after years of quiet rapprochement including the hosting of athletes and ministers from the Jewish state. But the diplomatic flirtation has also reached Oman, which was visited by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in 2018 and Bahrain, which received Israeli journalists last year.

Both countries have welcomed Thursday's bombshell announcement as advancing the prospects for peace in the Middle East, while Riyadh has been conspicuously silent. Yoel Guzansky, a Gulf politics specialist at the Institute for National Security Studies at Tel Aviv University, said he expected Bahrain to be among the first to adopt the UAE's position, possibly along with some North African nations.

"I don't see Saudi Arabia jumping immediately. I think it will wait and see the reactions in the Gulf, the Arab world... and then they will decide how and when, and in what scope," said the former adviser to several Israeli prime ministers. "I don't think that they will go full ahead like the Emirates." — AFP

'A little annoyed'

In 2002 Saudi Arabia sponsored the Arab Peace Initiative which called for Israel's complete withdrawal from the Palestinian territories occupied after the Six-Day War of 1967, in exchange for peace and the full normalization of relations. But the kingdom, the Arab world's biggest economy and custodian of Islam's holiest sites, has also cultivated ties with Israel in recent years, in a shift spearheaded by de facto leader Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

In 2018 Riyadh quietly opened its airspace for the first time for an Israel-bound passenger plane. And it has pursued a bold outreach to Jewish figures in recent years, even as it appears wary of a public backlash. However it is unlikely it will take the monumental step of establishing official relations "at least not right away", said Hussein Ibish, an analyst at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington. "My guess is that King Salman will be at least a little annoyed, since this breaks the Arab consensus that the Arab Peace Initiative is the guiding basis for all major diplomacy with Israel."

The specter of Iran plays a fundamental role in the rapprochement between Israel and the Gulf states, all staunch allies of the United States in its confrontation with the Islamic republic. But there are difference in the perception of threat among Gulf states. Iran's opponents accuse it of interfering in other nations' affairs by supporting, financing and mobilizing armed groups and parties across the region. Nevertheless, Kuwait, Qatar and Oman have relations with Iran, while hardliners Saudi Arabia and Bahrain maintain a total boycott. — AFP