

# The Israel-Morocco Accord: Trump Gives the Nobel Peace Prize Committee Another Reason to Honor Him

by Hugh Fitzgerald



**Moroccan King Mohammed VI**

**Donald Trump has just given** the Nobel Peace Prize Committee another reason for awarding him that prize. After the U.A.E., Bahrain, and Sudan, a fourth Arab state – Morocco – has now announced it has agreed to normalize ties with Israel. “Morocco, Israel normalize ties as US recognizes Western Sahara,” by Omri Nahmias, Lahav Harkov, and Greer Fay Cashman, [here](#).

And Israel, in turn, helped Morocco. Mossad helped persuade a Moroccan dissident, Mehdi Ben Barka, to come to a rendezvous in Paris, where he was then kidnapped outside a famous

restaurant, the Brasserie Lipp, by two French policemen working for the Moroccans; Ben Barka was never seen again.

*Netanyahu, however, focused on the many Israelis of Moroccan origin and not security matters in his remarks on normalization, which he called a "great light of peace" in honor of Hanukkah.*

***"Everyone knows the warm ties of the kings of Morocco and the Moroccan people to the Jewish community there," Netanyahu said. "Hundreds of thousands of Jews moved to Israel from Morocco and they form a living bridge between the people of Morocco and Israel. This solid base is the foundation on which we build this peace."***

*Trump's proclamation said the US "affirms, as stated by previous Administrations, its support for Morocco's autonomy proposal as the only basis for a just and lasting solution to the dispute over the Western Sahara territory...An independent Sahrawi State is not a realistic option for resolving the conflict and that genuine autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty is the only feasible solution."*

*"Therefore, as of today, the United States recognizes Moroccan sovereignty over the entire Western Sahara territory."*

*The White House also urged the sides in the Western Sahara conflict to return to the negotiating table under the framework of Morocco's plan for autonomy for the Sahrawi people of Western Sahara.*

*Morocco's sovereignty over the Western Sahara has been recognized by the U.S., but it is expected that the Sahrawi people will enjoy a large degree of autonomy. We will see if that promise by Morocco is borne out. And we still don't know if that "autonomy" will give the Sahrawis a fair share of the revenues from the huge deposits of phosphates in the Western Sahara.*

*The US plans to open a consulate in Dakhla, in Western Sahara, which the Moroccan Foreign Ministry said would have “a primarily economic vocation.”*

*Kushner said recognizing Moroccan sovereignty in the Western Sahara was “something that seemed inevitable at this point; is something that we think advances the region and helps bring more clarity to where things are going.”*

***Following the announcement, President Trump spoke with King Mohammed VI of Morocco. According to a readout provided by the White House, “the leaders discussed cooperation in the fight against the coronavirus, ways to minimize its economic impact, and common interests in critical regional issues.”***

*During the conversation the King agreed to resume diplomatic relations between Morocco and Israel and expand economic and cultural cooperation to advance regional stability,” the White House said in a statement.*

***King Mohammed told Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in a phone call on Thursday that Rabat stands by a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a royal court statement said.***

Like the U.A.E. and Bahrain, Morocco has reaffirmed the boilerplate commitment to a “two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.” And like them, it has no plans to help the Palestinians beyond that recital; it has decided to promote its own national interests – its claim to the Western Sahara – over the demands of the Palestinians, who have been “betrayed” and “stabbed in the back” yet again, this time by Rabat’s willingness to normalize ties with the Jewish state.

*The king added that negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians are the only way to reach a final, lasting and comprehensive solution to the conflict.*

*King Mohammed also highlighted his commitment to a two-state solution, as well as the importance of freedom of worship in Jerusalem, during his conversation with Trump.*

Of course, there is now total “freedom of worship” in Jerusalem, as there was not during the 19 years of the Jordanian occupation. The only worshippers who may feel they don’t have “freedom of worship” are the Muslims from countries that have normalized ties with Israel, who have been cursed and threatened at Al-Aqsa mosque by angry Palestinians.

*The White House, not Netanyahu, informed Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi and Defense Minister Benny Gantz of the developments with Morocco several weeks before they were made public, contrary to the UAE, Bahrain and Sudan deals in which they were told at the last minute.*

*Ashkenazi said that “today is another great day for Israeli diplomacy, a day of light befitting the holiday of Hanukkah.*

And Ashkenazi should have mentioned that it’s also “another great day for American diplomacy,” but since he didn’t, we’ll do it for him.

*“Renewing relations between Israel and the Kingdom of Morocco is an important part of the Abraham Accords that reflects the deep and longstanding friendship between the nations. I call on more nations to join the Abraham Accords’ circle,” he stated...*

It isn’t true that there has been a “deep and longstanding friendship between the nations” (of Israel and Morocco), but I suppose it’s a useful fiction. Ashkenazi might have said that “we all hope that this historic agreement will lead to a deep and longstanding friendship between our nations.” That would have been dignified, hopeful, and true.

Approximately one million Israelis are wholly or partly descended from Moroccan Jews, the second largest group in Israel after the Jews from Russia. They are well disposed to their original home and to the present King Mohammed VI, who like his father, King Hassan II, is known for his sympathetic interest and affection for the Jews in the Kingdom.

Furthermore, King Mohammed VI's senior advisor is Andre Azoulay, a Moroccan Jew who previously advised Mohammed's father, King Hassan II.

The Moroccan king's philosemitism, beside his interest in Moroccan Jews, is expressed in the distinct absence of any animus toward Israel, a view which he surely inherited from his father. His father hosted two Israeli prime ministers, Rabin and Peres, in Morocco, and remained friendly with Rabin until the end of the Israeli's life, and with Peres until the end of his own, even when Israel and the Palestinians in Gaza were engaged in war. King Hassan II's father, King Mohammed V, blocked efforts by Vichy officials to impose anti-Jewish measures on Morocco and deport the country's 250,000 Jews to their deaths in Europe, and is revered for that by Morocco's Jews and their descendants in Israel.

King Hassan has been celebrating Morocco's Jewish heritage in recent years, and bringing other Moroccans along with him. "Judaism is part of Moroccan identity," said Zhor Rehihi, Muslim conservator at the Museum of Moroccan Judaism in Casablanca, the first of its kind in the Arab world. "We still have a Jewish memory, even though the Jews left." No other Arab state has devoted so much attention to its former Jewish population.

This normalization of relations with a fourth Arab state has gone off without a hitch. The sky has not fallen. The Palestinian Authority, still smarting from its treatment by the Arab League (that refused to denounce the U.A.E. and Bahrain), has been quiet. Morocco's decision to normalize

relations is likely to increase the pressure on other Arab and Muslim states to follow suit. Each additional Arab state that normalizes relations with Israel increases the gravitational pull on the others that have not. They've all taken note of the granting of national wishes – the F-35 sale for the U.A.E., the recognition of its sovereignty over the Western Sahara for Morocco, the removal of economic sanctions for the Sudan – by the American government. What would it take to get Oman to follow suit? Or Mauritania? Or Tunisia? And what of Saudi Arabia, whose King Salman thinks one way about normalization of ties with Israel (which he insists can only happen after a Palestinian state in the “pre-1967 lines” is created), and his son the Crown Prince, who doesn't give a damn about the Palestinians, quite another?

Another coup for President Trump, in achieving yet another astonishment, but will the Biden transition team be willing to recognize this feat of diplomatic finesse? I have my doubts.

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