Abraham Accords Anniversary Sept. 15: Peace Treaties Continue to Grow

written by Meir Ben Shabbat | 13.09.2024

The terrible war imposed on Israel on Oct. 7 tested not only Israel's military power and national strength but also its relations with its neighbors in the Arab and Muslim world.

An emergency conference of leaders from these countries that convened in Saudi Arabia in the first month of the war, turned into a verbal demonstration of support for the Palestinians. As Israel's actions in Gaza increased, so did the fears for the future of peace and the fate of the Abraham Accords, which in a short period of time had enough to experience a pandemic, security crises, and unprecedented political upheavals.

Sunday, Sept. 15, marks the fourth anniversary of the signing of the accords.

Despite difficult conditions, even this time, the question marks were once again replaced by an exclamation mark. The relationship stood strong even in the face of the anti-Israeli campaign and the difficult pictures from Gaza. Except for Sudan — which was shaken by a civil war — stability is maintained in all other arenas. That same optimism can be attributed to the continued possibility of Saudi Arabia and other countries joining the Abraham Accords.

On Oct. 7, the normalization between Israel and its normal neighbors took a hard hit from its abnormal neighbors, yet remained steady. Already at the beginning of the war, the Abraham Accords countries signaled their intention to preserve relations with Israel and not let Hamas sabotage them. These countries were among the first to publicly condemn Hamas for the monstrous attack it carried out on the Jewish holiday of Simchat Torah.

UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed welcomed Israeli President Isaac Herzog for a meeting on the sidelines of COP28 in Dubai while the military campaign on the battlefield continued. Since the war broke out, Israel's ministers of economy, energy, and strategic affairs all made public visits to the UAE and

met with their colleagues. The IDF Chief of Staff participated in a summit in Bahrain, while a delegation of Israeli rabbis visited Morocco.

The Emirati minister of state for foreign trade and the Bahraini minister of finance stated that they intend to continue promoting economic relations with Israel, while at the same time in interviews he gave to the media, the head of the Moroccan mission in Israel praised the cooperation between the countries.

The Technology and Innovation Institute of the United Arab Emirates announced the establishment of an artificial intelligence center at the Technion in Haifa, while the Moroccan government signed a billion-dollar satellite deal with the Israeli Aerospace Industry.

While most foreign airlines canceled their flights to Israel, FlyDubai and Etihad of the United Arab Emirates were among the only airlines in the world that continued flying to Israel.

And perhaps the most surprising: Trade between Israel and the Abraham Accords countries continues to increase significantly. According to a report recently published by the Abraham Accords Peace Institute: In the first half of 2024, there was a 7% increase in trade between Israel and the UAE, a 709% increase in trade between Israel and Bahrain, a 64% increase in trade between Israel and Morocco, and a 53% increase in trade between Israel and Egypt. These figures are relative to the first half of last year and reflect significant progress in economic relations between America's allies in the region.

Such a significant increase in trade at a time of multifront war that increases uncertainty in the region, is not a matter of course and shouldn't be taken for granted. As crazy as it seems, one of the factors that contributed to this trade growth is the war itself.

In the recent past, European companies used to send their cargoes of goods to the Gulf countries through the port of Beirut. These goods arrived by boat via the Mediterranean Sea and were loaded in the port of Beirut on trucks that took them from Lebanon through Syria to the Gulf countries. However, because of the Syrian Civil War and escalation in the conflict with Hezbollah in Lebanon, the use of this route has decreased over the past decade.

The preferred alternate route was from Egypt through the Suez Canal and the

Red Sea to the Gulf. But in recent months, even this trade route has become problematic. The threats of the Houthis and their attacks in the Red Sea resulted in the shutdown of a significant part of the civilian maritime traffic on this route.

And so, the land route through Israel became the safest trade route between Europe and Asia. What was impossible before the Abraham Accords because of the boycott in the Arab world against Israel, became the preferred and most worthwhile route.

In recent months, the volume of cargo and goods passing through the Sheikh Hussein crossing between Israel and Jordan, and through the Nitsana crossing between Israel and Egypt, has been increasing. The traffic jams and congestion at the border crossings confirm the picture that emerges from the dry data and indicate that despite the war, when it comes to trade — it's still business as usual.

Israel has a clear interest in preserving the positive momentum created and developing trade along this route. To this end, it will first of all have to expand the infrastructure at the border crossings and ports, including increasing the number of workers there and extending their hours of operation. It would be correct to get Jordan to agree to this effort in order to encourage the increase in trade and to optimize the transportation of cargo.

The diplomatic crisis between Israel and Turkey, which has negatively affected imports to Israel the food sector, provides an opportunity to expand imports from other sources in the region — mainly from Egypt. Due to the threat from the Houthis in the Red Sea, there are fewer Egyptian exports through the Suez Canal. The Egyptian economy is suffering a serious blow but can improve it through the expansion of land trade with Israel. Moving goods through Israel is the safest way for Egypt to export products eastward to the Gulf and Asia.

To reduce unnecessary regulation, Israel must complete the signing of free trade agreements with Bahrain, Morocco, Egypt and Jordan similar to the agreement already signed between Israel and the United Arab Emirates. Even if the timing is not suitable for this because of the war, it is right to complete the negotiations and prepare the groundwork for the day when it becomes possible.

The developments in Sudan require Israel and the United States to take emergency measures to stop the Iranian influence that has increased in this region, following the civil war and after the delay in progress of the Abraham

Accords. For about a year and a half, a bloody war has been going on in Sudan between the military ruler, General Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan, and his deputy, Hemedti, who attempted to stage a coup against him.

Iran saw this as an opportunity to sink its claws into Sudan and began to supply UAVs to Burhan, who had previously been the one to carry the normalization with Israel on his back. His appeal to Tehran was not out of sympathy with it, but as a coercion due to a vacuum left by the United States and the lack of weapons and means to defend his country.

From Iran's point of view, Sudan is a strategic asset in light of its geographical location that can create an operational base for terror activity against the shores of the Red Sea, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Sinai, the Gaza Strip and Israel, and on the other hand, against African countries.

Many steps are necessary to expand the circle of peace, but the chances of an agreement with Saudi Arabia have not diminished. The same goes for other desirable countries. They are all waiting for "the right time," in view of the multi-stakeholder war and the upcoming U.S. presidential election.

One way or another, even in the shadow of the war, the facts on the ground show that the Abraham Accords countries still strive to develop and deepen their ties with Israel in many areas. The Abraham Accords were founded on a concept of peace through strength. Not only military power but also economic and technological power. Although the current war pushed them out of the headlines, these peace treaties have quietly become part of the landscape of our lives.

Published in Newsmax, September 13, 2024.