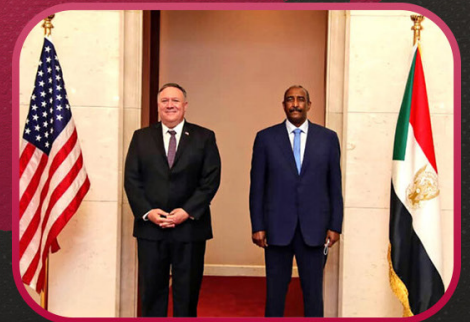


Weekly wire



The MENA Region: Shared Insecurity in the Era of Multipolarity Taskforce

December 25, 2020

## MOROCCO

### **Morocco Signed a Normalization accord with Israel (24.12.2020)**

Morocco's ruling Justice and Development Party released a statement on Thursday, December 24, supporting King Mohammed VI and Prime Minister Saad-Eddine El Othmani over resuming official contacts and diplomatic relations with Israel in exchange for US recognition of Morocco's sovereignty over the Sahara region.

Having rejected any normalization with Israel since its establishment, the Justice and Development Party was subject to outrage within the party and amongst Moroccans who rejected the normalization.

Late King Hassan II is known to have negotiated the peace accords between the Arab states and Israel. Morocco established low-level ties with Israel in 1993 after the signing of the Oslo Accord, but froze its relations after the outbreak of Palestinian intifada (uprising) in 2000. Morocco is the fourth Arab country to normalize relations with Israel this year after the UAE, Bahrain and Sudan.

## LEBANON

### **Israel-Lebanon Maritime Demarcation Negotiations Failed (23.12.2020)**

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has announced that the US mediated maritime demarcation talks between Lebanon and Israel have failed, saying "regrettably, despite goodwill on both sides, the parties remain far apart". Previously, the fourth round of negotiations on the maritime borders between Israel and Lebanon, scheduled on December 2, has been postponed due to a standstill around the conflictual 860 square kilometers of the Mediterranean Sea. Despite the failure, the negotiations were a diplomatic success for the Trump administration. For Israel, the talks also constituted a win to build relations with Beirut independent from Hezbollah.

### **Lebanon Lifted Banking Secrecy Laws to Contact with Alvarez & Marsal (21.12.2020)**

On December 21, Monday, the Lebanese parliament issued a bill to suspend banking secrecy laws for a year to conduct a forensic audit of Banque du Liban. After two days, on Wednesday, Lebanon's caretaker finance minister, Ghazi Wazni, asked for his consultant to restart the forensic audit of New York-based consultancy firm Alvarez & Marsal (A&M), which previously withdrew from the deal due to being unable to obtain the demanded documents prevented by banking secrecy laws. A forensic audit is the key demand of international donors.

## TUNISIA

### **Tunisian Media Mogul and Minister of Environment Arrested (24.12.2020)**

A judge ordered the arrest of Nabil Karoui, the kingpin of Tunisian media and the head of the Qalb Tunis party, in a case related to tax evasion and money laundering on Thursday. Previously in last year, Karoui was detained but released during the presidential election in which he ran as a candidate.

Tunisian Minister of Environment Mustapha Laroui is displaced from his office and arrested on Monday because of a scandal over an illegal cargo of toxic household and hospital waste from Italy to Tunisia. Some 11 more people, including senior officials from the environment ministry and Tunisian Customs and the Waste Management Agency, have also been arrested as part of the investigation.

### **Tunisia Rejects Normalization with Israel (23.12.2020)**

In the statement issued by the Foreign Ministry, following the Israel-Morocco normalization agreement, Tunisia declared the categorical rejection of any normalization process with Israel, highlighting that this decision will not be influenced by any international developments. Speaker of Parliament and the head of Ennahda, Rached Ghannouchi, evaluated the Israel-Morocco agreement as a violation of the Arab Peace Initiative and he emphasized the Tunisian support for Palestinian's rights. In that vein, Tunisia and Algeria blocked an Israeli airplane from using its airspace, forcing it to use European territories.

## SUDAN

### **US Congress Reinstates the Sovereign Immunity of Sudan with Exception (20.12.2020)**

On Monday, December 20, US Congress legislated a bill to reinstate the legal immunity of Sudan, following the removal of Sudan from the state sponsor of terrorism list on December 14. The bill, however, puts an exception providing for multi-district litigation by the families of victims of the attacks of September 11. Under the bill, Washington will also allocate \$111 million to repay part of Sudan's debt and \$120 to help pay off its debt to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), while allocating another \$700 million to aid the country by September 2022. Sudan's finance minister announced a US "bridge loan" last week that would help Sudan to forgive \$1 billion in World Bank arrears. Previously, Sudan's interim government threatened the US that it would cancel the normalization agreement with Israel if not removed from the State Sponsors of Terrorism list and given legal immunity against terrorism cases by the end of 2020.

**Sudan and Ethiopia Negotiate to End Conflicts at the Border (21.12.2020)**

Ethiopian foreign minister paid a visit to Sudan on December 21, Tuesday, to meet with his counterpart, as tension at borders has intensified, with 4 dead and 20 wounded in Sudanese troops after Ethiopian cross-border operation. On Saturday, the military deployed “large reinforcements” to Al-Qadarif province to retake territory occupied by Ethiopian farmers and militias in the Al-Fashqa border region of Sudan, including 250 square kilometers of fertile land within 600 square kilometers of Sudan’s alleged conflict zone.

Dina Mufti, the spokesman for the Ethiopian Foreign Ministry, declared on Wednesday that the border dispute between the two states should be resolved peacefully through dialogue. Khartoum also announced that the Sudanese-Ethiopian Joint Political Committee, which is being held in the Sudanese capital, is negotiating the demarcation of borders between the two countries and will set a date for the beginning of the process.



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#### **ABOUT AL SHARQ STRATEGIC RESEARCH**

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