

# Morocco, Israel sign 'unprecedented' security deal

By **Peter Powell** - December 2, 2021

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The framework agreement was signed by Mr. Gantz and the Minister Delegate in charge of the administration of Moroccan National Defense, Abdellatif Loudiyi.

He formally launches security cooperation *"in all its aspects"* between the two countries, barely a year after the normalization of their relations, in the face of *"threats and challenges in the region"*.

This Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) covers *"exchanges of experience and expertise, technology transfer, training as well as cooperation in the field of the defense industry"*, specified the Moroccan side, which also mentioned a cooperation agreement in the field of *"cybersecurity"*.

## Drones and security software

The agreement – the first of its kind with an Arab country, according to the Israeli side – will facilitate Morocco's acquisition of technologies from Israel's military industry.

*"This is a very important thing that (...) will promote Israeli exports so far"*, underlined Mr. Gantz.

The Hebrew state is one of the world's leading exporters of armed drones and security software like the controversial NSO firm's Pegasus.

However, sales of armed drones and some advanced technologies, such as spyware Pegasus, must be approved by the Ministry of Defense headed by Mr. Gantz.

In question, Morocco categorically denies having purchased this software and announced that it had filed complaints for "*defamation*" against media claiming that Rabat had used it to infiltrate the phones of several national and foreign public figures.

*"Relations with Morocco are not based on arms sales, but on the long-term strengthening of our ties in the region"*, justified an Israeli Defense official on condition of anonymity.

Gantz also met with Moroccan Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita on Wednesday, met the Inspector General of the Moroccan Royal Armed Forces (FAR), General Belkhir El Farouk, and attended parachute training.

## *"Abraham's Agreements"*

Morocco and Israel had already established diplomatic relations in the early 1990s before Rabat ended it at the start of the Second Intifada, the Palestinian uprising of the early 2000s.

Now allies in a tense regional context, they resumed relations in December 2020 within the framework of the "Abraham Accords", a process of normalization of relations between the Hebrew State and Arab countries supported by the administration of the former -US President Donald Trump.

In return, Washington recognized the "*full sovereignty*" of Morocco on Western Sahara, territory disputed with the Saharawi separatists of the Polisario Front supported by Algeria.

## Tensions with Algeria

Benny Gantz's visit comes as Algiers severed relations with Rabat in August due to "*hostile actions*" kingdom and that the Polisario Front has decided to "*intensify*" his armed struggle against Morocco.

The head of American diplomacy, Antony Blinken, reiterated Monday the support of Washington in Rabat on the question of Western Sahara.

*"It is possible that in a context of Algeria-Morocco tension, Moroccans (...) wish to show the world – their own population, their Algerian rivals and the West – that they are deepening their relations with Israel."*, analyzes Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, specialist in Israeli-Moroccan relations at Tel Aviv University.

## Attempted demonstration

Mr. Gantz's visit nevertheless takes place in relative official and media discretion, the Palestinian cause winning the sympathy of the Moroccan population.

About fifty pro-Palestinian activists tried to gather in front of the seat of Parliament in Rabat, but they were prevented from doing so by the police. *"Normalization is betrayal"*, they chanted.

For Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, Morocco has not abandoned the Palestinian cause, *"but has many other interests, many other benefits to be derived from recalibration"* of his relationships.

Benny Gantz will complete his stay on Thursday with an interview with the boss of Moroccan counter-espionage and a visit to the Talmud Torah synagogue, the largest in Rabat, which in the past served as a school for future rabbis of the large Moroccan Jewish community. .