

End-Time Prophecy in the News

Nides: Biden administration taking Abraham Accords ‘from start-up to real operation’

On 2nd anniversary of signing ceremony, US ambassador says Washington is working to deepen and broaden Israel’s normalization with Arab neighbors

By JACOB MAGID 15 September 2022, 3:27 pm



US Ambassador to Israel Tom Nides, at the Prime Minister's Office in Jerusalem, on March 27, 2022. (Olivier Fitoussi/Flash90)

In the early days of the Biden administration, there appeared to be some reluctance in Washington to embrace the Abraham Accords.

Biden officials acknowledged that the Trump-brokered normalization agreements Israel signed with the UAE, Bahrain, and Morocco in 2020 were positive developments for the region, but took little public action to advance the initiative in early 2021. Some senior US officials intentionally referred to them only as “[normalization agreements](#),” rather than using the term coined by the previous administration.

US Ambassador to Israel Tom Nides was not one of those officials. At his Senate confirmation hearing last September, Nides made a point of [demonstrating](#) his support for the initiative regardless of its origins. “The Abraham Accords — yes, the Abraham Accords — are critical to the region’s stability and prosperity,” he said then.

Roughly a year later, the Biden administration’s attitude toward the Abraham Accords seems to have fallen in line with the one presented by Nides. While it has not yet succeeded in coaxing additional countries to join the initiative, it has worked to [develop](#) the existing agreements and has created new [multilateral forums](#) made up of Abraham Accords members along with additional US and Israeli allies.

In a Wednesday interview with The Times of Israel, Nides elaborated on the administration’s approach to the Trump initiative, signed two years ago this week. **The US envoy highlighted the importance of advancing the agreements at the grassroots level, folding into the mix Israel’s veteran Arab allies, Egypt and Jordan, as well as working to ensure that Palestinians can also benefit economically from Israel’s improved standing in the region.**

Nides was adamant about giving his predecessors credit for getting the accords off the ground, while explaining that **the role of the current administration is to help institutionalize the initiative.**



Then-prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, left, then-US president Donald Trump, Bahrain Foreign Minister Abdullatif al-Zayani, and United Arab Emirates Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan pose for a photo on the Blue Room Balcony after signing the Abraham Accords during a ceremony on the South Lawn of the White House in Washington, on September 15, 2020. (AP Photo/Alex Brandon, File)

“With the former administration, [the Abraham Accords] was a start-up,” Nides said. “Our job is to take it from a start-up to a real operation.”

To exemplify those efforts, the ambassador highlighted last March’s Negev Summit, which was organized by Israel with assistance from the Biden administration, and brought together the foreign ministers of Israel, the US, the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, and Egypt at the Negev’s Kibbutz Sde Boker. The top diplomats used the gathering to launch six different working groups aimed at boosting regional cooperation on security, education, health, energy, tourism, food and water. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken made sure that each working group also promotes initiatives that benefit the Palestinians.

The Palestinian Authority has [yet to embrace](#) the effort to fold the Palestinians into the Accords, arguing that the initiative is ultimately aimed at bypassing a diplomatic solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Indeed, the Trump administration boasted that the Abraham Accords stripped the Palestinians of their veto power over Israel’s broader acceptance in the region.

Nides said he recognizes that the issue is “complicated” for the PA, but insisted that **the US is determined to “bring the Palestinians in [to the accords in] any way we can.** We believe it’s important for them to get the best economic benefits of any [agreements]... in the region.”

He recalled the administration’s recent \$100 million dollar donation to the East Jerusalem Hospital Network, which was matched by several other Gulf countries — something that might not have been possible before the Accords.

But for all the successes in developing the existing agreements, it is hard to ignore the momentum that seemed to be building in the final months of the Trump administration, when every few weeks saw a new country launch diplomatic ties with the Jewish state — a momentum that dissipated once Biden took office.

Part of this likely had to do with the incentives that former president Donald Trump was willing to provide to countries who agreed to normalize relations with Israel — from the sale of F-35 fighter jets to the UAE to the recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over the disputed Western Sahara region. Biden officials have made their discomfort with those gestures known, and have even slowed the sale of F-35s.

Earlier this week, former White House senior adviser Jared Kushner [expressed](#) his “disappointment” over the lack of new Abraham Accords countries and claimed he had been engaged in conversations with six more potential members before leaving office, which the Biden administration ostensibly could have continued.

Nides declined to respond to Kushner’s critique, and insisted that his colleagues in Washington were engaged in “lots of conversations going on with lots of countries simultaneously” about joining the Accords.

“Yes, we want to add more countries. We’re working with a bunch of countries...But these are complicated, long conversations, and we have a lot of balls in the air,” Nides said.

Unlike the Trump administration, President Joe Biden has not appointed a point-person tasked solely with advancing this one issue. Nides in many ways has become the leading US official on the Accords, though he stressed that his role is “to go deeper” with the existing agreements while “Washington’s goal is to go wider” in seeking new ones.

“In the meantime, you cannot lose sight of those” who have already made peace with Israel, Nides said. “That’s why we spend a lot of time on Egypt and Jordan too.”

While Jordan declined to participate in the Negev Summit, Nides chalked the absence up to scheduling difficulties, adding that he has “no doubt” that they’ll participate in future gatherings of the Negev Forum.

Explaining the importance of nurturing existing deals, the ambassador said, “People tend to chase the fancy, new diamond, and you forget about all the things that have already been done.”

One of those particularly sought-after normalization deals is one between Israel and Saudi Arabia, and, while Nides admitted that such a deal is still a long way off, the administration managed to make ostensible progress in that effort where its predecessors could not.

Coinciding with Biden’s July trip to the region, the US brokered a multilateral agreement that saw Egypt transfer a pair of Red Sea islands once controlled by Israel to Saudi Arabia, which in turn agreed to allow Israeli flights to use its airspace, in addition to advancing an agreement that will see direct flights between Tel Aviv and Mecca for Hajj pilgrims.

“Our hope is that we can get to [a normalization deal] because having Saudi Arabia be part of the Abraham Accords would continue to make the Middle East a safer, more prosperous region,” Nides said.

What Nides appeared most excited about, though, were the grassroots initiatives that have been advanced aimed at bolstering people-to-people ties between Israel and its new Arab friends.

“The people-to-people thing is more important than the economics. When you feel good about the people, when these countries feel good about each other, the economics will come from that,” the ambassador argued.

Previewing additional projects in that field, Nides said his office was working on putting on a videogaming tournament for children from Abraham Accords countries, in addition to new sporting and tourism initiatives that will be launched soon.

He (*Nides*) seemed unfazed by the challenge of getting new countries to join the Accords, explaining that “it sells itself.”

“This is about showing people how good this club is, and we’re the membership committee, so we’ll work on that.”

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/nides-biden-administration-taking-abraham-accords-from-start-up-to-real-operation/>