

# Sudanese-Israeli Normalization with a Popular Flavor

by [Areig Elhag \(/experts/areig-elhag\)](#)

Nov 4, 2020

Also available in

[العربية \(/ar/policy-analysis/ttby-swdany-asrayly-bnkht-shbyt\)](#)

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Areig Elhag \(/experts/areig-elhag\)](#)

Areig Elhag is a contributor from Sudan. She is a journalist and researcher in international relations and national security.



Brief Analysis

Sudan's inclusion on the terrorism list has ended after President Trump signed an order to remove Sudan from the State Department's list of state sponsors of terrorism on October 23, 2020. That decision followed Sudan's formal agreement to take steps towards normalization with Israel in the wake of four-way talks between Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, the Chairman of the Sovereignty Council, Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and U.S. President Donald Trump.

In September 2020, the Trump administration pressured Congress to pass sovereign immunity legislation—**opposed by two members of the Democratic Party (O)**, Chuck Schumer and Bob Menendez—by which Sudan would become immune from any charges associated with the terrorism crimes of the former regime. However, it would not be immune under other laws in the future, such as the Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act and the Magnitsky Act.

The U.S. government handled the issue of normalization between Sudan and Israel with keen interest, with some describing it as extreme pressure from the U.S. administration to make Sudan accept normalization in exchange for its removal from the U.S. State sponsor of terrorism list. The Hamdok government objected to this condition at first, justifying its refusal by saying that it “does not have a mandate to decide on normalization with Israel.” Although the government of Sudan was forced to say yes to its three “no’s” (i.e., no to peace with Israel, no to recognition of Israel, and no to negotiations with Israel), as the designated Foreign Minister, Omar Qamar al-Din confirmed in a televised interview, saying that the government of Sudan **objects**

**([https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/head-of-sudans-largest-party-slams-recognizing-israel/2020/10/24/ec7735e6-15f5-11eb-a258-614acf2b906d\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/head-of-sudans-largest-party-slams-recognizing-israel/2020/10/24/ec7735e6-15f5-11eb-a258-614acf2b906d_story.html))** to the major pressure to pursue normalization, the **government soon discussed mandating**

**([https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/head-of-sudans-largest-party-slams-recognizing-israel/2020/10/24/ec7735e6-15f5-11eb-a258-614acf2b906d\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/head-of-sudans-largest-party-slams-recognizing-israel/2020/10/24/ec7735e6-15f5-11eb-a258-614acf2b906d_story.html))** the as-yet unelected parliament to decide on a vote regarding Khartoum's future relationship with Tel Aviv.

Despite the many stances and the bungling within the Sudanese government, Sudan was trying to take advantage of

Trump and Netanyahu's urgent desire to include Sudan in the Deal of the Century. The purpose of the U.S.-sponsored visit of Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, the Chairman of the Sovereignty Council, to the Emirates last month, accompanied by a delegation including Minister of Justice Nasr al-Din Abdel Bari, was to negotiate with the Israeli side on the issue of normalization in exchange for removing Sudan from the state sponsors of terrorism list, as well as to obtain economic assistance from the UAE.

Sudan is aware that normalization with Israel and removal from the state sponsors of terrorism list will lead to new avenues for economic aid and investment in Sudan, helping to revive a Sudanese economy that is on the brink of the abyss. The deteriorating economic situation in Sudan has weakened the Sudanese government and provoked anger in the Sudanese street, with protesters coming out on October 21 to demand the resignation of the government.

In September, Sudan experienced the **worst floods in decades (<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/9/25/over-800000-affected-in-sudan-flooding-un>)**, affecting nearly 800,000 Sudanese, killing more than 120 people, displacing thousands of families, and destroying farm land. Prior to the floods, the Coronavirus pandemic caused a deteriorating situation such that food and medical aid from neighboring countries and friends could not be found. The fallout from the pandemic included the resignation of the Minister of Health, Akram Eltom, in July. Naturally, this weakness is threatening the transitional phase, including the elections due to be held in 2022. Thus, there is an urgent need to inject intensive economic support into building and reforming the economy and supporting the transitional phase, the failure of which means the country will slide into conflict and revert to a dictatorship.

In regards to domestic reactions to normalization, the home front is divided over relations with Israel between those in support and those against. The Forces of Freedom and Change, the main backer of the Hamdok government, are split over the issue of normalization with Israel. The Communist Party has rejected normalization, along with a breakaway group from the Sudanese Professionals Association with a socialist background, the Ba'ath Party has withdrawn its support from the transitional authority, and the Islamic Umma Party, the most powerful political party, opposes peace with Israel. Sadiq al-Mahdi, a former Prime Minister and the leader of the Umma Party, released a **statement (<https://www.geeskaafrika.com/sudan-umma-party-rejects-normalization-with-israel/>)** threatening to withdraw support from transitional period institutions, saying that "the transitional governing institutions have no mandate to make any decision on contentious issues such as establishing relations with Israel" and stressing that establishing relations with "the apartheid state" [Israel] is similar to its establishing relations with apartheid South Africa before liberation. The position of the Umma Party, the Communist Party, and the Ba'ath Party has been against normalization with Israel since the beginning of the negotiations and the al-Burhan-Netanyahu talks in **Entebbe (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/sudan-israel-relations-democratic-transition-normalization>)** last February.

Social media users in Sudan have addressed the issue of normalization with Israel and its feasibility, but it appears that those opposing normalization have not been able to provide much explanation as to why normalization would damage Sudan as a sovereign state. It also appears that the Sudanese street is not very openly concerned about normalization—Khartoum did not witness any protests against normalization. Nonetheless, the public's quiet acceptance could change if normalization does not accompany improvements in the economic situation, seeing as economic development is the current justification for normalization.

On the other hand, the pro-normalization side includes the Revolutionary Front, Democratic Unionist Party, Sudanese Congress Party, a splinter of the Umma party led by Mubarak al-Fadel al-Mahdi, and the Sudanese Professionals Association. The Sudanese Congress Party issued a statement **describing what happened as a historic victory**, with an emphasis on supporting the right of the Palestinians to establish their independent state based on United Nations resolutions.

What makes the agreement between Sudan and Israel different and important is the presence of a civil base

welcoming of and ready to engage in civil relations with Israel, something that is lacking in other Israeli peace agreements in the region. Thus, we can say that the other agreements were formal ones between Israel and the top of the political hierarchy in those countries and lacked a popular base of support. That popular base does exist in Sudan. For example, a Sudanese businessman named Abu al-Qassem Bartoum helped pay the costs for a **scheduled trip to Israel (<https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/sudanese-businessman-organises-ice-breaker-israel-trip/ar-BB1a4QCz>)** with 40 compatriots to break the ice between the two peoples and attempt to build friendships with the other side. In addition, the establishment of a number of popular initiatives for friendships between Sudanese and Israelis indicates **that al-Bashir's hardline anti-U.S. and anti-Israel rule has caused the Sudanese street to consider turning a new page in the modern history of Sudan, based on rejection of all of al-Bashir's domestic and foreign policies.** ()

In this phase, Sudan is seeking to benefit from normalization, emerge from economic distress, and establish democracy. These are the goals of the Hamdok government and his political and popular supporters. If the United States and Israel succeed in supporting Sudan and making a difference at this critical stage in its history, Sudan will become a model for peace in the region that motivates other countries to join the deal. ❖

---

## RECOMMENDED

---



BRIEF ANALYSIS

### [Iran Takes Next Steps on Rocket Technology](#)

Feb 11, 2022

◆  
Farzin Nadimi

(/policy-analysis/iran-takes-next-steps-rocket-technology)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

### [Saudi Arabia Adjusts Its History, Diminishing the Role of Wahhabism](#)

Feb 11, 2022

◆  
Simon Henderson

(/policy-analysis/saudi-arabia-adjusts-its-history-diminishing-role-wahhabism)



ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

## [Podcast: Breaking Hezbollah's Golden Rule](#)

Feb 9, 2022



Matthew Levitt

[\(/policy-analysis/podcast-breaking-hezbollahs-golden-rule\)](#)