



[El Al Flight is Criticized for Politicizing the Middle East Peace Process Ahead of the Upcoming U.S. Presidential Election](#)

Earlier this week, an El Al flight travelled from Israel to the United Arab Emirates as the Trump administration seeks to cement and tout the normalization of relations between the two countries as a foreign policy win in the lead up to the upcoming U.S. presidential election in November. The recently announced agreement disregards the longstanding regional position that calls for normalized relations with Israel which coincide with its withdrawal from illegally-occupied Palestinian territory and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, and thus critics have denounced it and the subsequent moves to formalize it as a blatant attempt to politicize the Middle East peace process during an election year. In fact, Morocco refused to normalize their relations with Israel for these very reasons, lack of fair concessions to the Palestinians and timing, as the country has a history of avoiding partisan gestures during U.S. election cycles. Furthermore, in meetings with Trump administration officials this week, leaders from both Saudi Arabia and Bahrain also expressed that they would not normalize relations with Israel until the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. Due to the politicization of the El Al flight, it has also been condemned for being a cynical use of American taxpayer money.

Even the name of the plane itself was not free from controversy as well. Kiryat Gat, the Israeli city after which the plane is named for, was constructed in the 1950s on the foundations of two ethnically cleansed Palestinian villages. As a result, observers were quick to point out the ironic nature of the word “peace” being written in the three languages of Arabic, English, and Hebrew on a plane which carried the name of a municipality with such a destructive past. On various social media platforms like Twitter, Palestinians shared their personal connections to the historical villages and expressed outrage at the chosen name for the flight.

One of the aspects of the trip that highlights the suspicious manner in which it is being used for election-related purposes is the aim that it will lead towards a signing ceremony in Washington D.C. between Israeli and Emirati officials. President Trump’s potential use of the White House as a staging venue for such a gathering is problematic, as it has the clear purpose of providing his administration with a foreign policy boost ahead of the upcoming presidential election in November. As we draw closer to the election, the Trump administration has clearly tried to ramp up its efforts to coax other Arab nations into normalizing their relations with Israel, as was demonstrated by Secretary of State Pompeo’s controversial recent trips across the Middle East last week. Following this week’s trip to the United Arab Emirates, President Trump’s son-in-law and adviser Jared Kushner flew to Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar to continue the attempted push for normalization with Israel.

Ultimately, the normalization of relations between Arab countries and Israel is something that should be achieved apolitically, with the implementation of regionally agreed upon actions being the endgame, not an administration’s re-election bid. Therefore, the important consideration and question is on what terms is the agreement being made under, and in the case of the Abraham Accord between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, the respective governments are warming relations with each other in a way that allows Israel to continue its oppressive policies against the Palestinians. As such, Palestinians have unsurprisingly reprimanded the agreement, saying that it undermines their efforts for an independent state because it rewards the incumbent Israeli government with normalization despite no meaningful changes to the status quo in the illegally-occupied West Bank. Simply put, the Abraham Accord and the spectacles made towards officially formalizing it can be boiled down to a beneficiary deal for the parties involved rather than an actual achievement towards lasting peace in the region. Israel receives an additional source of regional normalization, the UAE’s financial and technological hubs get a boost from open ties, and an American president faced with an upcoming election gets to proclaim his role as peacemaker in the Middle East.