

Iran Denounces Sudan's Normalization Agreement As Paying 'Ransom'

by Hugh Fitzgerald



Tehran appears to be almost as unhinged as the Palestinians in its reaction to the normalization agreements that three Arab states – the UAE, Bahrain, and Sudan (once its government approves the deal) – have now made with Israel. Iran's charge of "ransom" is reported on here: "Iran slams Sudan's Israel deal, says it paid 'ransom' to get off terror list," [Times of Israel](#), October 24, 2020:

Iran denounced on Saturday the normalization agreement between Sudan and Israel, saying it was the result of Khartoum paying a "ransom," as Bahrain became the latest Arab country to welcome the announcement of the deal.

“Pay enough ransom, close your eyes to the crimes against Palestinians, then you’ll be taken off the so-called ‘terrorism’ blacklist,” Iran’s Foreign Ministry tweeted. “Obviously, the list is as phony as the US fight against terrorism. Shameful.”

Sudan is not paying “ransom.” It is making a deal – a deal in which it comes out way ahead. For being taken off the list of state sponsors of terrorism will allow Sudan to attract foreign investors who have been reluctant to deal with Khartoum, to receive foreign – especially American – aid, and above all, to be eligible for loans from the IMF, World Bank, and other international financial institutions. And in normalizing relations with Israel, Sudan will benefit from Israeli desires to ensure that “early adopters” of normalization see, in a reasonably short time, clear benefits from taking such a step. In the case of Sudan, Israel is ready to help Sudanese farmers share in its advances in drip irrigation, waste water management, and solar energy – all areas important to those farmers, and in which Israel is a world leader.

Sudan was a staunch ally of Iran until 2016, helping the Islamic Republic smuggle rockets and other weapons to Palestinian terror groups in Gaza. This prompted Israel to repeatedly bomb military facilities in Sudan, according to foreign reports....

Iran is miffed because Sudan will no longer conceivably serve again as a way station for Iranian weapons being transshipped to terror groups in Gaza. While Sudan stopped such cooperation with Iran in 2016, in Tehran there always remained the hope that such transfers could begin again. It was the coup against Omar al-Bashir in 2019 that definitely dashed Iranian hopes that Sudan would once again collaborate with Tehran. Sudan was not only the land link for delivery of Iranian weapons to

Hamas in Gaza; it also gave members of Hamas refuge. Most devastatingly, it provided Osama bin Laden with a home and secure headquarters in the very years when he planned the bombing of the American embassies in Tanzania and Kenya. But since the overthrow of Omar al-Bashir, Sudan has ended all support for Hamas, as it had previously stopped support for remnants of Al Qaeda. It can no longer be described as a state sponsor of terrorism. Even without its promise of "normalization" of relations with Israel, Sudan deserved to be taken off that list.

In addition to no longer sponsoring any terrorists, which it had already done without needing American prompting, Sudan had to meet another American requirement to be taken off the list: Khartoum promised to, and did, transfer \$335 million to compensate Americans who had been killed or wounded in the Al-Qaeda bombing of U.S. embassies in Tanzania and Kenya in 1998. Was this payment part of the "ransom" Iran says Sudan was forced to pay, or was it, really, a perfectly sensible undertaking, paying in full the amount that was determined to be due to the wounded and to the families of the dead, for the 1998 Embassy bombings in East Africa? Since when did a nation meeting its responsibility, behaving correctly, become "the payment of ransom"?

What must really enrage Iran about this deal is Sudan's commitment to designating Hezbollah, Iran's closest ally, as a terror group. This comes at a very bad time for Hezbollah. Since early 2019, two of the most important European countries, the U.K. and Germany, have banned as a single terrorist entity both the "political" and the "military" wings of Hezbollah, severely constricting its ability to attract recruits and raise money in Europe. The last of the "big three" European powers, France, once a firm holdout on banning Hezbollah, appears to be leaning toward now doing so. President Macron has been outspoken, in his attempts to help Lebanon right itself, in denouncing the role of Hezbollah

which, he has said, cannot be both “an army and a political power.” Macron has become increasingly fed up with the role of Hezbollah in preventing reform in Lebanon. No one should be surprised if France, after the examples of the U.K. and Germany, were soon to ban both wings of the terror organization. And there have been three more blows to Hezbollah since mid-August: both Lithuania and Estonia have banned Hezbollah, leading some observers to predict that the third Baltic state, Latvia, will soon do the same, as will, in the same neighborhood, Finland. In mid-October, Guatemala banned Hezbollah; it has previously been banned by Guatemala’s neighbor, Honduras. Paraguay and Argentina banned Hezbollah last year. Brazil’s President Jair Bolsonaro has now promised to ban the terror group. Hezbollah had had a strong following among the large Lebanese Shi’a community in Latin America, but the recent banning of the group in its entirety by several countries has made recruitment and fundraising more difficult. That fundraising had already been made more onerous a task from the fact that Hezbollah’s largest operation in South America is in Venezuela; that country’s economy has collapsed, making it much harder to raise money among the Shi’a community there. If President Bolsonaro finally makes good on his promise to ban Hezbollah in Brazil, it will be a crushing blow to the terror group in South America.

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas said he “condemns and rejects” the Israel-Sudan agreement.

“No one has the right to speak on behalf of the Palestinian people and the Palestinian cause,” the statement from Abbas’s office said.

But Sudan was not claiming the “right to speak on behalf of the Palestinian people.” It said nothing about the Palestinians at all. It is only doing what the UAE and Bahrain have done, which is to promote their own national interests, and not to allow the Palestinians to block their agendas. It

is the Palestinians, in fact, who claim the “right to speak on behalf of all the Arabs” when anything supposedly affecting the Palestinians is brought up. It is this presumption that they, the Palestinians, should have their *diktats* obeyed by the other Arabs that has so infuriated the UAE and Bahrain, and may now, one hopes, infuriate the Sudan.

The Hamas terror group, which rules the Gaza Strip, also condemned the deal as a “political sin” that harms both Palestinians and Sudanese.

The deal with Sudan will include aid and investment from Israel, particularly in technology and agriculture, along with further debt relief. It comes as Sudan and its transitional government teeter on the edge. Thousands have protested in the country’s capital Khartoum and other regions in recent days over dire economic conditions.

How does this deal harm the “Palestinians”? They are harmed only in the sense that, in failing to stop the Sudan from promoting its own interests, they point up their current political weakness, show the world that they are no longer at the center of Arab concerns and can be safely ignored.

And how does this deal harm the Sudanese, as Hamas as claimed? Sudan is removed from the list of state sponsors of terrorism, which will be of terrific economic benefit. Its removal from that list will now encourage foreign investment in the country, turn on the spigot of foreign – especially American – aid, and again give Khartoum access to loans from the IMF, the World Bank, and other financial institutions. What could be more valuable for Khartoum?

Furthermore, the Sudanese will now have a beneficent economic partner in Israel, which is eager to show the “early adopters” of normalization that they made the right choice. Israel, as the original Start-Up Nation, famously offers cooperation in high tech, but while that kind of cooperation is of some value

to Khartoum, what Sudan now needs the most help in is agriculture. Israel happens to be a world leader in three areas – drip irrigation, wastewater management, and solar energy – that are of vital importance to Sudanese farmers. One can expect immediate benefits to Khartoum from Israelis ready to share their advances and their expertise, just as soon as the agreement is ratified by Sudan.

Israel has a major stake in making sure the “normalization” agreements pay off for the Arab states that have been willing to engage in such a hopeful fashion with the Jewish state. We’ve already seen the astonishing results involving Israel and the UAE – the agreements between Emirati and Israeli investors, businessmen, entrepreneurs, marketers, with more such agreements announced almost daily.

Iran can bluster and curse, but what it describes, and decries, as the payment of “ransom,” is nothing more than a sensible business deal, in which Khartoum comes out way ahead. The economic benefits are entirely on its side. The U.S., in removing Sudan from the list of state sponsors of terrorism, gives Sudan much-needed access to IMF and World Bank loans, to American foreign aid, and to foreign investors. For its part, Israel will now provide Sudan with the economic benefit of its expertise in industry and, especially in agriculture, in exchange not for an economic benefit of its own, but for the political benefit of having established normal relations with yet another Arab state. For Israel, continuing to punch holes in its isolation in the region, country by country, it is well worth the price.

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