

# THE ECONOMIC CLUB

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O F W A S H I N G T O N, D. C.

## **Virtual Signature Event**

**H.E. Ron Dermer, H.E. Yousef Al Otaiba,  
& H.E. Abdulla R. Al Khalifa**

### **Speakers**

**His Excellency Ron Dermer  
Ambassador of Israel to the United States**

**His Excellency Yousef Al Otaiba  
Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates to the United States**

**His Excellency Abdulla R. Al Khalifa  
Ambassador of the Kingdom of Bahrain to the United States**

### **Moderator**

**David M. Rubenstein  
President  
The Economic Club of Washington, D.C.**

**Monday, Nov. 16, 2020**

ANNOUNCER: Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome David Rubenstein, president of The Economic Club of Washington, D.C.

DAVID M. RUBENSTEIN: Welcome, everyone, to our ninth Virtual Signature Event of our 35th season. But it's really not completely virtual because for the first time since COVID has hit, we are actually having live guests here today. And it's because it's a special program. And I want to thank our live guests for coming in and participating in what's a fairly unique program for us, because we've really been doing everything virtual for almost nine months now, I guess it is. But our guests are here to talk about something very special, the Abraham Accords,<sup>1</sup> which were signed at the White House on September the 15th with the heads of each of these countries, as well as President Trump being there as the official host.

But let me just introduce our guests. First is the ambassador – his excellency Abdulla R. Al Khalifa, who is the ambassador from Bahrain – the Kingdom of Bahrain. And he has been the ambassador here since 2017. Then Yousef Al Otaiba, ambassador – his excellency Yousef Al Otaiba. He's been the ambassador since here since 2008, and one of the longest-serving ambassadors, I guess, now in Washington, D.C. And also our ambassador from Israel. The ambassador from Israel Ron Dermer, who has been the ambassador here since 2013.

Let's go into the conversation about this with all of you. Why don't I just start on my left and we'll work our way through, if we could. So what brought about this historic accord – the Abraham Accords? Did all of a sudden the heads of your countries say this is a good idea? Was in the works for a long time? What led to this? Ambassador Al Khalifa.

AMBASSADOR ABDULLA R. AL KHALIFA: Well, thank you, David, for having us. I think that we've seen historically how important this step was for those that have actually taken this step. It's truly historic. We've seen Anwar Sadat. We've seen King Hussein. And it took bold leaders to take this step forward. And today we've seen our leaders as well take this step. We had the foreign minister in town. He signed the accords on behalf of the kingdom. And I think that there were a lot of events that led up to where we are today. Definitely his majesty's vision of peaceful coexistence within Bahrain and the region has led to where Bahrain could take a decision like this at this very important time.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So I should have said at the outset, I wanted to offer our condolences, too. Your prime minister passed away last week. We're very sorry to hear this. And thank you for coming despite that situation.

AMB. AL KHALIFA: Thank you very much.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, Ambassador Al Otaiba, what led to this happening right now?

AMBASSADOR YOUSEF AL OTAIBA: We've been having a debate inside the UAE about when is the right time to do something like this. And the truth is, it could have happened a year

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<sup>1</sup> The Abraham Accords is a joint statement between Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States, reached in August 2020. It is also used to refer collectively to agreements between Israel and the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. The statement marked the first normalization of relations between an Arab country and Israel since that of Egypt in 1979 and Jordan in 1994. The accords are named after the patriarch Abraham, regarded as a prophet by both the religions of Judaism and Islam.

earlier, it could have happened two or three years from now. The reason it happened now in August of 2020 is because of the annexation debate. We think that the progress we were making with Israel, and the things like having an Israeli pavilion at Expo, things like that were going to be harmed by annexation. So we came up with the idea of trading up, of basically preventing annexation – suspending annexation in exchange for normalization.

So the reason we had it in August is because that debate, that negotiation with the White House happened very quickly, very enthusiastic White House, made – got us over the finish line on August 13th. We made the announcement. The signing, as you saw, was on September 15th. And it's very, very widely received.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, Ambassador, some people have asked why you did it before the presidential election. Why not wait till after the presidential election because, you know, you could give a gift to the next president. Why did you want to do something now? What was the reason for doing it now?

AMB. AL OTAIBA: So it's not always about the United States, David.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: It isn't?

AMB. AL OTAIBA: It's not. [Laughter.] This had nothing to do with the election. This had nothing to do with politics. The annexation debate was raging, you know, June and July. And again, there was a July 1st deadline for annexation. We thought that was risking the progress that we saw inside the UAE. Over the last couple years I think people visibly saw Israeli athletes participating in sports events, Israeli delegation participating in the Special Olympic core games. You saw that there was going to be a pavilion at Expo. All these things were us slowly getting to a place where we can be comfortable with normalization. All of these things were going to be at risk if annexation proceeded.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. Ambassador Dermer, why do it now? What was the reason that your country wanted to do this now?

AMBASSADOR RON DERMER: Well, just to pick up on what Yousef said, I think there were factors that brought us together underneath the surface actually for several years now. One of them was the rise of Iran as a power in the region, and the fact that we face – our countries faced a common danger. Another factor, I think, was the rise of Sunni radicalism. So Iran is on the Shia side, but on the Sunni side you had al-Qaida, which was sort of Sunni radicalism 1.0. You had then ISIS, which is 2.0. And there's going to be a 3.0. And I think the governments here all share a common interest in also confronting that danger.

I think there was a third factor as well. There is a perception, David, that the United States is withdrawing from the Middle East – or, at the very least reducing its military footprint there. And I think that's something that connected President Obama with President Trump, and even with future President Biden, because no one is talking about sending more troops to the Middle East. And I think that brings us towards a common position and a common strategy. That's what created this strong alliance underneath the surface.

So what surfaced it were really the events of the last year. President Trump put out a peace plan in January. And it was a peace plan that Israel could accept and that the Arab states did not reject. It was interesting that two of the three ambassadors who were in that room when President Trump unveiled the peace plan are here with me today. They were in that room in January. And then a few months later, as we were moving forward to extend Israeli sovereignty over territory that was consistent with the Trump peace plan, that, as Yousef said, is I think what sort of got their country in a position that, look, we wanted to do this for some time. This may be the opportunity to do it.

And then they contacted the White House and said: Look, if Israel is willing to suspend the extension of sovereignty, we are willing to normalize. And once we had that real offer on the table it took us several weeks and we were able to finalize it, and really create a breakthrough for the whole region.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So Yousef mentioned the annexation, has Israel agreed not to annex the territories that are in dispute in the West Bank now, or not?

AMB. DERMER: Yeah, well we – part of our agreement, and you can see it in the statement that was made on August – in August 13th of this past year, is that Israel is going to suspend extending sovereignty to those territories. That was a word that was carefully chosen. I mean, Yousef can tell you it was very, very specific about what it means. It doesn't mean permanent. It doesn't mean tomorrow. It means somewhere in between those two positions. So we've agreed to suspend it. And that enabled this breakthrough first with the UAE and then, fortunately, the Kingdom of Bahrain followed immediately thereafter. Now we've got a third country in Sudan. And we very much hope that we will see more countries in the months and years ahead.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So in Bahrain, has this met with popular support or has there been some protest of this agreement?

AMB. AL KHALIFA: Well, I think, David, first of all, we've seen – ever since the UAE announced, the speaker of the House came out with a very positive statement. We've seen the chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee come out with also a very positive statement. And so for people looking at it from abroad, the surprise came with the people that actually supported the move, and not any sort of opposition to it.

Now in any democratic society there will be those that are with a decision like that, and those that are against it. But I think here there was overwhelming support. The country moved forward. The foreign minister actually left town immediately after, the same day as the signing, to brief Congress. And so I think that people in Bahrain are looking at it very positively. They're looking at the positive implications that will come out of the deal, the possibilities unlocking potential that was never there before. And we're moving forward with it.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, Yousef, you've been in this town for a long time. As I mentioned, you've been ambassador here since 2008. How did you keep this a secret so long? In other words, there are no secrets in Washington. Everything leaks. So how did this not leak? I mean, tell us the secret of keeping this from leaking?

AMB. AL OTAIBA: Kept it in a very tight circle. Really only negotiated with about two or three people in the White House. It ultimately grew to about maybe eight or nine. I'm sure in Israel it was also kept in a very tight circle. And you just limit the number of people who are exposed to something like this, and in our case it worked. Also, what really helped was it didn't take long, right? From the minute we started discussing this to the minute the announcement went public, I think we're talking about five or six weeks in total.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And was all the negotiation virtual, or was it?

AMB. AL OTAIBA: No, no. I went in person to the White House many, many times in July and August.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So if you were to say there is one person at the White House other than President Trump who deserves the credit for this, who would you say?

AMB. AL OTAIBA: I would say most of the work was done with three people – Jared Kushner, Avi Berkowitz, General Miguel Correa.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. Ron, let me ask you a question that – you've said the word "suspend" was carefully negotiated. Some people say it was carefully discussed about whether the F-35s that some countries would like – UAE, for example – that Israel has agreed not to oppose that. Is that – how would you phrase Israel's position on the F-35s?

AMB. DERMER: Well, first of all, the F-35 issue was not part of the deal that was made with the Emirates. You would have to ask Yousef about his desire to have that vis-à-vis the United States. But what we take very seriously in Israel is the American commitment to maintain Israel's qualitative military edge. It is one of the most sacrosanct principles that we have in the U.S.-Israel alliance. And there is a process that we go through whenever any weapon system would go to any country in the region.

And after the accords were signed in mid-September, September 15th, we started that process with the United States. Sometimes that process takes a year, it can take a year and a half. But we put a team here in Washington. And they were here really throughout, for about 30 days or 40 days, discussing it, our relevant security officials with their counterparts in the Pentagon. And we were able to reach understandings with them. It was culminated when our defense minister came to Washington and signed some agreements with the secretary of defense.

And we believe, as we said publicly – both the prime minister and the defense minister, Benny Gantz, who don't agree on a lot of things within Israel but they agreed on this – that this perspective sale would not violate the U.S. commitment to maintaining Israel's qualitative military edge. And we feel very confident about that. And we are grateful that we also have partners in the region to confront common dangers. I wouldn't underestimate the impact that the danger of Iran has had on bringing our states closer together, because this is – as I said, this has been happening for several years underneath the surface. And we were able, because of a certain dynamic that Yousef described, to be able to surface it.

But we face a real danger in Iran. It is a country that vows to destroy the state of Israel and that works every day to destroy the state of Israel. And it is a country that has attacked my

colleagues here – have attacked their countries. And so we all have that shared concern. And I believe in the years ahead we will work together, I think, to confront that common danger. And I think that's very good news for peace in the Middle East.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So, Ambassador Khalifa, let me ask you. Are there other members of the GCC<sup>2</sup> that you think are likely to sign up to the Abraham Accords in the near future? People have speculated about, let's say, Saudi Arabia. There's been speculation about Oman. And outside the GCC there's been speculation about Morocco. Anything you can say about the likelihood of any of those countries joining?

AMB. AL KHALIFA: Well, here's the thing, David. I can't speak for other countries, but what I can say is that in the process leading up to Bahrain's decision we did consult with some of our allies in the region and beyond the region. The foreign minister was on a trip to Europe immediately before coming here. We've spoken obviously to our neighbors as well. And we've seen support throughout. So I think that at this stage the critical issue is whether or not it's going to be successful. Well, we have a successful model here that other countries can emulate. And I think we are on the right track.

We have a – we've accepted a trade delegation from Israel and the United States last month. Secretary Mnuchin was present, Meir Ben-Shabbat from the Israeli side. And it started out as a joint communique plus two MOUs. It ended up with a joint communique and seven. We also have a historic visit from the foreign minister in two days to Tel Aviv, along with the minister of industry and commerce. So working groups have been formulated. MOUs have been signed. And more good news is going to come out sometime very soon.

AMB. AL OTAIBA: I think, just to tack on that. I think we are the first wave – the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan. We're the first wave. To the extent any other country in the region is looking at this and debating whether this is good for them or not, it's on us to make sure we demonstrate this is successful. First, we have to demonstrate to our people that this decision – which was risky, which was unconventional – made sense, was the right decision, and is going to produce the right outcome. So we need to show people that this is a success. And that depends on us.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Right. Now, when I was very young, and my hair was very dark, I worked in the White House for President Carter. And he had the famous Camp David summits. And ultimately, as you know, Egypt and Israel came to an agreement. But there was plans then that there would be a lot of, I'd say, commerce between those two countries and a lot of tourism between those two countries, and investments. But it didn't materialize. What are you – so far. What are you doing to make certain that there actually is real investment back and forth, and real exchange and tourism?

AMB. AL OTAIBA: So, first let's try to understand the differences. Jordan and Egypt, when they made peace with Israel, they made it on the tail end of wars, conflicts, tension. I'm half Egyptian. I grew up in Egypt. My mother is Egyptian. My wife is Egyptian. All of us, we grew up thinking Israel is the enemy. We're just – we're programmed that way. Without

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<sup>2</sup> The Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, originally known as the Gulf Cooperation Council, is a regional intergovernmental political and economic union consisting of all Arab states of the Persian Gulf - Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates - except Iraq.

understanding why, without understanding the reasons we are taught that this is our enemy. And so it takes a while for you to reprogram yourself and to change your mindset.

I think the UAE's looking at it very differently. If you take all the geopolitical issues aside, making peace with Israel on a simply bilateral economic investment trade platform makes total sense. We've already seen MOUs signed in COVID research on AI, technology, autonomous vehicles. There's going to be a joint film festival. I don't know if you knew that. So on its own, engaging with Israel for economic, investment, trade, research reasons is totally, totally valid.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now, if I want to fly from Jerusalem or Tel Aviv to Abu Dhabi today I can do that on a commercial plane?

AMB. AL OTAIBA: In fact, I was just texting with the CEO of IATA Airlines today. He's going to – I think IATA will launch direct flights in March, Emirates in April. But Fly Dubai is already starting next week.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: But to do that you have to fly over the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. So somebody must have called up somebody in Saudi Arabia and say: Do you have any problems with this? And they said, what?

AMB. AL OTAIBA: Someone called somebody. And that someone who answered said: It's fine.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. I won't ask you who that was, but I can guess. [Laughter.]

So, Ron, the Israeli Knesset is famous for lots of divisions. And Israel is famous for lots of political parties and lots of I would say disagreement from time to time – you're probably familiar with that. So has this met with unanimity in Israel? Is this actually something everybody in Israel agrees on, or is there somebody in Israel who says this is not such a good thing?

AMB. DERMER: Well, you don't get unanimity in Israel on anything, but you get pretty much as close to it as you can. And people are thrilled with what happened. I want to get back to something that Yousef said – comparing this peace in 2020 with the peace when you were in the White House in 1979. And look at the differences. When Sadat made his peace with Israel, that peace was rejected by every Arab government in the region and by the Arab public throughout the Middle East. And Sadat, if memory serves, Egypt was thrown out of the Arab League at that time. And of course, he ultimately paid with his life for his courageous act in making peace with Israel.

Now, fast-forward 40 years when Sheikh Mohammed decided to make this peace with Israel. This was welcomed by many governments in the region. Some openly, some were silent about it – which speaks volumes sometimes in the Middle East. And what we see here is that the Arab public, to the extent that we can measure it in social media, you have very broad support for this decision. And so we have the possibility here of doing something that we didn't do with Egypt or Jordan. We'd like to do it with both them, which is to have a warm peace with them. Not just a peace from the top down but a peace from the bottom up.

And we do not see the forces, either in the Emirates or in Bahrain – political, economic, and cultural forces – militating against peace, which you’ve had for decades. There were a lot of times where if an Egyptian businessman would go to Tel Aviv and make a deal and come back to Cairo, he wouldn’t be welcomed with roses. And the same thing could be with the Jordanian intellectual who would go to Israel and come back to Jordan. Here, I think, in these two countries you clearly see a very positive sentiment that is not just coming from the top down, which is critical, but from the bottom up. And we really think this could be a huge shift in the region. And my hope, David, is we’ll look back on 2020 and see it at the beginning of the end of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Since 1979 Israel has boomed as a venture capital place, and technology’s been quite successful. But mostly the technology companies that are built in Israel, they often migrate to the United States. Do you think that the Israeli entrepreneurs will now migrate to the UAE, and Bahrain, and other countries? Or they will not do that?

AMB. DERMER: It’s a very interesting question. I think we might be able to forge partnerships. And you could think of, what two better countries than the UAE and Bahrain to be able to forget that partnership, because we have great innovators and great technology in Israel. They have great innovation, great entrepreneurs, great resources there. When you marry these two the skies are the limit.

And if you think about the traditional Arab boycott of Israel – which has gone on for decades – it’s sort of like Oregon, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, and half of Southern California boycotting Silicon Valley. It makes no sense, because Israel is a great center of innovation, not just in the region in global terms, in certain critical technologies. Now when you have this partnership, to be able to take advantage of it, I think it’s to the benefit of all our peoples and really the entire region.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So as people who are watching who may not know you, you do not have what some would call an Israeli accent. So you have an American accent. How did you –

AMB. DERMER: It’s a Miami accent.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: How did you get an American accent?

AMB. DERMER: Born and raised in Miami Beach.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And then you said?

AMB. DERMER: And went to school here in university and then made it to Israel when I was 25.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: All right. So you went to the University of Pennsylvania, and then you migrated to Israel. And then how did you become ambassador? How did you get to know –

AMB. DERMER: Well, you only have an hour program.



MR. RUBENSTEIN: Well, just give me the one-minute version. So you became ambassador, you got involved in politics. How did that happen?

AMB. DERMER: Well, I wanted to get involved in this – in this country that I loved. I loved the United States, where I was born and raised and feel grateful for having been born and raised here. But there was another country that I wanted to help in its fight not just to survive, but its right to survive. And I think what we've achieved in the last few months with this breakthrough I think strengthens Israel's security, and I think will expand peace in the region.

And as I said, hopefully we can look back at what has happened in the last few months – and I was very heartened, as I'm sure my colleagues were as well, that the President-elect Joe Biden, one of the things that he agreed with President Trump on was the Abraham Accords. He actually put out a statement saying he'd like to build on that and expand it. And I think that's a very good thing at a time when the two parties can't agree on anything, hopefully they can agree on this, which is peace. And to expand it, to deepen the peace we already have with Egypt and Jordan, and then to have other countries join in and fundamentally transform the region.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So when you were coming up with a name for this was it unanimous it was going to be the Abraham Accords, or what came in second? Was there something else you were thinking of calling it? I understand why it was Abraham. Was there something else anyone had thought of?

AMB. DERMER: Maybe Yusef can answer.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: All right.

AMB. AL OTAIBA: So none of us came up with the name. We were all thinking about something, and somebody at the White House – General Miguel Correa – came up with the name. Honestly, it couldn't have been a more perfect fitting. We're also building the Abrahamic Family House in Abu Dhabi which is going to be a compound that has a mosque, a church, and a synagogue where all people can visit and practice together. And so, having welcomed the pope, building the Abrahamic House, calling this the Abraham Accords is a very, very fitting name.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK.

AMB. DERMER: And you know, Abraham is the father of Ishmael and Isaac. So and we are the descendants of Ishmael and Isaac. So I think it's a very fitting name. And the last time Ishmael and Isaac got together was to bury Abraham, about 4,000 years ago. So instead of coming together after a death, it's nice to come together for a birth – a birth of a new peace in the region.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. We've talked about your background. Where did you grow up?

AMB. AL OTAIBA: I grew up in Egypt. I was born and raised in Egypt. Like I said, my mother is Egyptian. Finished high school there. And then finally, after high school, in 1991 came here and went to school at Georgetown. And then after Georgetown I finally moved to Abu Dhabi. I started working in the government about 2000. I think the first time we met was

probably around 16 years ago. We had a first meeting. We had lunch with Sheikh Mohammed. And I think what I wanted to say is the Middle East that you saw then is very different from the Middle East that we are talking about today. And the perfect reflection of that – or, evidence of that is the three of us are sitting here doing an interview with you. That couldn't have happened 16 years ago when we first met. So the region's changing.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, Ambassador Al Khalifa, where did you grow up? And I know you also have gone to school in the United States?

AMB. AL KHALIFA: Correct. I did grow up in Bahrain. I went to school up in Bentley in Boston, six years, MBA. Went back, civil servant all my life. My previous post was as a governor of one of the four governorates back home. So I worked very closely with the people. And this was a shift, but a very good shift. And serving the country is still an honor and a pleasure.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So for those who haven't been to Bahrain, or are not that familiar with it, what is the population of Bahrain?

AMB. AL KHALIFA: I know, David, you've been Bahrain. Population is 1.5 [million]. We have – speaking of COVID very quickly – we have one of the highest tests per capita because of the number of population. We have 1.8 tests – 1.8 million tests that were done up to date. But Bahrain is a developing country. It's moving really quickly. We diversified away from oil a very long time ago. And so we were looking at different prospects as we grow our entrepreneurship and small to medium enterprises. And we're looking at opportunities. This is a great opportunity. And it will unlock potential business opportunities for entrepreneurs and especially in the tech industry.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So I've been to Bahrain many times. And I always wonder, why is it that Bahrain didn't get oil as much as, let's say, the other countries in the region. Do you ever think that maybe you could look harder? There's no oil nearby? Or do you ever feel shortchanged? Or what have you done to build your economy without oil?

AMB. AL KHALIFA: Well, back in 1932 Bahrain was the first country to discover oil in the whole region. And ever since that time it was – it was just restricted to that field. Now, last year we've uncovered off the shore oil which is in vast levels. And so we're looking at U.S. companies to help us, because it's unconventional oil that we're looking at. The market rate today doesn't make economic sense, but I mean the amount of oil that was discovered in the offshore oil field is vast. And we're looking for partners to assist in it.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, Yousef, there are two countries that people often wonder about what's going to happen with respect to them. And it's not quite related to the Abraham Accords – maybe the Abraham Accords will change it. One is Qatar and one is Yemen. So do you think anything is likely to change in the near future with respect to what's going on in either country?

AMB. AL OTAIBA: So I think with Yemen – as you know, we've been out of Yemen now for coming up on a year and a half. Yemen has a serious amount of challenges ahead of it – not just economic but health care, and humanitarian. But I think the challenge with Yemen is going to be largely domestic, you know? I know we all want the Yemen War to end. What's preventing the

Yemen War from ending are the Yemeni factions unable to get to a solution, or a political reconciliation. You have the Hadi government, you have the Houthis, you have the Southern Traditional Council – you have a variety of players who can't come to an agreement on what the political formula should be. I think that's the main challenge. We have been working with the U.N. envoy for many years and I think if you ask him today what his biggest challenge is, it's getting the Yemenis on board.

With the Qatari rift, I don't think it's going to get resolved any time soon. It's a small problem. It's not really being addressed. It's not on anyone's, you know, priority list right now. I think we just have a very philosophical disagreement over what we want our region to look like. And we haven't really sat down to figure out what the solution is. They want to go their way; we're going to go ours. And I don't think anyone pays too much attention to it.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: For those who haven't been to the UAE, I've been there many times, can you explain what Dubai is, Abu Dhabi, and the other parts of UAE, and how it came together to be UAE, and who kind of controls the foreign policy and other things?

AMB. AL OTAIBA: Sure. Yeah, sure. This one's easy. The UAE's a combination of seven Emirates. So think of them as seven states, right? They created a union on December 2nd of 1971. Abu Dhabi's the largest in size. It's also where most of the oil is found. Dubai is sort of the commercial, financial, logistics and trade capital. So we think of Abu Dhabi – or, I often describe it – Abu Dhabi's the Washington, D.C. Dubai is the New York City. There are five other Emirates called the Northern Emirates. And they basically come together and form one diverse but very stable federation in the region.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And the total population is?

AMB. AL OTAIBA: About 10 million people. UAE citizens are about 1.5 million – a little under 1.5 million.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Have you ever been to Israel?

AMB. AL OTAIBA: I have not. I'm actually looking forward to going as soon as corona's under control. And we also look forward to having the prime minister visit us again once corona's under control.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Ambassador Al Khalifa, have you ever been to Israel?

AMB. AL KHALIFA: Not yet, but I think I'll be on the same flight with Yousef.

AMB. DERMER: Well, you're both officially invited.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: All right. So, Ron, have you ever been to UAE or Bahrain?

AMB. DERMER: No.

AMB. AL OTAIBA: I just extended an invitation to him and his son for the Formula One in Abu Dhabi as soon as we allow visitors again.

AMB. DERMER: For some reason he's into cars. You know, I want to – I want to pick up on something that was said. If you look at who supported the Abraham Accords and who opposed it, I think it tells you a lot about where the region is. The only states in the region that really opposed it was, one, Iran – and that's obvious one, because we're all their enemies – or, they regard us as their enemies. The Palestinian Authority opposed it. And the reason why they opposed it is they thought that they had veto power over Israel's relationship with any Arab states. And the courage of the leaders of both UAE and Bahrain is about telling the Palestinians: You don't have that veto power over progress in the region. And I think that was a very, very important thing.

Another power was Turkey. Turkey, remarkably, opposed the agreement. And they even threatened – and maybe Yousef can speak to this – they even threatened to remove their ambassador from the Emirates – the Turkish ambassador to the Emirates over this accord. Now, David, you might know this, I'm sure you do, Israel and Turkey have had diplomatic relations for 70 years. They have an embassy in Israel. We have an embassy in Turkey. And yet they were threatening the UAE that they were going to recall their ambassador because of this agreement. And another country, unfortunately, was Qatar, who used the considerable power that it has over media in the region through Al Jazeera, not to support this agreement.

So when you have an agreement in the region and the only states that are opposing it are Iran, the Palestinian Authority, Turkey, and Qatar, I think that tells you something. There is a divide in our region. It is not Sunni and Shia. I don't think it's Jew and Arab. It's between the forces of modernity and the forces of medievalism. And on this stage are those states that want to embrace modernity and want to embrace progress.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: The population of Israel today is?

AMB. DERMER: A little over 9 million.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Nine million people. And of the 9 million people, would you say that – what percentage are immigrants to the country? Let's say – you were an immigrant to the country – and what percentage were born there?

AMB. DERMER: That's a good – maybe about half? Because we've had waves of immigration. We had immigration right after Israel's establishment, largely from the Middle East and North Africa. Jewish communities that had existed for 2,500 years – like in the case of the Jews from Iraq. And there were communities in Yemen, and communities in Libya, in Morocco, and other places. We also had a massive wave of immigrants from the former Soviet Union when the Iron Curtain fell. We also had Ethiopian Jews who were airlifted in the 1980s. So there's quite a number of people – I don't know the exact number – who were born in Israel. But we are a society of immigrants, Jews who have come from maybe 100 countries around the world to return to our ancestral homeland.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So do you have a view that there will be any progress with the Palestinians in the next three, four, five years? Or you see nothing really likely to happen in terms of resolving the so-called Palestinian issue?

AMB. DERMER: I think that because of what happened there is a chance for progress. Because I think the old formula was: Let's make a deal with the Palestinians. And if we can achieve peace with the Palestinians, Israel will have peace with 21-22 Arab states. And that would be great, as long as we have a Palestinian partner who'd like to make peace with us. But I think the decision of Sheikh Mohammed and King Hamad to come into this alliance with Israel, to come in this new relationship, makes it more likely that you're going to have moderate forces among the Palestinians emerge that are willing to actually reach a historic compromise with Israel.

Before, the rejectionists, I think, ruled. They said the entire Arab world will never make a peace with Israel. Now that the Arab world is prepared to make a peace with Israel, beyond Egypt and Jordan. That now you have three other countries that have moved towards peace with Israel, I think it will strengthen the forces of moderation within Palestinian society and, hopefully, we will get a Palestinian leader who will want to be like Sadat, or Hussein, or Sheikh Mohammed, or the others – who will want to be – want to join in this remarkable movement for peace.

The decision will be theirs. We cannot force them to make peace with us. They have rejected the legitimacy of a nation-state for the Jewish people for a century. I hope they won't waste the next century. I hope they will follow the example of my colleagues here and decide to make peace with Israel.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now, the ambassador from Israel to the United States often deals not just with the U.S. government, but also with the Jewish community in the United States. And the Jewish community in the United States, what has been their reaction to this?

AMB. DERMER: They're overjoyed. Overjoyed. Look, any time that we had an Arab leader who wanted to make peace with Israel, who spoke peace to their own people, there was overwhelming support within Israel and certainly within the broader Jewish world. And that was the case now. And maybe Yousef can speak to it, I don't know if he's been – how many salmon dinner's been invited to.

AMB. AL OTAIBA: I've spoken to a lot of groups – and both groups and individuals, the common reaction I get is most people didn't think this was possible. Most people didn't think that this could happen before a Palestinian state was formed. And to Ron's point, we tried this approach, right? The Arab world came together, and the collective position was: We're not going to do anything until there's a Palestinian state. Makes sense. Didn't work. It simply didn't work. We have this intractable political problem that hasn't made any progress in the last 20-30 years. So I think we finally concluded: Let's try something else. Let's try a different approach. It seems to have been incredibly well-received by everyone, with the exception of the countries that Ron was talking about.

But here when you talk to individual Jewish Americans, or even Evangelicals, they are in disbelief that this actually happened. And they're very proud, they're very excited. And I think this is just the beginning. I really do.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now, we've mentioned a couple times Sheikh Mohammed. For those who don't know Sheikh Mohammed, could you just describe his background and how long he's been effectively in his position?

AMB. AL OTAIBA: Yeah. We'll make sure he doesn't see this part of the interview because he doesn't like his name coming up at all. He's very low profile. He is now the crown prince of Abu Dhabi. He's also the deputy supreme commander. He formerly was the head of the armed forces – first the head of the air force, head of the armed forces. A military guy by background, spent 26 years in the military. And he's the gentleman I've been working for the last 20 years of my life.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. And the ruler of Bahrain now is?

AMB. AL KHALIFA: So his majesty King Hamad has ascended to the throne in 1999. First thing he did was he took us from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy. Two houses, so a legislative branch, an appointed house and an elected house. The appointed house, which is interesting for us today, has always had people from different backgrounds within Bahrain. And so there was always representation from the indigenous Jewish society from Bahrain in the appointed house. Actually, one of the members was later representing Bahrain here in Washington, D.C. as an ambassador for a number of years.

And so, he – his majesty has been invested in safety and security for many years hence, building on the U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet. We've been in every U.S.-led military operation in the region. We've hosted the International Maritime Security Construct, with a number of countries, CTF, et cetera. So we've been looking at peace within the region as a pillar for economic stability, progress, and moving forward.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now your country is what percentage Shiite and what percentage Sunni?

AMB. AL KHALIFA: We never looked at it, David. I think it's – we're looking at Bahrain first. I mean, when we look at Bahrainis, everyone needs to move forward. And then you have a lot of people that have a Sunni father and a Shia mother. Where would you classify them? And so, the "Bahrain First" policy has been one policy that has taken us forward, and we've moved as a community. It's a small community. We need to work with one another. We're not divided into different geographic locations. And so the country needs to work together in order to move forward.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: There's a Jewish population in Bahrain?

AMB. AL KHALIFA: Absolutely. We've had a synagogue for over 80 years. That synagogue used to be visited by the indigenous Jewish society in Bahrain, but now what's happening is because we're going to expect visitors from Israel, because we're going to expect visitors from throughout the world, hotels are starting to offer kosher meals. The synagogue is undergoing a renovation. And we have started to look at people coming from abroad and making sure that those services are there.

AMB. AL OTAIBA: One of Sheikh Abdulla's predecessors, the Bahraini ambassador who came in when I came in, on July of '08, which was Ambassador Houda Nonoo, who was a Jewish Bahraini.

AMB. AL KHALIFA: Houda Nonoo was the first female Arab ambassador here in Washington. And she happened to be of the Jewish faith.

AMB. DERMER: Yeah, Abdulla, you'll need a second synagogue, because Jews need a synagogue that they always go to, and a synagogue that they never go to. [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, Yousef, you mentioned that everything doesn't revolve around American presidential elections. I recognize that. But, you know, sometimes a new president comes in you might want to have a gift for him. So do you have any surprises or any gifts that you might want to mention today?

AMB. AL OTAIBA: I don't have anything prepared, but I think a great gift would be a model of the Abrahamic Family House. To me, that symbolizes who we are in the UAE and what we believe in. We've always promoted interfaith understanding, acceptance, tolerance. We have a ministry of tolerance and a minister of tolerance. But even without the Abraham Accords there's a growing Jewish community in the UAE. Even without the Abraham Accords the pope visited us a year and a half ago. Even without the Abraham Accords, we've always opened our society up to everyone.

You know, today we have 200 nationalities in the UAE, every religion you can possibly imagine. Everyone practicing and coexisting peacefully. And those are the values we try to show the rest of the world. We want to prove to the rest of the world that, yes, you can have a tolerant, open, modern society in the Middle East. I think the Abraham Accords and the political element of that is going to add to that awareness for the rest of the people.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: What do you think is the basic interest of Iran in trying to deal with the Middle East? In other words, what is their concern with, let's say, your country or Saudi Arabia? What are they most worried about or concerned about?

AMB. AL OTAIBA: This is my own personal theory. I think Iran looks at our part of the world and thinks of the days of the Persian Empire and thinks that this is an area that belongs to them. We are countries that are either subservient or that ultimately – sort of Persian colonies. I think that's the crux of the disagreement. I don't believe it's just Sunni-Shia, because we have examples and cases and demonstrations where countries – where you have Sunni and Shia that coexist. I think this is more about Arab and Persian identity, and who feels that this belongs to them. So I think that's the main challenge.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So what do you think Iran's biggest concern is with Israel?

AMB. DERMER: Well, they want to export their revolution that began in 1979. And they vowed, as I said before, to destroy Israel. And they're also trying, through their proxy forces, to undermine stability and to take over countries throughout the region – in Iraq, in Syria, in Lebanon through Hezbollah, in Yemen through the Houthis. Iran is the greatest sponsor of terrorism in the world. And they have this fanatic ideology that they seek to export.

And they've been doing it until recently in the last two or three years, where essentially sanctions have been put back on Iran. The president withdrew from the nuclear deal, which I think was very important for the region and made the region much safer, because it took a power

that had a tailwind, in Iran, and then turned it into a headwind. And it's become much more difficult for them to export their ideology.

I will tell you, David, what's important – at least for me – the most important thing is to understand why did we achieve this success? What was the recipe for success? And it's pretty clear to me. It was a policy where you confront Iran, you embrace your allies in the region, and you leave open a door to the Palestinians, but you don't put that issue front and center because a lot has been invested in that issue and, as Yousef said, not a lot has been achieved.

I think a new administration that would do the same things – confront Iran, embrace your allies in the region, leave open a door to the Palestinians but don't put it front and center – I think could expand this peace to more and more countries. And, as I said, hopefully end the Arab-Israeli conflict and begin to see a change in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So the greatest existential threat to Israel is Iran, you would say, I –

AMB. DERMER: The one existential threat.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: All right, so no other existential threats at this moment?

AMB. DERMER: No. No. Not a threat to the survival of Israel. Israel's a very powerful country, powerful militarily, powerful technologically. But Iran is a country that is pursuing nuclear weapons and openly calls – they tweet about it – that they are going to destroy the state of Israel. And so we have to do whatever we have to do in order to defend ourselves. And I think finding allies in the region who will stand against the common danger is part of that effort.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So most people are saying now the president-elect is Joe Biden. And if he is ultimately sworn in as president and he says, I want to put the Iranian agreement back together again, your position would be that's not a good thing to do?

AMB. DERMER: I think it would be a mistake. And hopefully he will look at the Middle East as it is, he will see the benefits of this process, of how he can continue that process, and I think to not go back into the same deal. Look, we all in the region – Israel and the Arab states – opposed the nuclear deal. The prime minister opposed it publicly in Congress in 2015. But I think he spoke for many others in the region. And I think that when you have Israelis and Arabs who are saying to you: This is not a good idea. Do not follow that path. I think that that should be taken into consideration.

What you had – when you were dealing with North Korea you had six party talks with the North – with North Korea. Two of those parties were Japan and South Korea. Meaning, your allies in the region were at the table. In the discussions over Iran when the nuclear deal was made Israel was not at the table and the Arab states were not at the table. So the first thing I would say to the incoming administration, sit with your allies in the region, listen to us. We have the most skin in the game. We have the most to lose. Speak to us. Try to work out a common position, which I think is possible, not only to deal with nuclear issues but also to deal with the regional aggression of Iran. Forge a common policy with your allies in the region. That will both enhance this process and, I think, put the United States in a much better place to deal with Iran.



MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, Yousef, you've been ambassador, as I said, for quite some time here now. And you're considered, I think, one of the most influential ambassadors in Washington. So what's the key to being an influential ambassador? Is it going to cocktail parties? Is it getting to know the people at the White House? What is the key to being a good ambassador?

AMB. AL OTAIBA: Well, I haven't been to anything in about 10 months, so that's obviously not it. I think it's being consistent. It's being honest. It's being – it's being direct with people, even when you – they don't like what you hear. You know, sometimes we have honest disagreements, but they're honest. You don't hide your position. You are very direct about what your country stands for, what your policies are, what your analysis of other countries – of the host country's positions are. It's not always perfect. There's no country on the planet where we agree with on everything. There are going to be disagreements. But I think as long as those disagreements are handled with respect and with honesty, I think it just makes you – it makes one effective at their job.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So the greatest pleasure of being an ambassador is, what?

AMB. AL OTAIBA: Ah, being able to reflect the views, the positions, the values of an entire country. Actually – if you think about it, it's very stressful. There's no margin for error. You can't make a mistake about what your country believes or stands for. So you have to be – you have to be accurate. But you know, being able to tell people, this is what my country believes or this is what my country thinks, it's really a big honor.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: What's the greatest downside to being an ambassador?

AMB. AL OTAIBA: You always have to be right. You can't afford to make a mistake. People look to you for guidance on all kinds of things. That's actually not a down – it's not a bad thing, but people come to you for advice on anything from how do you travel or how do you enter, to what is your policy on Iran or on the Abraham Accords, or on Yemen. You know, you have to be able to answer a lot of different questions.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So how have you found being an ambassador? Is it as much fun as you thought, or not quite as good as you thought it was going to be?

AMB. AL KHALIFA: Well, David, let me first go back to Ron's discussion on Iran, and then I can answer the fun question. I think that countries around the world need to realize the effects of Iran's policies on not only the region, but the entire world. When you have an attack on the global energy infrastructure a guy in California filling up his gas tank is going to realize that there's a difference that he's paying here.

I think that it is important for the U.S. government going forward if we were to see an agreement with Iran to take into consideration all the challenges that we are facing in the region. And we're talking not just the ballistic missile program, but we're talking proxy activities, we're talking the spread of the ideology of this – of this hegemonic ambition that we have seen from Iran for 40 years now. And so I think, as allies to the United States, we stand ready to be at the table talking about what is important to us and assisting in any way possible going forward.

Now, as a political appointee, this was new to me. So I had to speak to a lot of people here in Washington. There was a very supportive role that I've seen from my friend and colleague Ambassador Otaiba. And it's just been a very interesting time, especially in the past three years where we've seen a lot.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Ron, I should have asked you, what's the greatest pleasure of being ambassador and what's the greatest downside to being ambassador?

AMB. DERMER: Well, it's a – it's a tremendous honor to be the representative of the one and only Jewish state. And I don't take it for granted for one minute, because we were a people – as you know, David – that did not have sovereignty for 2,000 years. So the restoration of Jewish sovereignty in the land of Israel was an act, I think – or, was an event not to be seen not in the context of one generation or two generations but, as Churchill said, maybe 1,000 years. So I'm very cognizant of the privilege. And the most remarkable thing about being an Israeli ambassador is that Israel has ambassadors, meaning that we have a voice, or that we have as a state refuge, or that we have a shield. That's something that the Jewish people did not have 75 years ago when we faced the worst disaster in our history.

So I'm cognizant of the fact, and I'm cognizant of the fact that many other powers throughout history who sought to annihilate our people don't have representatives in Washington. You know, there's no ambassador of ancient Babylon. There's no ambassador of imperial Rome in Washington. There's no ambassador of the thousand-year reich, but there is an ambassador of Israel. So for me, it is a great honor to be able to represent my country, Jews and Arabs, in Israel. Jews, and Muslims, and Christians.

And to speak for them, as Yousef said. And I would say the most important thing any ambassador can have is that people who speak to them know they are speaking for their leadership and they are speaking to their leadership. And I think this is what has made, frankly, Yousef such an effective ambassador in Washington. I think it's the same with Abdulla and the same with me. They know that I am speaking for the leadership. And that enables us with a very small circle of people to be able to reach the agreements that we have. Because if you have to go through layers and layers of bureaucracy, I think it's very different.

But, you know, it's a great honor to serve. The difficult part of being Israel's ambassador in Washington is that you're with security wherever you go. So you lose a little bit of that sense of privacy. But hopefully I'll get that back when I return to Jerusalem.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So people in Washington always say, OK, now I understand the news, what's next? So what are you going to do next to build on the Abraham Accords? Is there some second phase?

AMB. AL OTAIBA: So the first phase, or the first thing we got to do after the announcement was a series of sort of bilateral MOUs with the government of Israel on flights and civil aviation, on trade and protecting investments, on visa travel – visa-free travel. So now Israelis and Emiratis can travel to the two countries with no visas, which is a big deal. It basically put together – or, put in place the infrastructure for our countries to be able to trade, to travel, to invest, to do business with each other. That was done very quickly, and I think it's almost done. Flights are coming in. We've set the ground for anybody who wants to do business.

You know, one of the things I see a lot – or, I hear from the UAE is the business community's really excited. Why? We've just opened a brand-new market to them. They haven't been able to invest, or trade, or go do business in Israel, and vice versa. Israelis are coming to the UAE with really, really – with a lot of excitement. I was talking to a young government official a few weeks ago. They were supposed to send me some papers for something. And they said: Sorry, sir, we're really late. We apologize. But we're being completely overwhelmed with requests. I said, overwhelmed with what? They said, the number of Israeli companies that are calling us to set up shop in Abu Dhabi has been incredibly overwhelming. We just can't – we don't know how to respond.

So I think phase two is now seeing the fruits of what we put in place, is in people being able to access each other's markets. Eventually we're going to have students going back and forth. Eventually we're going to have research programs actually produce something. We're talking about a space program. So I think there's a lot of excitement both ways, from both directions, about the things outside of the policy and political world that we can do together.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: When you go to Israel what is it that you want to see that you've never seen before?

AMB. AL OTAIBA: I have no idea what's there. [Laughs.] Like, I have never been. So I don't know what I'm supposed to see. That's one of the reasons I'm so excited, is a country that has been off limits to us for a long time finally is no longer off limits. So that's why I'm excited to go.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. And what do you want to see in Abu Dhabi or Bahrain?

AMB. DERMER: Well, it's breathtaking, some of the pictures. And now that I've been invited to go see Formula One there, I suppose I should look at that. But I just think it's very exciting. As Yousef said, the Emirates is a financial and commercial center in the region and beyond. And I think Bahrain, we saw last year on the Palestinian issue that they hosted an economic conference because it was important for them to see how they could move this process forward. Again, you have two countries that are forces for modernity in the region. And I think when you marry what they bring to the table with what Israel brings to the table, the sky's the limit. In fact, it won't just be the sky, since we'll be going to space together, I guess, in the near future.

AMB. AL OTAIBA: The part I'm most excited about is not the business opportunities, or the political cooperation, or trade and investment. What I'm excited about is – I told you is, I grew up in Egypt. I grew up thinking Israel is the enemy. And I drove by the Israeli ambassador's house every day going to school thinking, ah, you know. So my 10-year-old son is going to grow up thinking it's totally normal to visit Israel. It's totally normal to invest in Israel. It's totally normal to visit. He's going to grow up with a completely different mindset than the one I grew up with. And to me, that's probably the most meaningful part of the Abraham Accords.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And do you think Egypt is likely to maybe follow suit? Because it hasn't invested as much in Israel as maybe was originally expected. Do you think that might change now, or you don't know yet?

AMB. DERMER: I don't know. I hope so. And I think that the way that they have welcomed and embraced this process I think bodes very well for the future because, again, Egypt is a very large country. It's got about 100 million people in it. It is right next door to Israel. The peace was different, as Yousef mentioned, because we had fought wars with Egypt. And certainly a cold peace is better than a hot war. But we would like to see that peace become a warm peace. And I would think that if we proved that this peace is a success, if we turned this into a good model, that that will impact the peace that Israel has with Egypt and deepen it. And I think it will impact the peace that Israel has with Jordan. And look, people want to invest in success. And if we prove to them that this will be successful, I think that you'll have other parties join.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: All right. So tell us what it was like at the White House on September the 15th. You get there, you know, your leaders are there, President Trump is there. Was, you know, they serving nice Jewish delicatessen, or were they serving nice Middle East delicacies? What were they serving as food, and what was it like right before you went out on the stage?

AMB. AL OTAIBA: So the way it worked is each delegation came in, had a brief bilat with the president in the Oval Office, and then we went outside to the – to the lawn, and we kind of waited there for the leaders to come down and sign. It was just really exciting. I don't know how you felt at the time, but at the time it did not hit me that, you know, we were in the middle of creating history. I'm worried about where you're going to sit, I'm trying to see, take some selfies with my phone, like everybody else is. So at the moment it felt exciting. I'm not sure when it will actually hit me that, you know, we created history and changed the dynamics in the region in a way we still don't even understand how it's going to happen. I think it's going to take years and years for what we've done on September 15th to really factor into people's analysis.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And what was it like for you at that event?

AMB. AL KHALIFA: I think, yeah, same thing. It was – it was surreal. It took a little bit of time for it to sink in. And as we look at things and how they're progressing today, I think that the Bahraini people are starting to ask questions about the Israelis in the same – and vice versa. So I think it's an educational process that we're going through right now. When it comes to trade, for example, when we were talking to the Israeli side we're saying: Look, Bahrain has zero income tax, it has zero corporate tax, it was 100 percent ownership – foreign ownership. And so all of these elements are starting to get clearer to the Israeli business community. And I think that within the next couple days we will see a lot of progress that will help us as we move forward.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So I should have mentioned President Trump earlier. You've mentioned him as being involved in this. But suppose President Trump had not been president, do you think this would have happened eventually or not?

AMB. DERMER: I don't know. You'd have to leave that to historians. I think the fact that he confronted Iran helped. The fact that he embraced the allies in the region helped. The fact that he didn't put the Palestinian issue front and center helped. All of those factors came – I think, came together. And I'll just tell you, I was at the signing ceremony. And to me the word that kept popping into my head was majestic. I mean, you guys really know how to put on a signing

ceremony at the White House. When you're sitting there, looking at the – at just the beautiful façade of the White House.

And I was very proud to be part of this historic process as well. It was – we had to wait – you know, 1979 was the first one, and then it was 15 years before we had the second peace with Jordan, which really came right after the Oslo process, so it was sort of at the tail end of that. But we waited a quarter of a century to go from number two to number three. And we waited less than a month to go from number three to number four. So that tells you something is changing.

And the other thing I felt, David, was really very proud of Prime Minister Netanyahu, and honored to serve as his ambassador, because he is somebody who believed in this process. For years he's been telling me: We must make Israel extremely strong – strong technologically, strong militarily. That will lead to diplomatic strength. And then it will ultimately bring peace closer. And I was very happy for him to be able to enjoy this moment, because so many people had criticized that policy saying he was trying to avoid making peace.

And ultimately he had to make the critical decisions here. And so did Sheikh Mohammed, so did King Hamed. And the leadership came together at his critical moment. And we are grateful to the administration – the outgoing administration, to President Trump, to Jared Kushner, to Avi Berkowitz, to all the other people who were involved – Secretary Pompeo. I don't know if it would have happened just on its own. I will tell you, if they continue this policy of confronting Iran, embracing those allies, you will actually see this process continue.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So a final question for each of you. Is COVID making diplomacy harder or easier? If there had been no COVID would this have happened sooner, or was it make easier because you had to deal with things virtually and it made it easier not to have to travel so much?

AMB. DERMER: Well, as Yousef said, we had so many meetings at the White House back and forth. I think he was coming in, I was leaving. He was coming in, I was leaving. So we had a lot of meetings over that five- or six-week period. I can tell you, as an ambassador now in his eighth year, and Yousef's here longer than I, COVID had less of an impact on us. I think if you were in your first year or second year, before you had developed all the relationships with people, I think it would be much harder. But the fact that we were both here as long as we were I think enabled us to do a lot of things by phone that would otherwise be more difficult to do.

AMB. AL OTAIBA: Yeah, I agree with that. I think because – for those of us who have been for a long time, we've been to enough events and receptions, and we've met a lot of people, doesn't have a direct impact on you being able to do your job. But I'm thinking of, for example, the U.K. ambassador, or the Sudan ambassador, or anyone who have come in the last three, four, six months, who have to meet people, who have to get to know the lay of the land and get to know the people they are going to be working with, they are, you know, faced with a handicap and they – it's going to be very hard to overcome.

AMB. AL KHALIFA: Well, I think that, again, diplomacy was and always will be a face-to-face kind of interaction. It's hard to start relationships virtually. But here's a thing with those that have spent a couple years here in Washington, we were able to fill in folks from back home into

a lot of events here through virtual means, where before COVID it was challenging. And so I think it opened up a new paradigm that we're exploiting now.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. Listen, I want to thank all of you for coming here and having a very nice half-virtual and half-in person conversation with us. So I appreciate it. And when you come back with an addition to the Abraham Accords, whenever that is, please come back here. And you're welcome back. And we'll have another conversation. Thank you.

AMB. DERMER: We hate to be the bearers of good news from the Middle East, but we're thrilled to be here.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: All right. Well, thank you all for coming. Appreciate it. Thank you all. Appreciate it. Thank you all. Good day.



**His Excellency Ron Dermer  
Ambassador of Israel to the United States**

Ron Dermer was born and raised in Miami Beach, Florida. He earned a degree in Finance and Management from the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania and a degree in Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE) from Oxford University. For three years, he was a columnist for the Jerusalem Post.

In 2004, Ron co-authored with Natan Sharansky the best-selling book, *The Case For Democracy: The Power of Freedom to Overcome Tyranny and Terror*, which has been translated into ten languages. From 2005-2008, Ron served as Israel's Minister of Economic Affairs in the United States. From 2009-2013, he served as Senior Advisor to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

He is married to Rhoda and has five children.

*The Embassy of Israel to the United States,*

<https://embassies.gov.il/washington/AboutTheEmbassy/Pages/The-ambassador.aspx>



**His Excellency Yousef Al Otaiba  
Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates to the  
United States**

His Excellency Yousef Al Otaiba, Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates to the United States of America, took up his Washington-based post in July 2008.

In this role, Ambassador Al Otaiba enhanced UAE-US relations and improved bilateral security and economic cooperation. In addition to leading efforts that increased military, intelligence and counterterrorism cooperation between the two countries, he also played a critical role to facilitate the landmark US-UAE 123 Agreement for Peaceful Civilian Nuclear Energy Cooperation, which

came into force in 2009.

He also works closely with his counterparts in government and with business leaders to promote greater UAE and US economic and trade ties. Since becoming Ambassador, bilateral trade increased over 70 percent, solidifying the UAE's position as the US' largest trading partner in

the Middle East and North Africa. UAE investments in the US expanded, and prominent US healthcare, education and cultural institutions, such as Cleveland Clinic, New York University and the Guggenheim, established new UAE branches. In addition, the UAE and US governments established a formal Economic Policy Dialogue and cooperated on ways to streamline travel for Emirati nationals between the two countries.

Ambassador Al Otaiba has also led the UAE's significant commitment to philanthropic activities in the US. The program is predicated on preserving and advancing the strong friendship between the UAE and the United States. In 2009, he facilitated a transformational gift from the Government of Abu Dhabi to launch the Sheikh Zayed Institute for Pediatric Surgical Innovation at Children's National Medical Center in Washington, DC, and personally assists Children's National with its fundraising efforts. The Ambassador has also led the UAE's response to the coronavirus pandemic in the US, emphasizing the importance of diplomacy, healthcare policy and the UAE's commitment to protecting the public from the spread of COVID-19. Through innovative community partnerships, the UAE Embassy has already constructed eleven soccer fields around the US to benefit kids in underserved communities. The Community Soccer program will expand further in the coming years.

Under the Ambassador's leadership, the UAE Embassy also provided assistance to aid in the reconstruction and recovery of US communities following natural disasters, including providing significant aid to the states of New Jersey and New York following Hurricane Sandy in 2012, and helping Joplin, Missouri recover after one of the largest tornados ever recorded in US history devastated the town.

Ambassador Al Otaiba also dedicates a great deal of time to promoting inclusion and religious tolerance worldwide. On behalf of the UAE Embassy, he supported 2019's "Year of Tolerance," a UAE movement to encourage peace, respect and acceptance across all cultures and backgrounds. Ambassador Al Otaiba joined the Board of Directors for the Special Olympics and played a key role in the initiative to host the World Games in Abu Dhabi, the first Special Olympics World Games held in the Middle East and North Africa. In addition to advocating for people of determination, his leadership directed the UAE Embassy towards a number of interfaith efforts including a virtual interfaith discussion. In February 2019, he supported Pope Francis' historic visit to the UAE to promote interfaith cooperation and foster peace and goodwill among the followers of the world's religions.

Previously, Ambassador Al Otaiba served for eight years as the Director of International Affairs for the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces, His Highness General Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan. The focus of his portfolio during this time was the strengthening of the UAE's security and economic relations throughout the Middle East region, with the US and other nations. He served as one of the UAE's principal security, anti-terrorism and defense liaisons to other governments, and was heavily involved in diplomatic efforts to improve regional security and defense cooperation. These efforts included working to enhance UAE enforcement of export control laws and policies, and the coordination of counter-proliferation activities with allies.

In recognition of his loyal service to the UAE, and leadership to build closer ties with the US, Ambassador Al Otaiba was promoted to the rank of Minister in October 2017. He will remain in his current role as the UAE's Ambassador to the US.



Ambassador Al Otaiba obtained a degree in international relations from Georgetown University in Washington, DC, after graduating from the Cairo American College. He also attended the Industrial College of the US Armed Forces at the National Defense University in Washington, DC as an International Fellow.

He and his wife Abeer Al Otaiba have two children.

*Embassy of the United Arab Emirates,*

<https://www.uae-embassy.org/services-resources/uae-embassy-consulates/ambassador-yousef-al-otaiba>



**His Excellency Abdulla R. Al Khalifa  
Ambassador of the Kingdom of Bahrain to the  
United States**

On June 23, 2017 His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa issued Royal Decree No. 34/2017 appointing Shaikh Abdulla bin Rashid bin Abdulla Al ~Khalifa as the ambassador of the Kingdom of Bahrain to the United States of America.

#### Education

- Shaikh Abdulla obtained his Bachelor's Degree from Bentley University. He continued his studies at the same university and received a Master in Business Administration. Shaikh Abdulla attained a certificate from the Harvard Kennedy School focusing on "Innovation in Governance" as part of his executive education program. He is currently pursuing a PhD at the International School of Management based in Paris.

#### Professional Career

- Shaikh Abdulla's post-graduate career started at the Royal Court where he worked and oversaw Educational, Medical and Social Affairs.
- He then joined the General Organization for Youth and Sports as the Director of Planning and Follow-up and was later appointed Director of Financial and Human Resources.
- In 2010, he was appointed as Governor of the Southern Governorate of the Kingdom of Bahrain, the largest in size and with the highest potential for development.
- As part of a collaborative effort between the Kingdom of Bahrain and the United States of America, Shaikh Abdulla launched a partnership between the Governorate and the American non-profit organization D.A.R.E. to develop and deploy an anti-violence and anti-addiction program delivered by trained community police officers in local elementary and secondary schools. The initiative would later transform into a national program sponsored by the Kingdom's National Anti- Drug Committee, on which Shaikh Abdulla serves.

- Shaikh Abdulla played an active role in drafting the National Anti-Drug Strategy in conjunction with the regional office of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, which was launched in 2016.

#### Volunteer Work

- Shaikh Abdulla served as a member of the Bahrain Olympic Committee from 2008 and as the Treasurer until 2017.
- When he served as Vice President of the Bahrain Olympic Shooting Federation, Shaikh Abdulla formulated the first women's shooting team, competing in the different disciplines locally and internationally. In 2007, he gained continental support to be elected Vice President of the Asian Shooting Confederation.
- The Bahrain Weightlifting and Bodybuilding Association was another entity that Shaikh Abdulla chaired until his recent appointment. He, once again, gained continental and international support to earn posts as the President of the Asian Bodybuilding Federation and the Vice President of the International Federation for Bodybuilding and Fitness.

#### Honorary Award

- In 2016, His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa AlKhalifa granted Shaikh Abdulla bin Rashed AlKhalifa an Honorary Distinction Award recognizing his gubernatorial achievements and contributions.

#### Stevie Award

- In Oct. 2019 Bahrain Ambassador to the United States, Shaikh Abdullah bin Rashid Al Khalifa, received the 2019 Stevie Award for the personality of the year category, for his role in the founding and development of the of the Maan "Together" program against violence and addiction.

*Embassy of the Kingdom of Bahrain,*

<https://www.mofa.gov.bh/Default.aspx?tabid=7631&language=en-US>