



17.13x19.79	1	5 עמוד	haaretz-front	29/11/2018	66162917-8
המרכז האקדמי למשפט ועסקי - 26330					

Mutasim Ali

Will PM shake hand of genocidaire?

As I read the news about the unprecedented visit by the president of Chad, Idriss Deby, to Israel, I ended up arguing with myself.

Should I praise this historic visit? Or allow my skepticism free rein? My skepticism was rooted in two concerns: Would they discuss the "voluntary" deportation of African refugees from Israel? And was it a preemptive step to Netanyahu meeting the war criminal president Omar al-Bashir of Sudan?

I am an advocate of the expansion of relations between Africa and Israel. I welcome relations based on mutual interests and respect of human rights and dignity.

I often argue that Israel needs to absorb its African refugees and asylum seekers because one day, they will be key leaders in Africa. Israel would then find no better allies than the currently unwelcome African refugees and asylum seekers.

Unfortunately, so far, this hasn't been the case. Netanyahu has continuously denied African refugees and asylum seekers any chance to remain in Israel with dignity and rights.

I believe these formal visits are important and necessary both for Israel and African countries for their mutual benefit. Africa is in need of Israel's advanced technology, cyber security and agriculture. And Israel needs Africa's natural resources.

But my fear is: If Israel's Netanyahu can meet with Chad's Deby, then the next African leader Netanyahu will meet with will be Omar al-Bashir, the president of Sudan, subject of an international arrest warrant for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

I worry that the fast pace of normalizing relations with Chad are a clear harbinger of a similar dynamic with Sudan. After all, both are led by repellent despots with abundant blood on their hands.

Presidents Deby and Bashir have so much in common.

Both presidents are career military officers who assumed via a military coup. They came to power around the same time; Omar al-Bashir was proclaimed as president in 1989, Deby in 1991. Both have survived attempts to overthrow them. Deby "won" his fourth consecutive presidential election in 2011; Bashir "won" his second in 2015 and is now he is running for his third in elections due in 2020, even though Sudan's 2005 transitional constitution limits any president to two terms only.

Amnesty International's report of 2013 accused Chad's Deby for violently oppressing his opponents as well as grave violations of human rights. Bashir, as it better known, is wanted by the International Criminal Court for genocide charges, war crimes and crimes against humanity for atrocities he di-

rected committed in Darfur.

Both Deby and Bashir have a propensity to get actively involved in proxy wars; Deby intervened in Central African Republic and Mali to "fight terrorism" and Bashir has actively intervened on behalf Saudi Arabia in Yemen in the name of "fighting terrorism." What an irony, that a president who himself is a war criminal and a terrorist, intervening in other countries using the moral justification of "saving lives."

In Yemen, Sudan is now complicit in one of the worse human catastrophes of our time where more than 85,000 people are expected to die through conflict-fuelled starvation. It is exact the same kind of man-made disaster with which Sudan's president has experience; he used the same tactics, starvation as a weapon, against his own civilians in Darfur, the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile.

Deby and Bashir maintain very strong ties, even though the two went through a period of mutual hostility in the early 2000s.

Now, the two presidents are coordinating their efforts to dismantle the refugee and displaced people's camps in Chad and Sudan, in order to remove the minimal protection those camps offer their inhabitants.

The only difference I see between Deby and al-Bashir is that Bashir is wanted by the International Criminal Court, and Deby is yet to re-

ceive an ICC warrant.

When Deby fled to Darfur in 1989, accused of plotting against his predecessor Hissien Habre (currently serving a life sentence for war crimes), he sought asylum – and the people of Darfur offered him shelter.

But there's no honor among tyrants: Deby has since thrown mud in the face of the Darfuri struggle, and his wholehearted support for Bashir, genocidaire of Darfur, is offensive and unforgivable.

I am absolutely for the reestablishing relations between Israel and Sudan – but not with Bashir's genocidal regime. But bearing in mind Netanyahu didn't flinch at all when he shook Deby's hand, and bearing in mind Netanyahu's own domestic political necessity to showcase foreign policy achievements, it's all too easy to imagine smiles and handshakes between Netanyahu and Bashir.

That moment will be a cruel disappointment for the victims of genocide in Sudan. And it's a cruel doubling down on Netanyahu's determination not to countenance the continued presence of survivors of Bashir's genocide in Israel.

Mutasim Ali is the Public Relations Officer at the African Student Organization in Israel. The first Sudanese to be granted refugee status in Israel, he is a law graduate from Ramat Gan's College of Law and Business. Twitter: @mutasimali3