

Normalization of Sudanese and Israeli Relations: From Hostility to Pragmatic Conciliation

Sudan ve İsrail İlişkilerinin Normalleşmesi: Düşmanlıktan Pragmatik Uzlaşya

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ABSTRACT	ÖZET
<p>This article examines the elements of continuity and rupture in the relations between Sudan and Israel. The relations between the two countries, which were historically seen as hostile to each other, seem to have turned into cooperation after the coup d'etat in Sudan. Especially, the fact that Sudan has been among the countries that got closer to Israel as part of Abraham Accords makes it important to explain the transformation in Sudanese foreign policy. At this juncture, this study presents an interrogatory perspective, with reference particularly to developments between the parties from the independence of the country to the end of Omar al-Bashir's period, for better understanding the recent Sudan-Israeli relations. Within this scope, through process tracing, the study examines, first, the period before independence when Sudan established contacts with Israel, and then the Abboud regime period in which the ties were severed, and finally the rule of Nimeiry when relations continued implicitly. The article explains both the reasons for the tensions in the relationship between Sudan and Israel after Islamists came to power in 1989 as well as the defining features of the post-Bashir period. Although the so-called Sudan's normalization of relations with Israel, that started after Bashir was ousted from power in April 2019, is viewed as a dramatic change in Sudan's foreign policy by many analysts, this study argues that to the contrary, the recent developments indicate a continuity in the historical relationship.</p>	<p>Bu makale Sudan ve İsrail ilişkilerindeki süreklilikleri ve değişimleri incelemektedir. Tarihsel olarak birbirine düşman olarak görülen iki ülke arasındaki ilişkiler Sudan'da gerçekleşen darbeden sonra iş birliğine dönüşmüş görünmektedir. Özellikle Abraham Anlaşmaları kapsamında Sudan'ın İsrail ile yakınlaşan ülkeler arasında kendisine yer bulması, Sudan dış politikasındaki dönüşümün açıklanmasını önemli kılmaktadır. Bu amaçla, bu çalışma özellikle son dönem Sudan-İsrail ilişkilerinin daha iyi anlaşılabilmesi amacıyla, ülkenin bağımsızlığından Ömer el Beşir döneminin sonuna kadar geçen sürede taraflar arasında yaşanan gelişmelere de atıfla, sorgulayıcı bir perspektif sunmaktadır. Bu kapsamda, çalışmada, süreç takibi yöntemiyle, Sudan'ın bağımsızlık öncesi İsrail'le kurduğu irtibat ve bağımsızlık sonrasında ilişkilerin koptuğu Abboud ve üstü örtülü devam ettirildiği Numeyri dönemlerinin kırılmaları mercek altına alınmaktadır. 1989'da İslamcıların iktidara gelmesiyle başka bir boyut kazanan ilişkilerde taraflar arasında yaşanan gerilimlerin sebepleri izah edilmekte ve Beşir sonrası dönemin belirleyici özellikleri üzerinde durulmaktadır. Çalışma, Beşir'in Nisan 2019'da iktidarı kaybetmesiyle başlayan Sudan-İsrail normalleşme sürecinin dış politikada her ne kadar bir değişim olarak görülse de aslında süreklilik olduğu tezini ileri sürmektedir.</p>
<p>Keywords Sudan, Israel, Omar al-Bashir, Coup, Normalization</p>	<p>Anahtar Kelimeler Sudan, İsrail, Ömer el Beşir, Darbe, Normalleşme</p>

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1. Introduction

Sudan is a country that has developed close relations with Islamic states and movements in the region over the last thirty years when the Muslim Brotherhood was in power under the leadership of Omar al-Bashir. Undoubtedly, one of the consequences of this position has been the tense relations between Sudan and Israel. As a matter of fact, Sudan had established a very close cooperative relationship with Israel in the years surrounding its independence from Egypt. The relations between these countries were interrupted during the rule of Abboud, but gained momentum again during Nimeiry period and were maintained, albeit implicitly. The 1989 coup and the Islamist takeover of Sudanese government led to growing tensions with Israel with occasional eruption of conflicts between them. In the last 10 years of this thirty-year period, discourses of relative rapprochement have been produced between the parties. However, the rhetoric of rapprochement voiced by some segments of Sudanese society and politicians did not produce any results at the official level. It was not until the ouster of Omar al-Bashir that Sudan and Israel could develop closer relations and cooperate once again. Sudan started to normalize relations with Israel under the new order established after Bashir in 2019 through the country's inclusion in the Abraham Accord process alongside the UAE and Bahrain, even though domestically it has been experiencing a chaotic process. This new order not only provides mutual benefits to both parties, but also has consequences for other actors in the region.

The results of Sudan-Israeli normalization will affect the Arab-Israeli conflict. Unlike the UAE and Bahrain, which have both recently signed agreements with Israel, Sudan had actively taken part in the anti-Israeli front in the Arab-Israeli wars, especially in 1948 and 1967. After Bashir came to power, Sudan supported HAMAS, the most important resistance group fighting against Israel, and moved closer to Iran. On the other hand, Israel had been supporting separatist movements in the south of the country since their emergence and increased these efforts during Bashir's rule, which resulted in the independence of South Sudan in 2011. Therefore, rapprochement between Sudan and Israel has the potential to influence actors beyond just these two countries.

This study analyzes chronologically the political history of Sudan's relations with Israel from pre-independence to the present, using process-tracing method, in order to understand the current state of the relationship between these two countries. The study consists of five main parts. The first part explains Sudan's contacts with Israel while still part of Egypt. The subsequent two parts discuss the developments during Abboud's rule, when relations with Israel were completely severed, and during Nimeiry's rule, when relations continued implicitly. The fourth part focuses on the Bashir period when major changes were apparent to relations. The last part explains how post-Bashir order was established and the change in power in Sudan affected the relations between the two countries. Although the so-called Sudan's normalization of relations with Israel that started after Bashir was ousted from power in April 2019 is viewed as a dramatic change in Sudan's foreign policy by many analysts, this study argues that to the contrary, the recent developments actually point to the continuities.

2. Pre-independence Sudan and Israel Relations

After being established on Palestinian lands in 1948, Israel did not refrain from making strategic moves in order to control countries which were of great importance for Arab national security

and unity. Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Iraq, which are geographically close to Palestine, were at the forefront of these countries. In addition, Sudan, which was part of Egypt at that time but would soon gain its independence, was at the center of these strategies.

The importance Israel attaches to Sudan dates back to the early 1950s, or in other words, before Sudan became independent in 1956. Firstly, Israel sent a trade delegation of 50 people to Khartoum, the capital of Sudan, in 1951 for the purpose of purchasing Sudanese products and importing them to Israel (Amer, 2011, p. 67). With this contact, Israel had the opportunity to communicate with various Sudanese political parties and organizations, especially the Sudanese Ummah Party, which opposed the unification project with Egypt.⁶⁰

The most important development after the first contact took place in London. In 1954, the Sudanese Ummah Party sent a delegation to London to get British support for the independence of Sudan. The British Intelligence communicated to the delegation that they should seek help from Israel (Yunif, 1994, p. 99). Thereupon, a meeting was held in Britain on June 17, 1954 with Sadiq al-Mahdi⁶¹, one of the founders of the Umma Party⁶² (حزب الأمة) (Holt and Daly, 2000, pp. 126-127), Mohammed Ahmed Omar, the general secretary and also the spokesperson of the party, and the Secretary Mordechai Gazit of the Israeli Embassy in London in attendance. The financing of the Ummah Party by Israel in case Egypt intervenes in Sudan and the positions of other Sudanese parties, which did not see Egypt as an enemy and wanted the unity of the Nile valley between Egypt and Sudan, were discussed at the meeting. Through its cooperation with Sudan, Israel, which was surrounded by hostile Arab states at that time, was able to break the blockade around it and opened commercial channels (Haj Hamd, 1996, pp. 486-492). The two sides agreed to continue negotiations (Black & Morris, 1992, p. 163)⁶³ with Mohammed Ahmed Omar designated as the liaison between the Ummah Party and Israel (Taqrir Sha, 1956).

⁶⁰ In July 1952, when King Farouk was dethroned and a republic was established in Egypt with the “Free Officers (الضباط الأحرار) Coup”, Egypt renounced all its claims on Sudan. The first agreement that would ensure Sudan’s full independence in 1956 was signed on February 12, 1953. Then the Sudanese Legislative Assembly (المجلس الوطني) enacted a self-government law and the institutionalization process of independent Sudan began (Holt & Daly, 2000, pp. 136-141). After this date, Sudan and Israel relations were conducted between two sovereign states.

⁶¹ Sadiq al-Mahdi is the eldest son of Abd al-Rahman al-Mahdi, son of Imam al-Mahdi, the founder of the “Mahdi State”, and also the chairman of the Ummah Party since 1949.

⁶² The Ummah Party was founded in 1945 by Abdurrahman al-Mahdi, the leader of the Ansar Movement, who supported Imam al-Mahdi. The party is a political formation supported by the Mahdi Movement that emerged in Sudan in the 19th century and the followers of Imam Muhammad Ahmed al-Mahdi, the founder of the “Mahdi State”, which was accepted as the first nation-state in Sudan's history between 1885-1898. The Umma Party is one of the largest political parties in Sudan today (Holt & Daly, 2000, pp. 126-127).

⁶³ Ian Black and Benny Morris, the authors of the book “The Secret Wars of Israeli Intelligence” published in 1991, referred to other secret negotiations that took place in Istanbul in 1955 after the London meetings, between Josh Palmon, the Arab Affairs Advisor to the Israeli cabinet, and some leaders of the Ummah Party, whose names are not explicitly mentioned in the book. According to the authors, the representatives of the Ummah Party opposed Egypt’s influence in Sudan and expressed their desire to improve their relations with Israel during these meetings. Moreover, Israel's second Prime Minister, Moshe Sharett (1954-1955), confirms the Istanbul talks in his diaries when mentioning Mohammed Ahmed Omar, the representative of the Ummah Party in these talks. After the Istanbul talks, Josh Palmon invited Omar to visit Israel and meet with David Ben Gurion in August 1956.

While there were many communications between Israel and the Ummah Party between 1954 and 1956, the first high-level contact between them was the meeting of Sudanese Prime Minister Abdullah Khalil with Israeli Foreign Minister Golda Meir in August 1957 at the Athenee Hotel in Paris (Amer, 2011, p. 68). This high-level visit, which took place following the independence of Sudan, is actually the last meeting between these two countries prior to the severance of relations as a result of the 1958 coup. It should be noted that during this time, the contacts and meetings held by both the Ummah Party and the Sudanese Prime Minister were never formalized (Black & Morris, 1992, p. 163).

3. Sudan-Israel Relations during Ibrahim Abboud's rule

With the coup in 1958, Ibrahim Abboud started to follow a traditional and Arab-centered policy, and thus, Sudan started to get closer to Egypt, which was one of the biggest threats for Israel at that time. An important consequence of Abboud's military coup is that Sudan cut off relations with Israel. Abboud's government lasted until 1964 when it was overthrown by the great popular uprising. During his six-year rule, Abboud suspended the constitution, dissolved the parliament and all political parties, pursued a program of Islamization and Arabization of South Sudan, banned missionary activities in the south expelling the missionaries from the country. These latter two decisions especially led to the expansion of the rebellion in the south which transformed into an armed uprising against the government. As a result of Abboud regime's policies, the 'southern' problem took on an international character with pressure from western countries. Abboud government, which was in favor of cutting contact with Israel, made a radical decision regarding relations with Israel by enacting a law of boycott of Israel⁶⁴ in July 1958 - the improvement of Sudan's relations with Egypt in this period should also be taken into account - and a period of hostility started which would last for about 10 years (Abushok, 2021, p. 349).

Many legal regulations came into force with the law on boycotting Israel. Accordingly, individuals were prohibited from, either personally or through mediators, entering into any agreements with any organization or resident of Israel; with organizations or individuals known to be Israeli or working for Israel. The ban also covered the entry or trade of Israeli products transported into Sudan, whether purchased directly or indirectly from Israel. Article 7 of the relevant law stipulated "10 years" of imprisonment or a fine or a combination of both for those who violate the law (Qaanun Muqataeat 'Israyil Lisanat 1958).

Israel, which was subjected to a large-scale boycott by Sudan as of 1958, changed its strategy dramatically and started to establish much closer relations with the rebel groups in South Sudan and to train them militarily in their guerilla war against the Sudanese army (Hermann, 2011). In this context, Israel tried to strengthen its relations with the Anya-Nya⁶⁵ (Wells & Samuel, 1993) movement, the strongest militia force, by educating its leaders and members (Hermann, 2011). In addition, since then, many South Sudanese leaders and activists started to meet with Israeli officials from time to time in Israeli embassies in Uganda, Ethiopia, Chad, Congo and Kenya (Beshir, 1975, pp. 91-92; Niblock, 1987, pp. 274-277).

⁶⁴ After the 2019 military coup, the law on boycotting Israel was abolished.

⁶⁵ The Anya-Nya Movement is an army of South Sudanese rebels formed during the First Sudanese Civil War that broke out in 1955. The word Anya-Nya means "snake venom" in the Madi language spoken in Sudan and Uganda (Wells & Samuel, 1993).

One of the most important developments that accelerated Israel's support to the militias in the south of Sudan was the appointment of Uri Lubrani, who was Israel's ambassador to Uganda from 1965 to 1966, as ambassador of Ethiopia in 1967. During the five years Lubrani served, between 1967 and 1972, the transfer of officers and soldiers from the Israeli Special Forces (paratroopers) to the region to train the armed movements in South Sudan and join the war with them took place through Ethiopia. Some sources state that more than 2,000 of the armed movement in South Sudan was trained by Israel. Israeli soldiers helped to expand the scope of the war in the south by providing training on organization, armament and war preparation, and especially in martial arts (Al-Taweel, 2012, p. 236).

During this period, Sudan and its capital, Khartoum, were at the center of regional anti-Israel action. After the Six-Day War in June 1967, in which the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Golan and Sinai were occupied by Israel, the 4th Arab League Summit was held in Khartoum between 29 August-1 September 1967. Khartoum stood out as the capital of Three No's: "No to peace with Israel, no to recognition of Israel, no to negotiation with Israel!" (Zieve, 2012). All Arab countries except Syria, which called for a people's liberation war against Israel, attended the summit. The 1967 Khartoum Summit is one of the "most powerful" in the history of the Arab League summits. In addition to the adoption of a clear stance against Israel by all Arab states, the summit also managed to create an atmosphere of 'Serious Arab Reconciliation' between the two most important Arab leaders of the time, Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser and Saudi King Faisal (Aljazeera, 2016).

4. Sudan-Israel Relations during the rule of Jaafar Muhammad an-Nimeiry

The year 1969 is a critical date for Sudan when Jaafar Muhammad an-Nimeiry came to power after a military coup⁶⁶. Nimeiry transformed Sudan's domestic politics and well as foreign policy until he was ousted from power in 1985. He ordered all political parties in the country to disband and in 1971 founded the Sudanese Socialist Union and established a one-party state. He also gave autonomy to the southern region in order to solve the long-standing "southern question". Moreover, for the first time since Sudan's independence, Nimeiry signed a peace agreement in 1972 between the north and the south (Khalid, 2000, pp. 159-160)⁶⁷ ending the civil war and beginning 11 years of peace. In fact, this move by Nimeiry nullified the plans of those states, especially of Israel, which were using the problem of the southern Sudan as a tool to weaken the country. The establishment of stability caused dissatisfaction and anxiety in Israel, which sees the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea as the depth of its security strategy.

Israel's support for the Southern Sudan rebel groups decreased after peace was established because of its dissatisfaction with the independence movements' decision to end their armed struggle against the government of Sudan when their demands were met. Israel increased its support to the southern region when the conflict resumed in the early 1980s. Furthermore,

⁶⁶ Between Abboud's resignation in 1964 and Nimeiry-led military coup in 1969, three governments were formed. They are not discussed in this article since there was no structural change in Sudan's relations with Israel during this period.

⁶⁷ The Addis Ababa Agreement, mediated by the World Council of Churches and Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie, was signed in March 1972 at the capital of Ethiopia, between Nimeiry and General Joseph Lago, the leader of the Anya-Nya Movement who later became Vice President of South Sudan). The Addis Ababa Agreement ended the First Sudanese Civil War and was incorporated in the Sudanese Constitution. The period of peace lasted about eleven years and ended in 1983 by the rebellion led by John Garang (Khalid, 2000, pp. 159-160).

Israel began to increase its interference in the domestic affairs of Sudan during the same period. Both during the brief period of peace and in the early 1980s, Israel did not give up its efforts to establish and maintain relations with Nimeiry.

Although there is not much information about the nature of Israel-Sudan relations in this period and how they were established, Yaacov Nimrodi, a senior Mossad official, mentions in his memoirs published under the title "My Life's Journey" that Saudi businessman Adnan Khashoggi was influential in the establishment of relations between Israel and Sudanese President Nimeiry (Namrudi, 2003, p. 521). According to Nimrodi, in 1979 Adnan Khashoggi arranged the meeting between five important Israeli security officials and President Nimeiry in Khartoum, namely; Yaacov Nimrodi, David Kimhi, Al Schweimer, Rahfieh Vardy and Hank Greenspan. Yaacov Nimrodi, who was among the five-person delegation, also states in his memoirs that the main purpose of this visit was to establish economic relations between Israel and Sudan. Nimrodi characterizes their visit as a dream describing how they were hosted by Nimeiry at the palace. Furthermore, it is important to point out that Nimrodi also writes about Nimeiry's desire to establish relations with Israel and his remarks on Sudan's need for Israeli support in order to develop its economy (Namrudi, 2003, p. 515). Shortly after the Israeli delegation returned home, an official and secret meeting was held in New York between Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Yigael Yadin and Sudanese President Nimeiry (Awdah, 2003, p. 65).⁶⁸ The friendly atmosphere of the meeting between these two leaders confirmed the cooperation between Israel and Sudan (Namrudi, 2003, p.515).

The cooperative relations formed between Nimeiry and Israel in the United States⁶⁹ bore fruit when Ethiopian Jews (known as Beta Israel or Falasha⁷⁰), one of the biggest evacuations of modern times, were brought from Ethiopia to Israel via Khartoum (Muhamed, 2017, p. 54-57).⁷¹

Towards the end of the 1970s, Israel made attempts to bring the Falashas to Israel, but the Ethiopian government did not take kindly to the issue, so no results could be obtained. Thereupon, in 1979, Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin requested Egyptian President Anwar Sadat (BBC Arabic, 2019)⁷² to meet with Sudanese President Nimeiry to allow Ethiopian

⁶⁸ It was later revealed that Nimeiry had been an officer involved in the contacts between Sudan and the United States since 1965, and through this role he had at various times made contacts with Israeli officials secretly visiting Sudan.

⁶⁹ Apart from funding the operation to carry Ethiopian Jews to Israel, the United States provided a total of 1.4 billion USD to Sudan, led by Nimeiry between 1977 and 1985 (El Gizouli, 2021).

⁷⁰ The word falasha means 'exiled from one's original place' in Ge'ez, the ancient Semitic language that was spoken in present-day Eritrea and northern Ethiopia, as well as the liturgical language of the Ethiopian Orthodox Monotheistic Church. In addition, the word Falasha is used as a derogatory term in the Amharic language, which is unique to Abyssinia (present-day Ethiopia), meaning "Exiles" or "Foreigners" (Parfitt & Semi, 2005, p. 131); (Dillmann, 1970, p. 1340). The Falashas trace their lineage to the Judah, a follower of Menelik, the legendary son of King Solomon and Makeda, the Queen of Sheba, Makeda. Because they refused to cross the river on the Sabbath, which is considered a day of worship and "rest, quitting work" in Judaism. Thus, Falasha means 'those who refuse to pass' (Friedmann & Santamaria, 1990, p. 58). Today, the Falashas live in Israel with a population of 120,000, which is approximately 85% of their total. The community however is exposed to racism and continues to live under poor economic conditions.

⁷¹ Operation Moses (1984), Operation Sheba (1985) and Operation Solomon (1991) were the secret operations to airlift Ethiopian Jews to Israel.

⁷² Numeiry is one of the few Arab leaders who supported Sadat's rapprochement with Israel. When Egypt was expelled from the Arab League as a result of the peace agreement it signed with Israel in 1979, Sudan was one of the exceptional states that did not break its relations.

Jews to immigrate to Israel via Sudan. Sadat responded positively to Israel's request and met with Nimeiry, who subsequently approved the operations on the condition that they be carried out in complete secrecy.

The migration of Ethiopian Jews to Israel started in 1977 and accelerated after 1979 was carried out in complete secrecy. 'Nkodah' (نقوداه), one of the newspapers published by the Jewish settlers in the West Bank published an article in 1985 about the operation which sparked great debates. The news in the local press was soon carried to the international media and Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres had to hold a press conference to reveal information about the covert Operation Moses to bring Ethiopian Jews to Israel. On January 5, 1985, two days after Shimon Peres' press conference, the Sudan Government, which was in a difficult situation, informed the U.S. administration that it had decided to halt the operation. Approximately 1,000 Falasha Jews remained in Sudan, and in March 1985, as a result of pressure from the U.S., Nimeiry allowed the airlifting of the remaining Falasha Jews to Israel by American planes (Melman & Raviv, 1990, pp. 201-202). With the thought that it would revive the Sudanese economy, Sudan supported the operations in secret in order not to attract the public's reaction, but had to end them following the disclosure. The cost of the operations was approximately 100 million dollars; the United States government paid 15 thousand dollars and the rest of it was paid by American Jewish Communities (Abadi, 1999, p. 26).

The indignation that emerged in a significant part of the society with the disclosure of the operations grew even more when Numeiry met with U.S. President Ronald Reagan in order to bring his country out of the bad economic situation and the IMF demanded structural adjustment to reduce state subsidies. Numeiry regime ended in 1985 as a result popular uprising. At this point, the "smuggling" of Ethiopian Jews via Sudan continued to be one of the important issues of the post-Numeiry period.

After the collapse of the Nimeiry regime in 1985 and the end of the transitional period, Sadiq al- Mahdi won the elections and formed five governments between April 1986 and April 1989. Except for the Government of National Unity, the last one among them, all other governments were overwhelmed with problems and disagreements, and they could not find a way to end the war with South Sudan. The fact that the governments established under the leadership of Mahdi could not find a solution to the chronic problems of the country caused great discontent and unrest among the people. This situation resulted in a military coup by a group in the Sudanese army, which was close to the National Islamic Front led by Hasan al-Turabi, on June 30, 1989. After the coup, Omar al-Bashir took over power in Sudan with an operation that was described as the "National Liberation Revolution" (Abdul Rahman, 2005, p. 242).

5. Sudan-Israel Relations during Omar al-Bashir's rule

It is possible to analyze the Sudan-Israel relations during the rule of Omar al-Bashir around three important issues. The first is Sudan's support of the anti-Israel camp in both bilateral and regional relations with the coming to power of an Islamist government in the country. The second issue is Israel, which has been investing in the southern problem almost since the beginning, encouraging the Southern rebel groups to secede (Hazran, 2020, pp. 396-411),⁷³

⁷³ The support for groups deemed to serve as breakwaters against Arab nationalism has traditionally occupied an important place in Israel's foreign policy. Based on this strategy, Israel that supported the

and the third is the implicit rapprochement attempts between the two sides, especially in the latter years of Bashir regime.

Islamists, who took power in the country with the motto of “National Liberation”, introduced Islamic law (Shariah), to be implemented throughout the country. In addition, anti-American and anti-Western voices grew louder in the country. Sudanese society had been supporting the Palestinian cause economically, politically and armed struggle for a long time. With the change of power in the country, Sudan opened its doors to various Palestinian resistance movements and also offered various scholarship opportunities to Palestinians to study at Sudanese universities. In addition, Bashir’s government hosted many people whom Israel described as “enemy” and even provided weapons and military equipment to these individuals or groups from time to time. Sudan also strengthened its relations with the Iranian regime and Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, who were Israel’s most violent enemies. In addition, Sudan hosted al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden (lived in Sudan from 1990 to 1996), his deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri, as well as Sánchez, nicknamed Carlos the Jackal (Qisat Baye Karlus, 2012)⁷⁴, who had conducted many operations in France and other European countries. Israel viewed Sudan during this period as a base that support Iran’s activities against Israel, as a haven for HAMAS and Islamic Jihad leaders and as a gateway for Iranian arms convoys to Palestinian groups in Sinai and the Gaza Strip (Hamad, 2013, p. 67).

The Sudanese government denied these Israeli allegations. However, Israel carried out numerous military operations in Sudan between 2011 and 2014 based on the above-mentioned allegations and destroyed many important structures. For example, in one of these operations, on April 5, 2011, a Sudanese citizen’s car in Port Sudan, the city on the Red Sea coast, was bombarded by an Israeli drone (Shoval), on the grounds that it was secretly providing weapons to HAMAS. One day after the incident, on April 6, Sudanese authorities accused Israel of carrying out the airstrike. Foreign Minister of the time, Ali Ahmet Karti stated, “We have evidence that the attack was carried out by Israel, we are completely sure of this, but we do not know the reason.” (Albayan, 2011). In such an environment of mutual accusations, Yedioth Ahronoth, one of the best-selling newspapers in Israel, reported that the Israeli army carried out an attack on Sudan (Aljazeera, 2011) and emphasized that the car was carrying a senior HAMAS official. HAMAS vehemently denied the allegation. After the events, the Sudanese Government detained some individuals on arms smuggling charges, but released after a short time due to insufficient evidence.

The most striking one among the operations carried out by Israel against Sudan is undoubtedly the bombing of the Yarmuk Military Industrial Complex in the capital Khartoum by Israeli planes

Maronites in Lebanon, the Druze in Syria and the Kurds in Iraq, aided the rebels in the southern Sudan (Hazran, 2020, pp. 396-411).

⁷⁴ Carlos, whose Spanish name is Ilich Ramírez Sánchez, was born on October 12, 1949 into a wealthy Venezuelan family and was educated in Moscow. Carlos, who took the name Salim Muhammed after converting to Islam, began to fight against Israel in 1975 after undergoing rigorous training in the camps of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Carrying his struggle against Israel to the big cities of the West in the following years, Carlos attacked many banks, associations, newspapers and embassies that had relations with Israel. Carlos, who was declared the most wanted person in the world in 1980, managed to circumvent the CIA, Mossad, Interpol and French intelligence many times. Wanted by Interpol, Carlos was caught in 1994, after a chase that lasted for 25 years, as a result of an operation jointly organized by the French and Sudanese intelligence. After his trial by French judges, which lasted for three years, Carlos was sentenced to life in prison (Qisat Baye Karlus, 2012).

in October 2012 (Abu Amer, 2012). Sudanese Information Minister Ahmed Bilal Osman accused Israel of bombing the complex with four warplanes (Reuters, 2012), but Israel remained silent on this issue. Later, it will be revealed that the factory in Sudan was bombed by Israel on the grounds that it produced the weapons that were smuggled to the Palestinian insurgents in Gaza.

This incident led to tensions between the two countries. Despite denying the allegations, it was a well-known fact that Sudan opened its doors to the Palestinians. Sudan recognized the legitimacy and authority of the Palestine Liberation Organization after the Oslo Agreement. Officially, there was also an old Palestinian embassy in Sudan. For this reason, it did not surprise anyone when HAMAS leader Ismail Haniyeh said on Aljazeera TV based in Qatar that Sudan has been one of the countries that contributed to the strengthening the resistance and embraced it in the past. On the same program, Dore Gold, a former adviser to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, explained how Sudan was supporting HAMAS as follows; “Iran sends its gunships to a port in Sudan, the weapons are sent from this port to the Egyptian border, where the cargo is unloaded and delivered to Gaza.” (Aljazeera, 2020). During this period, Sudan’s direct political support for HAMAS and channeling of weapons from Iran to HAMAS, which also helped Iran evade arms embargo imposed on the country by the West increased Israel’s security concerns. When Amos Gilad, the director of Political-Military Affairs at the Israeli Ministry of Defense, said that Sudan was a dangerous terrorist state and it would take some time to understand the reasons for the attack immediately after the explosions at the ammunition factory, he was most probably pointing to Sudan’s policies in the region (Cherian, 2012).

The second determining factor in the Sudan-Israeli relations under Bashir’s rule is the South Sudan issue. Israel has supported all separatist movements, especially the political parties in the south. Among these movements was the Sudan People’s Liberation Army/Movement the largest and most powerful rebel group in the south, led by Colonel John Garang. In this process, Israel provided not only military but also logistical, medical and food aid to the southern insurgency that would pave the way for the separation of South Sudan from the north.

Especially after 2001, Israel’s assistance to the southern rebels Sudan expanded. A group of Israeli army officers were deployed to the region to train and arm the Sudan People's Liberation Army, fighting against Khartoum under the leadership of John Garang. This move was simultaneous with the declaration of the separatist movement’s wishes to the world public opinion.⁷⁵ Avi Ditchter’s⁷⁶ remarks during a lecture at Israel National Security Research Institute on September 4, 2008, clearly pointed to the underlying reason for Israeli efforts to partition Sudan; that is the likelihood for Sudan to become a powerful actor in the Arab world due to its rich resources, large territory and population (Mansur, 2020).

⁷⁵ Israel's active role has been a factor that further restricted Sudan that had already been experiencing isolation from the world economically since the mid-1990s. Before this date, a bad image was created about Sudan, especially with the southern-oriented efforts of the Israel lobby in the United States. The country was included in the list of states supporting terrorism (1993) and this decision was followed by an economic embargo imposed on the country (1997) (Shaaban, 2012, p. 204).

⁷⁶ Ditchter served as the head of Shin Bet (Israel Security Agency) from 2000 to 2005 and Israel's Minister of Defense from 2006 to 2009.

Israel played an active role in South Sudan's declaration of independence after the results of the referendum held in 2011 was overwhelmingly (% 98.93) in favor of secession from the north and the establishment of a new state. Israel is the fourth country to open a diplomatic mission in South Sudan, after Sudan, Egypt and the United States. Having achieved its goal in Sudan, Israel hosted a large number of Southern Sudanese and organized a celebration attended by 2500 South Sudanese on the official day of secession. At the ceremony, the power and influence of Israel in the new state being formed was emphasized and an announcement was made that South Sudan would start building an army with Israel's support, as an indicator of the solid relations between these two countries (Minshawi, 2014, p.7).

It can be said that Israel sees South Sudan as an important base to consolidate its interests in Africa. The establishment of a new state has the potential to bring Israel closer to more than one Arab country and indirectly lead to its involvement in part of the river Nile.

Apart from South Sudan, Israel was not indifferent to other problematic regions of Sudan. It has established relations with many armed groups in Darfur, Blue Nile and South Kordofan regions over time. Israel has been pursuing a policy of separation of Darfur, a problematic region since 2003, from Sudan. An article by Avi Ditchter published in Israeli newspapers in October 2008 reveals this approach: "Our strategy in South Sudan has succeeded. Much has been achieved in the South. We have a chance to realize this in Darfur as well" (Osama, 2010, p. 121).

While the hostility between Israel and Sudan continues over the support each gives to the other's resistant groups, it is also important to note that Sudan has called for "normalization" of relations with Israel from time to time. For example; Wikileaks published a letter sent by Alberto Fernandez, the U.S. Acting Ambassador to Sudan (2007-2009), to the White House that contained information about his communication with Mustafa Osman Ismail, the adviser to the Sudanese president at the time. Ismail apparently offered his country's cooperation with the United States including normalization of relations with Israel. Ismail told the Charge d'Affaires that if there would be a rapprochement with the US, then the US could help Sudan with the process of normalization with Israel as its closest ally in the region (Radyo Dabanga, 2011).

The same issue was also discussed at the "Sudan's National Dialogue Conference" (2014-2017), which was held with the participation of 116 parties and some Sudanese armed movements at the invitation of President Omar Hassan al-Bashir on January 27, 2014. A member of the Independents Party (حزب المستقلين), an unrepresented and ineffective party in the parliament, submitted a proposal for normalization with Israel⁷⁷. As the majority did not approve of the proposal, it was rejected without a vote (Akhir Lahza Newspaper, 2016a). Shortly after this meeting, then Sudanese Foreign Minister Ibrahim Gandur, in a speech he gave to Sudan's

⁷⁷ During this period, voices of different segments of the society started to be heard on the necessity of getting closer with Israel. In this context, for example, Islamist preacher Mohamed Hashem al-Hakim, affiliated with the University of the Holy Qura'n and the Foundation of Sciences in Wad Medani, stated that although a complete normalization would never be allowed, but Sudan's tactical rapprochement with Israel as a survival strategy would be permissible. The head of the Islamic Center Party, Yousef al-Kuda, took the discussions a step further at that time and argued that it was possible for Israel to enter a full normalization process, as Jordan and Egypt had done previous (Rosenhart, 2021).

Akhir Lahza newspaper in January 2016, said that his country might consider normalizing its relations with Israel (Akhir Lahza Newspaper, 2016b).

In August 2017, then Sudan Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Investment Mubarak Al-Fadil Al-Mahdi stated in an interview with Sudaniya 24 TV channel broadcasting in Khartoum that normalization with Israel would be possible if it was in the interests of the Sudanese people. He stated that Sudan should be able to publicly discuss this issue considering that even HAMAS buys electricity from Israel and there are some Palestinians who sympathize with Israel (Ida2at, 2018). Israel welcomed this message by al-Mahdi. For example, Israeli Communications Minister Ayoob Kara said that Israel was pleased to hear Sudanese Minister of Investment's statements "in support of peace". Similarly, Haretz Newspaper characterized al-Mahdi's statement as "extraordinary", because it was made by a senior minister of the Sudanese Government that does not even recognize Israel and congratulated him (Almersadnet, 2017).

The messages of normalization by both parties resulted in a meeting between Israeli Ambassador and senior Sudanese officials in 2017. In 2019, Director of Mossad, Yossi Cohen met with the Sudanese Intelligence Chief on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference. These steps taken by the Sudanese government have brought about the suspension of some economic sanctions of the United States against Sudan (Fuda, 2020).

It should be noted that the European states did not take kindly to the rapprochement between Sudan and the USA/Israel. They rejected the request of Israel and insisted that Omar al-Bashir be tried by the International Criminal Court (ICC) (Aawsat Newspaper, 2020).⁷⁸

The significance of the extent to which Sudan made efforts towards normalization of relations with Israel becomes more apparent when one considers that it was once considered taboo to talk about normalization with Israel, large protests condemning Israel's attacks on Lebanon and Gaza on the streets of Khartoum, and sit-ins in front of the American Embassy were frequent occurrences. However, it is important to keep in mind that the demands and theses of normalization with Israel did not become effective, in other words official until the 2019 military coup.

6. The Abraham Accords and the post-coup Sudan's relations with Israel

Aside from the issue of rapprochement with Israel, which provoked public reaction, the fact that the deteriorating economic conditions of the country was not resolved, resulted in different segments of the society in opposition to the regime to start demonstrations and protests which continued for about four months and culminated in the massive protest in front of the headquarters of the armed forces starting on April 6, 2019 (Abuzhouk, 2021, p. 349), and finally, on April 11, 2019, General Awad Mohammed Ahmed bin Awf addressed the nation on Sudanese State Television, stating the removal of President Omar al-Bashir from office by the military, which ended his 30 year-rule.

After the 2019 military coup d'etat, the Transitional Military Council was established, a state of emergency was declared and a two-year transition period was declared. The leaders of the National Congress Party (حزب المؤتمر الوطني) and the Muslim Brotherhood, including Omar al-Bashir and other prominent members, such as Ali Osman Taha, Nafi Ali Nafi, Avad Ahmed al-

⁷⁸ An arrest warrant was issued for Bashir in 2009 on charges of war crimes and genocide by the ICC.

Jaz, Ali al-Hac and Ibrahim al-Senusi, of the “Revolutionary Command Council for National Liberation” (مجلس قيادة الثورة) who took part in the 1989 military coup d’etat were arrested. Following these arrests, on 29 November 2019, the National Congress Party was dissolved by the Sudanese Sovereignty Council (مجلس السيادة السوداني) (BBC News, 2019), all its property was confiscated and all of the party members were banned from participating in the elections for ten years (Anadolu Agency, 2019).

After Omar al-Bashir was removed from power and the National Congress Party was banned, there were a number of failed military coups attempts by Bashir supporters. Political stability was not achieved and protests continued. With the latest coup in October 2021, the military continues to hold its grip on power in Sudan.

While protests continued in the country after Bashir was overthrown, Sudan accelerated the process of normalizing relations with Israel. Sudan’s agreement to normalize ties with Israel differs from the cases of the UAE and Bahrain, because of the country’s active involvement in the 1948 and 1967 Arab-Israeli wars by sending troops to the frontlines (Think Drishtii, n.d.). When the UAE and Bahrain officially signed the Abraham Accords Declaration committing to establishing diplomatic ties and normalize relations with Israel at a ceremony held at the White House with the participation of US President Donald Trump on September 15, 2020, all eyes were on the region. The question many observers had in mind was whether other countries would join this wave of normalization, which has the potential to affect the historical course of the Arab-Israeli conflict in the region. This process was accelerated with the decision by Sudan and then Morocco, shortly after the UAE and Bahrain, to sign onto the Abraham Accords. Thus, these four countries joined the only other Arab states, Egypt and Jordan, that had signed peace treaties with Israel previously, officially recognizing Israel and commit to normalizing relations.

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The normalization agreement between Sudan and Israel was signed on January 6, 2021 in the capital Khartoum at a ceremony attended by the U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, Sudanese Finance Minister Hibe Muhammed Ali and Sudanese Justice Minister Nasredeen Abdulbari. Shortly before the agreement, the U.S. Treasury Secretary Mnuchin and Sudanese Finance Minister Grant Muhammed Ali signed a memorandum of understanding to write off Sudan’s \$1 billion debt to the World Bank. In addition, by signing the Abraham Accord, Sudan gained access to 1 billion dollars in annual funding from the World Bank for the first time in 27 years. Minister of Justice Abdulbari, who attended the meeting, heralded the agreement as an “important step” by saying “It confirms our belief that peace strengthens relations and interests between people” (DW, 2021). The gains from the signing of the normalization agreement between the two countries were not limited to these.

A few days after the deal was concluded, Israeli Intelligence Chief Eli Cohen went to Khartoum with a delegation to meet with Al-Burhan and other military officials. In this meeting, the Sudanese Defense Minister presented his guest a replica M-16 rifle produced at the Yarmouk Military Complex, a weapons manufacturing facility in Khartoum, owned by the state. This site was heavily damaged by an airstrike in 2012 and the Sudanese officials had blamed Israel for carrying out the attack at the time. This instance is a good depiction of the direction of change in the relationship between these two countries (Al-Jizouli, 2021, p.6).

Thanks to this agreement, Israel eliminated one of the countries where it confronted Islamism and that supported HAMAS. Moreover, for those who travel between Israel and distant countries of the African continent and South America, Sudan is considered to be safest and least costly stopover destination on their trip. Thus, we can say that Israel has gained an important position in civil aviation (Şarkul Avsat, 2020). Furthermore, since Sudan’s diplomatic

recognition of Israel and normalization of relations were carried out when the wind in the region, was blowing in the direction reconciliation with Israel, Sudan did not face serious criticism and loss of reputation, and this rapprochement was even tacitly supported by the Arab League. In addition to these, many mutual agreements have been made between the two countries in order to develop economic cooperation and increase the trade volume. After all these steps, it becomes more meaningful for Netanyahu to make a statement that the embargo on Sudan will be lifted and Sudan will take its place among modern states (Awawda, 2021, p. 45).

The last contact between the two countries in January 2022 actually revealed the importance of Sudan for Israel once again. When the US delegation was visiting Sudan to discuss ways to end the political conflict and a reinstatement of a civilian regime, Israel also sent a delegation to the country and held meetings behind closed doors. This shows that Israel's efforts to secure the rapprochement between the two countries was based on its security concerns above all other considerations (Muhammed Ali, 2022).

7. Conclusion

History of Sudan-Israel relations has unique characteristics. Unlike some countries in the region that have been either completely friendly or completely hostile to Israel since its establishment, Sudan was either cooperative with or antagonistic to Israel depending on the individual who seized power in the country. The contacts established by Sudan in the pre-independence period, when it was part of Egypt, and at a time when all Arab countries took action against Israel, are quite remarkable. During this period, Sudan sought the support of Israel and the United States in order to gain its independence from Egypt. After gaining independence in 1956, it can be said that Sudan has a good relationship with Israel. However, this relationship changed completely when Abboud seized power in 1958. After Abboud gained control in the country, there was a major break in the foreign policy vision of the country and an embargo and a boycott began to be applied to Israel. So much so that during this period, laws were passed that stipulated fines and/or imprisonment for those who came into contact with Israeli institutions or individuals. During the Nimeiry period, which started shortly after the Abboud regime ended, the relations between the two countries shifted to a different course. In fact, Nimeiry did not normalize diplomatic relations with Israel. However, the two countries relations continued in secret which are evident both in the smuggling of Falashas to Israel and in Nimeiry's contacts with the United States.

The Islamists, who came to power with a military coup in 1989, changed Sudan's foreign policy toward Israel yet again after the severance of relations during Abboud's rule and the covert connections under Nimeiry regime. Bashir supported almost all individuals and organizations fighting against Israel. Most prominent examples are Carlos the Jackal, HAMAS and Hezbollah. Moreover, Bashir also got closer to Israel's regional rival, Iran. Meanwhile, Israel increased its support for the rebel movements in the south to break off from Sudan, and aided in the secession of Southern Sudan from Sudan. The establishment of the independent state of South Sudan provided Israel a great opportunity to further weaken Sudan, a state that supported people or organizations hostile to it, on the one hand; and an entry point to Africa on the other. Thus, Israel has assumed an active role in the region recently following Russia and Turkey.

Despite the fact that Sudan's relations with Israel remained hostile during Bashir's thirty-year rule, it should be noted that the tensions between the two countries began to decrease, especially in the last ten years of his presidency. Ideas about the need for normalization of relations with Israel started to be voiced within the Sudanese society, academic community

and political class more loudly, especially since 2015. However, most probably the fact that the party base and a significant part of the society did not take kindly to the idea of rapprochement hindered an official agreement between the two countries. If the military coup had not been carried out in Sudan, bad economic conditions with heavy foreign debt burden and isolation from the international community would have forced Bashir to enter into a normalization process with both the USA and Israel, perhaps more gradually. Under those conditions, Bashir would have sought alternative solutions to remain in power. For this reason, the normalization experienced after Bashir can actually be interpreted as a continuity rather than a change in foreign policy.

With the new political structure established as a result of Bashir's removal from power, Sudan joined the countries that have normalized diplomatic relations with Israel. This is a great achievement for Israel's fight against political Islam in the region in general and HAMAS in particular. Furthermore, political change in Sudan may enable Israel to take on a more active role in the Horn of Africa and the African continent in the upcoming period. Meanwhile, Sudan is rewarded by the removal from the list of countries that support terrorism and receiving aid and economic support from global actors and institutions. Although the political change in Sudan has created a different equation in the region, the fact that Sudan is the country with the most coup attempts in Africa keeps alive the possibility of a sudden reversal of the wind and shifting the relations between the two countries to a completely different direction.

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