

## Qposts

### UAE's Outreach to Israel, Jewish Community Bodes Well for Durability of New Ties

By Jonathan H. Ferziger

As you drive across the bay from downtown Abu Dhabi to Saadiyat Island, home to a \$1.4 billion branch of France's Louvre museum, [three sacred structures](#) wrapped in scaffolding come into view. Rising from a massive dust-filled construction site, the cube-shaped silhouettes of a synagogue, a church and a mosque embody the sweeping changes that the United Arab Emirates has embraced as it enters its second half-century.

While the small and prosperous Gulf state has long played host to a broad diversity of cultures brought from around the world by its nearly 9 million expatriate residents, the past year marked a profound leap. [Normalizing relations](#) with Israel after decades of political animosity shook the status quo and may offer sparks of hope for future Middle East peace efforts. Inviting Jews to participate openly in Emirati life, promoting the growth of kosher restaurants and dedicating a state-built synagogue inside the Muslim capital as an equal partner in the Abrahamic Family House lend credibility to official promises of building a society based on tolerance.

Fifteen months after the White House signing ceremony, the UAE and Israel have swiftly filled in the outlines of the Abraham Accords by exchanging ambassadors and promoting a constellation of joint business ventures, particularly in the realms of technology, security, health and agriculture. The new Tel Aviv air route has become [FlyDubai's busiest](#) as more than 200,000 Israelis have come to visit a country that they couldn't legally enter on an Israeli passport less than two years ago. [Israel's tech-themed pavilion](#) at the Dubai Expo has turned into the Jewish state's most prominent commercial billboard in the Arab world while Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and the UAE's de facto ruler, turned heads when he chatted with the CEOs of Israeli defense firms at November's [Dubai Airshow](#).

The Emirati path to solidifying ties with Israel hasn't been entirely smooth. Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas condemned the agreement when it was announced in August 2020 and still admonishes other Arab countries from following suit. The Hamas-driven [Gaza missile war](#) this past May and a parallel outbreak of

violence between Arabs and Jews inside Israeli cities made clear how volatile the Mideast conflict remains.

Even on the UAE-Israel front, business deals that looked airtight may be unravelling, such as an agreement to transport Emirati oil from Israel's Red Sea port of Eilat through a [pipeline](#) to its Mediterranean port of Ashkelon that is opposed by the country's new energy minister because of environmental risks.

Still, the UAE has indicated that it sees Israel's integration into the Arab world as a long-term project and won't lightly let it get blown off course. In October, senior Emirati officials participated in a two-day conference held in Abu Dhabi that brought together senior officials from Israel and the five other Arab countries that have signed peace treaties or normalized relations with the Jewish state, including Egypt, Jordan, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan. Sponsored by the Washington-based Atlantic Council and the Jeffrey M. Talpins Foundation, the [N7 Conference](#) was the first in a series of high-level encounters around the Middle East and Africa aimed at helping to advance Israel's further normalization with other Arab states.

Along with discussions on regional economic development, climate change and technology, the conference sought to generate ideas for developing a ["warm peace"](#) between Israel and the Arab nations. Those included sports and cultural events, Muslim-Jewish dialogue and a variety of opportunities for young people to get to know each other on a personal level.

A great example is last month's ADNOC Abu Dhabi Marathon, in which Israel was represented by Avi Solomon, a blind runner and Jewish immigrant from Ethiopia. During the week before the race, Solomon was accompanied on his [morning run in Tel Aviv](#) by the new UAE ambassador to Israel, Mohamed Al Khaja, who sees sports diplomacy as an effective way to break down cultural barriers. While business prospects focused on start-ups and the international diamond trade have brought a stream of Emirati entrepreneurs to visit Israel, tourism from the UAE has amounted to only a fraction of the flood of Israeli visitors coming to visit the tiny Gulf state.

As the UAE enters its Jubilee year, the speed with which the country has sought to promote tolerance as a basic societal value and overcome hostility to Israel has been impressive. While alliances can be tenuous in the Middle East and diplomatic relations that have been established can be severed, the new era of Israel's ties in the Gulf looks durable at this point and could increase in momentum.

In the hazy heat of Abu Dhabi, the three houses of prayer built on a monumental scale indicate the UAE's commitment to honoring the common spiritual roots of Jews, Muslims and Christians while taking concrete action to forge a lasting alliance between the Arab world and Israel.

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