



[Sudan Controversially Normalizes Relations with Israel in Exchange for Being Removed from the U.S. List of State Sponsors of Terrorism](#)

Late last week, the announcement was made that Sudan would begin to normalize its relations with Israel, joining the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain as the third Arab country to do so in recent months. Analysts have lamented the problematic workings of the deal whereby Sudanese officials were coerced into the agreement in exchange for being removed from the United States' list of state sponsors of terrorism. The Trump administration has been criticized for politicizing the Middle East peace process in the lead up to an election, taking part in efforts to strike these agreements by whatever means necessary and disregarding the longstanding position which calls for normalization to coincide with fair Israeli concessions to the Palestinians. These aspects, such as Israeli withdrawal from illegally-occupied Palestinian territory, are essential to achieving any genuine progress regarding the Middle East peace process and therefore any normalization agreements that are devoid of these elements will not help to address the core issues at the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Like other general populations in the region, the commitment to a just resolution to the conflict is strong in Sudan, and as such the less than desirable terms of the normalization agreement were met with public protests and opposition.

Trump administration officials have been working to coax Sudan into normalizing relations with Israel for weeks now, as the president is eager to tout these agreements as a foreign policy success in the run up to Tuesday's U.S. election. Sudan had been identified as one of the main potential Arab nations which could agree to do so because of its desire to remove itself from the United States' list of state sponsors of terrorism, a designation it has held since the early 1990s when then-dictator Omar al-Bashir provided safe haven for members of Al Qaeda. Its presence on the list has had a devastatingly negative economic impact on Sudan, and the transitional government that currently oversees the country following the removal of al-Bashir from power has been eager to amend its status. Sudanese officials conceded that this factor played an integral part in their decision, expressing that without normalizing ties with Israel, Sudan would have to wait at least another year to get itself off of the blacklist. Therefore, the blatant effort of U.S. officials under Trump to tie these two components together clearly pressured the Sudanese government to make a deal in this case.

Some of the pro-democracy activists behind the protest movement that led to the overthrowing of despot al-Bashir have condemned the transitional government's decision to normalize ties with Israel, calling it "humiliating for the soul of the Sudanese revolution which itself is aimed at the fight against injustice." Others have pointed out that it contradicts the popular will of the people, who largely empathize with the Palestinians in their struggle for social justice. There is also fear that the agreement will jeopardize the authority of Sudan's transitional government, which is currently a fragile coalition of military and civilian leaders. Additionally, in prior consultations regarding the prospect of a deal, Sudanese Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok himself told U.S. officials that his transitional government did not have the proper mandate to normalize ties and that there was a great risk of civil unrest with such a decision being made at this sensitive time in the country's political history. This is in fact what has happened, and therefore many have rightfully expressed anger with the government for proceeding with the agreement after all.

In taking the course of action that they did, the Sudanese government joins the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain in abandoning deep-seated Arab consensus that any normalization agreement with Israel should be coupled with fair Israeli concessions to the Palestinians. Ultimately, the recent deals entered into by Sudan, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain will only serve to cement Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory and do not promote a meaningful and lasting solution to the issue.