

The Abraham Accords: A Plain-English Guide

What the 2020 agreements actually changed, who has signed on since, why they happened, and where the diplomacy stands today.

BACKGROUND EXPLAINER | REVIEWED AGAINST MULTIPLE SOURCES | UPDATED MAY 2026

The Abraham Accords are a set of U.S.-brokered agreements, first signed on September 15, 2020, that established or normalized diplomatic relations between Israel and several Muslim-majority states. They marked the first time in decades that Arab governments had openly recognized Israel, and they reframed Middle East diplomacy around shared economic and security interests rather than a prior resolution of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The agreements take their name from the prophet Abraham, regarded as a common ancestor across Judaism and Islam, a deliberate nod to shared heritage.

KEY FACTS AT A GLANCE

- **First signed:** September 15, 2020, at a White House ceremony.
- **Original signatories:** Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain.
- **Joined later:** Morocco (Dec 2020), Sudan (declaration, Jan 2021), and Kazakhstan (announced Nov 2025).
- **Broker:** The United States, which positioned itself as patron and guarantor.
- **Core idea:** Use economic and security incentives to defuse geopolitical tension.

01 What the accords actually are

The Abraham Accords are not a single treaty but a framework: a short general declaration promoting peace and tolerance among the Abrahamic faiths, paired with separate bilateral normalization agreements between Israel and each participating country. Normalization means the formal machinery of state-to-state relations — exchanging ambassadors, opening embassies, launching direct flights, and signing trade, investment, tourism, and security arrangements.

This was a significant break with the long-standing Arab consensus, which had largely conditioned recognition of Israel on the prior establishment of a Palestinian state. By setting that sequencing aside, the accords opened relations first and left the Palestinian question for later — the feature their supporters praise most and their critics object to most.

02 Who has signed, and when

The circle of signatories has widened in stages since 2020:

Sep 15, 2020	The United Arab Emirates and Bahrain sign with Israel at the White House — the first Arab states to normalize relations with Israel in decades.
Dec 22, 2020	Morocco agrees to restore and normalize ties with Israel.
Jan 2021	Sudan signs onto the Abraham Accords declaration, but subsequent internal political instability stalled the move toward full normalization.
Nov 2025	Kazakhstan announces it will accede to the accords, the first expansion in years.
Ongoing	Saudi Arabia and Syria have signaled serious interest in joining but, as of mid-2026, had not reached an agreement to do so.

03 Why they happened

The accords grew out of a regional realignment years in the making. The 1990s Oslo peace process between Israelis and Palestinians had advanced and then collapsed, leaving the older land-for-peace model in doubt. Meanwhile, several Gulf states and Israel found themselves sharing strategic concerns — chief among them the regional reach of Iran — and had quietly maintained informal contacts for years.

The diplomatic philosophy behind the accords was that geoeconomics could ease geopolitics: offering tangible benefits such as trade, investment, and access to advanced technology could make cooperation more attractive than continued estrangement. The approach built on a 2019 economic workshop in Bahrain and was championed within the Trump administration as a way to reshape the region while sidestepping, rather than first solving, the Israeli–Palestinian dispute.

The wager behind the accords was simple: that economic and security incentives could do what decades of conflict diplomacy had not.

04 What changed in practice

The most concrete results came in the bilateral relationships. Israel and the signatory states exchanged ambassadors and opened diplomatic missions. Direct commercial flights began connecting Tel Aviv with Gulf capitals, and tourism, banking, and technology partnerships followed. Behind the scenes, the agreements also deepened intelligence-sharing and defense coordination among the United States, Israel, and Gulf partners.

For Washington, the framework served a dual purpose: reinforcing the U.S. role as the region's principal security guarantor while offering partners an alternative to deepening economic dependence on other major powers.

05 The criticism and the Palestinian question

Critics argue the accords delivered the most for political and commercial elites while leaving ordinary populations — and the Palestinians in particular — on the sidelines. By normalizing relations without securing Palestinian statehood, opponents say, the agreements weakened a key source of Arab leverage and offered little to resolve the underlying conflict.

That tension came under strain after the 2023–2024 escalation in Gaza. Public opinion across many Arab countries turned sharply against normalization, and people-to-people contacts cooled even where official ties held. Analysts describe the period that followed as a kind of "suspended animation": the agreements stayed formally intact, but much of their warmth retreated to state-to-state and business-to-business channels.

06 Where things stand now

Despite repeated regional crises, no signatory has formally withdrawn from the accords or severed ties with Israel. The framework's resilience was tested again during the spring 2026 conflict involving Iran, through which the core arrangements held and security cooperation among partners deepened.

The diplomacy has also re-entered an expansion phase. Following Kazakhstan's accession, U.S. officials publicly pressed a wider group of countries — including Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Egypt, Turkey, Pakistan, and Jordan — to consider joining, tying the prospect to a broader regional settlement. Whether that push produces new signatories, and whether the accords can translate elite-level agreements into durable popular acceptance, remains the central open question of the project's next chapter.

Sources & further reading

Encyclopaedia Britannica — "Abraham Accords." Neutral encyclopedia overview, kept current with recent signatories.

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Abraham-Accords>

Middle East Institute — "The Abraham Accords" backgrounder. Detailed think-tank briefing on strategy and status (updated 2025).

<https://mei.edu/backgrounder/abraham-accords/>

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace — "The Abraham Accords After Gaza." Analytical context on how the Gaza conflict reshaped the accords.

<https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2025/04/the-abraham-accords-after-gaza-a-change-of-context>

Wikipedia — "Abraham Accords." Comprehensive, heavily sourced reference for chasing primary documents.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abraham_Accords

Anti-Defamation League — "Abraham Accords" backgrounder. Concise factual timeline (advocacy organization — note perspective).

<https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounder/abraham-accords>

Prepared as a general background explainer for Genaware.ai. Compiled and cross-checked against the public sources listed above; dates and signatory status reflect reporting available as of May 2026. This document is informational and does not represent legal, political, or investment advice. Readers are encouraged to consult the original sources for full detail.