

EXCLUSIVE

FOREIGN MINISTER ASHKENAZI TALKS TO *KHALEEJ TIMES*

Sale of F35 fighters to UAE is fine, says Israel



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Israel has no objection to the UAE acquiring the F35 fighter jets, and does not think that it will upset his country's military superiority in the region, Israel's foreign minister has said.

"We are Ok with that. And that is not an impediment or obstacle for the Abraham Accords," Gabi Ashkenazi, Israel's Minister of Foreign Affairs, told *Khaleej Times* in an exclusive interview.

The US has in principle agreed to sell the Lockheed Martin fifth-generation stealth jets that the UAE has long been aspiring to add to its defence arsenal. In a final push to the arms sale, the US

I keep saying that what we are doing with the GCC and other countries in the region is not at the expense of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. We have to solve this conflict. I think what happened with the GCC may even help this opportunity to happen

Gabi Ashkenazi, Israel's Minister of Foreign Affairs

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo tweeted early in November that his administration has notified the Congress of the proposed sale of F35s to the UAE.

The proposed sale includes 50 F35s and accompanying equipment worth \$10.4 billion. If completed, the UAE will be the first Arab country to acquire the advanced fighter jets.



Ashkenazi said Israel has no concerns in the matter as the US government has a "very long and strong commitment" to preserve the Israeli Defence forces' QME (Qualitative Military Edge.)

"And it is a commitment that still exists. I can tell you that after several meetings with the US Defence establishment, we feel that we got the right answer and we are

satisfied with the answers we got."

"And we have to say that the UAE is not our enemy, we are not sharing a border or past hostilities. So, we are OK with that," he added.

Annexation off the table

On September 15 this year, the UAE became the first country followed by Bahrain to normalise relations with Israel. In exchange of the US-brokered peace deal, Israel has agreed to halt annexations in the West Bank in Palestine. When asked whether Israel has put a time-frame on annexations and for Palestinians to come to the negotiating table, the minister said "annexation is off the table".

TURN TO PAGE 8 

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