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Israel and the GCC member states in a security architecture of the Middle Eastern Regional Security Complex

Abstract

The six-member states of the GCC, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, for a long time have neither recognized the existence of the state of Israel nor hold any official diplomatic relations with it. Despite this, their interactions existed and developed, changing from open hostility to neutrality and even cooperation in certain areas. However, because their mutual relations are complex and embedded in a network of internal and international connections, their development is strongly dependent on the security dynamics in the Middle East. Two factors have a particularly strong influence on the development of Israel's relations with the GCC states: the Palestinian cause and the perception of the Iranian threat. This article explains the political and security interactions between GCC member states and Israel, their evolution, and their impact on the Middle Eastern regional order.

Despite the development in the Gulf states' relations with Israel their scope remains limited and is driven largely by a common sense of the Iranian threat. Most relations remain informal, apart from Bahrain and the UAE, which have established official diplomatic relations. As the study shows the regional patterns of amity and enmity are durable, especially when it comes to the Gulf societies' affection for the Palestinian cause and their aversion to Israel. The support for Palestinians in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict still marks a red line that none of the Gulf states decides to cross.

Keywords: Israel, GCC member states, Middle Eastern Regional Security Complex

Introduction

The six-member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, have never recognized the existence of the state of Israel and do not hold any official diplomatic relations with it. However, the relationship between Israel and those states is much more complex and complicated than that. This article sheds light on the various political and security interactions between GCC member states and Israel, their evolution, and their impact on the Middle Eastern regional order.

It is important to note that a full assessment of the evolution of this relationship may not be limited only to the changing relationships between the states' governments and the ruling regimes. When virtually no official diplomatic relationship is held between the parties, it is very important to look behind the scenes and track the trains of informal meetings and decisions. According to the principle that a friend is a person who has the same enemies as you, the relations between Israel and the GCC states are also influenced by numerous recent political events and current interests, particularly related to the security concerns around Iran. Yet another important factor forming the relationship is the mutual perceptions of the Arabs and Israelis, which are intersubjective and based on durable patterns of amity and enmity. On the one hand, because of the rentier state paradigm, the political regimes of the GCC states are not that dependent on the public opinion and political will of their societies¹. On the other, however, it does not mean that they are fully independent in their political decision-making. The kings and emirs still have to take into consideration the opinion of important political actors, e.g. the prominent members of their own families, the religious leader, or elders of the tribes and clans that constitute the social bases of their political power².

For that reason, the theoretical background of the article will constitute the regional security complexes theory (RSCT) developed by the so-called Copenhagen School. This specific theoretical approach allows capturing the complex interrelation between the groups of objective and subjective factors that have shaped the aforementioned relations throughout the last few decades.

¹ G. Luciani, *Oil and Political Economy in the International Relations of the Middle East*, [in:] *International Relations of the Middle East*, ed. L. Fawcett, Oxford 2009, pp. 103-126.

² R. Owen, *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*, London 2008, pp. 140-153.

The perspective of the regional security complexes theory

The RSCT combines elements of realistic and constructivist paradigms. Along with theories of securitization and security sectors, it forms the so-called Copenhagen School in security studies. A Regional Security Complex (RSC) is understood as „a set of units whose major processes of securitization, desecuritization, or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analyzed or resolved apart from one another”³. RSCT includes three key elements: arrangements of units and the differentiation among them, patterns of amity and enmity, as well as the distribution of power among major units. Theory’s authors assume, that „anarchy plus the distance effect plus geographical diversity yields a pattern of regionally-based clusters, where security interdependence is markedly more intense between the states inside such a complex than between states inside the complex and those outside it”⁴.

It is important to note that according to the RSCT Israel and the GCC member states belong to the same RSC (the Middle East and North Africa) but to separate subcomplexes (Israel belongs to the Levant subcomplex while GCC states to the Gulf subcomplex). Their interrelations are thus weaker than the ones between states belonging to the same subcomplex, as distance and common borders play a crucial role in the intensity of the security interrelations. As noted by Buzan and Waever „...RSCs define themselves as substructures of the international system by the relative intensity of security interdependence among a group of units, and security indifference between that set and surrounding units”⁵. Thus similar threats and security challenges occur most often in specific regions and rarely have an impact over longer distances. Of course, all states in the system are to a certain degree entangled in the global network of security interactions. However, interdependence between actors in the same complex or subcomplex is much stronger than between actors from different complexes or interdependence between entire complexes.

The presence of the Iranian threat undoubtedly strengthens the security interdependence between Israel and, at least some of, the GCC states. What is more, the distinction introduced by the theory of securitization between referent object, securitizing actor, and audience allows for a more complex analysis of security interactions that, besides states, also includes sub-state actors (e.g. societal, ethnic, or religious groups) and non-state actors (e.g. inter-governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, transnational companies, terrorist groups).

³ B. Buzan, O. Waever, *Regions, and Powers: The Structure of International Security*, Cambridge 2003, p. 491.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 46.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 48.

This might be helpful, considering the scarcity of formal international relations on the state level between Israel and the GCC states. Securitization implies also that the actors may differ in their perception of threats. Therefore, not necessarily the objective security problems but their subjective perception drives the dynamics of RSCs⁶. Both the securitizing actors involved and the outside observers differ significantly in assessing what constitutes a threat to security in the Middle East and what the actual level of this threat is.

According to RSCT, the relationships between states within a security complex are also shaped by specific patterns of amity and enmity. Those patterns are durable, may take the form of long-standing enmities or cultural/civilizational proximity and may significantly affect the security dynamics of the local complex⁷. This is an especially important issue in the relations between Israel and the GCC. The pattern of enmity has in the past few decades prevailed in the mutual perception of Arabs and Israelis. If political decision-makers want to change the status of mutual relations, for example by warming them or intensifying cooperation, they may face considerable resistance from society. Of course, the patterns of amity and enmity may evolve and change over time, but it is a long-term process. As security, according to the Copenhagen School, is socially constructed, it can be influenced by social processes, which normally transform the intersubjective perception of security. It is thus imaginable, that the Arab societies of the GCC states will start, at some point, to perceive Israel as a potential ally and Israelis as friends in the face of a common enemy such as Iran. For now, however, this does not seem to be the case, even if some GCC leaders wish otherwise.

The theory of regional security complexes distinguishes four levels of analysis in the security studies: state, regional, interregional, and global. The state level covers issues of security and stability within the state, as well as security threats and challenges generated by intra-state actors and their interactions. At the regional level, there are interactions between states located within one security complex. This is the level that plays the most important role in theory and where interactions are most intense. The interregional level, on the other hand, is less important, which results from the assumptions of the theory that the scale of interaction between states belonging to different regional complexes is relatively limited. Finally, the global level of analysis presents the influence of global forces such as superpowers and great powers on a given region and their interactions with regional security structures⁸.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 72.

⁷ B. Buzan, O. Wæver, J. de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, London 1998, p. 12.

⁸ B. Buzan, O. Wæver, *op.cit.*, p. 51.

History of the relationship

In 1948, when the state of Israel was established, Saudi Arabia was the only independent state among the future members of the GCC. King Abdulaziz Ibn Saud decided to join the Arab forces invading the newly established Israeli state and send a contingent of voluntary forces. The Saudi contingent in the 1948-49 Arab-Israeli War numbered between 800 and 1200 soldiers, was subordinated to the Egyptian command, and did not play any significant role in the campaign⁹. For the next decades, Saudi Arabia has been one of the major advocates of the Palestinian cause and has remained critical of Israeli policies. During the Cold War, certain elements of common interests and threats emerged (e.g. alliance with the USA, the threat from the Soviet Union and its client states in the region). However, they did not change Saudi Arabia's generally negative attitude towards Israel. During the Jom Kippur War in 1973, Saudi Arabia led other Arab members of OPEC to cut oil production and impose an oil embargo on the USA and other states supporting Israel, which led to the global energy crisis¹⁰. During this war, Saudi Arabia has also sent its contingent of 3000 troops to help Egyptian and Syrian war efforts against Israel. Saudi troops performed mostly reconnaissance and rearguard duties and engaged in combat only on a few occasions¹¹. In this war, the Arab forces in Syria were also joined by a contingent of some 3000 Kuwaiti troops, which, however, did not engage in combat¹².

Besides those few cases of active involvement in the Israeli-Arab conflict, the Arab Gulf states constantly expressed their anti-Israelism and supported the Palestinian cause financially and diplomatically. However, their hostility towards Israel was rarely motivated by ideology. In the case of Saudi Arabia antisemitism played a bigger political role only during the time of the reign of the first three kings, Abdul Aziz, Saud, and Faisal, whose hatred of Jews and obsession with worldwide Jewish-communist conspiracy were widely known¹³. Hostility towards Israel stemmed rather from Saudi Arabia's assessment of current national interests, a rational assessment of the geopolitical situation, and pressure from other Arab states. The smaller Arab Gulf states usually implemented the general guidelines of the Arab League policies towards Israel or followed the steps of Saudi Arabia, especially since 1981 when GCC was formally established and the six-member states started to coordinate their policies more closely in this forum. When it

⁹ B. Morris, *1948: The First Arab-Israeli War*, New Haven 2008, pp. 322-326.

¹⁰ C. Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, Bedford 2013, p. 322.

¹¹ D. Asher, *Inside Israel's Northern Command: The Yom Kippur War on the Syrian Border*, Lexington 2014, pp. 415-418.

¹² A. Rabinovich, *The Yom Kippur War: The Epic Encounter That Transformed the Middle East*, New York 2017, pp. 464-465.

¹³ G. Corm, *Bliski Wschód w ogniu. Oblicza konfliktu 1956-2003*, Warszawa 2003, p. 185.

comes to Saudi Arabia for most of the time it had to carefully maneuver to maintain a balanced position between contradicting requests from the pro-Israeli United States and mostly anti-Israeli Arab world. For this purpose, the Saudis tried to find a middle ground and work out their approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Since the beginning of the 1980s, Saudis decided to enter the role of a mediator, which, on the one hand, would allow them to present themselves to the Arab world as a representative of Palestinian interests, but on the other hand, it would not antagonize their relations with the United States. The first attempt at mediation, the Fahd Plan for Peace Settlement presented in 1981, was, however, a failure and did not find support from the interested parties¹⁴.

The turn of the 1980s and 1990s had a significant impact on Arab-Israeli relations. The end of the Cold War and the growing dominance of the US in the Persian Gulf region, as well as the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, changed the security dynamics in the Middle East. The invasion and, particularly, the position of Jasir Arafat and the PLO, who refused to condemn it and instead supported Saddam Husein's claims, worsened the Gulf states' relations with Palestinians¹⁵. Officially, the Gulf states still held a strongly pro-Palestinian position, but the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was now in a much lower position in the hierarchy of their political priorities. Economic development became a top priority instead and the GCC member states started to search for new partners and opportunities. This allowed them to start, yet limited and small-scale, cooperation with Israel. In the early 1990s, various representatives of the GCC states participated in the multilateral Israeli-Palestinian peace talks. More importantly, in IX 1994 all the GCC states renounced the secondary and tertiary Arab boycott of Israel (boycotts of companies doing business with Israel and on companies that deal with companies that do business with Israel)¹⁶. In XII 1994 Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin visited Oman. It was the first visit of an Israeli prime minister to a country from the Arabian Peninsula. In 1996 Rabin's successor, Shimon Peres visited Oman and Qatar. Subsequently, Oman in 1995 and Qatar in 1996 allowed Israel to open a formal trade office in their capital cities. The offices were then closed, in Muskat in 2000 after the outbreak of Al-Aqsa intifada and in Doha in 2009 after the Gaza Massacre, but trade did not stop¹⁷. Although none of the Arab

¹⁴ D. Gold, *Hatred's Kingdom. How Saudi Arabia Supports the New Global Terrorism*, Washington 2003, pp. 113-114.

¹⁵ C. Smith, *op.cit.*, pp. 418-419.

¹⁶ J. Sharp, *The United Arab Emirates(UAE): Issues for U.S. Policy*, Congressional Research Service [8 VIII 2024], <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/mideast/RS21852.pdf> (19 IX 2024).

¹⁷ K. Katzman, *Qatar: Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy*, Congressional Research Service [11 IV 2022], <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/mideast/R44533.pdf> (19 IX 2024); idem, *Oman: Politics, Security, and U.S. Policy*, Congressional Research Service [1 VI 2022], <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/RS/RS21534/115> (19 IX 2024).

Gulf states officially recognized Israel, the parties maintained unofficial trade relations (often using intermediaries) and developed semi-official political cooperation. On some occasions, Israeli officials participated in multilateral meetings and conferences in the Gulf states (e.g. on water desalination, environment, arms control, refugees, etc.).

At that time, Saudi Arabia approached cooperation with Israel with greater caution than the smaller states of the Arabian Peninsula. With ambitions to be a leader both among Arab states and in the Islamic world, Saudis had to consider a much greater variety of interests. In 2002 the then Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah formulated a peace plan, which proposed the full Israeli withdrawal from all the territories it has occupied since 1967, the establishment of a Palestinian state, and the solution of the Palestinian refugee problem in exchange for Arab recognition of Israel and normalization of the relationships¹⁸. Although this plan has not yet become the basis for Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, it was accepted by the Arab League as an Arab Peace Initiative and has since become the Arab League's official position on the conflict. Soon after the announcement of the peace plan, Crown Prince Abdullah (acting as king instead of his incapacitated brother) had to face a serious crisis related to Saudi relations with Israel. When the Israeli Defense Forces captured the offices of the Palestinian National Authority in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, they seized numerous documents confirming financial ties of Saudi individuals, institutions, and organizations with Palestinian terrorist groups (most notably Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad)¹⁹. This discovery also negatively affected Saudi Arabia's relations with the US, which were already strained by the previously discovered connections between representatives of the Saudi authorities and the perpetrators of the 11 IX 2001, terrorist attacks.

Evolution of the relationship

Despite the above-mentioned events, for the first two decades after the end of the Cold War, Israel's relations with the Persian Gulf states were characterized by a low level of cooperation and low priority for all parties concerned. This began to change after 2011 when new circumstances emerged that led to closer relationships. The improvement in relations between the Gulf Cooperation Council states and Israel was due mainly to three reasons. The first one was the similar attitude towards the events of the Arab Spring of 2011 and the perception of the changes in the political landscape it led to. Israel and the Arab Gulf states

¹⁸ *Text of Arab peace initiative adopted at Beirut summit* [24 IV 2002], <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-181223/> (19 IX 2024).

¹⁹ D. Gold, *op.cit.*, pp. 199-203.

(except for Qatar) shared a common view that in the new realities, it is Iran on the one hand, and the Muslim Brotherhood with its affiliates on the other, that represent the biggest threat to their external and internal security. The second was the fierce opposition to the Iranian nuclear program and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action signed between Iran and the P5+1 in VII 2015. The third one was the Obama administration's Middle East policies, commonly perceived in Tel Aviv and the Gulf states' capitals as undermining US allies and strengthening US enemies in the region²⁰.

Fear of Iran's nuclear program and the desire to block an international agreement on this matter also prompted Israel and the Persian Gulf states (especially Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates) to enhance secret intelligence cooperation, which has been ongoing for some time²¹. All the parties involved were aware that it was not yet the right time to come out with the plans for open rapprochement. Instead, they continued behind-the-scenes efforts to strengthen cooperation. In the economic field, the trade volume increased, although it still took place using intermediaries. Meetings between governmental representatives have become more frequent and semi-official (e.g. the meeting between Anwar Eshki, a retired Saudi general and chair of the Middle East Center for Strategic and Legal Studies in Jeddah, and Dore Gold, the director-general in the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs). The state-owned media (like Al Arabiya news network) stopped criticizing Israel and started to warm up the image of the Jewish states²².

Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain were the three Gulf states most enthusiastic about further developing relations with Israel. It was no coincidence that these three states were most afraid of the threat from Iran. This proves that the Iranian threat remains the main driving force of the rapprochement between Israel and GCC member states. It should be also noted that apart from the Palestinian issue and the antipathy that Arab societies have for the Jewish state, Israel and the GCC states have little objectively contradictory interests. King Salman, since he ascended the throne, in his statements emphasized the commitment to the terms of the Arab Peace Initiative from 2002 and the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people to establish their independent state with Jerusalem as its capital. However, his son and heir to the throne, Mohammed bin Salman, has a somewhat different approach. He does not consider the Palestinian issue to be that important. He expressed it on various occasions, stating, inter alia, that

²⁰ K. Ulrichsen, *Israel and the Arab Gulf States: Drivers and Directions of Change*, James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy of Rice University, 2016, <https://www.bakerinstitute.org/files/10861/> (19 IX 2024).

²¹ H. Shezaf, *Israel Eyes Improved Ties with the Gulf States after 'Foothold' Gained in UAE*. *Middle East Eye*, 2016, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/israel-eyes-improved-ties-gulf-states-after-foothold-gained-uae> (19 IX 2024).

²² K. Ulrichsen, *op.cit.*

„the Palestinians should accept Trump’s plan or shut up and stop complaining” or by explicitly acknowledging Jewish claims to the land in Israel²³.

For a long time, the smaller GCC member states treated their relations with Israel as an extension of their relations with the USA and Saudi Arabia. On most of the occasions, they followed the path marked out by the Saudis. It has been assumed that as weaker states they sacrificed their own, independent policy towards Israel, to preserve the good relations with their stronger allies, the USA and Saudi Arabia²⁴. In recent years, however, this has changed, at least in the case of the United Arab Emirates and Qatar. These two states, taking advantage of their privileged economic position, began to pursue independent foreign policy. Instead of following the guidelines set out by their American and Saudi allies, more and more often they try to realize their interests in their way. This is particularly evident in the Saudi-Qatari conflict of 2017 and the dissenting opinion of the UAE and Saudi Arabia regarding the aims and methods of war in Yemen.

Qatari relations with Israel stand out from the rest of the GCC. Initially, Qatar, along with Oman, was the GCC state that most quickly developed relationships with Israel. In IV 2008, the then Israeli foreign minister Tzipi Livni visited Qatar and met with then emir Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani. However, the relations changed in I 2009 after the Israeli invasion of the Gaza Strip (Operation Cast Lead). Since then, the development of cooperation has slowed down, and the next emir Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani regularly criticizes the Jewish state for violating Palestinian rights²⁵. At the same time, Qatar has developed its relations with Hamas which controls the Gaza Strip since 2007, putting itself in opposition to the rest of the GCC states. The other GCC members recognize as the sole legal Palestinian authority the government of the Palestinian National Authority in the West Bank, headed by President Mahmud Abbas and manned by members of a Hamas-rival Fatah party. Although the relations between Qatar and Hamas officials are heavily criticized in Israel, the USA, and the other Gulf states, they also bring some benefits. Firstly, Qatar’s contacts with Hamas allow for an indirect channel of communication between Hamas and Israel. Secondly, for many years, Qatari financial aid to the Gaza Strip, approved by Israel, helped to relieve the deepening humanitarian crisis over there resulting from an Israeli blockade²⁶.

Another interesting position is that of the Sultanate of Oman. Traditionally the sultanate tries to stay away from regional conflicts and keep good relations

²³ I. Black, *Why Israel is quietly cozying up to Gulf monarchies*, „The Guardian”, 19 III 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2019/mar/19/why-israel-quietly-cosying-up-to-gulf-monarchies-saudi-arabia-uae> (19 IX 2024).

²⁴ E. Rosman-Stollman, *Balancing Acts: The Gulf States and Israel*, „Middle Eastern Studies” 2004, nr 40(4), pp. 185-208.

²⁵ K. Katzman, *Qatar...*

²⁶ I. Black, *op.cit.*

with all the parties. In its relations with Israel Oman often stepped out of line, hosting high-ranking Israeli officials (i.a. Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres in 1996, Benjamin Netanyahu in 2018, Tzipi Livni in 2008, Yisrael Katz in 2018) and offering its role of regional mediator²⁷. For many years, Sultan Qaboos has sought to balance the extensive relations with Israel with closer cooperation with the Palestinians. Furthermore, because Oman is neither Sunni- nor Shiite-dominated (the majority of Omani are Ibadi) the sultanate may also serve as an indirect channel of communication between Iran and its adversaries (Saudi Arabia, Israel, and the USA)²⁸. It is also assumed that Oman's extensive relations with Israel in the past were coordinated with Saudi Arabia and served to test the reactions of other Arab societies and states. Similarly Bahrain, in Saudi calculations, plays „...the role of a scout – testing frontiers of engagement with Israel that the Saudis are not ready for themselves, to see what the traffic will bear and to lower the costs to Riyadh of taking similar steps later”²⁹.

Information about subsequent Israeli-Saudi contacts appeared in 2016 in connection with the agreement on the transfer of two islands in the Red Sea (Tiran and Sanafir) by Egypt to Saudi Arabia. Referring to this event, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia announced that his country intends to comply with the obligations regarding the two islands, which were included in the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty signed in 1979. The then Israeli Defense Minister, Moshe Ya'alon, stated that Israel received written guarantees from Saudi Arabia of the freedom of navigation through the Strait of Tiran for ships heading to and from the Israeli port of Eilat.

Fears about the threat from Iran, shared by Riyadh and Tel Aviv, remained the leitmotif of the secretly developing Israeli-Saudi cooperation. However, the XII 2017 controversial U.S. decision to relocate its embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem sparked critical reactions in the whole Arab world, including the GCC states. King Salman of Saudi Arabia called the decision a provocative move and warned that it would jeopardize the peace process. Qatari foreign ministry denounced the decision and called for its reversal. Kuwait also condemned the decision and called for an emergency UN Security Council meeting. The other Gulf states joined the criticism expressed by the Arab League³⁰. It is, however,

²⁷ K. Katzman, *Oman...*

²⁸ G. Wermtenbol, *Oman and Israel: The emergence of a new strategic partnership*, Middle East Institute 2018, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/oman-and-israel-emergence-new-strategic-partnership> (21 IX 2024).

²⁹ D. Shapiro, J. Guzansky, *Gulf-Israel Ties Might Not Survive Trump's Peace Plan*, Foreign Policy 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/07/12/gulf-israel-ties-might-not-survive-trumps-peace-plan/> (21 IX 2024).

³⁰ C. Dwyer, S. Neuman, *How The World Is Reacting To Trump Recognizing Jerusalem As Israel's Capital*, NPR [6 XII 2017], <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/12/06/568748383/how-is-the-world-reacting-to-u-s-plan-to-recognize-jerusalem-as-israeli-capital?> (21 IX 2024).

worth noting, that the GCC leaders' backlash against the decision was moderate and was not followed by any specific diplomatic, political, or economic actions.

Many politicians in Israel and the U.S. hoped that a breakthrough in Israel's relations with the GCC states would be the Middle East conference scheduled for February 2019 in Warsaw. However, this did not happen, although the Gulf Arab states (apart from Qatar) sent representatives in the rank of ministers to the conference and the foreign minister of Oman met with the Israeli prime minister. Besides the declaration that Iran is the greatest threat to security in the Middle East, to which, apart from Israel, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Bahrain joined, no important statements were made at the conference³¹.

The U.S.-sponsored Peace to Prosperity workshop in Bahrain in VI 2019 also did not bring any major changes in Israeli-Arab relations. The vague and unrealistic economic plan presented there neither took into account the political realities nor proposed a solution to the crucial problems. For example, the plan mentioned allocating 50 bln USD for economic investments, without indicating where this money would come from. Many of the provisions of this plan were also extremely unfavorable to the Palestinians³². None of the Arab Gulf states could afford to support such a plan as this would deeply undermine their credibility both in the Arab and Islamic world. To balance relations and to show that GCC states still strongly support the Palestinian cause, on 26 VI 2019 the Oman authorities announced the plan of opening a diplomatic mission in the Israeli-occupied West Bank³³.

The new architecture of the Middle Eastern Regional Security Complex

A significant breakthrough in Israel's relations with the Gulf states occurred in 2020, with the signing of the so-called Abraham Accords. The bilateral agreements signed between Israel and the United Arab Emirates and Israel and Bahrain on 15 IX 2020, constituted a milestone in the mutual relations. Within the US-brokered agreement, both the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain recognized Israel's sovereignty, which enabled the establishment of full diplomatic relations. There were several reasons why Bahrain and the UAE decided to normalize relations with Israel. One of them was undoubtedly strong pressure from the United

³¹ Netanyahu: Warsaw conference with Arab ministers a „historical turning point”, TVN24 [14 II 2019], <https://www.tvn24.pl/tvn24-news-in-english,157,m/netanyahu-on-iran-threat-warsaw-summit-a-historical-turning-point,909637.html> (21 IX 2024).

³² E. Marteu, 'Peace to Prosperity': lofty ambitions, fatal flaws, IISS [28 VI 2019], <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2019/06/peace-to-prosperity> (21 IX 2024).

³³ D. Shapiro, J. Guzansky, *op.cit.*

States. The then U.S. President Donald Trump's administration believed that normalizing Israel's relations with the Gulf states would be perceived as a significant success, not only by American evangelical Christians but also by other groups in the US, which would increase the incumbent president's chances for re-election. This pressure went hand in hand with growing uncertainty about further U.S. policy towards the Middle East and fears of a reduction in American political and military involvement in the security of the Gulf states³⁴. The UAE, which was more independent in its foreign policy, and where the support for rapprochement with Israel was higher, decided to sign a peace treaty and fully normalize relations³⁵. Bahrain's position was different. Its foreign policy is *de facto* dependent on Saudi Arabia, and the Riyadh's position had to be taken into account. At the same time, the Shiite majority living in the country remained hostile to Israel and vastly pro-Iran, so support for the agreement was low. The Bahrain authorities therefore only decided to a „joint communique on establishing peaceful and diplomatic relations”³⁶. Two more Arab states, Morocco and Sudan, followed in the footsteps of the UAE and Bahrain and also decided to normalize their relations with Israel. In both cases, the main broker and sponsor of these agreements was the United States. The incentive for Morocco to reach an agreement with Israel was the US recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara. In the case of Sudan, incentives included removing Sudan from the US Department of State's list of states sponsoring terrorism and granting the Sudanese government a loan of 1.2 bln USD³⁷.

Over the past few decades, one of the main factors motivating GCC member states to develop relations with Israel was a similar perception of the threat from Iran. This mainly concerned three of the member states – Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain. Kuwait and Oman both tried to maintain neutral relations with Iran. Qatar, on the other hand, has been developing its cooperation with Teheran, using it as a counterweight to the pressure from Saudi Arabia³⁸. However,

³⁴ Y. Guzansky, Z. Marshall, *The Abraham Accords: Immediate Significance and Long-Term Implications*, „Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs” 2020, nr 14(3), pp. 1-11.

³⁵ *Abraham Accords Peace Agreement: Treaty of Peace, Diplomatic Relations and Full Normalization between the United Arab Emirates and the State of Israel*, US Department of State [15 IX 2020], https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/UAE_Israel-treaty-signed-FINAL-15-Sept-2020-508.pdf (24 IX 2024).

³⁶ *Abraham Accords: Declaration of Peace, Cooperation, and Constructive Diplomatic and Friendly Relations*, US Department of State [15 IX 2020], https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Bahrain_Israel-Agreement-signed-FINAL-15-Sept-2020-508.pdf (24 IX 2024).

³⁷ Y. Guzansky, S. Feuer, *The Abraham Accords: Israel-Gulf Arab Normalisation*, „Strategic Comments” 2020, nr 26(8), pp. iv-v.

³⁸ A. Majidiyar, *Qatari Delegation Visits Iran to Boost Bilateral Economic and Commercial Ties*, Middle East Institute 2018, <http://www.mei.edu/content/io/qatari-delegation-visitsiran-boost-bilateral-economic-and-commercial-ties> (24 IX 2024).

in III 2023, several years of efforts to improve Iran's relations with the GCC states bore fruit. After several rounds of talks held in Iraq and then in Beijing, Iran and Saudi Arabia signed an agreement on the resumption of diplomatic relations, the reopening of embassies, cooperation in the fields of security, trade, and culture, as well as mutual respect for sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of the other states³⁹. The agreement was a significant success of Chinese diplomacy, which played the role of mediator and was widely positively received i.e. by the UN Secretary General, global powers (USA, Russia), and states in the region. It is meaningful that the only voices, criticizing the Iran-Saudi agreement came from Israel⁴⁰. In Tel Aviv, the Iran-Saudi conflict was considered to be beneficial for Israel, as it created an opportunity to build an anti-Iran coalition that would include the US, Israel, and Saudi Arabia. Therefore, the Iran-Saudi rapprochement and the reduction of bilateral tensions were detrimental to Israel.

The convergent security interests and similar threat perceptions of Israel and some GCC member states did not only concern Iran and its Shiite allies from Lebanese Hezbollah and Yemen's Ansar Allah. Similarly, although to a lesser extent, this also applied to Turkey. For some time, both Israel and the two strongest GCC member states, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, have perceived Turkey as an increasing threat to their interests and regional security. Israel's relations with Turkey deteriorated after 2009 and have remained more or less tense ever since. The main problems in mutual relations were Turkish support for the Palestinian cause, differences of opinion on the Kurdish issue, and Turkey's cooperation with Iran. The source of the growing problems in Turkish-Israeli relations should be seen in the strategic turn of Turkish foreign policy that took place under the AKP government⁴¹. Saudi Arabia and the UAE, for their part, were concerned about Turkey's growing influence in the Arab world, including among the GCC member states (especially in Qatar). Their serious reservations were also raised by Turkey's support for the Muslim Brotherhood organization, which is perceived as a serious threat by the Saudis, the UAE, and their allies in Egypt. Tensions have also emerged over the perception of uprisings during the so-called Arab Spring, the civil war in Syria, and support for opposing sides in the conflict in Libya. The tensions between Turkey and Saudi Arabia and the UAE culminated in the crisis related to the blockade of Qatar in 2017. It is no coincidence that one of the main demands made by Riyadh and Abu Dhabi towards the authorities in Doha was to end support for the Muslim Brothers and end the Turkish

³⁹ A. Jash, *Saudi-Iran Deal: A Test Case of China's Role as an International Mediator*, „The Georgetown Journal of International Affairs” 2023, <https://gjia.georgetown.edu/2023/06/23/saudi-iran-deal-a-test-case-of-chinas-role-as-an-international-mediator/> (24 IX 2024).

⁴⁰ T. Lazaroff, *Saudi-Iran deal destroys Israel's defense wall against Iran, Yair Lapid says*, „The Jerusalem Post” [10 III 2023], <https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/article-733960> (24 IX 2024).

⁴¹ L. Oztig, *Turkish-Israeli relations under AKP rule*, „Israel Affairs” 2024, nr 30(1), pp. 57-64.

military presence in Qatar⁴². Perceiving Turkey as an increasingly serious challenge, and in some areas also a threat to security, was another element that brought Israel and some of the GCC member states, primarily Saudi Arabia and the UAE, closer together.

These gradually built foundations for further normalization and development of Israel's relations with the GCC states suffered a serious blow on 7 X 2023. Hamas's attack on Israel and the resulting Israeli military operation in the Gaza Strip marked another turning point in mutual relations. Among the GCC member states, only Bahrain and the UAE have decided to officially condemn Hamas. Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Oman expressed concern about the escalation of the conflict, pointing out that it is the consequence of the ongoing Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands, the deprivation of Palestinians of their due rights, and systematic Israeli provocations. The Qatari authorities, in turn, directly pointed out Israel as the only one responsible for the escalation of the conflict and called on the international community to force Israel to stop violating international law and respect the historical rights of the Palestinian people⁴³. In the following weeks, as intense Israeli shelling and bombing of the Gaza Strip and the ground operation resulted in mounting losses among the Palestinian civilian population, the Gulf states' verbal criticism of Israel intensified. Due to the conflict between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip, a joint summit was held in Riyadh on 11 XI 2023, with the participation of the heads of state and governments of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the League of Arab States.

The joint declaration of the leaders of the member states issued after the summit emphasized their attachment to the Palestinian cause, expressed the demand for independence for Palestine, and criticized the Israeli occupation as the primary source of the conflict. It demanded that Israel immediately stop military operations and allow humanitarian aid to be provided to the people of the Gaza Strip. It was also announced that Israel would be held accountable before international tribunals for the crimes committed by Israeli troops⁴⁴. Although the declaration itself was firm, it was not followed by any practical steps that could put pressure

⁴² Ö. Tür, *Turkey's Role in Middle East and Gulf Security*, „Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies” 2019, nr 13(4), pp. 593-602; A. Bakir, *Turkey's security role in the Gulf region: exploring the case of a newcomer*, „Turkish Studies” 2023, nr 24(5), pp. 812-817.

⁴³ C. Waldo, G. Epstein, S. Hilbush, A. Zelin, *International Reactions to the Hamas Attack on Israel*, Policy Analysis/Policy Watch nr 3793, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy 2023, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/international-reactions-hamas-attack-israel> (27 IX 2024).

⁴⁴ *Joint Arab and Islamic Summit Concludes and Demands End to Israeli Aggression, Breaking of Israeli Siege on the Gaza Strip and Prosecution of Israel for its Crimes*, Organization of Islamic Cooperation [13 XI 2023], https://www.oic-oci.org/topic/?t_id=39923&t_ref=26755&lan=en (27 IX 2024).

on Israel and its allies. Such actions, including an embargo on the supply of weapons and oil to Israel, or even the termination of all trade relations with Israel, were demanded by a group of states spearheaded by Algeria, Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Syria, and Tunisia. However, these proposals were rejected by another group of Arab states that included all GCC member states as well as Egypt and Jordan⁴⁵. The fact that it was the GCC member states that opposed any sanctions that could strike Israel shows that the war in Gaza caused a change in the attitude of the GCC member states towards Israel, but not as major as one might expect.

The different levels of perception – the attitude of the societies of GCC states towards Israel

The theory of regional security complexes analyzes security interactions on four levels: state, regional, interregional, and global. In the case of relations between the GCC member states and Israel, one can observe contradictory expectations of securitizing actors at different levels of analysis. Excessive securitization and de-securitization of these relationships occur at the state, regional, and global levels. Only at the interregional level has there been no significant interest in Israel's relations with the GCC states. At the global level, there is strong pressure and numerous incentives from the USA to all the Arab Gulf states to normalize their relations with Israel. There are also moderate incentives from the United Kingdom, the European Union, and some of the EU member states to normalize the relations. Other world powers (China, India, Russia) do not take a clear position on Israel's relations with the GCC states. However, the policy of the United States is by far the most important at the global level. The US government has tools (political, economic, and military) with which it can, to some extent, influence the policies of the governments of individual GCC member states towards Israel.

At the lowest, state level, most securitizing actors (societal groups, interest groups, clan and tribal organizations, religious institutions, ethnic minorities, etc.) perceive Israel as the greatest threat to security and are hostile towards it⁴⁶. At this level, there is very strong opposition to the normalization of relations between individual GCC member states and Israel, fueled mainly by the issue of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and, to some extent, also by religiously motivated

⁴⁵ E. Salah, *Arab-Islamic summit in Riyadh on Gaza full of disagreements, Egyptian-Qatari cooperation aims to achieve progress on ground*, „Mada Masr” [11 XI 2023], <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2023/11/11/news/u/arab-islamic-summit-in-riyadh-on-gaza-full-of-disagreements-egyptian-qatari-cooperation-aims-to-achieve-progress-on-ground/> (27 IX 2024).

⁴⁶ *The 2022 Arab Opinion Index*, Arab Center [19 I 2023], <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/arab-opinion-index-2022-executive-summary/> (30 IX 2024).

antisemitism⁴⁷. However, at the regional level, where the main securitizing actors are the authorities of the individual GCC member states, the perception of Israel is somewhat different and more balanced.

At the state level, the negative perception of Israel by the societies of the Gulf states is reflected in the public opinion polls. Although the authorities of some Gulf states have recently revised their negative attitudes towards Israel, this process has not generally occurred among their citizens. They still see Israel mainly through the prism of the Palestinian cause. In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, they stand firmly on the Palestinian side. These trends in Arab communities are best illustrated by a study conducted by the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies (ACRPS). The research has been conducted in 16 Arab countries including Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia. Unfortunately, it has not been conducted in Bahrain and the UEA, which limits the accuracy of its results. The survey showed that the vast majority of Arabs see the Palestinian cause as an Arab, rather than exclusively a Palestinian issue. However, the percentage of respondents who thought this way was decreasing. It dropped from 84% in 2011 to 76% in 2022⁴⁸.

This trend reversed after the outbreak of the war between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip in 2023. At the beginning of 2024, 92% of respondents considered the Palestinian cause to be a pan-Arab problem. In the Gulf States where the survey was conducted, 96% of Omanis, 95% of Saudis, 91% of Qataris, and 90% of Kuwaitis agreed with this statement⁴⁹. The change in approach to this issue is illustrated by data from Saudi Arabia. In 2017, only 71% of respondents considered the Palestinian cause as an Arab issue, while in 2024 it was 95%. A similar process could be observed in the recognition of Israel. In 2022, 85% of respondents in the Arab states opposed it, and after the war broke out, this number increased to 89%. Of particular note is the increase in the percentage of those who refuse to recognize Israel in Saudi Arabia – from 38% in 2022 to 68% in 2024. In Qatar, opposition to recognizing Israel rose from 84% in 2021 to 90% after the war with Hamas began⁵⁰. Respondents were also asked what actions the Arab states should take to stop the war in Gaza. The most common response was to suspend relations or normalization with Israel. This solution was supported by 49% of Kuwaitis, 41% of Qataris, 36% of Omanis, and 21% of Saudis. Additionally,

⁴⁷ M. Küntzel, *Islamic Antisemitism: Characteristics, Origins, and Current Effects*, „Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs” 2020, nr 14(2), s. 229-239; M. Silva, *Antisemitism and the Global Jihad*, [in:] *Terrorism Revisited. Contemporary South Asian Studies*, eds. P. Casaca, S. Wolf, Cham 2017, pp. 157-179.

⁴⁸ *Arab Public Opinion about the Israeli War on Gaza*, Doha Institute 2024, <https://www.dohainstitute.org/en/News/Pages/Arab-public-opinion-about-the-israeli-war-on-gaza.aspx> (30 IX 2024).

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 18-19.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 20-23.

11% of Saudis responded that military support should be provided to the Gaza Strip⁵¹. In a similar poll, the respondents also assessed the attitude of authorities of individual Arab states towards the Israeli war on Gaza. „A majority of 67% of respondents viewed the UAE position as bad or very bad as opposed to 20% who said it was good or very good. Another 64% of respondents saw Saudi Arabia's position as bad or very bad compared to 25% who saw it positively⁵².

In another opinion poll, conducted by The Washington Institute in XI and XII 2023, Saudi citizens were asked about their attitude towards the war in the Gaza Strip. The overwhelming majority (91%) agreed with the statement that „despite the destruction and loss of life, this war in Gaza is a win for the Palestinians, Arabs, and Muslims⁵³. An even larger percentage of respondents (96%) agreed with the statement that „Arab countries should immediately break all diplomatic, political, economic, and any other contacts with Israel, in protest against its military action in Gaza⁵⁴. The survey also noted an increase in Saudi positive attitudes towards Hamas from just 10% in VIII 2023 to 40% in XI/XII. Also, the vast majority of Saudi citizens agreed with the opinion that Israel is weak, internally divided, and can be defeated someday. Support for maintaining business contacts between Saudi Arabia and Israel dropped from 43% in XI 2022 to 17% in XII 2024⁵⁵.

The surveys illustrate the trends occurring in the societies of some of the Gulf states. Unfortunately, there is no research available showing the attitude of residents of the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain towards Israel after the outbreak of war in the Gaza Strip. The authorities in Abu Dhabi and Manama did not break off diplomatic relations with Israel and only called for an end to the conflict. Nevertheless, the Bahraini government bowed to public pressure and allowed demonstrations in solidarity with the Palestinians that it had banned for the previous nine years. The Bahraini Society Against Normalization with the Zionist Enemy was also allowed to intensify its activities⁵⁶. In the UAE, however, no anti-Israeli or pro-Palestinian protests were allowed. The lack of reliable data does not allow for a clear assessment of the attitude of the inhabitants of Bahrain and the UAE towards Israel after 7 X. One can only assume that, as in other Arab countries, it has also deteriorated.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 24.

⁵² *Ibidem*.

⁵³ C. Cleveland, D. Pollock, *New Poll Sheds Light on Saudi Views of Israel-Hamas War*, Policy Analysis [21 XII 2023], <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/new-poll-sheds-light-saudi-views-israel-hamas-war> (30 IX 2024).

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁶ N. Saeed, *Bahraini Voices Against Normalization with Israel*, Arab Reform Initiative [22 II 2024], <https://www.arab-reform.net/publication/bahraini-voices-against-normalization-with-israel/> (30 IX 2024).

Public opinion polls in the Gulf states show variable trends in their attitudes towards Israel. Even though most of the inhabitants of these countries had a reluctant or even hostile attitude towards Israel, a gradual improvement in the image of the Jewish State has been noticeable over the past decade. However, after the start of Israel's war with Hamas, this trend has been reversed. On the other hand, there is constant pressure from the global level, especially from the United States, on the GCC member states to recognize Israel and establish official relations. The authorities of the Arab states of the Gulf must therefore confront contradictory expectations: hostility towards Israel from the state level and normalization of relations with Israel from the global level.

These conflicting expectations must be taken into account at the regional level by the authorities of the individual GCC member states. Of course, all six states are absolute monarchies with a wide range of authoritarian power in the hands of their rulers⁵⁷. Citizens have little if any direct influence on the government and its policies. This does not mean, however, that the ruling elites can completely ignore the opinions and expectations of the society. They must rely on sub-state actors such as the various factions in the ruling family, clan and tribal leaders, religious establishments, military and security institutions, and other interest groups. The durability and stability of their power depend on the loyalty and support of those actors. Thus, the governments can not completely ignore the expectations of the citizens, abandon the Palestinian cause, and intensify their relations with Israel. On the other hand, the rulers of the Arab monarchies in the Gulf must also take into account the expectations of the United States. It is their strategic ally, which guarantees their military security. It also has the tools to encourage the GCC states to adopt certain policies, as was evident in the negotiations of the Abraham Accords.

Conclusions

The regional security complex theory defines the Middle East as a conflict formation, with high dynamics of local conflicts and the strong influence of global actors, especially the United States of America. The domination of the United States on the global level is to some extent superimposed on a regional level. But this imposition is not strong enough to allow the Americans to overcome the longstanding animosities and manage regional rivalries. As the study shows the regional patterns of amity and enmity are durable, and this is especially true when it comes to the Gulf societies' affection for the Palestinian cause and their aversion to Israel. Other regional problems and conflicts, like Iran, Iraq, Syria,

⁵⁷ Z. Barany, *The Political Economy of Gulf Defense Establishments*, Cambridge 2021, pp. 6-7.

or Yemen, may preoccupy attention and pose a bigger immediate threat, but they do not diminish the importance of deeply rooted amities and enmities.

The attitude of the Gulf states towards Israel has changed within the last three decades. Nonetheless, the scope of relations is still limited and driven largely by a common sense of the Iranian threat, especially in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. Most relations with Israel also remain informal, apart from Bahrain and the UAE, which have established official diplomatic relations. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict still marks a red line that none of the Gulf states decides to cross. This is unlikely to change without significant concessions from Tel Aviv, which would have to include Israeli consent to the peace proposals of the Arab Peace Initiative. However, so far, successive Israeli governments have shown no interest in Arab peace proposals.

Moreover, the Israeli response to the Hamas attack of 7 X 2023, squandered what Israel had managed to build in relations with the GCC states. The brutality of Israeli military operations in the Gaza Strip, the widespread violation of international law, and the accusations of genocide against the Palestinian people have dramatically worsened Israel's image in the region and around the world. In this situation, one can hardly imagine that in the foreseeable future, any of the GCC member states would decide to develop new or deepen existing forms of cooperation with Israel. Meanwhile, it seems that the Iran threat has already exhausted its possibilities in bringing Israel and GCC states closer. The securitizing actors in the Gulf states have explored most of the ways to securitize Iran and the threat it poses to them, and the results are mixed. The vast majority of Arabs still view Israel (82%) and the U.S. (70%) as a more serious foreign threat than Iran (47%)⁵⁸.

Meanwhile, the potential gains from the cooperation and strengthening of the ties with Israel for the GCC states remain limited. One of them is military cooperation, especially in the case of potential armed conflict with Iran. It seems, however, that Israel has more to gain from such cooperation, as it can count on the use of Saudi airspace for its military operations against Iran, or the participation of the Gulf states' air defenses in shooting down missiles and drones fired at Israel by Iran or the Yemeni Houthis. Another potential benefit could be to improve the image of the Gulf states by showing them as open and able to cooperate with Israel. However, after X 2023, due to Israel's dismal image in the international arena, such cooperation could worsen rather than improve the perception of the Gulf Arab states in other parts of the world. Other potential gains could include profits from economic cooperation with Israel and the transfer of technologies. In this regard, however, the GCC states have a wide choice of partners

⁵⁸ *The 2017-2018 Arab Opinion Index: Main Results in Brief*, Doha Institute [9 V 2019], <https://www.dohainstitute.org/en/News/Pages/ACRPS-Releases-Arab-Index-2017-2018.aspx> (30 IX 2024).

and contractors. Cooperation with Israel is neither necessary nor strategically important for them.

All the risks mentioned above are still very serious. The analyzed public opinion polls show that Arab societies, including the GCC states, are still overwhelmingly anti-Israeli and pro-Palestinian. In these circumstances, any shift in the sphere of politics towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will undoubtedly negatively affect any political leader who decides to take such a step. Thus the leaders of the Gulf Arab states will be reluctant to develop new forms of cooperation with Israel. It is also to be expected that they will continue to express their support for the Palestinian cause, not because it is their national interest, but because it is an issue their societies expect to be securitized.

Abstrakt

Jarosław Jarząbek

Marcin Szydzisz

Izrael i państwa członkowskie Rady Współpracy Zatoki Perskiej w architekturze bezpieczeństwa Bliskowschodniego Regionalnego Kompleksu Bezpieczeństwa

Sześć państw członkowskich Rady Współpracy Zatoki Perskiej (GCC): Bahrajn, Kuwejt, Oman, Katar, Arabia Saudyjska i Zjednoczone Emiraty Arabskie, przez długi czas nie uznawało istnienia państwa Izrael ani nie utrzymywało z nim oficjalnych stosunków dyplomatycznych. Mimo to ich wzajemne relacje istniały i rozwijały się, przechodząc od otwartej wrogości do neutralności, a nawet współpracy w niektórych obszarach. Jednakże, ponieważ ich wzajemne relacje są złożone i osadzone w sieci powiązań wewnętrznych i międzynarodowych, ich rozwój jest silnie uzależniony od dynamiki bezpieczeństwa na Bliskim Wschodzie. Dwa czynniki wywierały szczególnie silny wpływ na rozwój relacji Izraela z państwami Rady Współpracy Zatoki Perskiej: sprawa palestyńska i postrzeganie zagrożenia ze strony Iranu. Niniejszy artykuł wyjaśnia interakcje polityczne i w zakresie bezpieczeństwa między państwami członkowskimi Rady Współpracy Zatoki Perskiej a Izraelem, ich ewolucję oraz wpływ na ład regionalny Bliskiego Wschodu. Pomimo rozwoju relacji państw Zatoki Perskiej z Izraelem, ich zakres pozostaje ograniczony i w dużej mierze wynika ze wspólnego poczucia zagrożenia ze strony Iranu. Większość relacji pozostaje nieformalna, z wyjątkiem Bahrajnu i Zjednoczonych Emiratów Arabskich, które nawiązały oficjalne stosunki dyplomatyczne. Jak pokazuje badanie, regionalne wzorce przyjaźni i wrogości są trwałe, zwłaszcza jeśli chodzi o przywiązanie społeczeństw Zatoki Perskiej

do sprawy palestyńskiej i ich niechęć do Izraela. Wsparcie dla Palestyńczyków w konflikcie izraelsko-palestyńskim wciąż wyznacza czerwoną linię, której żadne z państw Zatoki Perskiej nie decyduje się przekroczyć.

Słowa kluczowe: Izrael, państwa członkowskie Rady Współpracy Zatoki Perskiej, Bliskowschodni Regionalny Kompleks Bezpieczeństwa

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