

Advancing Abraham Accords 2.0: A Congressional Agenda

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

The Abraham Accords survived the post-October 7 war: Diplomatic ties held, and trade with Israel's Arab and Muslim peace partners has grown every year since 2020.

However, momentum has stalled in critical areas: People-to-people ties, public business partnerships, and multilateral forums all contracted after October 7, 2023.

Congress should act on five fronts: the IMEC corridor, a critical-technology partnership, a regional security framework, exchange programs, and a special envoy.

Introduction

September 2026 marks six years since the signing of the Abraham Accords on the White House lawn by Israel, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Bahrain. These historic peace and normalization agreements, brokered by President Donald Trump, produced a flourishing of diplomatic, economic, security, and cultural cooperation. Despite the multi-front war that followed Hamas's October 7, 2023, terrorist attack, the Accords proved remarkably resilient. Diplomatic, trade, and security ties were largely preserved. At the same time, many of the people-to-people initiatives that had characterized the warm peace fostered by the Accords declined in scope and public profile.

In the wake of the U.S.-facilitated Gaza ceasefire and Operation Epic Fury, the Middle East and North

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Africa (MENA) region stands at a critical crossroads. Restoring the momentum of the Abraham Accords, building regional frameworks that advance U.S. interests, and expanding the circle of warm peace will require sustained American leadership. With the right commitment and support, the Abraham Accords can evolve into the foundation of a new U.S.-led regional architecture that promotes the vital national security interests of the United States and its allies. Congress can play a central role in providing that leadership and turning the potential of “Abraham Accords 2.0” into reality. There are five principal avenues through which Congress can advance this goal.

Evolution of Abraham Accords Ties

From September 2020 to October 2023, the Abraham Accords opened the door to the rapid development of ties among Israel, the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, and (for a time) Sudan. Embassies were established; direct flights were launched; trade grew rapidly; and previously unimaginable commercial, technological, and civil society cooperation emerged. Partnerships were announced in artificial intelligence (AI), space, cybersecurity, water, precision agriculture, energy, health, financial technology (fintech), defense, and many other fields. The Accords also contributed positively to Israel’s ties with its traditional peace partners, Egypt and Jordan. More than 60 intergovernmental agreements, instruments, and memoranda of understanding (MOUs) were signed between Israel and its Abraham Accords and Arab peace partners.¹

This period also saw the emergence of Abraham Accords multilateral cooperation. In January 2021, the Trump Administration announced that Israel would be moved to the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) area of responsibility, enabling significantly enhanced cooperation with other American partners in the region. Under President Joseph Biden, the Israel–India–U.S.–UAE (I2U2) framework and Negev Forum were established.² In September 2023, the United States, India, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, the European Union, and other partners signed an MOU to establish the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC).³

Iran, Hamas, and other radical actors understood the implications of this trend. They viewed the emergence of a U.S.-aligned regional architecture culminating in U.S.-mediated negotiations toward Saudi–Israeli normalization as a serious threat. While Hamas’s October 7 attack had been planned over a number of years, evidence indicates that the acceleration of this regional alignment was one of the factors that led Hamas to launch the attack in October 2023.⁴

The attack and ensuing multi-front war generated far-reaching regional tensions and strain. Many questioned whether the Accords would survive. Nearly three years later, it is clear that the strategic foundations of the Accords are more resilient than many skeptics predicted. Despite the intense regional conflict, the framework of peace did not collapse.

This resilience found expression in at least four important ways.

- Formal diplomatic relations remained in place.
- Trade between Israel and the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, Egypt, and Jordan continued to grow. According to data from Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics, combined trade between Israel and its Arab and Muslim peace partners increased by approximately 15.4 percent in 2024 compared to 2023. It increased a further 0.8 percent year-over-year in 2025, a modest rise that is nevertheless impressive given the regional tensions and disruptions. During the first five months of 2026, trade was approximately 7.7 percent higher than it was during the same period in 2025.⁵ In fact, Israel's cumulative trade with its Arab peace partners has risen every year since the Accords were signed. Combined trade rose from approximately \$1.97 billion in 2021 to approximately \$4.56 billion in 2025, an increase of roughly 131 percent.⁶
- Air connectivity proved remarkably durable. Although international aviation to Israel faced severe disruption, Emirati airlines maintained service during periods when many Western airlines suspended flights. The UAE was the third most popular country for passengers traveling to and from Ben Gurion International Airport in 2025 and again during the first six months of 2026.⁷
- Defense integration advanced in the face of shared threats. In January 2026, CENTCOM announced the establishment of the Middle Eastern Air Defense–Combined Defense Operations Cell (MEAD-CDOC).⁸ The importance of this integration was demonstrated a month later with the launch of Operation Epic Fury. During the conflict, Israel deployed an Iron Dome battery and other military systems to assist in defending the UAE. This marked an extraordinary development made possible by the Abraham Accords: an Israeli defensive system, developed in close partnership with the United States, helping to protect an Arab partner under fire. Nor was military cooperation limited

to Israel and the UAE. In January 2026, a senior Moroccan military delegation traveled to Tel Aviv and signed a strategic work plan with its Israeli counterparts.

It should also be noted that in November 2025, Kazakhstan joined the Abraham Accords, becoming the first Central Asian country to accede to the framework.

At the same time, the damage caused by the post–October 7 regional war and geopolitical tensions should not be minimized. Public support for normalization declined across much of the region. People-to-people initiatives suffered, business and technology partnerships were paused or canceled, academic and scientific cooperation decreased, multilateral forums lost momentum, and the expansion of normalization slowed.

As noted, the Middle East and North Africa region now stands at a critical juncture. The Abraham Accords have the potential to shape a new regional architecture that supports crucial U.S. national security interests. Realizing this potential and restoring positive momentum on the bilateral and multilateral levels will require American leadership, commitment, and focus.

Five Things Congress Can Do to Advance the Abraham Accords

While U.S. leadership on the Abraham Accords has traditionally been associated primarily with the executive branch, Congress can help to strengthen regional cooperation, integration, and warm peace, thereby deepening and expanding the Accords, by acting in five critical areas.

- **Advance concrete steps to realize the IMEC vision.** IMEC could become one of the most consequential infrastructure initiatives of the 21st century. Such an overland route could shorten transit times for goods between India and Europe by 51 percent and between the UAE and Israel by 79 percent.⁹ However, IMEC's potential extends far beyond freight. Energy infrastructure, digital connectivity, and data infrastructure could form part of the corridor.

For the United States, IMEC is not simply a transportation project. It is an opportunity to strengthen supply-chain resilience, provide an alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and routes dominated by Russia and Iran, increase demand for American technology

and services, connect close U.S. partners, and reinforce a Western-aligned economic corridor extending from India to Europe.

Despite extensive diplomatic attention and rhetoric, there has been relatively little detailed analysis of IMEC's likely economic benefits, costs, regulatory requirements, and commercially viable projects. Overcoming political, bureaucratic, and economic hurdles and attracting public and private investment will require a credible account of what the corridor could deliver for each of the countries involved; a detailed mapping of infrastructure needs and gaps; an analysis of the regulatory, customs, and security requirements for its success; and an assessment of the opportunities for public-sector and private-sector actors along the route.

Congress should therefore pursue two complementary initiatives. Specifically, Congress should:

1. Seek an independent U.S. International Trade Commission assessment of IMEC's trade and economic implications.¹⁰ The assessment should examine potential employment, investment, trade, and growth effects for participating states and identify opportunities for American companies in engineering, logistics, cybersecurity, energy technology, and digital infrastructure.
2. Call on the Department of Commerce, in coordination with the Departments of State, Treasury, Transportation, and Energy together with the U.S. Trade Representative, Trade and Development Agency, International Development Finance Corporation (DFC), and Export-Import Bank, to develop an actionable commercial road map that includes bankable projects, financing gaps, regulatory barriers, customs harmonization procedures, and investment opportunities.

Congress should also encourage the Treasury Department and the U.S. Executive Director at the World Bank to support complementary analytical work. The World Bank has extensive experience modeling major transport corridors, including projects associated with China's BRI. Comparable work on IMEC could add international credibility and help to identify the steps needed to make the corridor viable. In tandem with these studies, the United States should convene the

IMEC signatories and the key transit and destination countries, including Israel and Jordan, to develop an implementation road map, measurable benchmarks, and a permanent secretariat for coordination, communication, and oversight.

Progress need not wait for a complete regional railway network. Existing and expanded trucking routes can demonstrate commercial value as rail infrastructure is being developed. Congress should encourage engagement with Saudi Arabia and other partners on transit arrangements for goods originating from or destined for Israel. Where appropriate, U.S. financial support through the DFC and other mechanisms could be made available to qualifying regional partners for infrastructure projects. One potential project would be DFC-supported feasibility and project-development work for a national Jordanian railway connecting the country's border crossings with Saudi Arabia and Israel.

As noted, IMEC should be viewed not only through the lens of trade, but also through the lens of energy and digital connectivity. Saudi Arabia's East–West oil pipeline has demonstrated the strategic value of energy infrastructure that is capable of bypassing the Strait of Hormuz. At this stage, IMEC's energy component should focus on natural gas, including pipelines from the Arabian Gulf to Israel's Mediterranean ports, from which the gas could then be transported to Europe through new pipelines in the Eastern Mediterranean.¹¹

- **Establish an Abraham Accords critical-technology partnership.** Technological leadership will shape the global balance of power and the national security of states to an increasing degree. The United States, Israel, and key Arab and Muslim partners possess complementary capabilities that can strengthen U.S. and allied technological leadership.

The State Department's Pax Silica initiative provides a valuable global framework for cooperation with trusted partners on AI and technology supply chains.¹² Congress should complement this global effort with an Abraham Accords critical-technology partnership that is focused specifically on regional projects and innovation ecosystems. This initiative could build on the United States–Israel Artificial Intelligence Center Act introduced by then-Senator and now

Secretary of State Marco Rubio in 2021 while expanding the concept to include Abraham Accords partners and additional fields such as quantum technologies, space, cybersecurity, and biotechnology.¹³ Such a partnership should leverage resources from all of its members to support joint research, shared test beds, pilot projects, standards cooperation, fellowships, commercialization partnerships, and deployment of emerging technologies that address shared regional challenges. Participation should depend on matching contributions and rigorous safeguards governing intellectual property, export controls, cybersecurity, and the exposure of sensitive technologies to adversarial nations.

- **Promote regional security integration.** Congress has already advanced and in some cases has enacted important initiatives involving regional air and missile defense, maritime security, cybersecurity, space cooperation, and joint exercises. These efforts should be consolidated into a practical regional framework that encompasses planning, interoperability, resilience, research and development, and manufacturing. One realistic model is the Comprehensive Security Integration and Prosperity Agreement (C-SIPA) signed by the U.S. and Bahrain in September 2023. C-SIPA establishes mechanisms for high-level consultation and coordination in response to external aggression, strengthens defense cooperation, and integrates security with trade, technology, and investment.¹⁴

The United States should work to establish an Abraham Accords C-SIPA. Such a framework would not require an automatic commitment to use force. Rather, it could facilitate rapid senior-level consultations, shared threat assessments, and consideration of coordinated political, economic, and defensive responses whenever a participant faces external aggression or coercion. Standing working groups could deepen cooperation in integrated air defense, counter-drone systems, maritime security, cyber defense, and defense industrial cooperation. Particular attention should be devoted to protecting the infrastructure upon which regional integration and economic prosperity depend, including ports, energy installations, data centers, desalination facilities, airports, and logistics hubs.

This architecture should be modular. Not every participant would take part in every aspect of the framework. The objective should be

a flexible regional security platform that strengthens deterrence, enhances resilience, and enables partners to coordinate responses to common threats while respecting different constraints.

- **Invest in the human foundations of peace.** Intergovernmental agreements and cooperation form the institutional basis for regional integration, but people-to-people relationships are this integration's beating heart. Lasting peace will depend not only on agreements signed by officials, but also on entrepreneurs building businesses together, scientists conducting joint research, students studying side by side, and future leaders developing relationships of trust across borders.

The post–October 7 period demonstrated the danger of failing to build extensive public constituencies that understand, value, and benefit from regional cooperation. If the Abraham Accords are to become a durable and lasting foundation, they must be rooted in sustained engagement among the peoples of the region. Fortunately, the United States already possesses highly effective tools for achieving this goal. Congress does not need to create new programs. Instead, it should adapt existing educational, scientific, and leadership programs by establishing dedicated Abraham Accords tracks that bring together participants from the United States, Israel, and regional partners.

The State Department's International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP)¹⁵ should establish recurring Abraham Accords cohorts that bring emerging leaders from Israel and Arab and Muslim partners to the United States as joint regional delegations. These cohorts could engage American counterparts while developing long-term professional networks focused on innovation, entrepreneurship, public administration, education, and economic integration. Similarly, the U.S.–Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI)¹⁶ should establish dedicated Abraham Accords groups within its existing leadership and entrepreneurship programs.

Congress should support an Abraham Accords–focused track within the Stevens Initiative for Virtual Exchange,¹⁷ bringing American and Abraham Accords member countries' classrooms, universities, and youth together for dialogue and shared projects. Finally, Congress should enhance the Middle East Regional Cooperation (MERC)

Program¹⁸ by creating expanded funding opportunities for multi-lateral research consortia involving Israel, the United States, and Abraham Accords partners in such areas as water security, agriculture, health, and AI.

- **Appoint and confirm a Special Envoy for the Abraham Accords and develop country-specific strategies for expanding normalization.** In the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024, Congress established within the Department of State the Office of the Special Presidential Envoy for the Abraham Accords, Negev Forum, and Related Integration and Normalization Fora and Agreements. The law provides for a Senate-confirmed envoy with the rank of ambassador who reports directly to the Secretary of State.¹⁹

This office should be filled, staffed, and empowered. The envoy should have the resources and access necessary to coordinate initiatives spanning the Departments of State, Defense, Commerce, and Treasury and other agencies while working closely with the White House and other special envoys. The envoy's mandate should encompass both the deepening of existing agreements and expansion of the Abraham Accords. The United States, for example, should continue to work toward Saudi-Israeli normalization, but it should also be recalled that there are more than two dozen Arab and Muslim-majority countries that lack formal relations with Israel. Before October 7, 2023, progress reportedly had been made toward the establishment of formal relations with a number of these countries.

The Special Envoy's office should develop prioritized, country-specific strategies for a broad range of potential normalization partners. These strategies should begin with each country's national priorities. For one country, the central issue might be defense cooperation. For another, it could be access to American technology, water and food security, energy, investment, or diplomatic and sovereignty-related issues. The United States should identify where American, Israeli, and regional capabilities can help to meet those needs, what mutually beneficial measures could pave the way for the expansion of ties, and what a road map toward gradual normalization would entail.²⁰ There should also be a concerted effort to return Sudan to the Abraham Accords framework while countering the efforts of Iran and other hostile nations to expand their influence in Sudan and across the Sahel.

Conclusion

The Abraham Accords have demonstrated how bold and innovative American leadership can produce outcomes that few believed possible, but without concerted U.S.-led efforts, these agreements could fail to reach their full transformative potential.

The next phase will require active American leadership, commitment, and a strategy that treats regional integration as a central instrument and goal of U.S. policy. Congress can help to translate this vision into practical institutions and programs: a mutually beneficial IMEC, a trusted critical-technology partnership, a flexible regional security framework, stronger people-to-people networks, and a dedicated diplomatic effort to deepen and expand normalization.

Congress should also recognize that strengthening regional integration requires countering actors that seek to demonize Israel and undermine the Abraham Accords model of peace. The United Nations is today perhaps the most globally influential actor working to promote delegitimization and boycotts of Israel while whitewashing terrorism and rejectionism. The U.S. should not work to integrate Israel and Arab allies and at the same time provide funding to an institution that seeks to isolate Israel and undermine U.S. national interests.²¹ Similarly, some regional state-connected media platforms, such as Qatar's Al Jazeera, have consistently promoted anti-normalization sentiments and a strongly negative framing of the Abraham Accords, thereby making the task of building warm peace more difficult. American policy should support institutions and initiatives that facilitate regional cooperation, recognition, and coexistence while opposing efforts to delegitimize the Abraham Accords.

The Middle East and North Africa region stands at a crossroads. Iran, the Muslim Brotherhood, rejectionist Palestinian factions, and others seek to steer the region down the path of extremism, instability, and terrorism. The Abraham Accords have provided an alternative path of tolerance, integration, and cooperation. Congress should lead the way in advancing regional peace, prosperity, and partnership in a manner that serves the vital interests of the American people.

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Endnotes

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