

Trump's Mideast deals are good for Israel. But they involve bad trade-offs.

Opinion by **Editorial Board**

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THE ACCORD announced last week between Israel and Morocco has a notably lopsided character. Like several other Mideast deals negotiated by the Trump administration, it entails Arab diplomatic recognition of Israel — and major concessions by the United States on unrelated issues. In the case of Morocco, President Trump offered U.S. recognition of the kingdom's claim to the disputed territory of Western Sahara, something Morocco has been seeking for decades. It also agreed to sell Morocco \$1 billion in weapons, including advanced drones.

In exchange, the regime of King Mohammed VI agreed to reopen the liaison offices it first established with Israel in 1994 and later closed. It also offered a vague commitment to “resume diplomatic relations as soon as possible.” That was a win for Israel — albeit a modest one — and it prompted President Trump to claim another “massive breakthrough” for his Middle East brokering.

But if there was a gain for the United States in the bargain, it wasn't readily apparent. On the contrary, the recognition of Morocco's claim to Western Sahara isolated Washington from its European allies, other U.N. Security Council members and dozens of African nations, which have supported U.N. resolutions calling for a referendum on the future of the former Spanish colony. It made more likely the re-eruption of war between Moroccan forces and the Polisario Front, which represents the indigenous Sahrawi people. And it risked further instability in a North African region that is already struggling to contain Islamist terrorism.

Mr. Trump brushed aside these considerations in his zeal to build on a strategy of normalizing relations between Israel and the Arab world. That's a worthy cause, though its benefits will inevitably be limited as long as Israel fails to settle with its immediate neighbors, the Palestinians. Mr. Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu see the diplomatic accords as a substitute for such a settlement; they are not. As long as the Palestinians live under occupation, Israel's future as a state that is both Jewish and democratic will be at risk.

In the meantime, the bribes Mr. Trump has had the United States pay for the upgrading of Israel's relations are troubling. In exchange for a partial normalization with Israel, the administration removed Sudan, a onetime base of Osama bin Laden, from the State Department's list of terrorism sponsors. Now, its government is threatening to withdraw from the deal if Congress does not grant it immunity from lawsuits stemming from the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

Last week, Congress failed to block a massive arms sale by the administration to the United Arab Emirates, which was rewarded for recognizing Israel with F-35 stealth aircraft as well as drones and advanced munitions. The \$23 billion sale went through even though the UAE has been using its air force to support insurgents fighting Libya's U.N.-backed

government, and along with Saudi Arabia has been accused of war crimes in Yemen.

Mr. Trump's reckless dispensation of these favors will leave President-elect Joe Biden with some difficult choices. He will want to preserve Israel's diplomatic gains. But those enhanced ties are also in the interest of Arab states. They should not require quid pro quos by the United States on other issues — especially when, as in the case of the Western Sahara, they are bad policy on their own merits.

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