

# Hebrew-Arab Convergence and Its Implications for Security Arrangements in the Persian Gulf Region

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## **Abstract**

In recent decades, differences, competitions, increased distrust, and conflicts between the countries bordering the Persian Gulf, as well as the presence and influence of extra-regional countries, have made it impossible to achieve comprehensive and lasting security arrangements, and on this basis, Arab countries in the region have sought to place themselves under the protective umbrella of other powers. In this regard, and after the Islamic Revolution, the major conflicting interests of the Arab countries in the Persian Gulf region with the Islamic Republic of Iran have made the realization of a security order more difficult and faced it with serious challenges. Especially during the past two decades, simultaneous with the increase in Iran's regional power, with the support of the United States, a groundwork has been provided for reconciliation and rapprochement between the Zionist regime of Israel and the Arab states in the region. In this context, it seems that the policy of reconciliation and convergence in Tel Aviv may have implications and consequences for the establishment of security arrangements in the region. Accordingly, the main question of the research is: what impact can the convergence of the Israeli regime and the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf have on the process of achieving regional security arrangements? The research hypothesis is that the expansion and development of Tel Aviv's relations with the governments of the Arab countries in the Persian Gulf region can make it difficult to achieve an internal security order by complicating regional equations and intensifying security problems in the region. The research method is qualitative and with an analytical-explanatory approach, and the data have been collected from library and internet sources. The balancing of threats theory has also been used to explain the research topic.

**Keywords:** Israeli regime, Iran, Persian Gulf region, Convergence, Security arrangements.

## Introduction

The Persian Gulf is a region with geo-economic, geostrategic, and geopolitical dimensions located within the Middle East subsystem. In various theories, such as the Heartland Theory, the Persian Gulf has been referred to as the heart of the Earth's geographical map. The exaggeration of this region in theories, which has been proven to be important in different periods, has led regional and international powers to have a special look at this region. Despite the fact that this region is considered one of the important areas in the world in terms of security, where insecurity can create tension in other regions of the world, due to the complexity of internal equations in the Persian Gulf region, such as differences between Arab states and Iran as well as foreign interventions, no comprehensive security system has been formed in this region that includes all the countries in this area. In recent years, two factors have played an important role in the lack of formation of a security system in the region: first, the formation of Iran-phobia by foreign powers, which has been able to influence the policies of Arab countries in the Persian Gulf region and prevent their unity with Iran. Second, the increase in Iran's nuclear capabilities and the strengthening of Iran's strategic influence in the Middle East, which has created a sense of threat in the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf and ultimately led them towards convergence with Iran's enemies, such as the Israel regime. In fact, the increase in Iran's assertive power along with the strengthening of its military and strategic capabilities has created a common threat to the regime of Israel and the Arab countries of the region, bringing them closer to each other. In this regard, Iran's presence near the borders of the Zionist regime has led to a sense of threat from Iran. This issue has led this regime to seek to repel the threat from Iran and encircle the country. Based on this, the Israeli regime has attempted to approach neighboring countries of Iran with the presentation of a "New the Periphery Doctrine" in order to not only keep the war with Iran away from its borders but also to enter Iran's borders if possible. On this basis, and with the full support of the United States government, Israel has put the policy of reconciliation and convergence with the countries of the southern shores of the Persian Gulf on the agenda of its diplomatic apparatus.

Therefore, unreal perception of the common threat of Iran to the Israeli regime and the Arabs has been the main factor in changing regional dynamics and ultimately the convergence of these countries. In other words, constructing Iran as a threat caused the

Israeli regime and the Arab states of the Persian Gulf to set aside their ideological differences and focus special attention on their most important issue, which is security against Iran. The formation of the "Abraham Accords" and the normalization of the Israeli regime's relations with the UAE and Bahrain, as well as the economic and military cooperation of the regime with some other countries in the Persian Gulf region, especially Saudi Arabia, indicate the creation of a regional coalition against Iran that can not only influence relations between Iran and the countries of the Persian Gulf region but also make conditions difficult for achieving regional security arrangements. Based on this, the present study seeks to examine the important backgrounds of the convergence of Arab states of the Persian Gulf with Israel in recent years and to assess its potential impact on the process of achieving regional security arrangements. The research question is that: What impact can the convergence of the Israeli regime and the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf have on the process of achieving regional security arrangements? The research hypothesis is based on the assumption that the expansion and development of relations between the Tel Aviv regime and the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf can complicate regional equations and intensify security problems in the region, making it difficult to achieve an indigenous security order. The research method is qualitative and with an analytical-explanatory approach, and the data has been collected from library and internet sources. The "balance of threat" approach has also been used as a theoretical framework to clarify the research topic.

Stephen Walt, as a neorealist, begins to criticize the theory of "balance of power" by Kenneth Waltz and places the weight of his theory on the subject of threat. Walt tried to improve the security domain realism with his theory. He states that it is not only the element of power that can be relied upon to create a balance, but it is the sense of threat that dictates balancing behavior and shapes the fundamental rule in foreign policy. The level of threat and risk is the most important factor in the decision-making of government leaders in foreign policy (Javanmard, 2023). According to Walt, states engage in balancing only when they perceive one or more states as a threat to themselves. Therefore, he does not consider power as the only factor in creating balance but rather attributes power as only one factor in threat calculations. Walt's definition of threat is not solely dependent on the power of states but rather on the perceptions of states in their relations (Bagheri Chokami & Mohammadi Almoti, 2014: 114). Therefore, balance in Walt's theoretical framework is

shaped by the necessity of fear and not just the accumulation of power. In other words, simply increasing challenging power does not create balance on its own, but the nature of a country's power is on the rise, which requires balance. Therefore, the equation includes power and the intentions of the power holders (Adami & Nourani, 2020: 117). Overall power (or power density) is calculated alongside factors such as geographical proximity, aggressive intentions, and aggressive power. These mentioned components are independent variables that, if changed, are likely to lead other states towards a sense of threat perception and consequently balancing actions (Ekhtiari Amir & et al., 2020: 107).

Stephen Walt's theory suggests that a state's capacity to pose a threat correlates directly with its resource base (Jansiz and Ajazi, 2021: 170). The overall power of a state encompasses factors such as population size, land area, and technological advancement; dominance in these areas can elevate the perceived threat to other countries. Additionally, geographical proximity increases the threat perception, as neighboring states with significant power are typically viewed as more immediate threats than distant powers. Another dimension of threat relates to aggressive capabilities, which enable a state to challenge the sovereignty or territorial integrity of others (Jansiz and Ajazi, 2021: 170). Military capacity, particularly with advanced weapons systems or influential ideologies, can amplify this threat. When a state with substantial resources also possesses advanced military capabilities, like nuclear weapons, it tends to provoke counterbalancing actions from other countries aiming to protect their stability and cohesion. The perceived intentions of states are also influential in alliance formation. Ideological differences between ruling elites can create tensions, especially when a dominant power holds ideologies that conflict with those of others. States encountering a unipolar power with opposing ideological leanings may resort to balancing strategies to mitigate perceived threats. According to Walt, these elements—resources, proximity, aggressive capabilities, and intentions—collectively shape threat perceptions in the international system. Thus, no single factor alone determines threat perception. In Walt's view, the lack of a central governing authority in the international system fosters an environment where states view each other's capabilities with caution, contributing to an anarchic order and a pervasive sense of insecurity.

Based on the above assumptions, the convergence of Israel and the Arab Gulf states can be attributed to their perceived threat of

Iran. In other words, the geographical proximity of the Arabs of the Persian Gulf with Iran, as well as Iran's proximity to Israel through resistance groups in Syria, Palestine, and Lebanon, Iran's pervasive ideology in the form of the Shi'a world, the country's access to nuclear technology, along with Iran's military power, especially in the missile and drone fields, has caused these countries to feel threatened and ultimately provided the grounds for the establishment of an official Hebrew-Arab coalition.

## **1. Reasons for the Convergence of Israel and the Arab Countries of the Persian Gulf**

### **1-1. Hostility Between the Israeli Regime and Iran and New Periphery Doctrine**

After the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, the new government in Iran declared the Zionist regime of Israel an illegitimate state and supported the people of Palestine. Since the beginning of hostilities between the two countries, several decades have passed. During this time, Iran and Israel have had numerous confrontations but have never entered into direct war with each other. Most of the tensions between the two countries in recent years have taken place through clashes between the resistance groups and Israel, or in the Syrian civil war. The hostility between Iran and Israel has led the ruling leaders in Tel Aviv to adopt different doctrines due to the lack of strategic depth. Among the most important of these are the "New Periphery Doctrine" and the "Octopus Doctrine." In the initial Periphery Doctrine, which was introduced by Ben Gurion, the then Prime Minister, Israel, based on the pragmatic logic of "the enemy of my enemy is my friend," and by relying on its strategic isolation, sought to develop relations with non-Arab countries in the region. Based on this, the development of relations with Iran was pursued during the Pahlavi era. However, with the change in equations and the hostility between Tehran and Tel Aviv, Israel has shifted its geographical policy under "the New Periphery Doctrine." In this doctrine, Iran is the main enemy of the Israeli regime. Therefore, this regime has tried to focus on uniting with the countries surrounding Iran within the framework of the New Periphery Doctrine. Within the framework of this doctrine, Israel has moved towards normalizing relations with the countries of the Persian Gulf. Peace with Egypt and Jordan has shown that peace with other Arab countries is possible for the Israeli regime. Especially, the common threat of Iran had provided the groundwork and necessary conditions for normalizing Arab-Israeli relations and unprecedented

cooperation between them.

At the same time, the leaders of the Zionist regime introduced the "Octopus Doctrine" with the aim of intensifying Iranophobia. Israeli regime authorities have stated that for years they have been engaged with the arms of the octopus, or the proxy groups of Iran, and now it is time to release those arms and target the head of the octopus. To achieve this goal, the "Jerusalem Statement" was presented, which is the same strategic cooperation program that emphasizes Tel Aviv-Washington's common positions on nuclear capabilities, missile programs, drone systems, regional behaviors, and Iran's support of the resistance groups in the West Asia region. In other words, the Jerusalem Statement is a prelude to security arrangements and then immunity from so-called Iran's aggressive intentions and threats towards Tel Aviv's presence in the West Asia region (Jahan Sanat Newspaper, July 14, 2022). It was planned that this strategic alliance and cooperation, according to the Jerusalem Statement, would not be limited and exclusive to Tel Aviv-Washington, and this strategic circle would be expanded by inviting broader Arab forums. Therefore, Israel, based on its hostility towards Iran and in line with its strategic goals to confront Tehran, has tried to find new allies among the Arab countries in the Persian Gulf region and align them with its own objectives.

### **1-2. Competition Between the Arabs of the Persian Gulf and Iran in West Asia**

One of the most important conflicts between the countries of the Persian Gulf region can be attributed to territorial and border disputes, religious differences (between Shiite and Sunni), ideological conflict (competition for leadership of the Islamic world between Iran and Saudi Arabia through support for the resistance groups and Sunni groups), and also the efforts to balance regional power. In this regard, the competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia is the main competition between the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf and Iran. The two countries pursue conflicting interests in West Asia. With the increase in Iran's power after the Arab Spring, the Saudis' perception of this country has changed, and they have identified it as the main threat. Therefore, Riyadh has tried to counter any political, diplomatic, and economic moves by Iran in the Southwest Asia region and the Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula subsystem and also prevent the empowerment of Shiites in the power structure of Arab countries (Sheikh Dareh-Ni & et al., 1402: 33-34). Although in recent years, the Arab states of the Persian Gulf



have tried to act independently of Saudi Arabia in their policies, nevertheless, due to the influence of Arab identity on their actions, Saudi Arabia still plays the role of the big brother of the Arabs. In addition, Iran's policies in the region are considered a serious threat to other countries, especially the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Kuwait. Therefore, the confrontation between Saudi Arabia and Iran is considered to some extent as representing the Arab states of the Persian Gulf. These confrontations have been observed in recent years in countries such as Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Lebanon.

In the Syrian crisis, although the Arab states of the Persian Gulf adopted different tactics, all of them were pursuing the same goal: the formation of a Sunni state instead of Bashar al-Assad's government, ultimately leading to a reduction of Iran's presence and influence in the Middle East. In the course of the Yemeni developments, Iran and Saudi Arabia took conflicting positions based on their own goals and interests. Iran's support for the Yemeni revolutionaries and later the Ansar Allah movement, and on the other hand, Saudi Arabia's and some members of the Gulf Cooperation Council's support for stabilizing the situation and strengthening the power of the previous government, the Abdullah Saleh regime, made the fate of the political developments in this country important for Tehran and Riyadh (Rostami & et al., 2018: 10); the increase in the power of each of the groups in Yemen led to an increase in the power of their regional supporters. In Iraq, since the rise of the Shiites and Iran's influence in the country since the fall of Saddam, we have witnessed the confrontation of the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf, especially Saudi Arabia, with Iran. During this time, Saudi Arabia's policy in Iraq has been based on countering Iran's increasing influence and geopolitical expansion, and based on this goal, in addition to ignoring the political process in Iraq, it has taken other actions such as supporting terrorist groups in Iraq, supporting the re-entry of Ba'ath Party members to power, and supporting opponents of the Iraqi government (Niaakoui and Moradi Klardeh, 2015: 124). All the conflicts and arenas of competition mentioned indicate the fact that before the improvement of relations between Iran and the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf in recent months, there have been serious confrontations between the two sides, which have even led to proxy wars; although these competitions and confrontations exist in a milder form at present.

### **1-3. Interventions of the Great Powers**

The confrontations between Iran and the countries of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council have always been intensified by the interventions of external factors, especially the interference of the great powers, and have made the situation more complicated than ever. In this regard, one can point to the influence of Western states, especially the United Kingdom and the United States, in the ruling apparatus of the Arab countries in the region. In this regard, Britain's presence in the region dates back to 1819. This is when Britain, under the pretext of establishing security in the Persian Gulf, established itself in the region and brought the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf together under the so-called "perpetual peace" treaty, according to which the British were allowed to intervene not only to combat piracy but also to maintain security in the Persian Gulf in any incident that occurred on the shores of the Persian Gulf (Fars News Agency, December 1, 2016). During the period of this country's presence in the Persian Gulf, multiple military bases were established in the Persian Gulf, which were responsible for ensuring security in the region. The military weakness of the Arab countries led them to enter into military agreements with Britain and involve this country in their decision-making. Britain has always prevented the establishment of regional security arrangements in order to maintain a presence and influence in the region; this approach continues to this day in a different form. After Britain's withdrawal from the region in 1971, the military vacuum left by this country led the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf to enter into military agreements with the United States. Kuwait, the Emirates, and Saudi Arabia were the first countries to sign military agreements with the United States. In addition to military agreements for their own security, these countries also signed various military arms purchase agreements with the United States. In this regard, and following the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the United States decided to secure the region by direct military presence in the Persian Gulf. In this context, in 1980, Jimmy Carter, the then President of the United States, declared: "The Persian Gulf oil is vital to America, and any attempt by a foreign power to control the Persian Gulf region is considered an attack on the vital interests of the United States and will be countered by any means, including military action." Following Carter's remarks, the plan to create a Rapid Reaction Force (including two hundred thousand soldiers equipped with modern weapons) was put into effect (Divsalar and Talavaki, 2013: 81).

Therefore, with the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the



United States took responsibility for maintaining stability and security in the region and strengthened its presence in the region by establishing military bases in Arab countries. Since the US military presence in the region, this country has become an important influential factor in shaping the security arrangements of the Persian Gulf. Although during the presidency of Barack Obama, the policy of "pivot to Asia" reduced the presence in the Persian Gulf and the Middle East, this reduction in presence has never meant a reduction in influence, and at the same time, the US has tried to bring Israel and the Arab countries of the southern rim of the Persian Gulf closer together in order to create its desired security arrangements. Additionally, after announcing its reduced presence in the Persian Gulf, the US has used various strategies such as "selective action" and "remote balancing." These interventions, given the hostile relations between Iran and the US, have made it difficult for Iran to create internal security arrangements against Arab-American allies. In the meantime, the interventions of Russia and China have also complicated regional relations. These two powers have mainly sought to increase their influence in the Persian Gulf region for political and economic purposes, in competition with Western powers. Although unlike Western countries, these two countries have normal and appropriate relations with Iran, they are still seeking to secure their own national interests in the region, which sometimes conflicts with Iran's national interests. In this regard, the anti-Iranian statements of China and Russia regarding Iran's sovereignty over the islands can be mentioned.

#### **1-4. Iran's Nuclear Program**

Iran's nuclearization means the departure of this technology from the Israeli regime's monopoly. Iran's acquisition of nuclear technology, given this country's hostility towards Israel, has created an existential threat for the regime. Leaders of the Israeli regime believe that if Iran acquires nuclear weapons, it will use them to destroy Israel. The Zionist regime has tried to portray Iran's nuclear activities as a security issue for humanity by creating a threatening image of Iran (Rostami and Tara, 1397: 131).

The highlighting of the issue of Iran's nuclear technology has initially created suspicion, especially among neighboring countries, particularly the Arab states of the Persian Gulf. Some Arab leaders are concerned that Iran's nuclear capabilities will upset the balance of power in the Middle East, embolden the Shia minority throughout the region, or worse, initiate a regional nuclear arms race

(Council on Foreign Relations, April 20, 2006). The continuation of Iran's nuclear activities, alongside ideological and geopolitical hostility with the Arab states of the Persian Gulf, especially the competition between Tehran and Riyadh, has led to severe fear among these Arab governments (Nader, 2013).

On the other hand, in recent decades, Iran's acquisition of nuclear technology and its role as a regional power have fueled Iranophobia, pushing regional countries towards purchasing advanced and large-scale weapons from major global powers. In fact, when the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council came to believe that Iran posed a necessary threat to their security, it meant that the Iranophobia project had been realized. In this situation, an arms race among the wealthy members of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council over military power intensified (Jamalzadeh and Aghaei, 1394: 43). Indeed, the increase in arms purchases by Arab countries in the region in recent years has been aimed at creating a balance against Iran's military power. After the United States, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and China are the largest arms exporters to the countries of the Persian Gulf region. In this regard, the annual data from the Stockholm Peace Institute shows the arms purchases and the share of gross domestic product of the countries of the Persian Gulf region in 2022.

**Table (1): The annual data from the Stockholm Peace Institute**

Country	Share of GDP	The Share of arm purchase
Bahrain	%3.2	1381.31
Iran	%2.6	6846.60
Iraq	%1.7	4683.14
Kuwait	%4.5	8244.12
Oman	%5.2	5783.49
Qatar	%7.0	15412.09
Saudi Arabia	%7.4	75013.33
United Arab Emirates	....	....
Yemen	....	....

Source: (SIPRI, 2022)

In recent years, the increase in arms purchases aimed at creating a balance against Iran's power has also pushed Arab countries in the region towards purchasing weapons from Israel. Given Israel's goal of repelling Iranian threats and gaining a market for its weapons, the Arab states of the Persian Gulf are considered a suitable option for this regime. According to the statement of the Ministry of Defense

of the Israeli regime, after the Abraham Accords, Israel's arms sales to the Arab states of the Persian Gulf have increased (Donyaye Eghtesad Newspaper, 2020), which may be due to their common sense of threat from Iran.

In addition to increasing Iran's strategic power in the Middle East in recent decades, the country's acquisition of nuclear technology, Israel's need for Persian Gulf oil, the Arab need for a powerful ally with a nearby geographical border to create balance with Iran, as well as the policy of reducing America's presence in the Middle East, and so on, have led the southern Arab states of the Persian Gulf and Israel towards normalization of relations with each other. Although the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain are the only countries that joined the "Abraham Peace Agreement" in 2020 and started official relations with Israel, other southern Arab states also have relative relations with Israel. Qatar, Oman, and Saudi Arabia have trade relations with Israel. Also, Saudi Arabia and Israel have had secret military-intelligence cooperation with each other. In early March 2022, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman said: "We look at Israel not as an enemy, but as a potential ally... But before that, some problems need to be solved" (Sputnik News Agency, 2022/04/07), to which he refers to Palestine; however, these statements by Saudi elites indicate Saudi Arabia's readiness to normalize relations if conditions are met.

## **2. Areas of Cooperation Between Israel and the Arab States of the Persian Gulf**

The common threat from Iran that facilitated Israel's convergence with some Arab countries also created suitable grounds for the development of relations and cooperation. In this regard, in 2015, the United Arab Emirates allowed Israel to establish diplomatic presence at the International Renewable Energy Conference in Abu Dhabi. Qatar has also cooperated with the Israeli regime to establish a ceasefire in Gaza, which is under the control of Hamas, and in 2018, the Sultanate of Oman hosted the Israeli regime's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. These actions were taken in line with the new definition of these countries' security and the need for strategic changes (Hashjin and Jandaghi, 1401: 99). Considering the convergence of Tel Aviv and the Arab governments in the region, various collaborations have been formed between the two sides in recent years, strengthening their relations, which will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

### **2-1. Oil Cooperation**

One of the areas of cooperation between Israel and Arab countries in the Persian Gulf region, especially the United Arab Emirates, is in the field of oil. Although Israel has claimed to have access to oil, the volume of discovered oil is relatively low compared to the country's consumption, and Israel needs to import oil. Until before the Islamic Revolution in Iran, most of Israel's oil imports were from Iran during the second Pahlavi era. The two countries signed agreements in the field of oil. According to the agreements, after the Arab-Israeli war in 1967, a 260-kilometer pipeline was drawn from the port of Eilat on the Red Sea to the port of Ashkelon on the Mediterranean coast, the expenses of which were paid by the Iranian government (Institute of Contemporary History, 2022, 31 December). After the Islamic Revolution in Iran, due to the hostility between Iran and Israel, the use of this pipeline remained stagnant. However, Israel and the United Arab Emirates had agreed within the framework of the peace treaty to develop their oil cooperation, relying on the "Eilat-Ashkelon" oil pipeline. Therefore, the Israeli regime company "Europe-Asia Pipeline" and the "Me\_Red Land Bridge" consortium signed an agreement in October 2020 regarding the United Arab Emirates oil pipeline (Euro News Agency, November 6, 2021). The Europe-Asia Pipeline Company, which owns a 158-mile pipeline from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea, can be used to bypass the Suez Canal and provide a cheaper alternative for oil shipments (Alishahi & et al., 2020: 160). According to the agreement, the United Arab Emirates is committed to exporting oil to Israel. However, this agreement has faced negative reactions from Iran, as Iran has a share in the construction of this pipeline, and Israel would have to compensate Iran for using this pipeline. According to the oil agreement between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, the volume of economic transactions between the two countries will increase significantly. By restarting this pipeline, Israel can become a center for energy transportation in the Middle East.

### **2-2. Commercial Cooperation**

In addition to cooperation in the field of energy, Israel has also expanded its commercial cooperation with some Arab countries in the Persian Gulf region. In this regard, for example, Tel Aviv and Abu Dhabi signed a "comprehensive economic partnership" in 2022. According to one of the most important clauses of the comprehensive economic partnership agreement between the United

Arab Emirates and the Zionist regime, customs tariffs are lifted or reduced by 96 percent of the two countries' trade (Mehr News Agency, December 23, 2022). This is Israel's first extensive trade agreement with an Arab country. Bahrain, like the Emirates, has cited economic reasons as one of the reasons for normalizing its relations with Israel. In this regard, the Minister of Bahrain claimed that establishing relations with Israel has been done to strengthen economic security. In fact, Bahrain's economic challenges in the face of a sharp drop in global oil prices, the spread of the coronavirus, and the government's inefficiency in resolving the economic crisis have led the regime to look to the economic promises of the United States, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Israel, especially since Bahrain's budget deficit doubled in the first half of 2020 as a result of the coronavirus pandemic and the decline in oil prices; in this regard, Bahrain's trade deficit reached \$1.29 billion in the second half of 2020 (Institute for the Future Study of the Islamic World, September 16, 2020). In this context, the Foreign Trade Administration of the Israeli regime's Ministry of Economy and Industry announced that since the signing of the formal relations treaty between Bahrain and Israel, the two sides' trade relations reached approximately \$7.5 million in 2021, with Israel's exports to Bahrain amounting to \$4 million, including diamonds, gemstones, chemicals, and electrical equipment, and Bahrain also exported approximately \$3.5 million worth of metals and fuel to Israel (Tasnim News Agency, December 7, 2022); although the war between Gaza and Israel has led Bahrain to sever its economic relations with Israel, this will not be a long-term issue.

Despite the lack of formal relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia, the two countries have had various interactions with each other. In this regard, after the Madrid Peace Conference in 2007, Saudi Arabia and Israel began cooperating in various dimensions, with the economy being one area of this cooperation. Perhaps the most important collaboration of these countries is in the construction of the city of "Neom." In 2017, Saudi Arabia announced the construction of a completely smart city. Saudi Arabia needed advanced Tel-Aviv technology for the construction of this city, and based on this, it entered into cooperation with Israel (Cohen and Bligh, 2022). Additionally, with the decision of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to invest in the Israeli economy, Saudi Arabia allocated two billion dollars from the Public Investment Fund to Jared Kushner's "Partners for Solidarity" initiative in May 2022 (Cohen and Bligh, 2022). Partners for

Solidarity is an American investment company formed by Jared Kushner (son-in-law of former US President Donald Trump and his senior advisor). The focus of this company was on investing in Israeli and American companies with (mostly) Saudi financial resources. Jared Kushner believed that this could create warm relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia.

The relations between Israel and Qatar also date back to the years of the first Persian Gulf War. Qatar was the first state of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council to unofficially recognize Israel. The status of the relations between the two countries improved further with the granting of commercial representation to Israel in Qatar in 1996, and in that year, Shimon Peres visited Doha (Fars News Agency, July 1, 2013). In 2010, Qatar issued permission for the establishment and reopening of a Zionist regime commercial office in Doha, and during this period, Israelis emphasized Qatar's constructive role in the Middle East (Fars News Agency, July 1, 2013). Until before 2021, the trade relations between the two countries have been fluctuating. After years of official sanctions and strong opposition to the Abraham Accords, Qatar reached a commercial agreement with Israel regarding diamonds in 2021. Although this agreement apparently pertains to a technical arrangement in an important commercial sector, it indicates the existence of direct relations between the two countries and their discussions on various issues (Zaken, 2021). In fact, achieving a trade agreement will normalize relations between the two countries more than ever.

### **2-3. Military-Security Convergence**

The first and most important reason for the rapprochement between Israel and the Arab states of the Persian Gulf has been the issue of security, or more specifically, the threat of Iran against them. The increase in Iran's power after the empowerment of the Shiites in Iraq prompted the countries of the Persian Gulf region to balance against Iran. In this context, the United Arab Emirates, which has been able to transform itself from a vulnerable and passive country into an influential country in the region in recent decades, and especially after 2011, has been active in many regional cases, confronting the resistance axis and in some cases against the Muslim Brotherhood groups, and therefore has tried to establish a balance of power against Iran and the resistance front by establishing relations with Israel (Moqoumi and Javedani Moghadam, 2022: 199). In this regard, Anwar Gargash, the UAE's Minister of State for Foreign



Affairs, emphasized that "Iran's aggressive and regional actions have forced the Emiratis to rethink their relationship with Israel" (Moqoumi and Javedani Moghadam, 2022: 200). On this basis, after normalizing relations between the UAE and Israeli regime, they strengthened their military cooperation. In January 2022, the Israeli advanced armaments company, Elbit Systems, announced that its subsidiary in the UAE had signed a contract worth approximately \$53 million to supply defense systems to the UAE Air Force (Middle East Monitor, February 22, 2023). In February 2023, the UAE and Israel also unveiled the first unmanned surface vessel produced by the defense companies of the two countries, an indication of growing military relations between them (Middle East Monitor, February 22, 2023). Regarding the unveiling of the joint vessel between the two countries, Torbjorn Soltvedt, of the intelligence company Verisk Maplecroft, has said that countering maritime threats from Iran is one of the areas of focus for UAE and Israel cooperation (France 24, February 20, 2023).

In addition to these collaborations, after the normalization of relations between the two countries, we have witnessed the purchase of Israeli weapons by the United Arab Emirates, while previously, due to US restrictions on the UAE and other Persian Gulf countries, this was prohibited. In this regard, Israel agreed to sell F-35 fighter jets to the UAE and also sold 4563 mine-resistant armored vehicles to the United Arab Emirates for \$556 million (Alishahi & et al., 2020: 162). It is estimated that Israel's annual arms exports and related security technology to the UAE amount to several hundred million dollars (Ahmadian & Javdani moghadam, 2022: 146). Bahrain, like the UAE, has also entered into military-security agreements with the Israeli regime. Defense Minister of the Zionist regime Benny Gantz signed a memorandum of understanding during his first public visit to Manama, formalizing security relations between Israel and Bahrain (Bassist, 2022).

Bahrain can be considered the second Arab country to sign a security cooperation agreement with Israel. This country hosts the headquarters of the Fifth Fleet and some of the operations of CENTCOM, the US military coordinating organization for the Middle East, to which Israel joined in 2021 (Reuters, February 3, 2022). Israel's accession to CENTCOM will lead to its presence at the organization's headquarters in Bahrain.

Despite the lack of official relations with Israel, Saudi Arabia has had secret security-intelligence cooperation with the regime against Iran. In this regard, Washington ordered the "Jeddah-Quds

Charter," a top-secret document, which predicted the normalization of relations between Israel and the Persian Gulf Arabs for a period of almost 90 days, with a priority on normalizing relations with Saudi Arabia (Shahid Ahmed, 2024). However, due to the issue of Palestine, Saudi Arabia has not yet entered into formal peace with Israel, and peace with Israel is conditional (of course, before the recent Hamas-Israel war) on the cessation of settlements and the return of Israel to its 1967 borders, although the two countries have been engaged in regional cooperation since 2015.

In this regard, Mohammed bin Salman stated: "We not only do not consider Israel as an enemy, but we also look at it as a potential ally in many of the interests that we can achieve together" (Entekhab News Agency, 1 March 2022). Although Saudi Arabia does not have official relations with Israel, this country has had secret security cooperation with Israel. The secret cooperation between Israel and Saudi Arabia dates back to 1960, when both supported the royalists in Yemen against the pro-Egyptian and Soviet-backed republic in Syria (Riedel, 2022). Their intelligence services coordinated the delivery of weapons and the expertise on how to use them to the royalists based in Saudi Arabia. Now, Iran and its allies, such as Hezbollah and the Houthis, form a common enemy for Israel and Saudi Arabia (Riedel, 2022). In this context, Saudi Arabia has even framed its demands for reaching a formal agreement with Israel within the framework of military and security issues. Saudi Arabia is seeking arms, a security pact, and assistance with its nuclear program, and Saudi demands indicate that they are more interested in an exchange-based security pact than a transformative one (Sharh Newspaper, 6 July 2023).

Military cooperation between Israel and Oman also dates back to 1975, when a team of Israeli military advisors helped the Sultanate in the face of Marxist insurgents in Dhofar, supported by the Soviet Union (Ghariani, 2020). Although there have been ups and downs in the relations between these two countries, Oman has maintained its neutral relations with Israel. This country has also supported countries that have entered into formal relations with Israel. This indicates Oman's willingness to join the Abrahamic peace. Given the current circumstances, the possibility of forming a security arrangement with the presence of Israel and the countries of the southern Persian Gulf is possible. Security arrangements that will be formed against their common threat, Iran.

Israel and the Arab states of the Persian Gulf are seeking to create a regional force in response to the crisis in the Middle East,

with capabilities similar to NATO. Although the military force of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council exists, it has become outdated, and they are looking for a new force with the presence of Israel (Mundy, 2022). According to Middle East Eye, the temporary agreement between Iran and the United States in June 2023, aimed at stopping Iran's nuclear activities in exchange for lifting sanctions and allowing the sale of some oil, has increased security concerns for these countries (Middle East Eye, June 13, 2023) and has led to a more determined effort by Israel and the Persian Gulf states to create a security system against Iran. In this regard, Israel and Saudi Arabia have increased their efforts to normalize relations. However, with Hamas' attack on Israel on October 7, 2023 (al-Aqsa Storm) and the increasing tension between Israel and Hamas, the agreement has stalled. In this regard, "Isaac Herzog" announced at the annual World Economic Forum on January 18, 2024: Normalizing relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia will be a key element in ending the war with Hamas and will be a game changer for the entire Middle East (Keaten & Lidman, 2024). This statement was made at a time when just a few days earlier, Prince "Faisal bin Farhan," the Saudi Foreign Minister, had stated that he definitely recognizes Israel as part of a larger political agreement (Keaten & Lidman, 2024). Although Saudi Arabia's relations with Iran have improved, it must be considered that the two countries pursue conflicting interests in the region, which can always create grounds for tension between them. In contrast, the increased convergence between Israel and the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf region can pose a challenge to achieving regional security arrangements.

### **3. The Impact of Hebrew-Arab Convergence on Endogenous Security Arrangements**

Since the Islamic Revolution in Iran, security arrangements in the Persian Gulf region have been shaped by the presence of the United States. In recent years, various reasons, in particular increased military costs for the United States and the containment of China, have led to a decrease in the attention of the United States to the Persian Gulf or the broader Middle East region. However, due to the geo-economic and geostrategic importance of the Persian Gulf region, the United States is seeking to involve its strategic ally, Israel, in the security arrangements of the Persian Gulf.

Following the peace agreements between Jordan and Egypt with Israel, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain have also entered into a peace agreement with Israel under the name "Abraham Accords."

The use of the name Abraham was a strategic move to appeal to the general Arab public, as Abraham is a common prophet among Jews and Muslims. In the midst of this, the Islamic Republic of Iran's acquisition of advanced weapons and its presence and influence in the region have led Iran's neighbors and Israel, as enemies of the Islamic Republic of Iran, to set aside their ideological differences and normalize relations with each other to ensure their security against the common threat of Tehran. In this context, the United States, as the global hegemon responsible for ensuring the security of the Persian Gulf region, has sought to bring the Arab states and Israel closer together. The convergence of Israel and the Arab countries in the Persian Gulf region, which are considered the main allies of the United States in the region, can complicate the process of achieving a sustainable and indigenous security order in the region from various dimensions and exacerbate the security challenges of the region. In the meantime, Tel Aviv's rapprochement with the countries in the Persian Gulf region has led to an increase in arms sales to these countries, resulting in an intensification in arms competition in the region. In fact, the acquisition of American military equipment is a bribe that Washington elites have used to persuade their Arab allies to get closer to Israel. In response, Iran is forced to strengthen its military capabilities and armaments to create a balance of power. Therefore, it is seen that the countries of the Persian Gulf region have more than ever entered a cycle of arms competition, which not only can lead to distrust and increased tension in the region but also divert the country's budget from investment towards militarization, which is a zero-sum game that will have negative consequences for all countries. Certainly, Israel will gain the most financial benefit through the sale of arms and will provide the necessary financial resources for its government and economy.

In addition, actions such as preparing for a possible Israeli presence in the Strait of Hormuz or creating a joint air defense system can exacerbate the anarchic disorder of the region and create a new alliance in the region. In this bloc formation, the Hebrew-Arab bloc will be in confrontation with the axis of resistance centered on Iran, thus increasing the security gap between the countries of the region. The confrontation between these two axes will seriously hinder the achievement of regional peace and security. Furthermore, Israel's presence in the region and its influence in regional countries will also hinder internal peace plans. The failure of indigenous peace plans, such as Iran's "Hormuz

Peace" initiative, although partly affected by the different security approaches of the countries on both sides of the Persian Gulf's cooperation with some Arab countries in sowing discord in Iran and terrorist activities, will also pose a challenge to achieving regional security convergence. and the Arab countries in the region have an outward-looking approach to security through the presence and military support of the United States, the failure of indigenous security plans in the future may be partly affected by Israel's military-security presence in the region. Israel's cooperation with some Arab countries in sowing discord in Iran and terrorist activities will also pose a challenge to achieving regional security convergence. In this regard, in recent years we have witnessed extensive intelligence cooperation between Israel and some Arab countries in the region against Iran, especially in border areas.

### **Conclusion**

The examination of the reasons for the convergence of Israel and the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf indicates that the threats of Iran to these countries have been the main factor in their proximity and even the revival of their relations. The increase in military power along with regional influence of Iran, especially during the past decade, has led to a sense of threat from the leaders of Tel Aviv and the Arab states of the Persian Gulf region. Considering their geographical proximity to Iran, these countries have attempted to create a balance against Iranian threats through mutual cooperation. The balance of threat model became more serious when these countries felt that they did not have real and practical support from the United States against Iranian threats, and Washington's focus on China and Eurasia led to these countries engaging with Tehran and providing the necessary opportunity for Iran to act in the region. Despite the reduction of Iran's tension and then revival of its diplomatic relations with regional countries, especially Saudi Arabia, and, on the other hand, the incident of the storming of the Al-Aqsa that led to a rupture in the expansion of Tel Aviv's relations with Arab countries, it seems that the Abraham peace process will continue in the future due to extensive support from the United States, as well as the desire of Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, and Oman, and these countries will move towards normalizing relations in the near future. What seems important in this regard in the current and future conditions are the implications of this convergence for the Persian Gulf region, especially in relation to the issue of security arrangements. It seems that the

appropriate expansion of political, economic, and even military security relations of the Arab countries in the Persian Gulf region with the Israeli regime not only has the capacity to increase regional security tensions but also makes it very difficult to achieve an indigenous collective security system between Iran and the regional countries. In fact, in addition to the military presence of the United States in the region, the expansion of Israel's relations with Arab countries can lead to further security divergence between Iran and the southern neighbors of the Persian Gulf and pose a challenge to the regional security process. Certainly, Israel's long-term goal is to create a strategic ring in the region against Iran so that it can put pressure on this country from the north (i.e., Azerbaijan) and the south through Arab countries. While this policy has been somewhat successful so far, considering the regional developments and the possibility of tension in Tehran's relations with the Arab states, it should be taken into account that in the event of serious tension in Iran's relations with its neighbors, Tel Aviv, given the scope of its relationship development, will be in a position to put pressure on Iran. The passive reaction of the Arab countries in the Persian Gulf region to the recent Hamas-Israel war on the one hand indicates the lack of priority for the Palestinian issue, and on the other hand, it shows the willingness of the leaders of these countries to repair relations with Israel and pursue normalization of relations. In such circumstances, where the political elites in the neighboring countries have adopted a pragmatic approach to maximize their interests, the Iranian decision-makers in the field of diplomacy should adjust their policies towards the southern neighbors more carefully and try to prevent the blocking of anti-Iranian countries in the region with the help of Israel by adopting a policy of tension reduction and crisis management for possible future crises.



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