

Is Sudan Next?

by Hugh Fitzgerald



Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, chief of Sudan's Sovereignty Council

After the United Arab Emirates' agreement both to recognize Israel and to normalize relations with it, there has been much excited talk about which Arab state would be the first to follow suit. Bahrain, Oman, Sudan, Morocco have all been mentioned. In mid-August, most bets were on Bahrain, or seemed to be; a week later, and suddenly Sudan has become the favorite.

[Here](#) is the latest on the Sudan's prospects:

Sudan's Foreign Ministry said the African country intended to sign a peace accord with Israel, following the normalization deal reached by the Jewish state and the United Arab Emirates last week.

"The Emirates' move is a brave and bold step and contributes to putting the Arab world on the right track to build peace in the region and to build sustainable peace," Sudanese

Foreign Ministry spokesman Haydar Sadig told Reuters on Tuesday.

“I cannot deny that there are contacts between Sudan and Israel,” he continued.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu later praised the announcement, saying, “Israel, Sudan and the entire region will benefit from the peace agreement and will be able – together – to build a better future for all peoples of the region. We will do whatever is necessary to turn vision into reality.”

Israel has cultivated relations with Sudan in recent years, and Netanyahu met with Sudanese leader Abdel Fattah al-Burhan during a trip to Uganda in February.

Israel has cultivated relations with Sudan not “in recent years,” but only since the dictator Omar el-Bashir was deposed in April 2019. It was after Bashir’s overthrow that Netanyahu had his meeting in Uganda on February 3, 2020 with the chief of Sudan’s Sovereignty Council, Abdel Fattah al-Burhan.

Immediately after the meeting, the Prime Minister’s Office said in a statement: “It has been agreed to start a cooperation that will lead to normalizing the ties between the countries.”

Why the Sudan? Under the dictator Omar el-Bashir, Sudan seemed irredeemably hostile to Israel. El-Bashir offered refuge, secure training facilities, and weapons to Hamas fighters. He beamingly played host to Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal. Indeed, under El-Bashir, the Sudan was Hamas’s best friend in Africa. And Israel treated it accordingly. On October 23, 2012, Israel bombed the Yarmouk munitions factory and warehouse in Khartoum, where weapons were being held for shipment to Hamas. El-Bashir, undeterred, continued to support Hamas until his

last days in power. But once he was overthrown, Khartoum did a complete turn, and that is when talks with Israel began to be held in secret about the establishment of diplomatic relations and, more recently, about “normalization” of those ties.

We know what Israel would derive from such ties: ever greater legitimacy among the Arab and Muslim peoples, while the Palestinians, visibly unable to prevent Arab states from making their own arrangements with Israel, would be seen as being on a losing side of their own stubborn making. Each new Arab state that follows the UAE’s lead makes it easier for the next one to go and do likewise. If Sudan is next, Bahrain – or Oman, or Morocco – can’t be far behind. A string of diplomatic victories for Israel, and diplomatic defeats for the increasingly frantic Palestinian Authority, with Mahmoud Abbas beside himself with fury.

What’s in it for the Sudan? First, there is a powerful message that such normalization with Israel would send to the West and especially to the United States. The days of a Hamas-supporting Sudan, eager to supply weapons to the terror group, are well and truly over. Sudan is ready to again be a part of the comity of nations. And what better way to demonstrate it than by normalizing relations with the Jewish state?

What else does the Sudan hope for? It is badly in need of both aid and investment, and the two most likely sources of such funds are Western countries and the rich Gulf Arab states – especially Saudi Arabia and the UAE – which withheld aid when the Sudan was supporting Hamas. Now there is a chance – with Israel embraced and Hamas rebuffed – that those spigots will reopen.

And then there is Israel itself, which can directly help the Sudan with its most pressing problem: the agricultural sector. Israel is a world leader in water use, especially in novel irrigation techniques that make maximum use of water resources by drip irrigation that can now pinpoint not just individual

plants, but particular parts of those plants. Israel is also a leader in desalination, another possible source of water for parched Sudanese farms. Israel now gets 55 percent of its domestic water from desalination, and that has helped to turn one of the world's driest countries into the unlikeliest of water giants. Israeli scientists have also come up with Watergen, a machine that manages to "squeeze" water out of the circumambient air. Finally, Israel leads the world in wastewater management.. Nearly 90% of wastewater in Israel is treated for reuse, most of it in agricultural irrigation. Some of it is also sufficiently purified to be potable. All of Israel's technical prowess in this area could be of great benefit to Sudanese farmers.

When the South Sudan declared its independence, the Sudan itself lost most of its oilfields, which were located in the south. For the Sudan, a poor country, fossil fuels are expensive. Israel is a leader in solar energy, and can be expected to share its knowledge and advances in this field with the Sudan. After all, Israel is eager to demonstrate to the Arab states the many benefits they can derive from good relations with the Jewish state. It has a stake in their economic success. Now is Israel's chance to show what it can do for the UAE, and Sudan, and Bahrain, and for any other Arab state now willing to give not only peace, but normalization, a chance.

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