

The Significance of the Abraham Accords for Morocco

Az Ábrahám Megállapodás jelentősége Marokkóra nézve

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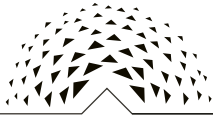
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Abstract: Morocco and Israel signed a Joint Declaration on 10 December, 2020 to normalise their relations. This paper demonstrates why this event is not limited to the dispute over Western Sahara, but attention should also be paid to the various economic, security, diplomatic, ethnic, religious, and foreign policy aspects that influence Morocco. While the country is headed for a diplomatic low point, its cooperation with Israel is opening new opportunities for Rabat.

Keywords: Morocco, Israel, Abraham Accords, Western Sahara

Absztrakt: Marokkó és Izrael 2020. december 10-én írta alá az Ábrahám Megállapodást annak érdekében, hogy kapcsolataikat normalizálják. A kutatás rávilágít arra, hogy miért nem korlátozható az esemény csupán a Nyugat-Szahara kérdéskörére, hanem a Marokkót érintő gazdasági, biztonsági, diplomáciai, etnikai és külpolitikai szempontokat is figyelembe kell venni. Közben Rabat a diplomáciai mélypont felé tart, addig az Izraellel való együttműködés új területeket nyit meg számára.

Kulcsszavak: Marokkó, Izrael, Ábrahám Megállapodások, Nyugat-Szahara

INTRODUCTION

The discourse and scientific research on the significance of the Abraham Accords is largely limited to the relationship between Israel and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). This is partly due to the fact that the UAE was the first country to sign the Declaration, as well as a consequence of the importance of the political and economic position of the United Arab Emirates compared to the other three signatories at the bilateral and international level. Most analyses covering the issue tend to pay less attention to Morocco, as it is currently the last country to have joined the Agreement. In addition, the decision of the United States of America, namely formally recognising the sovereignty of Morocco over the debated territory of Western Sahara, is among the internationally discussed topics regarding the Abraham Accords.

Therefore, the research aims to complement the significance of the Abraham Conventions concerning Morocco and answer the question *whether the Joint Declaration is merely a symbolic act between Israel and Morocco or does Morocco aim to achieve a sustainable result with the Accord.*

In order to answer this question, the sectors and fields indicated in the text of the Agreement as well as sections that help understand the context are analysed. The method is inductive, and the possible areas of cooperation listed are analysed quantitatively along the lines of the events that have taken place since the conclusion of the agreement.

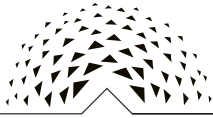
First, the Abraham Accords is discussed in general, followed by the agreement between Morocco and Israel. This is followed by an analysis of the past relations between the two countries and a description of their significance for the current situation. The subsequent section focuses on the unique situation of the large number of Jews living in Morocco as well as the Jews of Moroccan origin living in Israel. The presence of these communities has contributed to the normalization in several ways. The next part explores the improvement of diplomatic relations, an important aspect since the establishment of an embassy is among the objectives to be achieved.

The topic of security is followed by the analysis of economic cooperation, where several agreements have been made, indicating long-term co-operation. As a leading nation in the field of security resources and cyber security, Israel is of paramount importance for Morocco, with the two countries cooperating through several well-functioning instruments. Although, as stated previously, the issue of Western Sahara is covered in most scientific works. It needs to be discussed in the analysis to get a complex picture of how the Abraham Accord affects Morocco and to answer the research question. The last part of the analysis explores the foreign relations of Morocco, more precisely the challenges the country is facing nowadays and how the normalization with Israel fits into the current trends of international relations of Morocco.

THE ABRAHAM ACCORDS

On 15 September, 2020, the [United Arab Emirates, Bahrain](#), and Israel signed the Abraham Accords Declaration, which had been brokered by the United States. On 6 January, 2021, [Sudan](#) followed suit and signed the Declaration. The main aim of the Accords is to normalise diplomatic relations between the signatories. The [Abraham Accords Declaration](#) states that they “recognize the importance of maintaining and strengthening peace in the Middle East and around the world” while having “peace among the three Arabic religions and all humanity” by “establishing diplomatic relations between Israel and its neighbours in the region”. The [name further implies](#) the reunification of Arabs and Jews, since according to both Muslim and Jewish (as well as Christian) tradition, they are all descendants of Abraham.

Three months later, on 10 December, 2020, Morocco and Israel signed a [Joint Declaration](#) brokered by the United States, following the footsteps of the United Arab Emirates, Bahrein, and Sudan. King Mohammed VI and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu thus opened a new space for cooperation between the two countries. The document addresses two aspects of the normalization process. On the one hand, it describes the intentions of Morocco and Israel to authorize direct flights between the two states, establish full diplomatic relations, enhance bilateral economic cooperation, provide further assistance in trade, investment, tourism,



water, agriculture, and development, as well as reopen liaison offices in Rabat and Tel Aviv. 'In return', the United States recognised Moroccan sovereignty over the entire Western Saharan territory.

Since the first anniversary of the signing of the Declaration, some of its objectives have been met, and steps have been taken to achieve the rest of them. Nasser Bourita, Minister of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation and Moroccan Expatriates evaluated the first year during a [videoconference celebrating the first anniversary of the Declaration](#), stating that the past year has honoured a shared past, present, and future, rather than being a mere diplomatic event. In terms of the success of enabling Israelis of Moroccan origins to renew their heritage in a peaceful way, under the protection of the Moroccan Monarchs when they visit the country. In addition, Morocco, in the role of a historic peacebuilder, supports the achievement of long-lasting peace in the region and believes that the new tools can contribute to improving security, as well as accomplish a two-state solution between Israel and an independent state of Palestine.

MOROCCO AND ISRAEL IN THE PAST

The relationship between Israel and Morocco began even before the formation of the State of Israel, when a significant number of Moroccan Jews [migrated to the territory of today's Israel](#). The descendants of Jews of Moroccan origin owned part in the recent normalization process through the years. After the birth of Israel, government officials [intended to make contact](#) with Morocco and other states in the Maghreb, such as Tunisia and Algeria. During the Egyptian prime minister, Gamal Abdel Nasser, was reinforcing the pan-Arab ideology, the relationship between Israel and Morocco got warmer. An [arms deal](#) was signed in 1963, which resulted in Israel providing help for Morocco against Algeria, which in turn received assistance from Egypt during the Sand War.

During the Six Day War, Hassan II allegedly made it possible for the Mossad to receive crucial information by allowing it to monitor Arab leaders' private conversations. King Hassan even hosted the first Israeli prime minister in the country in 1976. The [Oslo accords](#) on 13 September, 1993 made it possible for Israel and Morocco to establish partial diplomatic relations.

After the death of King Hassan II in 1999, the deterioration of the Camp David peace conference, and the outbreak of the second intifada, the relations between Morocco and Israel started to [decline](#). This was also true for diplomatic relations, which especially deteriorated with the new King, Muhammad VI, as he focused on the strengthening of Islamism in Morocco, the Moroccan sovereignty over the the disputed Saharan territory, and facing the challenges of economic development.

[From 2000 until the signing of the Abraham Accords](#), the most significant milestones in the relationship between the two countries included the following. The liaison office was closed in Israel in 2000, while Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan

Shalom made a visit to Morocco and met with King Mohammed VI in 2003. Four years later, the Foreign Ministers of the two countries (Tzipi Livni and Mohamed Benaissa) met in Paris. In 2009, the King and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon conducted a phone discussion about the roadmap of the peace process in the region, where the Moroccan King confirmed the efforts of his state towards a just and long-lasting peace.

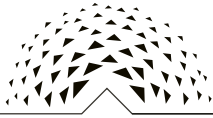
Around one year before the signing date, Benjamin Netanyahu and Nasser Bourita had a secret meeting,. When the Agreement was signed between Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrein, Moroccan Prime Minister Saad-Eddine El-Othmani stated that. Morocco rejects the normalisation with the 'Zionist entity' since it strengthens the position of Israel in continuation of violating the rights of the Palestinians. The next remarkable event was the signature of the Joint Declaration.

Overall, the fact that Israel and Morocco have not fought a war against each other, Jews have been migrating to Israel throughout the decades, and cooperation on security matters has taken place has made it easier for the two countries to normalise their relations.

MOROCCAN JEWISH MINORITY AND ISRAELIS WITH MOROCCAN ORIGINS

Morocco and Israel have a special relationship through the Moroccan Jewish community and Jews of Moroccan origin (around [700,000 Israelis](#)). [The city of Sefrou](#) near Fez is known as the capital of Moroccan coexistence and tolerance, having received the sobriquet "Little Jerusalem" due to the large number of Jews living there. Apart from the above-mentioned example, the number of [Jews living in Morocco is around 3,000](#), making it the largest Jewish community in the region. However, the Jewish minorities in Morocco and Jews of Moroccan origin are not mentioned in the Joint Declaration, and they have not played an active role in the realization of the document. [The need for establishing direct flights](#) comes from the 70,000 Israeli citizens, many with Moroccan origins, who travel each year for either touristic or religious purposes.

The significance of the Moroccan Jewish community was also highlighted by [Nasser Bourita](#) during the online meeting between Yair Lapid, Foreign Minister of Izrael, Abdullatif bin Rashid Al-Zayani, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bahrein, Anthony Blinken, Secretary of the United States, and Anwar Gargash, former President of the United Arab Emirates for Diplomatic Affairs. The videoconference was held to celebrate the one-year anniversary of the Abraham Accords between the United Arab Emirates and Bahrein. Foreign Minister Bourita described the meaning of the Declaration to King Mohammed VI as reflecting the links between the Moroccan Jewish community and the kings of Morocco.



DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

Since the signing of the Abraham Accords, several high-level and low-level meetings have taken place between the parties. The first conversation [via telephone](#) took place just a few days later, on 25 December, 2020. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu extended an [invitation to Moroccan King Mohammed VI](#) to visit his country. After the elections in Israel, the relationship continued to flourish, and on the 6th of July Israel's MFA Director, General Alon Ushpiz visited Morocco. The purpose of the visit was to continue the political dialogue and promote bilateral relations between the countries.

Further encounters were connected to occasions such as the [opening of Israel's liaison office](#) in Morocco or signing a memorandum of understanding related to security cooperation. The establishment of this office had been stated as a priority in the Agreement, although it only materialized on 12 August, 2021. Foreign Minister of Israel Yair Lapid visited the synagogue in Casablanca after the official opening of the facility. Not only was this the first minister-level visit in Morocco by an Israeli minister since 2003, it also enabled Yair Lapid and Morocco's Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Mohcine Jazouli to sign additional agreements. Beside an air service agreement, a further agreement was signed concerning cooperation in the field of sports, culture, and youth. Moreover, a memorandum of understanding came into existence on the establishment of a political consultation mechanism.

According to official statements, the liaison office would serve as an embassy in the future. During Yair Lapid's visit in August 2021, he declared that [the office would be upgraded and would serve as an embassy](#) within two months. On 10 October, 2021, the Foreign Ministry [nominated David Govrin as Israel's permanent ambassador](#), who had headed the diplomatic mission in the Moroccan capital between August and October 2021. However, there is no information on the liaison office for Morocco in Israel.

SECURITY POLICY

The other occasion when officials met was during the signing ceremony of the [memorandum of understanding on security cooperation](#), with Abdellatif Loudiyi, the Moroccan Minister Delegate to the Head of Government in charge of the National Defense Administration, and Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz present at this historic milestone. The memorandum of understanding establishes cooperation in the field of intelligence sharing and future arms sales, and it marks the beginning of official security cooperation between the two states. It also [enables smoother cooperation](#) between the defence establishments and allows Israel to sell arms to Morocco more easily. In addition, communication between the two defence ministers and militaries will become less complicated, as will sharing intelligence.

The deal can be seen as unprecedented, since Egypt and Jordan, two countries which had previously made the symbolic step of normalising their relations with Israel (the former in 1979 and the latter in 1994) do not have such a document to this day. An agreement to [promote bilateral cybersecurity efforts](#) had also been approved on 15 July, 2021 and signed before the defence memorandum of understanding. The Israeli National Cyber Directorate is known as one of the world's most advanced programs of its kind. Thus, Morocco could benefit from this advanced technology.

ECONOMIC RELATIONS

On 22 December, 2020, a [delegation flew from Tel Aviv to Rabat](#) to finalise the normalisation deal. Jared Kushner, adviser of the Trump administration, was also on the plane that made the historic flight. Seven months after the normalization agreement, on 25 July, 2021, El Al and Israir Airlines launched their [first direct commercial flights between Tel Aviv and Marrakesh](#). This not only meant the beginning of regular air travel for commercial passengers but also new business opportunities for companies in the travel industry. [Royal Air Maroc](#) likewise launched flights between Casablanca and Tel Aviv starting 12 December, 2021. Furthermore, El Al has increased the number of flights to a biweekly frequency. The high importance of this issue is indicated by the signing of a [cooperation protocol \(MoU\)](#) between Royal Air Maroc and El Al.

The [first economic agreement](#) between the two countries was signed on 30 December, 2020 by the respective finance ministers, covering the field of investment and finance, with the aim of boosting the volume of trade to half a billion dollars annually. The deal may fulfil these expectations based on the statistical information disclosed by the [Israel Central Bureau of Statistics](#). In the period between January-July 2020, the volume of trade was USD 14.9 million, while in the same period in 2021 it moved up to USD 20.8 million (excluding services and tourism). As stated previously, beside Morocco, Israel has also normalised its relations with the United Arab Emirates, with whom Israel does the highest proportion of trade out of the four (United Arab Emirates, Bahrein, Sudan and Morocco) countries. Therefore, trade volume between The United Arab Emirates and Israel increased significantly, from USD 50.8 million to USD 613.9 million (from January-July 2020 to January-July 2021). Israeli Minister of Economy Amir Peretz would further facilitate in the near future the realization of the appointed aim with a [free trade agreement](#). In January 2021, the Minister introduced the idea in Moroccan media during his first interview after the signing of the Abraham Accords. The fact that Amir Peretz appeared on television is symbolic in itself, due to his Moroccan origins. For Israel, the free trade agreement would mean a great leap forward regarding the accessibility of the growing Moroccan automotive sector. On the other hand, Morocco could benefit from the agriculture and water management capabilities of Israel. The agreement



seems ambitious, although no additional details have been revealed since the announcement. A team is devoted to drafting the possible outcomes of the plan and presenting it to the cabinets of the countries as soon as possible.

To further enhance the economic cooperation, Morocco and Israel have opened new channels for their respective business communities by [establishing two institutions](#). One is the Moroccan-Israeli Business Council, which was created by the General Confederation of Moroccan Enterprises (CGEM) and its counterpart, the Israeli Employers and Business Organizations (IEBO). The [aim of the new initiative](#) is the joint support of investment projects and ventures. The second establishment is the Morocco-Israel Chamber of Commerce Industry (CCIMI), which aims to deepen business ties and develop investment in innovation. To reach this goal, the first [Forum](#) will be held in May 2022 in Marrakech. Moreover, the sectors of agriculture and water, health, pharmaceuticals, and renewable energy will be discussed during the four upcoming meetings of CCIMI.

Finally, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (HU) and the Mohammed VI Polytechnic University (UM6P) have signed a memorandum of understanding to promote academic collaboration. It enables students and academic staff to participate in joint research and exchange programs, and it intends to establish collaborative degrees. The universities share an interest in business, pharmacology, mathematics, agriculture, and computer engineering, aiming to create an international academic community in these fields.

WESTERN SAHARA

The United States of America, as a quid pro quo, has formally recognised the sovereignty of the Kingdom of Morocco over Western Sahara. The [Joint Declaration](#) states that the United States also reaffirms its support for the Moroccan claim over Western Sahara. The Moroccan claim is described as a “serious, credible and realistic autonomy proposal”, which serves as the only basis for the dispute to be solved in the long term. In addition, the United States promises economic encouragement and social development regarding Morocco. This not only concerns Morocco as a whole but also the disputed area of Western Sahara. The assurance contains the promise of opening a consulate in Dakhla to promote the business and economic opportunities of the territory.

The territory on the northwest coast of Africa is bordered by the countries of Morocco, Algeria, and Mauritania, and until 1976 it was administered by Spain. After the end of the Spanish administration, both Morocco and Mauritania confirmed their claim over the area. On the other hand, the Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguia el-Hamra y de Río de Oro (Frente Polisario), supported by Algeria, opposed the claims of the two countries. The Frente Polisario

proclaimed the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). The Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the [United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara](#) (MINURSO) both seek to find a peaceful solution to solve this conflict.

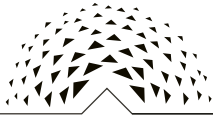
[Frente Polisario](#), which holds a fifth of the area and wants to hold a vote on self-determination to solve the issue, has commented on the Agreement that the United States' recognition of Moroccan sovereignty does not change anything in legal terms, since the international community has not changed its standpoint in this question. It also added that the Joint Declaration violates the UN Charter and the principles of the African Union, and it makes it more difficult for the international community to find a peaceful solution between the Moroccan Kingdom and the Sahrawi Republic. In turn, the United Nations has stated that their position on the question has not changed, and the Secretary-General believes that it can be solved based on the Security Council resolution.

The significance and consequences of the move of the United States are questionable, whether it influences other countries to follow suit and recognise Moroccan sovereignty, or if it just fits into the [new international trend](#) that countries are opening consulates in Dakhla, as [Senegal](#) did in April 2021. Over 20 countries have now opened consulates both in Dakhla and in Laayoune. On the other hand, the [SADR](#) is recognised by 46 states, while almost the same number of states (31) have cancelled their recognition, and 7 have suspended it.

During the videoconference meeting organised for the first anniversary of the Abraham Accords between Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrein, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation, and Moroccan Expatriates also mentioned the [downsides](#) of the Joint Agreement regarding Morocco, in that Morocco's neighbouring state Algeria decided to sever its relationship with the country. One reason given for this move was the relationship established between Morocco and Israel.

Algeria [broke ties with Morocco](#) on 24 August, 2021 due to 'hostile actions', as stated by Foreign Minister of Algeria Ramdane Lamamra. The two countries have had unstable relations for a long time, mainly due to the disputed Western Sahara region. The Foreign Minister has drawn attention to hostile actions such as wildfires caused by groups backed by Morocco. In addition, Algerian authorities have also accused the Moroccan government of supporting the terrorist organisation Movement for Self-determination of Kabylie (MAK).

With the United States recognising Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara, Algerians are left concerned about their national security. The Abraham Accords also enables Morocco to cooperate with Israel in matters of defence and security issues. As a result, after the 25-year operation agreement of the [Maghreb-Europe pipeline](#) had expired in October, 2021, Algeria decided not to prolong it. The pipeline provided gas to Europe via Morocco, providing Morocco with income from it. Since then, Algeria is intending to use a direct pipeline to Spain.



INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Since the second part of the 1970s, the question of Western Sahara has been at the [centre of Morocco's foreign policy](#). From that time, the importance of Western Sahara for the Moroccan decision-making varied. In 2022, Moroccan diplomacy finds itself at its [lowest point](#), in relative isolation since the country gained independence, despite the fact that the country serves as a considerable [link between North and South](#) regarding the political, economic, and cultural spheres and maintains a good relationship with the European Union, Germany, France, and Spain.

In 2021, the [European Parliament](#) passed a resolution that found the North-African state in breach of the Convention of the United Nations on the Rights of the Child. At the same time, the [Council](#) has approved two decisions that approved the conclusion of agreements between the EU and the Kingdom of Morocco. One of these concerns the issue of extending the definition of originating products applied to agricultural products to products coming from Western Sahara. The second was a fisheries agreement that included territories within the scope of Western Sahara.

The relationship between Morocco and Germany has also deteriorated, although the German Government has [welcomed](#) the announcement of normalizing relations between Israel and Morocco. On the other hand, the statement also highlights the fact that their standpoint on Western Sahara has not changed, and it emphasizes the role of UN-led mediation. Later, in May 2021, Morocco decided to [sever official diplomatic communication](#) with Germany as a consequence of these deep disagreements. Furthermore, Germany did [not invite Morocco to a conference](#) held in Berlin on the Libyan situation in 2020. Rabat accepted this step with surprise since, according to them, Morocco has played an essential role in ending the Libyan conflict. Two months later, the same reason led to the withdrawal of the Moroccan ambassador from Spain.

Although the United States has recognised Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara, the [appropriations bill and the National Defense Authorization Act \(NDAA\)](#) for the fiscal year of 2022 shows a sceptic stance. The question within the Biden administration whether to take a positive or a negative standpoint has ended up in the decision maker taking a neutral position. This further implies that Morocco is facing a worsening relationship with the United States, even though Morocco was the first country to recognise the independence of the United States in 1777.

CONCLUSION

To answer the question of whether the Joint Declaration is merely a symbolic act between Israel and Morocco or does Morocco aim to achieve a sustainable result with the Accord, the previously examined aspect will be evaluated in this part. The statements of the Moroccan government indicate the importance of the

Abraham Accords for Jewish Moroccans and Jews in Israel of Moroccan origin. Past events and the fact that the two countries have never fought a war against each other further suggest that the parties are eager to pursue their relationship more formally. A shared past and heritage can be discovered with the help of direct flights and cultural cooperation, enabling relatively easy and smooth interaction.

These factors have culminated in the formalization of diplomatic relations. Since Morocco is heading to isolation and a diplomatic low point, its relationship with Israel may counterbalance these losses. Since Morocco aligns their foreign policy along with the interest of Western Sahara, the standpoint of the United States of America on the disputed territory is crucial for Morocco. . On the other hand, isolation is not a sustainable situation for Morocco, considering its international efforts and its role as a link between the North and the South.

The cooperation regarding security policy is of significant importance for Morocco due to Israel's advanced security tools and facilities. Finally, economic cooperation enables Morocco to benefit from advanced agricultural and water management. The Israeli know-how exchanged during diverse Forums also contributes to the growth and development of the country.