

First Israel-Morocco flight takes off for Rabat to seal normalization deal

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Israeli national security adviser Meir Ben-Shabbat (C) flanked by Jared Kushner, senior adviser to U.S. President Donald Trump (R) and U.S. Ambassador to Israel David Friedman (L), at Ben Gurion Airport, Tel Aviv. (Photo: The Times of Israel)

Tel Aviv, December 22 (RHC)-- An Israeli delegation has headed to Morocco to meet with the king and hammer out a normalization deal, less than a fortnight after the Tel Aviv regime and the North African country agreed to normalize relations in a deal brokered by the outgoing administration of US President Donald Trump.

On Tuesday, the envoys, led by national security adviser Meir Ben-Shabbat, boarded El Al Israel Airlines in the first direct commercial flight from Tel Aviv to Rabat. The jet was painted with the Hebrew, Arabic and English words for "peace" and a palm-shaped Maghreb good-luck talisman.

The delegates were accompanied by Trump's advisor and son-in-law, Jared Kushner, the so-called architect of the recent normalization agreements with Israel.

The delegation is scheduled to spend less than a day in Morocco, holding high-level meetings with Moroccan officials, including King Muhammad VI, and sign bilateral and trilateral deals, including on aviation, tourism, health, water and agriculture, before returning to Israel.

Some U.S. officials have suggested that an Israel-Morocco signing ceremony might be held at the White House before Trump steps down on January 20th. Israel and Morocco agreed on December 10 to normalize their relations, making the North African country the fourth Arab state since August to strike such a deal, the other three being the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Sudan.

As part of the agreement, Trump agreed to recognize Morocco's sovereignty over the desert region of Western Sahara, where a decades-old territorial dispute has pitted Morocco against the Algeria-backed and pro-independence Polisario Front.

"This is a sin and it doesn't serve the Palestinian people. The Israeli occupation uses every new normalization deal to increase its aggression against the Palestinian people and increase its settlement expansion," Hazem Qassem, a spokesman for Gaza-based Hamas resistance movement, said.

On September 15, Trump hosted a White House ceremony, where Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu signed normalization agreements with Emirati Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan and Bahrain's Foreign Minister Abdullatif al-Zayani.

The U.S. president announced on October 23 at the White House that Sudan and Israel had also agreed to normalize their relations. There has been across-the-board condemnation from Palestinians, who view the deals as a betrayal of their cause to establish an independent state of Palestine, with East Jerusalem al-Quds as its capital.

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