



## Morocco Controversially Normalizes Relations with Israel in Exchange for the U.S. Recognizing Its Sovereignty Over the Western Sahara

Morocco has controversially agreed to normalize its relations with Israel in exchange for U.S. recognition of its sovereignty over the Western Sahara, after President Trump announced the United States would break from international norm to do so. Western Sahara's population of roughly 400,000 people have long fought for independence and the international community has refrained from recognizing Morocco's claim to sovereignty there. Thus, foreign policy analysts lament that the Trump administration used the move as a tool to coerce Morocco into normalization, similarly to the type of strategy that was also utilized to broker the recent agreement between Sudan and Israel. Like other Arab nations, the majority of Moroccans oppose normalization without fair Israeli concessions to the Palestinians. As such, in the immediate aftermath of the deal being announced, thousands of Moroccans descended on parliament in Rabat to protest.

Morocco became the fourth Arab country to normalize relations with Israel, following the lead of the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Sudan. Regional analysts and activists involved with the protection of human rights in Palestine have condemned the normalization deals as harmful to the chances of long-term peace in the region. This is in keeping with the Trump administration's regional foreign policy decisions since 2016, where Israel has been the beneficiary of biased policies due to domestic political considerations. In addition to the normalization agreements with Arab states, President Trump moved the American Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, phased the Palestinian Authority out of peace negotiations, reduced aid to Palestine, and formally recognized illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank.

In exchange for Moroccan normalization with Israel, President Trump broke with longstanding international tradition and U.S. policy in recognizing Moroccan sovereignty over the Western Sahara. The United States became the only Western nation to recognize Morocco's authority in the region, which remains fiercely disputed by the indigenous population. Morocco has put forward a plan that would see the population of Western Sahara given autonomy despite the territory being part of Morocco. There are also thought to be significant energy and mineral deposits off the coast of the Western Sahara, which could have played into the Trump administration's decision to recognize Moroccan sovereignty there.

Despite the agreement with Israel, Morocco's King Mohammed VI reaffirmed his commitment to securing a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, experts have concluded that normalizing relations with Israel further complicates the possibility of a legitimate Palestinian state in the future. Other nations, such as Saudi Arabia, have refused to normalize ties with Israel based on this premise and have argued that the only way to achieve sustainable peace is through a 2002 plan that designates an independent Palestinian state in return for full normalization with Israel from all Arab nations.

The thousands of Moroccan activists and demonstrators who protested against the terms of the normalization deal were showing solidarity with Palestinians and rejecting the establishment of diplomatic ties with Israel over the country's human rights record. Activists also claimed that the heavy-handed tactics used by police to break up the protests showed that the deal was implemented without the will of the general population being taken into consideration.