

The Emergence of National Interest: The Impactful Trigger for Arab Israeli Normalization

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Abstract. The normalization of relations between the United Arab Emirates and Israel from August to September 2020 marked a new chapter in Middle East geopolitical dynamics. Although this normalization began with hopes of Israeli-Palestinian peace through the Abraham Accords, the reality has been quite the opposite. Israeli violence against Palestinians and the construction of illegal settlements continue, sparking condemnation and rejection from various parties, including Muslims and Palestinian supporters. This research is motivated by the normalization agreement of four Arab countries with Israel in a short time span. The reason is the four Arab countries understand that this normalization agreement will receive bad perspective regarding their contribution to the struggle for Palestinian independence. Sources of data in this study came from national and international journals, as well as report data from national and international news media related to this topic. The research method used in this study is qualitative method with geopolitical approach. The theory used by the researcher is the paradigm of political realism proposed by Morgenthau and the existential theory proposed by Samuel P. Huntington. This article concludes that the motivation of Arab countries in carrying out normalization is the national interest of each country and the stability of the country and region.

Keywords: Arab; Israel; Normalization; National Interest; Stability

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INTRODUCTION

Normalization between the United Arab Emirates and Israel from August 2020 to September 2020 has come to a new chapter in geopolitical dynamical development in the Middle East. At first, this normalization based on reconciliation policy between Israel-Palestine on "Abraham Accords" in hoping for reaching the stability in the region and the fulfillment of every Palestinian rights (Pamuk & Lewis, 2021). However, the expectations that have been said, are very distinct from what has happened until today. This thing has proven by the violence from Israeli to Palestinian on April 2021 that encouraged Israel to do military aggression on 10th to May 21, 2021 (United Nation Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2021) and continual illegal settlement especially in the West Bank and Gaza that has been claimed by the President of Palestine, Mahmoud Abbas, as a form of Israeli struggle to realize one state solution (Sawafta & El-Haroun, 2021). This issue certainly creates pros and cons in its development because there are so many rejections from Muslims and Palestinian supporters to realize this normalization. Moreover, the member of executive committee from Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO),

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Bassam as-Sahli said that this normalization can be realized if the Israelis stop their occupation. He also said that the normalization between some Arab countries and Israel cannot be accepted nowadays, and he believes that this normalization will enforce an open brutal aggression (Aljazeera News Agencies, 2020). Palestinians also consider this agreement as a betrayal for their struggle and rights. They also withdrew their ambassador from Abu Dhabi as a response for this phenomenon (Pristiandaru, 2020). Despite the Israeli has violated the normalization document, the four Arab countries, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco didn't cancel their agreement with Israel. Therefore, the biggest question in this research is whether this normalization policy is really to find new ways and strategies for Palestinian independence or only for national interests and stability of these countries.

The previous research referred to by the author is the journal of Amira Elsayed Hassan Seddik titled "Geopolitics of the Arab Israeli Normalization". This research focuses on the geopolitical background that encouraged the achievement of Arab-Israeli normalization and predictions of Qatar's steps towards normalization by considering the steps of geostrategic actors and their rivalries in the MENA (Middle East North Africa) as areas that directly affected by the conflict. In contrast with Seddik's journal that solely focuses on the phenomena, this research analyzes the normalization documents more detailed and comprehensively. In addition, this research contains the data of the latest development issues. This research also analyzes the implicit factors that encourage the normalization.

METHODS

This article is qualitative research with a geopolitical approach. Geopolitical approach not only analyze the policy through geographic variables but also through the variable of interest or the factor national interest (Seddik, Geopolitics of the Arab-Israeli Normalization, 2021). The data on this journal is acquired by Library Research by using normalization documents as primary objects on this research.

The collected data were analyzed using a qualitative descriptive analysis approach. Data were analyzed using content analysis techniques to identify patterns, themes, and interrelationships between data. Relevant data is then used to formulate findings and conclusions. To ensure the validity of the data, data verification was carried out using data triangulation techniques. This technique is done by comparing the data obtained from different sources. This is done to minimize bias and ensure data validity. After the data is verified, data interpretation is carried out to formulate findings and conclusions. Data interpretation is carried

out using relevant theories to develop strong and credible arguments. In this study, a qualitative descriptive analysis approach was chosen because it is more suitable for analyzing the geopolitical background that encouraged the achievement of Arab-Israeli normalization and predictions of Qatar's steps towards normalization by considering the steps of geostrategic actors and their rivalries in the MENA (Middle East North Africa) as areas that directly affected by the conflict.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research used Political Realism Morgenthau as its paradigm. Morgenthau concludes that politics does not require moral justification but it requires a keen disparity between what is desired and what is achievable. (Asrudin, 2014). The paradigm of realism used the concept of interest that was measured by the concept of power in analyzing political and international relation dynamics. This paradigm will help the author to comprehend the official's framework in order to fulfill the government or national interest. This paradigm is applied in understanding the reasons why some Arab countries normalize their relation with Israel even though it is against their Arabism morals.

In addition to political realism, Huntington's existential theory is also used as a scalpel in comprehending the issue. Huntington concludes that most of developed countries have complex and strong social structure but do not have strong and proper governmental institutions (Huntington, 1975). This issue is certainly a problem for the government in running its main function that is governed. Therefore, the weak governments need foreign aid to strengthen their legitimacy and support them to fulfill public needs and interests. This theory is applied in analyzing the policy of some Arab countries that have complex social structure, such as Bahrain and Sudan to normalize their ties with Israel.

The United Arab Emirates-Israel Normalization

Diplomatic relations between Israel and the UAE tend to be indirect before normalization. It is due to the location of the UAE on the southern coast of the Gulf is far away from Israel which is in the Levant region, and this reduces the possibility of conflict between the two. Since the formation of the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) the UAE has strengthened its political views which tend to disagree with Israel by boycotting Israel and condemning Israeli acts of violence in the Palestinian territories (Ulrichsen, 2016). However, the UAE has never been directly involved in war with Israel, and the UAE also supports Palestine-Israel peace initiation in order to protect regional stability. The UAE views the two-state solution as the best solution in resolving the conflict between Palestine and Israel.

Despite siding with the Israeli opposition, the UAE also implemented some cooperation with Israel before the normalization. This cooperation was implemented in strategic fields such as economy, security, culture, and education. The other fields are tourism, and aviation (Wicaksono, 2020). The signing of Abraham Accords was done on September 15, 2020, by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation the United Arab Emirates, Abdullah bin Zayed an-Nahyan and the former Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu. This signing was witnessed by the former President of the United States, Donald Trump (U.S Department of States, 2020). However, there was a gaffe in the process of signing the normalization wherein the signing process was quick. It is due to the peace agreement between two countries was just achieved on August 13, 2020 (Dahan, Heller, & Steve Holland, 2020), and the UAE has officially stopped the boycott against Israel since August 29, 2020 (Chmaytelli, 2020). This rapid process was being questioned why Abu Dhabi could give the response in a quick. Moreover, the UAE is a monarchy country wherein the policy must be declared after the consensus between the Emirs, such as the United Kingdom who conducted a consensus with the ministers for the Brexit policy (Government of Ireland, 2017). However, there is no document or report about the consensus which should have been conducted by the government before the normalization.

At least there are three urges that encourage the UAE to normalize its ties with Israel in the short term such as political, economic and security interests. The political interest of the UAE is closely related to its geopolitical rivalry with Iran, Turkey, and Qatar (Ghantous, UAE official says time to Manage Rivalry with Iran and Turkey, 2021). The cooperation of the UAE and Israel in restricting Iran's influence was implemented in 2012 wherein the former Prime Minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu conducted a confidential rendezvous with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the UAE Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed. This rendezvous resulted political cooperation to realize a common interest between the two, that is the restriction of Iranian Nuclear Program (Ravid, 2018). Moreover, The UAE has an interest in strengthening its influence in the region in order to balance Iran's Influence (Ghantous, 2021). It became stronger after the instability of Iraq (Gardner, 2021). Iran has started to intervene directly in the region such as giving financial and arms support to Assad's regime in Syria (Fazeli, 2020), Hezbollah in Lebanon (Levitt, 2021), and Houthi in Yemen (Nicholas & Landay, 2021). Not only Iran, but also Turkey threatened the UAE's interests by supporting Islamic-Extrimist factions in Libya, Egypt, and Tunisia. Turkey also condemned the UAE by saying that the UAE is degrading Islamic moral and value after its boycott to Qatar (Gurses & El-Yakooubi, 2017), and Turkey's foreign policy that started to actively intervene the issues in the region especially in Morocco and the East of Mediterranean (Saddiki,

2020). Meanwhile, its competition with Qatar is closely related to Qatar's support to the Islamic-Extremist factions in the region, especially to the Houthis in Yemen which interferes the UAE's interests (Salama, 2020). Moreover, the close relation between Iran, Turkey, and Qatar became a threat to the UAE and it encouraged the UAE to join the Arab's Quartet in boycotting Qatar.

For security interests, the UAE stability was disrupted by territorial disputes in three Emirati regions with Iran (Al-Mazrouei, 2015). Moreover, the development of conflicts in Afghanistan, Yemen, and Libya are predicted to disrupt the national stability. Hence, all of the Emirs want to strengthen their military capabilities to protect their stability. The strengthening of the UAE military is one of the cooperation programs with the US, and Israel. It is specifically implemented to the air force by purchasing drones from Israel (Filseth, 2021), and the F-35 fighter from the United States, although in its development the UAE suspended the purchasing of the F-35 (England & Kerr, 2021). In addition, the UAE also conducts cooperation in cyber security.

For economic interests, the UAE and Israel conduct technological development cooperation in life sciences, agricultural and energy technology, and clean technology (Rufinaldo, 2020). In addition, the UAE and Israel cooperate in the banking sector. This cooperation is conducted by First Abu Dhabi Bank, Hapoalim Bank, and Leumi Bank by providing clearing, credit, and trading currencies. The UAE believes this agreement can strengthen the economic and financial cooperation between the UAE and Israel. If we look from economy sector, this normalization is sort of succeeded. This success can be seen from the surplus of trade balance which in 2020, it reached \$62.31 billion, and ascended in 2021, it became \$79.04 billion. The trade of balance increased approximately 16.73%. Besides the trade balance, the export of the UAE ascended to \$1.02 billion in 2021, which in previous year only reached \$120 million. The export of the UAE to Israel increased approximately 94% during the normalization (Trading Economics, 2022).

Bahrain-Israel Normalization

Normalization between Bahrain and Israel has reached after Bahrain minister foreign affair, Abdullatif Al Zayani and Israel prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu signed the Abraham Accord in Washington on September 15, 2020. Through this accord, Bahraini kingdom has officially cooperated with Israel in several sectors, such as investment, tourism, telecommunication, energy, and security (U.S Department of States, 2021). In contrast with the UAE normalization that was encouraged by political reasons, Bahrain normalization was encouraged by governmental interest to protect their authority from Bahraini complex social structure. Bahrain has been in a tough situation because Bahrain must face the risk of abolition that can be caused by their complex social structure. Moreover, the rivalries between geostrategic actors in the

region has threatened their stability. This condition has been worsened by the security cooperation between Bahrain and the US that caused financial issues due to the massive funding exceeding the funding's plan (Vittori, 2019).

The governmental challenge can be seen from Bahraini demography which has a massive Shia population that reached 70% of Bahrain population (Joyce, 2012). This issue absolutely has become a threat for the Sunni's government who rules over the kingdom. The condition has worsened since the Islamic Republic of Iran strengthened their influence in the region and consolidated all of Shia's factions. Moreover, Bahrain's sovereignty has become seriously threatened when Iran's reunification issues have grown in 2007, and 2009 which made Bahrain as the fourteenth province of Iran (Shahnan, 2009). As a response to these issues, Bahrain has made many efforts to protect their governmental stability. It has been proven by Bahrain's contributions as one of GCC founders. Moreover, Bahrain has played strategic roles in Iraq's instability. In addition, Bahrain has put all of the efforts, such as requesting Peninsula Shield Force support in order to face Arab Springs (Bowden, 2017). At last, Bahrain cut off their ties with Iran in response to Iran's intervention that supported Sunni's monarchies in the Gulf region (Onyanga-Omara, 2016). Besides facing Iran, Bahrain also has been threatened by Qatar, and Turkey. Qatar has strengthened its ties with Iran especially when Arab boycotted Qatar (Walsh, 2017). Moreover, Turkey is Qatar's ally and it has military bases in Qatar. (Naar, 2020). Hence, Qatar and Turkey's influence become a threat for Bahrain's stability.

Relating to the normalization, Bahrain considers this policy can strengthen their power in order to protect their stability. It can be seen from the biggest corporation between the two in the security sector. Moreover, Bahrain considers Israel as a potential geostrategic partner in facing the rivalries' power. Bahrain has a projection to cooperate with the US through this normalization (Najjar, 2020).

Sudan-Israel Normalization

Sudan is a republic country that had a coup d'état in 2019. The coup d'état involved two sides in Sudan. One was in the government's side, who was led by the president of Sudan, Omar al-Bashir, and the other side was led by the minister of defense, Awad Mohamed ibn Auf. (Reuters, 2019). This coup d'état led into an agreement, they agreed to divide the authority and caused the downfall of Omar al-Bashir's government. It has been replaced by the military junta, Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, who was a prime minister during the transitional government. (Kottasova & Mackintosh, 2021).

Divergent with the UAE and Bahrain, the Abraham accord that was done by Sudan, is a declaration, not a treaty. This declaration was signed by Nasredeen Abwas Abdulbari, the Minister of Justice during the transition government. It was witnessed by Steve Mnuchin, a Secretariat of State from the US. (U.S Department of States, 2021). This declaration was done secretly at White House, Washington on January 6, 2021. (Reuters, 2021). The interesting thing is that the Sudanese Transitional Government has only been recognized by the United Nations on October 9, 2020 through "*Juba Peace Agreement*". (United Nations, 2020), and in a short term, Sudan has declared its commitment towards this Abraham Accord.

As a third country that normalized its ties with Israel, Sudan has a sharp turning point in political views, especially after the downfall of Bashir regime. At first, Sudan was an ally with the alliance of Iran, Qatar, and Turkey. Sudan utilized its ties with Turkey to get economic support in order to pay economic sanctions in 1993 (Dwinanda, 2017). As a replacement, Turkey got access to establish harbors and military facilities in Suakin Island (Kucukgocmen & Abdelaziz, 2017). Besides Turkey, Sudan also strengthened its ties with Qatar in order to get economic advantages, wherein Qatar's investment was so massive towards Sudan's harbor establishment and development in the Red Sea (Fagan, 2018). In addition, its ties with Iran, was encouraged by similar orientation about establishing a country that based on religious ideology, Islam. During Bashir's regime, Sudan considered Iran as a reliable ally because Iran sent many funding support to Sudan in order to strengthen its influence in the region (Cafiero, Is a Sudanese-Iranian Rapprochment Possible?, 2019).

In 2015, there were political shifts in Sudan, wherein Sudan changed his position to the alliance of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the US. It was caused by the regional political suppression, and domestic economy (Cafiero, 2015). However, Sudan has still been used by Iran to smuggle arms to Hamas (Israel Security Agency, 2020). During Bashir's regime, bilateral relation between Sudan and Israel was not good enough. Sudan smuggles its arms to Hamas for facing Israel occupation (Aziz, Eltahir, & Irish, After Fall of Bashir, Sudan Closes Door on Support for Hamas, 2021), On the other hand, Israel supports and strengthens rebellion militia groups in South Sudan (Miller, 2013). However, after the downfall of Bashir's regime, the political orientation in Sudan shifted sharply. Sudan is not considered the US and Israel as enemies anymore. Sudan also has conducted several cooperation with the US in order to prevent the international views to its country as a terrorist country. Sudan's transitional government has strong ties with Saudi Arabia and the UAE (Feierstein, 2020). Meanwhile, its agreement with Turkey for Suakin Island's development has been suspended since the downfall of Bashir's regime (Fadhel, 2020).

It can be concluded that the normalization between Sudan and Israel is based on Sudan's economic interest. Because Sudan has been struggling by the economic sanctions that caused the loss of 70% Sudan's energy, and the loss of South Sudan (Aziz, 2018). Sudan has become a "geopolitical pivot" for the region. Hence, Saudi Arabia and the UAE put many efforts to weaken Sudan's relation with Iran, Qatar, and Turkey in order to strengthen their influence against the opposition. In addition, Sudan has freed from a terrorist country's list that made by United Nation Security Council (Asseburg & Henkel, 2021).

Morocco-Israel Normalization

Unlike the previous countries, Morocco has strong ties with Israel even though Morocco is not yet fully recognized Israel as a country before the Abraham Accord. These countries conduct several cooperations in security sectors even before the document of normalization was being ratified (Mezran & Pavia, 2021). Israel has been helping Morocco in obtaining intelligent data and arms and logistic support to establish the Great Wall of Western Sahara. As a replacement, Morocco accommodates many Jewish people who migrated to Israel (Bergman, 2020).

The good relation between Morocco and Israel has given advantages to Morocco in its rivalries with Iran, Algeria, and Turkey. Both of Iran and Algeria support Polisario Liberation Front in Western Sahara (Aljazeera, 2018) that threatens Morocco's sovereignty towards its area. This support is encouraged by Iran's interest to strengthen its influence in the Horn of Africa in order to spread Shia's ideology in the area (Dostri, 2018), and Algeria's influence in Maghreb relates to the gas pipeline and gas export to Spain and Portugal (Fakir, 2021). In addition, its rivalry with Turkey is related to Libya's instability. Turkey considers Libya as a strategic asset. Hence, Turkey has put many efforts to protect its influence in Libya (Harchaoui, 2020). In contrast, Morocco appeared as an initiator who encouraged several conferences that rejected foreign intervention in Libya (Hatim, 2020).

Morocco signed the joint declaration for Abraham Accord on December 22, 2020. This declaration was signed by the prime minister of Morocco, Saad Dine El Othmani, the chief of staff for national security of Israel, Meir Ben-Shabbat, the foreign minister of Israel Alon Ushpiz, and witnessed by the US' president advisor, Jared Kushner. Through this signing, Morocco and Israel have been officially cooperating in many sectors, such as trading, investment, economy, tourism, telecommunication, and energy. Both of them also sent their delegations and established their embassies in Rabat and Tel Aviv (U.S Department of States, 2021). The normalization plan between Morocco and Israel has been arranged since 2017, even though this normalization was just officially inaugurated on December 2020. This normalization provides geopolitical advantages

for Morocco. Firstly, Morocco can strengthen its ties with other geostrategic actors, such as Saudi Arabia, and the US (Jakes, 2020). Secondly, due to close ties with the US, Morocco obtained its sovereignty over the Western Sahara (U.S Embassy and Consulates in Morocco, 2020), and strengthen its legitimacy to rule over that area. However, this issue inflicted negative effects, such as escalation in the cold war between Algeria and Morocco (Cafiero, How The Abraham Accords Reignited Algeria and Morocco's Cold War, 2021). Thirdly, this normalization gives chances to Israel to send an open military support for Morocco (Arnaout, 2021). Lastly, Morocco can mend its ties with the UAE (Jacobs, 2021), and Bahrain after the weakened ties that caused by the Boycott of Qatar in 2017. Moreover the UAE has become the first Arab country that opened their consulate in Western Sahara and strengthened Morocco's legitimacy over that area (Reuters, 2020). Hence, Bahrain also took the same step as the UAE to open their consulate in Western Sahara (Reuters, 2020).

CONCLUSION

The development of the geopolitical dynamics of the Middle East after normalization is influenced by geostrategic actors who take a role in it. This condition has shown the phenomenon of "Multipolar Regional System" while the actors compete with each other. The UAE and Israel normalization is based on the UAE's three interests, politics, security, and economy. However, the main goal of the UAE is more for political interests where the UAE wants to restrict the influence of Iran, Turkey, and Qatar which can interfere with its national interests in the region. In contrast to the UAE, the normalization of Bahrain was encouraged by security interests wherein Bahrain seeks to maintain the stability of its Shia-majority country from Iranian influence. In addition, Bahrain's dependence on the US also encouraged Bahrain to ratify the normalization agreement. The third country that normalizes its ties with Israel is Sudan. The normalization of Sudan-Israel is encouraged by the economic interests of Sudan where Sudan has experienced an economic crisis since the economic sanctions in 1993. In addition, Sudan has also experienced an energy crisis and already lost 70% of its energy after the split of South Sudan. The last country that normalizes its ties is Morocco. Different from the other countries, the close relation between Morocco and Israel has existed for a long time. The normalization of Morocco was encouraged by political and security interests wherein Morocco wants to be recognized for its sovereignty over Western Sahara, and assisted to defend the region. Through this normalization, Morocco also gets advantages in strengthening relations with other actors such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and the US. The normalization ratified by several Arab countries was

encouraged by the national interests of each country in various sectors. Even though they have realized the implementation of normalization will degrade their morale towards the Palestinian struggle, they prioritize the stability of the country, and the national interests of each country. For those countries, state and regional stability related to the regional balance of power is something that must be prioritized.

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