



## Engagement with Regional Leaders and Efforts for 'Normalization'

■ Sunni Arab countries in the region, who saw Iran as a rival, welcomed Trump's strong positions on Iran.

■ Tamir Hayman, the head of Israeli military intelligence, emphasized the deep sectarian competition between Iran (Shi'a) and Sunni Arab countries in the Persian Gulf, which was perceived as even deeper than the rivalry between Israel and Iran.

■ The emergence of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman was also significant. He was accessible, energetic, and open to modernizing Saudi Arabia, including its relations with Israel. Cohen established a relationship with bin Salman, leading to secret meetings and discussions. Bin Salman's actions, such as the detention of hundreds of Saudi elites at the Ritz-Carlton hotel and the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, raised international concerns about cooperation with Saudi Arabia. In contrast, Israel continued its efforts to normalize relations with Gulf Arab countries, with the expectation that the UAE would be the first to do so, followed by Saudi Arabia.

■ The theft of Iran's nuclear archive in 2018 raised Israel's profile among Arabs in the Persian Gulf, especially with Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman and Mohammad bin Zayed. Efforts were made to advance Israel's relations with the Gulf, including the "Deal of the Century" peace plan. However, the Palestinian issue remained an obstacle.

■ The Palestinian issue hindered progress, as the Palestinians rejected Trump's plan. Yossi Cohen had contacts with Gulf Arab leaders, including a meeting with Mohammad bin Zayed in the UAE. Mohammad bin Zayed emerged as a key figure, viewing Israel as a balance against Iran and an economic partner.

■ An agreement with Saudi Arabia, given its regional influence and religious importance, was vital for further developments. Bahrain, with its close ties to the United States, played a crucial role in pressuring for normalization with Israel. Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa, the Foreign Minister, openly supported Israel's right to strike Iranian targets and indicated that Israel should "stay here" and that normalization could occur even without an Israel-Palestine agreement. Bahrain, especially due to its reliance on the US Fifth Fleet for security, sought to strengthen its security through relations with Israel. This cooperation also included facilitating Israeli military communication at the Fifth Fleet's headquarters.

■ Personal relationships between Israeli leaders and officials and Gulf Arab countries have become friendly. The countries cooperate in defense and Israel's annual arms sales have reached their highest levels, especially to the UAE and Bahrain.

## The Abraham Accords for Advancing the 'Change' Project in the Middle East

■ In August 2020, the United Arab Emirates and Israel reached a preliminary agreement to normalize their relations. The negotiations were centered around a joint statement and were named the Abraham Accords to reflect their significance for Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. These agreements included various aspects of cooperation, signaling a historic shift in Israel's relations with the Arab world. Simultaneously, the United States approved the sale of F-35 fighter jets to the UAE, indirectly impacting Israel's support for normalization.

■ The Abraham Accords marked the culmination of decades of efforts by Mossad, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and others. They aimed to reshape the balance of power in the region by bringing Israel into full-fledged relations with Arab countries.

■ The agreements required the cooperation of several sensitive national leaders, including Saudi Arabia's Mohammed bin Salman, the UAE's Mohammed bin Zayed, Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu, and U.S. President Trump. Each of them could have derailed the agreements. Mossad, Israel's intelligence agency, played a behind-the-scenes role in building trust and relationships with Gulf countries, especially with bin Salman and bin Zayed, which ultimately helped in the success of these efforts.

■ The agreement with Sudan faced challenges due to political developments in the country. Normalization with Sudan was symbolically significant as it marked a departure from a policy established after the 1967 Six-Day War. Despite challenges, efforts were made to maintain peaceful relations and keep the doors open for further

normalization, especially with Sudan.

■ The Abraham Accords, signed between Israel, the UAE, and Bahrain in September 2020, strengthened unprecedented cooperation. Israel immediately began selling advanced military equipment to the UAE and Bahrain after signing the agreement. The focus was on cooperation and coordination in missile defense systems between Israel and Gulf countries. Personal relationships formed during secret negotiations became visible and friendly. The annual sale of Israeli weaponry, especially to the UAE and Bahrain, reached its peak.

■ Mohammed bin Salman may consider normalization with Israel in the future, but it depends on various factors. Recent developments, such as the agreement between Saudi Arabia and Iran, can influence the pace of nor-

malization. There are debates and controversies within Israel regarding judicial reforms and their impact on foreign relations. The role of Saudi Arabia in potentially expanding the Abraham Accords to other Muslim countries is crucial. While Saudi Arabia is not part of the agreement, it has played an important role in supporting the normalization process. However, complete normalization with Saudi Arabia may depend on various factors, including the situation in Palestine.

■ The agreements signed between Israel and Gulf countries have initiated a new era of unofficial military cooperation and alliances among former adversaries. The sale of advanced military hardware by Israel to the UAE and Bahrain, along with discussions on missile defense cooperation, is conclude of these agreements.

## From Israeli Terrorism to Pressuring the IAEA

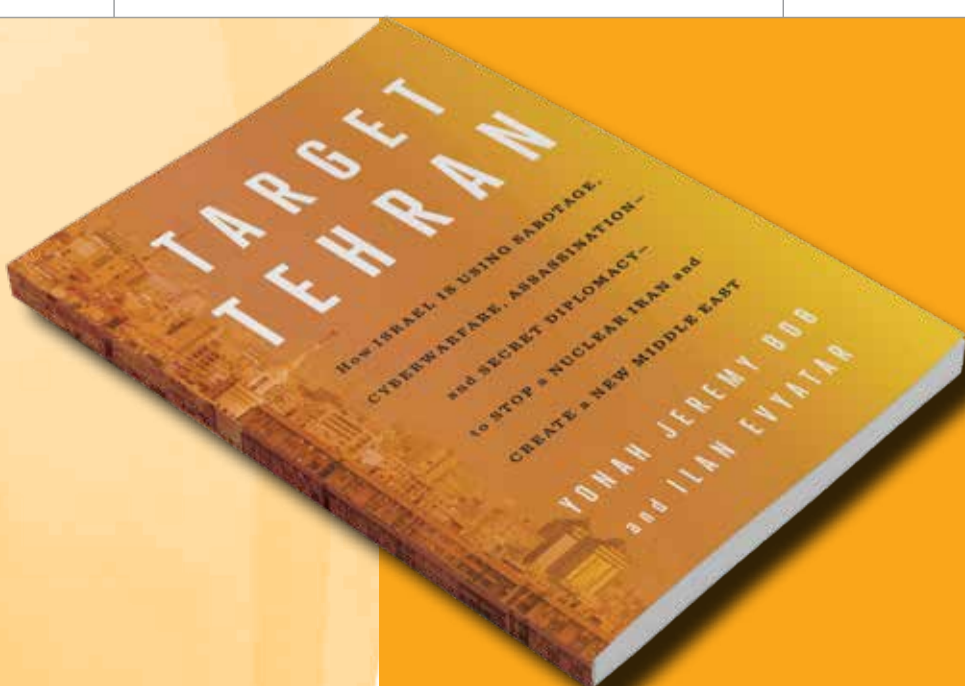
■ Two and a half years after gaining access to Iran's nuclear archive, Israel achieved a significant goal when the United States withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal and forced the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to investigate Iran. This led to a change in the leadership of the International Atomic Energy Agency from Yukiya Amano to Rafael Grossi, resulting in a more active stance against Iran. Grossi pressed Iran for transparency in its nuclear activities, including uranium enrichment and nuclear efforts under

pressure. He publicly acknowledged Mossad's claims about Iran's hidden uranium enrichment facilities, causing concern. Israel was pleased with Grossi's tough approach and condemnation of Iran. Israel refrained from direct action, even though International Atomic Energy Agency member states and the JCPOA believed Iran was in compliance.

■ The assassination of Fakhrizadeh was a complex operation. It involved a remote-controlled machine gun hidden in a disguised van, which had been secretly assembled in

Iran over eight months by a team of operatives closely monitoring Fakhrizadeh's movements. The weapon was associated with facial recognition technology, ensuring that the scientist was the target and not someone else.

■ Yossi Cohen, the head of Mossad, couldn't publicly declare his role in Fakhrizadeh's assassination, but he was confident that Israel was safer after removing both Soleimani and Fakhrizadeh, who were perceived as threats, reduced concerns about threats against Israel.



## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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