

Interest, Not Altar — October 2026 edition

Aryeh Leib Thorne Toren · 21 October 2026

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The sentence

In late August 2026 a quarrel on X over a photograph at the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi asked what the Abraham Accords really are. I answered in one sentence: the UAE's relationship with Israel is based on interest and not ideology, and only a strong and proud Israel and Jewish people will keep it going. Two months later, the Gulf has tested that sentence harder than any photograph could.

What October added

On Saturday, 10 October 2026, an attack on King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh killed 13 people, one of whom, an Indian national, died of his injuries the next day, and injured more than 300, according to Saudi authorities (BBC; NBC News; Anadolu). The Houthis claimed the attack (BBC). A second strike on the airport on 11 October killed one more person, bringing the toll from the two days to 14 (Al Jazeera). On the night of 13–14 October, a strike hit an administrative building at Aramco's headquarters in Dhahran. Saudi Arabia's Energy Ministry reported a limited fire and no casualties (AP). The Houthis also claimed hits that Saudi authorities have not confirmed. The strikes have not stopped. Late on 21 October an attack on King Fahd International Airport in Dammam killed two people and injured eight, Saudi Arabia's civil aviation authority said (SPA; BBC). That day the United States ordered non-emergency diplomats and their families to leave the kingdom (BBC; Politico).

The Gulf states face the same threat Israel does, from the same network. That is the interest. It is real, and it is not small. The Gulf's own governments now describe it the same way. On 18 October the Gulf Cooperation Council's foreign ministers declared in Manama that "any aggression against any member state constitutes a direct aggression against all" (GCC), and on 22 October the UAE's foreign ministry called the Dammam attack "a flagrant violation of the sovereignty" of Saudi Arabia and reaffirmed its "full solidarity" with the kingdom (WAM).

Why interest is not a lesser bond

Daniel Elazar described a kind of covenant used "for the long-term resolution of international problems by creating limited but lasting relationships between former or potential enemies." That is what the Accords are. They are a limited covenant of interest among sovereign states that share a threat and do not share a faith. That is not Sinai, and it doesn't need to be.

The Torah gives the model. Yitro, a Midianite priest, gives Moshe the best advice on government in the whole Chumash (Shemot 18), and then goes home. He does not convert the camp, and Moshe does not put on Yitro's robes. The Kenites, his descendants, stay loyal allies for generations without merging into Israel. Am levadad yishkon, a people that dwells apart (Bamidbar 23:9), has never meant a people without friends.

Two errors

The first error is costume fusion: treating courtesy, dress codes and tourist architecture as proof of shared civilization. It confuses hospitality with kinship, and when the hospitality cools it feels like betrayal.

The second error is civilizational essentialism: treating every mosque, every Muslim state and every Gulf ruler as one enemy. It ignores the Gulf states' own interests, and it throws away an alliance that missiles over Riyadh and Dhahran have just made more valuable.

Both errors fail as statecraft. Both fail as Torah.

Hadar

Jabotinsky's word for the missing ingredient was hadar: dignity, bearing, self-respect. Partners keep a bond of interest with the strong. They respect a partner who is sure of what it is. Israel does not need to borrow anyone's robes, and it does not need to insult anyone's house. It needs to be strong, and visibly proud of its own covenant.

Whatever coalition forms after 27 October, the question for it is the same. Will it keep the Accords as what they are, a limited and lasting partnership of interest, kept by strength and dignity?

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