**Group 1**

It’s a geopolitical earthquake.

To fully appreciate why, you need to start with the internal dynamics of the deal. It was Trump’s peace plan drawn up by Jared Kushner, and their willingness to stick with it, that actually created the raw material for this breakthrough. Here is how.

The Kushner plan basically called for Israel and the Palestinians to make peace, with Israel being able to annex some 30 percent of the West Bank, where most of its settlers were, and the Palestinians getting to establish a demilitarized, patchwork state on the other 70 percent, along with some land swaps from Israel.

The Palestinians rejected the deal outright as unbalanced and unjust. But Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin [Netanyahu](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/13/world/middleeast/israel-uae-annexation.html), who basically helped to write the very pro-Israel plan, said he intended to proceed with the annexation part of the plan by July 1 — without agreeing to the part that his political base of Jewish settlers rejected: Palestinians later getting a state on the other 70 percent.

It didn’t work, because Kushner, who was hearing regularly from Egypt, Jordan and the gulf Arabs that such a unilateral Israeli annexation would be a total deal-breaker for them, told Bibi, “Not so fast.” Kushner persuaded Trump to block Bibi’s cherry-picking of the plan by taking annexation now.

The U.A.E. and Israel and the U.S. on Thursday showed — at least for one brief shining moment — that the past does not always have to bury the future, that the haters and dividers don’t always have to win.

**Group 2**

The reaction to the agreement reveals how deep the concept is that Israel needs to make peace with the Palestinians in order to achieve peace with its neighbors. This is interesting, because today the main reason for lack of normalization is ascribed to the “occupation” or Israel’s control of the West Bank.

However, prior to 1967, the Jewish state also didn’t have normalized ties and wasn’t occupying the West Bank. This means that the goal posts for “peace” have shifted over the years. There was no recipe for peace prior to 1967, only denial of Israel’s right to exist by a plethora of states in the Middle East.

Peace with Egypt came later, and Israel agreed to leave the Sinai Peninsula. In 2002 during the Second Intifada, the Arab Peace Initiative proposed normalization throughout the region in exchange for Israel’s withdrawal from the West Bank, Gaza and the Golan Heights. This concept largely underpins hesitancy in Riyadh and Bahrain to normalize relations with Israel today.

The anomaly of Israel’s lack of relations – and the theory that Israel must make peace with Palestinians to achieve relations – is not found in any other conflict. India doesn’t have to come to an agreement with Pakistan over Kashmir to have relations with countries, for instance.

The theory that lack of normalization has pressured Israel to make peace with the Palestinians has little evidence to back it up. Decades of lack of normalization didn’t bring Israel and the Palestinians closer to a solution – if anything, it entrenched Israel’s role in the West Bank after it left the Gaza Strip.

Much of the discussion about peace therefore centers primarily on Israel achieving peace, even if neither the Israelis or Palestinians can agree on basic aspects of it – such as Jerusalem, refugees and removing Jewish communities in the West Bank – creating a Catch-22 in which Israel can’t achieve peace with the Ramallah-based Palestinian Authority, and therefore can’t achieve normalization anywhere else.

**Group 3**

Israeli hardliners will say the deal shows that they don’t need to make peace with the Palestinians — that joint interests in technological and economic development, and especially in thwarting Iran’s ambitions, will inexorably push Arab nations and Israel together. They’re wrong. Normalizing ties with other Arab countries will not eliminate the Palestinian problem.

In fact, by giving up on annexation, Netanyahu is effectively admitting that Israel cannot simply impose its will in the West Bank. It has tried doing so on multiple occasions, but Netanyahu knows all too well that military force can only go so far in advancing Israeli political designs on the West Bank, at the expense of the Palestinians, of course. He has been toying with the idea for years, but he knows that none of the world's most influential actors on the geopolitical stage will ever support his land-grabbing machinations, a fact echoed in the multitude of UN resolutions condemning Israeli occupation activities in the West Bank.

Any move now to restart the process of annexation, or even to stonewall peace efforts, would risk a break not just with the UAE but its partners, and in fact, the Arab states that had normalized their relationship with Israel before the deal – namely Jordan and Egypt – have often used their leverage to prevent Israel from taking unilateral steps that might fan the flames of the conflict at flash points such as Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Haram A-Sharif.

**Group 4**

Republicans and Democrats have hailed the Israel-UAE normalization agreement, with some observers going so far as to call it a [geopolitical earthquake](http://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/13/opinion/israel-uae.html). But does the agreement merit the hype?

One way to look at the question is to consider what genuine regional shakeups have looked like in the past. An “earthquake” must involve some transformational regional or even global realignment. Consider the first earthquake in [Arab-Israeli diplomacy](https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/08/israel-united-arab-emirates-us-benjamin-netanyahu-trump.html). Egyptian President Anwar Sadat’s dramatic visit to Jerusalem in 1977 led not only to Israel’s first peace treaty with an Arab state, but it also caused Egypt to exit the Soviet orbit and join an American-backed axis. It also paved the way for a return of territory (the Sinai) and ended hostilities with Israel after fighting multiple regional wars, some of which risked direct conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Or consider the 2003 American invasion of Iraq, which led to the removal of Iran’s most formidable Arab adversary and a shifting balance in the sectarian leadership of the country. Iraq went from a Sunni-Arab balancer of Iran to a country whose new leadership had taken refuge in Iran. The ensuing wars provoked not only regional alarm about rising Iranian power but also, separately, civil strife that planted the seeds for the rise of the Islamic State.

So yes, the Middle East has faced transformative moments. But the [Israel-UAE agreement](https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/08/israel-us-united-arab-emirates-benjamin-netanyahu-gantz.html) is not one of them.