

Abraham Accords: American and Israeli Exceptionalism

by [Geoffrey Clarfield](#) (July 2022)



Jacob's Ladder, Marc Chagall, 1973

The following is the text of a presentation made at B'nai Israel Synagogue Pensacola, Florida on May 7, 2022 by Canadian-Israeli anthropologist and contributing editor of New English Review.

First of all, I would like to thank you all for inviting me to

address your congregation today. As a Canadian, I never stop reminding my American friends and colleagues, that my country of birth does not have the First Amendment. Instead, it has a growing number of laws and orders that gag free speech. This is on top of our recent experience of a full week of unjustified, unconstitutional and arbitrary martial law, many of whose measures are now being made permanent, not only at the federal, but also at the provincial level. Americans enjoy the blessing of the First Amendment and this is just one part of its exceptional status during the last two centuries of this country's destiny and development. If I understand it correctly, the First Amendment is a God-given right, and so I am exercising it today in this house of worship, in this most admirable state, Florida.

Today, I would like to go some small way towards making sense of the landmark Abraham Accords which were set in place, less than two years ago by President Trump and two key Jewish advisors, his son in law Jared Kushner and Avi Berkovitz. And, I would like to point out what I believe the American Jewish community can and could do about it. But more on that later.

The Abraham Accords, simply put, are the documents that allowed for full diplomatic relations between Israel, the United Arab Emirates, the Kingdom of Bahrain and the Kingdom of Morocco. Since their inception, ambassadors from these states have set up Embassies in Israel and the Israelis have set up embassies in the Gulf states and Morocco. Trade and tourism between Israel and the Gulf is booming.

For over one hundred years the Jewish people and the people of Israel have only seen the darker side of Islam, with its antisemitic anti Zionism and the many Arab League wars against the Jewish state which have cost billions of dollars and killed thousands of Jews. These have not ended, but they are winding down. The Abraham Accords are a political indicator of this trend.

During the last one hundred years, Jewish and Israeli scholars have shown that Judaism influenced the Koran and the laws of Islam in its early years, in a myriad of ways, and then, as the large part of the Jewish people became subjects of the Islamic states, from about 700 Ad to the early Middle Ages, the Jews of Islam were influenced by their hosts. For example, the Hebrew poetry of Yehuda ha Levi, Ibn Gavirol and so many other Jewish luminaries in Moorish Spain, such as Maimonides were part of a larger, medieval Arabic cultural renaissance.

For those of you familiar with the history of the Jews of Islam, I would like to remind you of the great and learned Israeli scholar, Shlomo Dov Goitein, who spent most of his academic career, in both Israel and then here in the USA, bringing to life the social history of the Jews of Islam for the reading public, especially during the 12th century, when Jews participated in the India trade, which stretched from Morocco to Egypt, through the Gulf to India and back.

When you read Goitein's books, you quickly discover that that Jews are not newcomers to the Arab Gulf states. We, the Jewish people, have an ancient history there. And from an anthropological point of view, as that is my calling, let me point out that Islam and Judaism do not look negatively at money and commerce, whereas those countries who still count themselves as Christian, have a deep conflict about the validity of money and trade.

Muslims and Jews see commerce as a *mitzvah*. So, for those of you who remember the film Ben Hur, there is a scene where Judah ben Hur meets an Arab horse salesman who says to him, "You know we Arabs and you Jews should get together and do something." Well with the Abraham Accords in place that time is now.

There is another dimension to Israel's tilt towards the Gulf states. They have the oil money and have employed hundreds of thousands of Arabs from states without oil, such as Egypt and

Syria to develop their economy. In the past they have also donated to the military in Egypt and Syria. The Gulf states may now begin to think twice about giving money to Hamas or Hezbollah, or even allowing funds to be transferred to these organizations through their banks, if and only if the Israelis, and their allies in the diaspora, play their economic and diplomatic cards right in the near future.

Of course, the elephant in the room is Iran. As you know, from the beginning of Islam that religion has been divided between two sects, the Sunni and the Shiah, similar to but not the same, as the schism between Protestant and Catholic.

It is unimportant to comment on the theological content that distinguishes one brand of Islam from another because again, they are really national and geographic symbols. Mostly lowland Arabic speakers are predominantly Sunni Muslims, whereas Persian speakers live in the highlands of what is now Iran, as state that wants to destroy Israel. Like Israel today, the gulf Arabs fear that they may also be the targets of Iranian hostility and so prefer an alliance with the Jewish state, as does Saudi Arabia. This is new and promising.

The Abraham Accords therefore may allow Israel to assemble its diplomatic and military coalition of the willing, in the face of declared Iranian hostility and their growing threat of gaining a nuclear bomb. In this scenario, Jews will have a significant cultural advantage, because a majority of Israelis come from Arab and Islamic countries, and many of their children, as well as the children of Ashkenazi Israelis, speak Arabic.

All of this was good news until the last presidential election, when President Biden decided to bring back so many of President Obama's foreign policy advisors. They are once again engaged in a tilt towards Iran and a tilt away from Israel. So, in order to better understand what the present American government is really doing, here is what Saudi

Arabian writer, Dr Ibrahim al Nakhlas thinks about this:

The P5+1 group is once again moving towards rewarding the extremist Iranian regime for its terrorist and destructive policies, practices and behavior... This group works without realizing the direct harm to global security, peace and stability. This group needs to take into account the great danger that the extremist Iranian regime poses to global security, peace and stability. It needs to be aware of the great suffering caused by the Iranian regime's terrorism and extremism. It is necessary for this group to listen to the fears and concerns of the countries of the region ... The [Iranian] terrorism and extremism, however, will be more violent and destructive, given the nuclear and armaments benefits it will obtain from a new agreement.

This is not an Israeli speaking. These are the words of a Muslim, Arab, Sunni Saudi expert. Israel is not mentioned specifically, but it is implied as being one of the "countries of the region."

So, we can be sure that the Biden administration and the State Department will do everything possible to weaken the Abraham Accords, or background them to the degree that they can, for it would seem that their political platform is to simply negate all and anything that President Trump's administration achieved, and the Abraham Accords are and were, the jewel in the crown of President Trump's foreign policy.

This leads us to a question that most Jewish leaders and institutions in the United States may now ask. That is, "How can the Jewish community of the United States, the wealthiest, most educated, most influential diaspora community in the history of the Jews, living in the most powerful country in modern world ... support the Abraham Accords?"

Well, the first thing that most American Jewish leaders must do is stop. And that is to say stop beating up on the State of

Israel. This one-sided criticism of Israel has affected the younger generation of North American Jews. Here is a quote from a Jewish community [report](#):

A mounting body of evidence has pointed to a growing distancing from Israel of American Jews, and the distancing seems to be most prominent among younger Jews,...more than half of Jews under 35 say they would not view the destruction of Israel as a personal tragedy... recent research shows that young Jews believe a connection to the State of Israel is not among the primary factors in determining the collective Jewish identity...Bottom line: young American Jews don't care about Israel as much as their parents or grandparents do.

The last ten years has only seen this trend increase.

What can and should American Jews, or better still, those American Jews who are true friends of the Jewish state, do to further the Abraham Accords? I think the answer is that they must come up with a better story than the anti-Zionist left.

Let me tell you what this story could be, at least in its outline and to whom the story should be addressed, for it may not be what you are expecting to hear. If it is, all the better.

It is commonly assumed that Israel and the Arabs of the Land of Israel are in a fratricidal fight, with the Israelis having the upper hand. It is also assumed that the Arabs of the Land of Israel are stateless and deserve an independent Muslim state in Judea and Samaria. In order to argue against this thesis, we must remind ourselves of a bit of recent history.

Until the end of WWI, most of the Arabic speaking Middle East was under the authority of the Turkish Ottoman Empire. The Ottomans then lost their empire, having allied themselves with the Germans and Austrians who lost WWI to the allies.

When this happened four centuries of subservience to the Turks for Christian and Muslim speakers of Arabic ended. Their not so numerous Protestant missionary educated elites, longed for independence. They then created Arab nationalism, a political movement that mirrored the ethnic and linguistic nationalisms that had transformed the landscape of 19th century Europe.

In this new ideology, an “Arab” was someone who spoke Arabic. The largely Christian Arab proponents of this ideology hoped, that as citizens of newly created secular states, they would finally be given the legal and political equality denied to them for centuries under Islamic law and Muslim rulers. And so, after WWI, a number of “Arab” states were created by the League of Nations including Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq. By the end of WWII, they had all gained their independence.

Among these newly created “Arab” states, there arose the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, which became formally independent in 1946. Until then, it was legally part of the League of Nations Mandate for Palestine, implemented on trust from the League of Nations by the British government.

And so, we must take a moment and ask ourselves, where do the Jordanians live and who are they?

The people who reside in the State of Jordan live on the east side of the Jordan River.

Three thousand years ago, what is now northern Jordan was the territory of the Israelites: specifically, the tribes of Dan, Manasseh, Gad and Reuben. Later, the area east of the Jordan river became part of the second Jewish Commonwealth under the Maccabees, before the Romans conquered the whole area and made it part of their empire.

The Christian Bible has retained 8 books (based on earlier Jewish originals) which describe the history of the Maccabees until just before the Roman conquest and, we know that Jesus

and his disciples spent much time in Jordan for they thought of it as part of the Land of Israel.

Southern Jordan is also part of the route of the Exodus from Egypt by the Israelites who crossed the Jordan River from the east, near Mount Nebo, where Moses, the Israelite leader died, and is reputedly buried. For Christians, this area is also the home of John the Baptist. Clearly, Jordan is a Biblical land.

Who are the Jordanians? Until the second decade of the 20th century there had never been a Jordanian people, ethnic group or tribe by that name, or a group of diasporic exiles who thought of themselves as "Jordanian." Jordan is an upper class, 20th century British invention, dreamed up in the 1920s, for the miniscule number of people in what Britain illegally hived off from the League of Nations Mandate for Palestine in 1923. Until 1946 its British administrators called it just that-Eastern Palestine.

Today no one reads the League of Nations Mandate for Palestine document anymore. However, it is still the legal basis for the creation of the Jewish state of Israel. Its provisions still stand, because all of the legal decisions of the League, were subsequently recognized as binding, when the United Nations was created after WWII, and that body accepted Israel as part of the family of nations, according to international law.

In 1923 the Mandate was arbitrarily, morally and legally violated by the British who created the temporary "Emirate of Jordan" in Eastern Palestine. Not surprisingly, from that date on, no Jews were allowed to live there on a permanent basis. As it is said in Hebrew, there is nothing more permanent than temporary.

The name, the "Hashemite" Kingdom of Jordan, makes reference to the fact that its ruling tribe, the Hashemis, were imported by the British from outside of Jordan in the Hejaz (what is

now Western Saudi Arabia) during the 1920s. The Hashemis rule Jordan today as the Saudis do Arabia, claiming the name of the country by right of conquest, but in their case with the connivance of the British, who unilaterally decided to lop off 70% of mandated Palestine, and give it to them as their reward for being paid in gold to revolt against the Turks during WWI.

In order to give this new national fiction of Jordan some instant legitimacy, the British gave these newly installed tribal tyrants British names like King and Prince. In fact, the Hashemi were and continue to be a usurping Bedouin tribal elite in Eastern Palestine.

There were other nomadic camel herding tribes who had wandered into the area that the Hashemites occupied and they made common cause with them. Under the Hashemites, they created an army called "The Arab Legion," trained and led by British officers.

This army fought against Israel in 1948. They killed many, many Jews, including Holocaust survivors.

East of the Jordan there were always small towns and villages, where farmers and townsmen eked out a living. Many of the Arab Muslims of these towns and villages were former Bedouin who had become farmers. Among them were also the Christian demographic remnants of the Byzantine Empire, which had fallen to the invading Arab Muslims in the 7th century during the first Muslim invasions from Arabia.

These included various Arabic and Aramaic speaking Christians as well as Armenians, who were later joined by Muslims from the Caucasus, and Druze immigrants from Syria during the 1800s.

Today the majority of the country's inhabitants are largely Muslim Arabs who now think of themselves as Palestinians.

Before the Mandate, they had no national identity. There is also no record of a self-defined, self-declared Palestinian national identity in any historical document, before that time.

However, once the British established the Mandate, and Jewish immigration began to create a mini-industrial revolution there, both Western and Eastern Palestine attracted waves of Muslim Arab immigrants from Egypt and Syria and as far away Morocco. In the early 1900s there were more than fifty non-Jewish ethnic groups speaking a myriad of languages in the land of Israel on both sides of the Jordan. These new immigrants found it convenient to make common cause with the non-Bedouin residents of Jordan and Israel west of the river, eventually called themselves and their children, Palestinians adopting Arabic as their language. As a side note it is worth remembering that the British hired Britons who administered the mandate, turned a blind eye to Arab immigration and discouraged and blocked Jewish immigration in defiance of the terms of the Mandate itself.

The great historical joke of this period is that all of those Muslim, Arabic speaking peoples who came to live in Mandated Eastern Palestine, all of sudden stopped being thought of as Palestinians by the British and later the members of the United Nations after 1948, and even more so, since the Oslo process of 1992. In the early fifties they were all Jordanians and after Oslo, hundreds of thousands had their passports revoked to add to the number of so-called Palestinians living in Judea and Samaria.

This has and remains one of the great disappearing acts of modern history, for Jordan is clearly a Palestinian Arab State, in what was formerly British Mandated Palestine, with a majority of non-Bedouin villagers and townspeople who do not define themselves as Bedouin or "Jordanian."

In 1948, Arabs of the Land of Israel from both Eastern and

Western Mandated Palestine, went to war with the newly created state of Israel in that small part of Western Palestine that had been begrudged by the UN to the Jewish people. No one thought it would survive.

The Arabs of the British Mandate on both sides of the Jordan, attacked Israel and when they were defeated, many of them removed themselves from one part of Western Palestine to one part of Eastern Palestine. The same thing happened when Arabs from the what is now called the West Bank chose to cross the Jordan after the 1967 and 1973 wars, when so many of them had once again taken up arms against Israel, in the hope of conquering Western Palestine. If that is the case, are they really “refugees”?

The political and ethnographic disappearance of the Palestinians of Eastern Palestine has largely been a tactic used by the Arab League and its allies on the left, to put Israel and its supporters on the defensive.

Israeli and foreign scholars have been loath to clearly explain this strange disappearing act until they were recently challenged by an Arab, Muslim, Palestinian, Jordanian who has had to flee Jordan because he has told the truth to his fellow Arabs. He argues that Jordan is a Palestinian State or even better still, a state where the majority identify as Palestinian Arabs. That man is Mudar Zahran. The Jordanian government has sentenced him to death in absentia for saying so. So much for the universality of the first amendment.

In a recent [article](#), Zahran has bluntly stated:

There is, in fact, almost nothing un-Palestinian about Jordan except for the royal family. Despite decades of official imposition of a Bedouin image on the country, and even Bedouin accents on state television, the Palestinian identity is still the most dominant...to the point where the Jordanian capital, Amman, is the largest and most populated,

Palestinian city any-where. Palestinians view it as a symbol of their economic success and ability to excel. More-over, empowering a Palestinian statehood for Jordan has a well-founded and legally accepted grounding: The minute the minimum level of democracy is applied to Jordan, the Palestinian majority would, by right, take over the political momentum.

Today's media and government officials in America, Europe and Israel seem to be afflicted with a case of historical amnesia. The Mandate for Palestine is still valid, the majority of Arabs of the Land of Israel who call themselves Palestinians, live as a demographic majority in an independent but, illegitimate state in Mandated Eastern Palestine, occupied by a conquering Bedouin elite, whereas the Jews and Israelis have a state in the Western part of Mandated Palestine.

The world has been living with a two-state solution for decades. Jews and like minded gentiles, have simply been afraid to spell it out because, as Israeli politicians like to say, "the Arabs may not like it." No matter what the fake King of Jordan may say or do, his country and his people are not Jordanian. A majority of self-identifying Palestinian Arabs there are ruled by a group of tyrannical conquering Bedouin. Jordan is what anthropologists call an "ethnographic fiction." The majority of Jordanians are Palestinians living in Palestine. There can be no peace without the recognition of this simple truth.

Ladies and gentlemen this is the story that American Jews need to tell to the Arabs of the Gulf states, on radio, on TV, in their universities and through coordinated social media. They also must share it with North American youth, that is to say their own children and families. They have not done this. This kind of initiative is minimally a ten-year project. It will not be easy, and it is a project that has yet to begin. But someone must begin it, and begin soon.

It is an exceptional project, for an exceptional people, who breathe the free air of liberty in an exceptional county, blessed by the God of our fathers. If American Jews do not do it, no one else will.

Let me add one final note.

Our children and grandchildren, have been indoctrinated at their Liberal Arts colleges with critical race theory to think that Israel is a white, European, colonial, occupying power, an apartheid state that denies the national rights of the Arabs of the Land of Israel, and so are fast becoming enemies of the Jewish state.

When they hear arguments like the one I have shared with you here today, they might, just might begin to doubt their false certainties, especially when they hear it from people like Mudar Zahran, the exiled Jordanian opposition leader, who speaks English with an Arabic accent, a man who is thought of as neither white, American, or Jewish, and who presents himself to the world as a Muslim, Arab, Palestinian with a revoked Jordanian passport.

Thank you.

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Geoffrey Clarfield is an anthropologist at large. For twenty years he lived in, worked among and explored the cultures and societies of Africa, the Middle East and Asia. As a development anthropologist he has worked for the following clients: the UN, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Norwegian, Canadian, Italian, Swiss and Kenyan governments as well international NGOs. His essays largely focus on the translation of cultures.

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