

How Israeli-Emirati Group Sharaka Is Pushing Pakistan to Embrace Israel

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An Emirati-Israeli group brought a delegation to Israel in May that [included](#) Pakistani nationals and Pakistani Americans.

Israel and Pakistan have no formal relations. Every Pakistani passport [bears](#) the inscription, “This passport is valid for all countries of the world except Israel.”

Still, the 15-member delegation appears to be part of an effort to pressure Pakistan into recognizing Israel – something that would violate one of Pakistan’s core political principles since its founding.

Trip to promote Israel

The trip was organized by Sharaka, a shadowy group that says it has offices in the United Arab Emirates and Israel that was formed after the so-called Abraham Accords.

These are the deals brokered by the US between Israel and several Arab states since 2020 – despite the [popular opposition](#) of citizens of those countries to normalizing relations with Tel Aviv.

The Washington-based American Muslim and Multifaith Women’s Empowerment Council (AMMWEC) also helped arrange the junket.

Anila Ali, president of AMMWEC and now a board member of Sharaka, led the delegation.

A Pakistani-born US citizen, Ali describes herself as a “centrist Democrat” who previously served as a delegate to the Democratic National Convention.

She is a long-time defender of Israel who has [repeatedly characterized Palestinians](#) as “terrorists.”

Her organization lists among its “[partners](#)” the US Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Department of Homeland Security, several police departments and Hillel, a national US Jewish organization which [boasts](#) that Israel, an [apartheid state](#), “is at the heart” of all of its work.

While claiming to offer a welcoming home to Jews on American campuses, Hillel [boycotts Jews and non-Jews](#) who disagree with its hardline pro-Israel positions.

AMMWECC also partners with the [Anti-Defamation League](#), an Israel lobby group that plays a major role in attacking and smearing Palestinians and supporters of their rights.

The delegation Ali led met with Israeli President Isaac Herzog, to whom Ali gifted a book written by her father – a biography of Pakistan’s founder Muhammad Ali Jinnah, a staunch opponent of Zionism.

I’m honored to be the first Pakistani & American to present a book, an eyewitness account of the [#Pakistan](#) movement written by my father, Qutubuddin Aziz, to the President of Israel, [@Isaac_Herzog](#). The president’s warmth & grace humbled me. [@ammwecofficial](#) [@sharakango](#) [pic.twitter.com/TY6qe2xRYX](#)

— Anila Ali (@anilaali) [May 12, 2022](#)

“The delegates spoke to the president about their efforts to develop relationships with Israel,” AMMWECC [said](#).

It “was an amazing experience because we haven’t had a group of Pakistani leaders in Israel ever in such scope,” Herzog later [told](#) the World Economic Forum in Davos.

“And that all stemmed from the Abraham Accords, meaning Jew and Muslim can dwell together in the region, of course with Christians who live in the region and Druze and other religions.”

The delegation [went to Israel’s parliament](#), the Knesset, and the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial.

Thank you [@AmbDaniDayan](#) for speaking to our historic American-Pakistani delegation at [@yadvashem](#) [pic.twitter.com/tx07K41kJm](#)

— Sharaka - شراكة (@sharakango) [May 10, 2022](#)

They also visited the al-Aqsa mosque compound in occupied East Jerusalem – a frequent site of attacks by Israeli forces on Palestinian worshippers.

The tour guide who took us to Masjid [#Aqsa](#), Dome of the Rock, Wailing Wall, Church of Holy Sepulcher was a [#Palestinian](#) [#Muslim](#) Arab. Since maj of us were Muslims he’s sharing history. [@sharakango](#) [@ammwecofficial](#) [@VOANews](#) [@washingtonpost](#) [pic.twitter.com/rNqq8K5Cmn](#)

Fury in Pakistan

The trip caused [outrage](#) in Pakistan, where solidarity with Palestine [has always been a foundational principle](#).

The delegation included Pakistani journalist Ahmed Quraishi and Jewish Pakistani [Fishel BenKhalid](#).

Beautiful to see a Pakistani Jew ☆ Fishel BenKhalid [@Jew_Pakistani](#) finally praying at the Western Wall in Jerusalem. This was a dream come true for this man. Religious freedom is a basic right. Good work Pakistan 🇵🇰 , great work [@sharakango](#) and [@ammwecofficial](#) 🇵🇰 [pic.twitter.com/1XbCdRwoYo](#)

— حسن سجواني 🇵🇰 Hassan Sajwani (@HSajwanization) [May 19, 2022](#)

Quraishi was fired from his position at state broadcaster PTV for making the trip.

“Persons indulging in cheap publicity should have thought of their national interests first and last,” PTV [stated](#).

“In lieu of unacceptable actions, Pakistan Television has terminated the contract of an individual who proceeded to travel to a specific country out of his own accord.”

Although Quraishi, who was born and raised in Kuwait, claimed the junket was “private,” [he told](#) Ellie Cohan, a broadcaster and formerly the Trump administration’s deputy special envoy for anti-Semitism, that he hoped the controversy would help persuade his fellow Pakistanis of the case for relations with Israel.

“This is the moment really for us to finally have peace with Israel and deal directly with Israel,” Quraishi said.

Quraishi also revealed himself to be a Muslim Zionist. “As a Muslim, I think we need to own what’s written also in the Quran about the story of Israel and the Israelites and the people of Israel,” he asserted, “and there’s a claim, a very strong one, that the Jewish people have to their historical homeland.”

In a [resolution](#) passed after the trip, the Senate of Pakistan condemned recent [Israeli attacks](#) against worshippers at the al-Aqsa mosque compound in Jerusalem.

And a Pakistani senator [called](#) for the revocation of the citizenship of those who went to Israel.

What is Sharaka?

Sharaka – which means “partnership” in Arabic – also [led](#) a delegation of young Arabs and Muslims to Auschwitz, the site of the World War II German government death camp in Poland earlier this year.

Although it claims to be motivated by pursuing interfaith harmony, Sharaka has the [stated goal](#) of “realizing the tremendous potential of the Abraham Accords.”

Sharaka’s website presents the group as a grassroots, non-governmental initiative “founded by young leaders from Israel and the Gulf in order to turn the vision of people-to-people peace into a reality.”

Sharaka’s Israeli co-founder, Amit Deri, is [also the founder](#) of [Reservists on Duty](#), a group of Israeli soldiers dedicated to combating the Palestinian-led boycott, divestment and sanctions movement – a campaign promoting Palestinian freedom and equality.

David Brog, former executive director of the fanatically anti-Palestinian group Christians United For Israel, and pro-Israel lobbyist Arsen Ostrovsky, are also on Sharaka’s board.

And although Sharaka claims to be nongovernmental, its Emirati co-founder Majid al-Sarrah [says](#) in a Sharaka video promoting Israel that “I consider myself a representative of the Emirati state and its policies.”

The reality is that no such organization would be permitted in the United Arab Emirates – where there is [no freedom of speech or association](#) – without government approval.

Though it solicits donations through its website, Sharaka is silent about where it obtains the substantial funding that would be needed to finance the various delegations it sponsors. Its website provides no information about where the organization is registered.

Sharaka did not respond to a request for comment regarding where it is registered as a nonprofit organization and whether it receives any government funding.

Notably, Jared Kushner, the adviser and son-in-law to President Donald Trump, was [personally present](#) in December when Sharaka signed a cooperation agreement with the Abraham Accords Peace Institute, a US-based group with a similar pro-Israel mission.

Normalization under the banner of religion

The Abraham Accords were brokered by the Trump administration and are supported by the Biden administration to formalize diplomatic relations between Israel and Arab states. They aim to consolidate military, economic and political cooperation between Israel and other local American client regimes while putting an end to the Palestinian national liberation struggle.

These efforts are often marketed as promoting “interfaith” cooperation – relying on the misrepresentation that the violence arising from Israel’s belligerent occupation and colonization of Palestinian land is really rooted in religious strife.

Promoting the myth that Muslim-Jewish disharmony is the root of conflict is a [common tactic](#) used by Israel propagandists.

Similarly, Israel has long promoted the falsehood that commemoration of the German-led European genocide of millions of European Jews during World War II is inextricably linked to the recognition of Israel as a Jewish state.

“Israeli Zionists have appropriated events in Jewish history, including the Holocaust, for

propagandistic purposes to assert their 'right' to Palestine – a land to which they had laid their suspect colonial claim half a century before the genocide,” Columbia University professor [Joseph Massad](#) recently [wrote](#) in relation to the Sharaka-sponsored trip to Auschwitz.

“Palestinians and other Arabs were called upon to accept the linkage between the Holocaust and Israel’s ‘right to exist as a Jewish state’ as a package deal.”

The bid to “engage Palestinians and other Arabs with the history of the Holocaust is an attempt to deflect Palestinian and Arab engagement away from the Zionist Jewish and Israeli present and an attempt to justify Israel’s ongoing crimes against the Palestinian people,” Massad adds.

“Israeli demands that Palestinians and Arabs commemorate the Holocaust are not about the Holocaust at all, but about the other part of the formula, namely recognizing and submitting to Israel’s ‘right to exist’ as a settler-colonial, racist Jewish state,” Massad concludes.

US-Pakistan “reset”

It is clear that bringing Pakistani nationals to Israel is an attempt to push Pakistan – a Muslim state with a population of 220 million people and an arsenal of nuclear weapons – towards recognition of and normalization with Israel.

Indeed, this issue may be at the heart of recent political turmoil in the country. An April no-confidence vote removed Imran Khan as Pakistan’s prime minister.

Analysts [saw](#) Khan’s unwavering solidarity with Palestinians and refusal to warm up to Israel as key motivators for what was effectively a US-backed putsch against him.

Rumors [emerged](#) last year that Saudi Arabia had been pushing Pakistan to normalize relations with Israel after Khan was asked about such pressure in a November 2020 [interview](#) with local broadcaster GNN.

Saudi Arabia is both a key – though informal – ally of Tel Aviv and a [major source](#) of financing for Islamabad.

Pakistani PM Imran Khan being pressured to recognize Israel
pic.twitter.com/6E9gryf5zR

— LifeRacer (@LifeRacer_1) [November 13, 2020](#)

“How much pressure is on you to recognize Israel?” the interviewer [asked](#) the then-prime minister.

“The pressure is because Israel has a big influence on America,” Khan said, adding that this had increased under the Trump administration.

“Now, it was never in our thinking that we can recognize Israel,” Khan said.

He added that since Pakistan’s founding, its policy has been that until Palestinians “get their rights and a just settlement,” there can never be recognition.

Pakistan's refusal to cut ties with Russia following the latter's invasion of Ukraine earlier this year may also explain the American animosity towards Khan.

Khan [went to Moscow](#) just hours after Russian forces entered Ukraine in late February.

Although the visit had been pre-planned, the Pakistani leader [rebuffed Washington's efforts](#) to persuade him to cancel it.

Khan also revealed his willingness to buy Russian gas and grain just as the US and EU were pressuring the rest of the world – [albeit unsuccessfully](#) – to impose sanctions on Moscow.

Following Khan's removal from office, his replacement as prime minister, Shehbaz Sharif, [expressed enthusiasm](#) for "deepening" Pakistan's relationship with the United States.

Imperial courtiers in Washington also view Khan's downfall as a golden opportunity to "reset" the US relationship with Pakistan.

[Writing](#) for the Brookings Institution think tank, CIA veteran Bruce Riedel and Brookings fellow Madiha Afzal denounce Khan as an "anti-American" ideologue who was "leaning away from America toward Russia and China."

Though they acknowledge the [legendary corruption](#) of the Sharif family – Shehbaz's brother Nawaz was prime minister several times before being barred from office due to corruption – Riedel and Afzal view them as "pragmatic men" with whom Washington can do business.

Similarly, pro-Israel Pakistanis may view this moment as a golden opportunity to fulfill the dream of seeing the Israeli flag fluttering over a Zionist embassy in Islamabad.

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Featured image: A delegation including Pakistani nationals visits the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial in May. ([via Twitter](#))

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