

## Netanyahu's Visit to Abu Dhabi: The Timing's Implications and the Messages Behind the Denial



The UAE's denial of what the office of Israeli occupation Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had announced regarding a secret visit to Abu Dhabi in recent weeks, at the height of the ongoing war against Iran, sparked a wide wave of debate in political and media circles and opened the door to many questions about the nature of this discrepancy and the political messages and implications it carries.

What is striking in this case is that talk of the visit did not come through media leaks or anonymous sources that could be denied or cast into doubt; rather, it was officially issued by Netanyahu's own office, which gave the Israeli account a considerable degree of seriousness, especially since it is rare for the Israeli government to announce information at this level and then face a direct and rapid denial from an allied state.

In response, the UAE Foreign Ministry moved quickly—within just hours—to issue a statement denying what had been circulated about the visit, stressing that Abu Dhabi's relations with Tel Aviv are “declared relations” established within the framework of the well-known Abraham Accords, and are not based on secrecy or hidden arrangements. It also emphasized that any talk of undeclared meetings or visits does not represent the official position unless issued by the competent Emirati authorities.

This unusual contradiction between the two sides does not appear to be merely a

difference in narratives or in the way events are presented. Rather, it most likely reflects a state of political caution and confusion in managing an extremely complex regional scene, in which each side seeks to employ the narrative in a way that serves its own calculations at a highly sensitive regional moment.

Between the Israeli account and the Emirati denial, the question remains open: did Abu Dhabi actually witness a secret visit by Netanyahu during the war?

### A Dispute Over Timing, Not Substance

It is worth noting that relations between the UAE and Israel have seen unprecedented development in recent years since the signing of the Abraham Accords in 2020. The relationship between the two sides has moved into a deeper and broader phase, based on advanced levels of coordination and understanding across multiple political, security, and economic files, in addition to cooperation on a number of regional and international issues.

From this perspective, the discrepancy surrounding Netanyahu's visit to Abu Dhabi cannot be interpreted as a disagreement over the nature of the relationship or the level of closeness between the two parties. Bilateral relations have for years moved beyond the matter of symbolic visits or protocol meetings and reached more complex and intertwined levels.

Accordingly, the core of the disagreement appears to concern not the substance of the visit or the possibility that it took place, but rather the timing of its announcement and the way it was politically and media-wise presented, especially under an extremely sensitive regional circumstance marked by escalating confrontation with Iran and growing polarization across the region.

In many cases, communications and understandings between states reach advanced levels beyond what is publicly announced, but the nature of some files requires keeping them away from direct media circulation to avoid the political or security repercussions that may result, especially at moments of sharp regional tension such as the current scene.

### What Would Netanyahu's Visit to the UAE Mean at This Time?

If one were to assume—purely for the sake of argument—the truth of the Israeli account that Netanyahu visited the UAE weeks ago to discuss the level of coordination between the two sides in confronting Iran, this would carry extremely sensitive political and security implications. In practical terms, it would mean that Abu Dhabi had moved from the position of a “cautious partner” or a regionally balanced actor to that of a party directly involved in the conflict equation, going far beyond the traditional Gulf approach based on containing escalation and avoiding open involvement in regional confrontations.

In this context, the “Wall Street Journal” linked the issue to a broader context of security and military cooperation between Israel and the UAE during the war period, especially after the UAE was subjected to Iranian attacks and drone strikes. The newspaper spoke of repeated security and intelligence visits by Israeli officials to Abu Dhabi, including secret visits by the head of the Mossad aimed at coordinating security and military files related to developments in the confrontation.

The Israeli account was further reinforced by statements from Netanyahu's former spokesman, Ze'ev Agmon, who said he accompanied the Israeli prime minister during that visit, noting that Netanyahu received what he described as a “royal reception,” and that UAE President Mohammed bin Zayed personally drove him in his private car.

Netanyahu has now publicly revealed what Iran's security services long ago conveyed to our leadership.

Enmity with the Great People of Iran is a foolish gamble. Collusion with Israel in doing so: unforgivable.

Those colluding with Israel to sow division will be held to account.

— Seyed Abbas Araghchi (@araghchi) May 13, 2026

This coincided with what the Israeli Broadcasting Authority reported regarding a visit by the head of Israel's internal security service, the Shin Bet, David Zini, to Abu Dhabi accompanied by a number of security and intelligence leaders in recent weeks, adding a security dimension to the Israeli account that goes beyond the traditional protocol or political character.

In the same context, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said that Tehran was aware of Netanyahu's visit to the UAE and that Iranian intelligence had confirmed it took place, without revealing why this was not officially announced at the time.

When these data points are read together, alongside what was raised about Israel sending air defense systems and operating personnel to the UAE during the military escalation as part of defense cooperation between the two countries, this opens the door to serious questions about the nature of the Emirati role in the war and whether Abu Dhabi has indeed moved from the square of limited political and security coordination to a deeper level of involvement within the camp supporting Israel against Iran.

Undermining the Gulf Narrative and Justifying Iranian Operations

From the first day of the war, the Gulf states adopted a clear political and security approach based on avoiding any slide toward expanding the conflict and

steering clear of any direct involvement in the confrontation, insisting that they are not a party to that equation, despite repeated Iranian attacks targeting some countries in the region. This was rooted in a Gulf conviction that the cost of becoming entangled in the war—politically, security-wise, and economically—would be far greater than any potential gains participation in the conflict might bring.

Within this framework, Saudi Arabia sought from the very first moment to adopt a diplomatic discourse calling for de-escalation and containment, an approach later echoed by Oman and Qatar, and then to varying degrees by Kuwait and Bahrain. By contrast, the UAE appeared relatively more hardline in its rhetoric toward Iran, though this remained within a calculated ceiling focused on denying any direct involvement in the war or any military coordination with either the Israeli or American side, in an effort to refute the Iranian narrative accusing Abu Dhabi of participating in targeting it.

However, recent developments—from talk of Netanyahu's visit to Abu Dhabi, to revelations of visits by Israeli intelligence chiefs, to what has been raised about security and military coordination and the dispatch of Israeli air defense systems with their operating crews to the UAE—place Abu Dhabi before a more complex scene and open the door to questions about how consistent these moves are with the declared Gulf narrative of not becoming involved in the war in any direct way.

What further heightened the sensitivity of this scene was what the UAE Ministry of Defense recently published regarding the presence of an Egyptian air detachment in Abu Dhabi, a step that sparked widespread debate and speculation about the nature of the military movements underway in the region and the possibility that they are linked to war-related defensive arrangements.

In light of these developments, the Iranian narrative appears more capable of politically and media-wise exploiting them, as they give Tehran broader room to justify its military operations against the UAE and some Gulf states as falling within the framework of “self-defense,” rather than as direct targeting of Gulf countries. This represents a real challenge to the Gulf narrative that has sought since the beginning of the war to affirm its neutrality and non-involvement in the confrontation.

### Pushing Toward a Gulf-Iran Confrontation

In a parallel context, another issue emerges that is no less sensitive—and perhaps increasingly worrying within Gulf circles—related to the timing and nature of the leaks being pushed into media circulation amid the war. Days ago, reports circulated claiming that Saudi Arabia had participated in targeting Iranian

sites in late March. These accounts—regardless of their accuracy—carry dangerous implications in terms of reshaping the image of the Gulf within the conflict equation.

Such leaks, which are most likely neither random nor coincidental, gradually contribute to shifting the Gulf states from the position of a “neutral party” or a “cautious observer” to the image of a partner directly or indirectly involved in the war. Such a shift would raise tensions with Iran and increase the likelihood of sliding into a broader Iranian-Gulf confrontation.

The timing of these leaks and the nature of the messages accompanying them also open the door to questions about the parties that stand to benefit from pushing the Gulf toward greater confrontation with Tehran, especially given that many Gulf capitals are aware that widening the circle of regional confrontation ultimately serves the Israeli and American agendas.

#### That Is Why the UAE Issued Its Denial

Fearing the highly sensitive political and security implications that such a visit—if true—might carry, the UAE moved quickly to deny the Israeli account early and clearly, in an attempt to avoid appearing as a party openly aligned in the ongoing war against Iran. A public reception for the Israeli occupation prime minister at this moment would have been interpreted, both popularly and regionally, as a direct alignment with Israel, at a time marked by widespread Arab anger over the Gaza war and the rapidly escalating military tensions in the region.

It appears that the scale of the potential political and media repercussions—whether resulting from confirming the visit or even remaining silent regarding the Israeli announcement of it—was the main driver behind the UAE Foreign Ministry's swift move to deny the account, in an attempt to contain the resulting political cost.

At the Iranian level, cementing the visit narrative, alongside what has been raised about security and military coordination between the two sides, could strengthen Iranian rhetoric that considers Abu Dhabi a direct party to the war, potentially opening the door to further escalation against it. At the Gulf level, confirming such a visit could place the UAE in a position that appears to depart from the broader Gulf approach based on avoiding direct involvement in the conflict, which could be seen as a threat to Gulf security and stability by pushing the region toward greater tension and confrontation with Iranian missiles.

#### But: Why the Israeli Insistence?

Israeli confirmation of that visit was not limited to the statement issued by the prime minister's office alone. It was followed by a series of statements, reports,

and testimonies that sought to cement the Israeli narrative and confirm that the visit had indeed taken place, even speaking about the level of reception Netanyahu received from Mohammed bin Zayed and members of the ruling family, in what appeared to be a direct response to the Emirati denial and an attempt to politically and media-wise embarrass Abu Dhabi.

Here an important question arises: why is Netanyahu's government insisting on confirming the visit in this way despite the regional sensitivity surrounding it? The answer appears tied to a set of political and strategic objectives Israel is seeking to achieve at this time, foremost among them Tel Aviv's attempt to send a clear message that it is not regionally isolated despite the war with Iran, that its relations with a number of Arab capitals remain active and effective, and that channels of political and security coordination have not collapsed despite the military escalation and ongoing war, whether in Iran or earlier in Gaza.

Through this discourse, Netanyahu seeks to counter the narrative that speaks of the erosion of Israel's international and regional standing as a result of his policies, by showing that influential Arab states still maintain relations with Tel Aviv even at the height of regional tension. This gives him broader room to maneuver in the face of international criticism and mounting security pressures.

UAE denies reports of Israeli PM Netanyahu secret visit during war on Iran, after Netanyahu's office described meeting with UAE president as "historic breakthrough" in relations. Mohammad Al-Kassim has more [pic.twitter.com/sSbphPJXlO](https://pic.twitter.com/sSbphPJXlO)

— TRT World Now (@TRTWorldNow) May 14, 2026

Announcing a visit at this level also carries important domestic electoral dimensions for Netanyahu, especially with internal elections approaching, as he seeks to present himself to the Israeli voter as the leader capable of preserving the network of regional alliances, and that influential Arab capitals are still opening up to him despite the war. This is an image of great importance in an electoral battle tied to perceptions of strength, influence, and the ability to manage regional files.

In addition, marketing the existence of coordination with Abu Dhabi during the war gives Netanyahu an opportunity to reinforce his discourse centered on building a "regional axis" against Iran, a discourse that enjoys broad acceptance within currents of the Israeli right that see security alliances with some Arab states as a strategic achievement that must be strengthened and politically exploited.

In this context, Netanyahu's approach appears highly pragmatic, placing his political and electoral interests at the top of his priorities, even if that comes at

the expense of his regional allies. Israel's insistence on confirming the visit, despite the Emirati denial, reflects that Netanyahu's government sees no problem in exposing Abu Dhabi to further—temporary—political embarrassment or pushing it to the forefront of escalation with Iran, so long as that serves its domestic goals.

Conversely, this behavior may carry within it an Israeli attempt to push the UAE toward greater alignment and entrenchment alongside Tel Aviv by deepening the state of political and security friction between it and Tehran, making the cost of retreating from this positioning more difficult in the future, especially amid rising tensions within the regional environment and sensitive relations with parts of the Arab and Gulf neighborhood.

Ultimately, regardless of whether Netanyahu actually made that visit or not, the contradiction between the Israeli and Emirati accounts does not necessarily mean that one side is engaging in direct denial, deception, or lying as much as it reflects a difference in political calculations and in the management of timing and messaging.

Given the advanced and intimate level of relations between Abu Dhabi and Tel Aviv, the disagreement does not appear to concern the essence of the relationship or the limits of coordination, but rather the way it is brought into the open at an extremely sensitive regional moment. Such divergence in narratives does not significantly alter the essence of the scene: relations between the two sides continue on a growing trajectory and have reached high levels of coordination and understanding, making Abu Dhabi closer to a political and security positioning different from the broader Arab narrative, and more inclined to go its own way outside the Arab fold at an exceptionally complex regional moment.