

Biden embraces Trump policy in backing Arab-Israeli deals



PM Benjamin Netanyahu with former president Donald Trump at signing of peace accords with UAE and Bahrain, Sept. 15, 2020. (Avi Ohayon/GPO)

The Biden administration is considering appointing former U.S. ambassador to Israel Dan Shapiro to a Mideast role that would marshal and potentially expand the Abraham Accords.

The Biden administration is laying the groundwork for a renewed push to encourage more Arab countries to sign accords with Israel and working to strengthen existing deals after last month's devastating war in the Gaza Strip interrupted those diplomatic efforts.

The embrace of the so-called Abraham Accords is a rare carryover of a signature Trump administration policy by President Joe Biden and other Democrats.

The Trump administration put U.S. clout and incentives into landing the country-by-country pacts by four Arab states last year, easing enmity and isolation for the Jewish state in the Middle East that had dated back to Israel's 1948 founding. The Biden administration saw significant prospects of several other Arab governments

signing accords soothing and normalizing relations with Israel.

U.S. officials have declined to publicly identify the countries they regard as promising prospects.

Sudan, which signed a general declaration of peaceful intent but has not yet signed on to diplomatic relations with Israel, had been a prospect. Oman, which has a policy of non-interference that allows it to be a broker across the Middle East's fault lines, long has been seen by Westerners as a likely contender.

But the 11-day war between Israel and Hamas last month has complicated U.S.-backed diplomacy for new Abraham accords.

The fighting "has strengthened the conviction of opponents of normalization" with Israel, activist Doura Gambo said in Sudan. Sudanese were already divided over their government's agreement last year to become one of the four Arab states signing accords. In Sudan's case, the Trump administration offered financial relief from U.S. sanctions.

The Biden administration is considering appointing a former U.S. ambassador to Israel, Dan Shapiro, to a Mideast role that would marshal and potentially expand the country-by-country accords between Israel and Mideast governments.

Two people familiar with the matter confirmed Shapiro was being considered for the job, as first reported by *The Washington Post*. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to comment publicly.

U.S. officials also are working to encourage more business, education, and other ties among the four Arab states and Israel. They hope visible success there will also promote the bilateral accords in the region, at the same time the U.S. works to advance the resolution of the Israel-Palestinian conflict.

Last year, the United Arab Emirates became the first Arab country in over two decades to establish ties with Israel, after Egypt and Jordan in 1979 and 1994, respectively. It was a move that bypassed the Palestinians, who saw it as a betrayal.

The Abraham Accords include a general declaration of support for peaceful relations in the Middle East among Jews, Muslims, and Christians, all followers of religions linked to the patriarch Abraham. The Trump administration saw the

accords partly as paving a path toward full ties with Israel, including in security and intelligence cooperation to counter common rivals, such as Iran.

The deals former President Donald Trump struck were “an important achievement, one that not only we support, but one we’d like to build on,” U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken told the House Foreign Affairs Committee this week.

In addition, “we’re looking at countries that may want to join in and take part and begin to normalize their own relations with Israel. That, too, has been very much part of conversations I’ve had with, with several of my counterparts,” Blinken added.

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