

The Trump Administration's Geopolitical Hat Trick

by Hugh Fitzgerald



Sudan has become the third Arab country to agree to normalize relations with Israel. The Palestinians are most unhappy: “Palestinians condemn ‘shameful’ Israel-Sudan accord,” by Khaled Abu Toameh and Celia Jean, [Jerusalem Post](#), October 24, 2020:

The Palestinian Authority said on Friday that it “condemns and rejects” the normalization of relations between Arab countries and Israel.

A statement by the PA presidency in Ramallah said that normalization with Israel is in violation of the Arab summit

resolutions and the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative....

Friday's statement by the PA, however, did not accuse Sudan of betraying the Palestinians or stabbing the Palestinian people in the back, as was the case with the UAE and Bahrain.

Mahmoud Abbas has apparently figured out that the curses and insults that he and his cronies flung at the UAE and Bahrain when they normalized relations with Israel, did the Palestinians no good, but merely inflamed passions against them. With the Sudan, they're trying a different, more-in-sorrow approach: How can you do this to us? Don't you feel our pain?

"No one has the right to speak on behalf of the Palestinian people and the Palestinian issue," the statement added. "The path to a just and comprehensive peace should be based on international law and legitimacy so as to end the Israeli occupation of the land of the State of Palestine and achieve independence for the Palestinian people in their state, with East Jerusalem as its capital, on the 1967 borders. The Palestinian leadership will take the necessary decisions to protect the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people."

But Sudan did not arrogate to itself the "right to speak on behalf of the Palestinian people and the Palestinian issue." It said nothing at all about the "Palestinians" in its agreement to normalize relations with Israel. It was only addressing, and promoting in two ways, its own national interest. First, to obtain this agreement, the U.S. has removed the Sudan from its list of state sponsors of terrorism. That will give it access to foreign investors, and to loans from the World Bank, the IMF, and other institutions. Second, Israel will be eager to prove to the Sudan that it made the right choice, by helping it where it most could use Israeli help: in agriculture. Israel is a world leader in drip irrigation, in wastewater management, and in solar energy, all

of which could be of great help to Sudanese farmers.

While not in the official PA statement, Wasel Abu Youssef from the Palestinian Liberation Front, a small faction in the Palestinian Liberation Organization, said that Sudan joining “others who normalized ties with the state of the Israeli occupation represents a new stab in the back of the Palestinian people and a betrayal of the just Palestinian cause.”

“A new stab in the back”? Oh dear. It sounds as if Wasel Abu Youssef of the PLF did not get the memo from Mahmoud Abbas calling for a kinder, gentler approach to Sudan. This kind of charge only infuriated the UAE and Bahrain when it was made about them by the PA; the Sudanese are just as unlikely to be pleased to be described as back-stabbers. The Palestinians really ought to do a better job of coordinating their responses; this mixed-messaging will never do.

Abbas Zaki, a senior official of the ruling Fatah faction, said that Sudan would not gain anything from the normalization accord with Israel...

“Sudan would not gain anything from the normalization accord”? But Sudan has already gained something. It has been removed from the American list of state sponsors of terrorism; that removal will greatly improve Sudan’s ability to attract foreign investment, and will now enable Sudan to receive loans from the IMF, the World Bank, and other financial institutions that were previously impossible to obtain. And then there is the extensive Israeli aid that will be given to Sudanese farmers, just as soon as the agreement goes into effect. Abbas Zaki is whistling in the dark.

Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri said that the agreement was “not compatible with Sudan’s record of supporting the Palestinians.”

But that “record of supporting the Palestinians” took place under the long and terrible rule of Omar al-Bashir, the dictator of Sudan from 1989 to 2019. Bashir was an ardent supporter of Hamas, allowing it to operate freely in the country. Bashir also gave refuge to Osama bin Laden, who lived securely in the Sudan for four years. The new regime in Sudan wants to end any hint of the country’s previous connection to terrorists; it wants to reconnect with the West, attract investors, and build its economy, especially agriculture. It has gotten nothing from its “record of supporting the Palestinians” except being placed on the list of state sponsors of terror. Now, by normalizing relations with Israel, it has already been taken off that list, allowing it to attract investors, be again eligible for foreign aid, and be able to obtain loans from major financial institutions such as the IMF. Israel is ready to share with Sudanese farmers the benefits of its expertise and advances in at least three key areas – solar energy, drip irrigation, and wastewater management – where it is a world leader.

PIJ [Palestinian Islamic Jihad] spokesman Daoud Shehab accused Sudan of presenting Israel with a “free gift” in order to appease the US.

“This is a black day in the history of Sudan,” Shehab added. “The agreement jeopardizes Sudan’s future and identity and is a betrayal of the Arabs and Muslims.”

The PIJ official expressed confidence that the Sudanese people would not accept this “betrayal.”...

It is Israel that will be giving gifts to the Sudan, in the form of aid to its agricultural sector. As for Shehab’s claim that the normalization agreement “jeopardizes Sudan’s future and identity,” since when did the Palestinians become the judges as to the “Arab” identity of others? Because the Sudanese are black, is there possibly an attempt here to hint

at doubt as to their “Arab” identity unless they fall back into line with what the Palestinians demand? And what exactly was the “betrayal” by the Sudan? Did it owe the Palestinians anything? Have the Palestinians ever done anything for the Sudan, other than land the country on the list of state sponsors of terrorism?

There is certainly domestic opposition in the Sudan to this new agreement. But the opponents of normalization surely know that the Sudanese quid for that significant American quo was Sudan’s agreeing to normalize relations with Israel. And if they are willing to “give peace a chance,” they will find the new connection with Israel will pay ample dividends, for the Israelis want to make sure that the “early adopters” of normalization realize economic benefits quickly. In the case of Sudan, as bears repeating, that means Israeli help to Sudanese farmers, mainly by sharing Israeli advances in drip irrigation, in waste water management, and in solar energy.

Commending the agreement from the Arab world was Egypt’s President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who tweeted that he welcomed the joint efforts of all three states involved in the agreement.

He added that he also values “all efforts aimed at achieving regional stability and peace.”...

El-Sisi has for a long time been cooperating with Israel on security matters, especially against Jihadis in the Sinai and, naturally, against the Muslim Brotherhood that is the sworn enemy of his regime. He previously praised both the UAE and Bahrain for their normalization agreements with Israel. It is not surprising, but is still heartening, that the most populous Arab state, and Sudan’s immediate northern neighbor, has come out foursquare for the agreement.

The Palestinian Arabs continue to believe that they should have a veto power over the policy toward Israel of all the

other Arabs. They seek to deny the Arab states the possibility of making their own arrangements with Israel, arrangements that further their own national interests. The UAE and Bahrain dismissed the Palestinian objections, and went ahead in normalizing relations with the Jewish state. They have had only curses and insults heaped on them by the Palestinians, which only makes them more determined to promote both economic and people-to-people ties with the Israelis – “a warm peace.” Meanwhile, the entire nation of Israel seems ready to make sure their new Arab interlocutors benefit from such normalization; Israeli businessmen, entrepreneurs, scientists, academics, and tourists have gone to the UAE and Bahrain, while Emiratis and Bahrainis are doing the same in the Jewish state. And now, to complete the Trump Administration’s geopolitical hat trick, Sudan has just become the third Arab state to announce its intention to normalize relations with Israel. Abbas rages in Ramallah, for he can do no other, and the caravan moves on.

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