

# Israel Chooses to Normalize Relations with Countries Which Have Directly Supported Terrorism

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*A new agreement of enormous importance to the Middle East has followed Israel's peace deals with Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates - the normalization of relations between Israel and Sudan. The agreement marks a new direction in Israel's normalization with the Arab World, especially since Sudan, a country of 40 million people, was only until very recently "supporting terrorism", including for Al-Qaeda and Hamas.*

The normalization treaty between Israel and Sudan is seen as an electoral blessing for U.S. President Donald Trump who is just days away from the next elections. He will claim credit for "paving the way" for its implementation and promote it as another foreign policy victory.

"The State of Israel and the Republic of Sudan have agreed to make peace," Trump told reporters at the White House Oval Office during a teleconference with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his Sudanese counterpart, Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok.

"Do you think Sleepy Joe could have made this deal, Bibi? Somehow, I don't think so," Trump said to the Israeli prime minister in reference to Democrat Presidential Candidate Joe Biden.

To his disappointment, Netanyahu shunned the obvious electoral ploy and replied: "one thing I can tell you is we appreciate the help for peace from anyone in America." For Israel, this is more than a partisan issue, it is part of a major regional transformation.

The Sudanese government has made it clear that this is not a peace deal but rather Khartoum will seek to normalize relations between the two countries. What has been confirmed is that Israel will provide assistance and private investment in the technological and agricultural sectors in Sudan. This will likely be accepted as the current Sudanese government is struggling to improve the economic situation of the country after coming to power last year when it toppled a decades old military dictatorship.

In addition to U.S. election goals, the deal has geopolitical implications, mainly by deepening Iran's already significant isolation in the region. As Netanyahu hinted: "Iran is unhappy. Hezbollah is unhappy. Hamas is unhappy. But most everybody else is very happy, and they should be, because peace is a good thing." This comment came as Sudan recognized Hezbollah as a terrorist organization.

Sudan has traditionally been one of the strongest supporters of the Palestinian cause. This agreement and other two with Bahrain and the UAE, undermines the historical Arab consensus that normalization with Israel cannot take place until an independent Palestinian

state exists.

The Sudanese normalization with Israel is much more transformative than the peace deals with Bahrain and the UAE. Netanyahu was not exaggerating when he said it is a “new world, and I can’t tell you how — how excited we are for cooperating with everyone, cooperating with Sudan to build a future — a better future for both of us.”

The UAE is a strong regional power that exerts its influence militarily and economically. Bahrain’s normalization with Israel is seen as precursor to Saudi Arabia doing the same eventually when considering Manama’s near reliance on the Saudi Kingdom.

Unlike the UAE and Bahrain, Sudan has been a rogue state for quite some time and is perhaps best known for the genocide in Darfur between 2003 and 2009. Sudan had provided a safe haven for terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaeda and Hamas. To compensate for their role in international terrorism, Sudan has agreed to pay \$335 million to U.S. victims of previous terrorist attacks and their families. This compensation is due to the logistical support Sudan provided Al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden in the late 1990s.

The North African country has sought a more pro-Western orientation with a renewed vigor since the powerful Omar al-Bashir, wanted by the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity, was ousted in a coup last year. Days before the agreement was signed, the Trump administration signed a resignation letter to remove Khartoum from the list of state terrorists.

Traditionally, Israeli relations with Sudan has been hostile. In 1967, shortly after the Israeli victory over the Arabs in the Six Day War, the Arab League announced the Khartoum Resolution. This expressed the will of the Arab states for “no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, no negotiation with it.”

Following this symbolic act, and in retaliation for Sudan’s involvement in the war, the Israeli government began to actively support separatist groups operating in the southern region of Sudan. By providing high-quality weapons and training, Israel helped improve South Sudan’s military to the point where it established an autonomous zone. Israel has also been a staunch supporter of South Sudan’s successful bid for independence, which finally came in 2011.

The South Sudanese government in Juba is concerned that rapprochement between Israel and Khartoum will reduce its traditional proximity to the Jewish State. However, they refrained from acting against normalization because it is a top American project headed by Trump and on the eve of presidential elections. Juba would find it difficult to operate without American and Israeli support. Also, relations between Sudan and South Sudan have improved, and both are more concerned with their own internal affairs than with each other.

The Sudan-Israel agreement is therefore not only a triumph for Israeli foreign policy but also for the U.S. While Israel’s agreements with the UAE and Bahrain only reinforces its existing foreign policy orientation, the Khartoum agreement marks a new direction for a country of 40 million and a step away from a dark past related to fostering terrorism. It also demonstrates that Israel is willing to normalize relations with countries who have directly supported terrorism, which makes this deal more significant than the one with the UAE and Bahrain.

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