

# Morocco sees return to normal diplomatic ties with Germany

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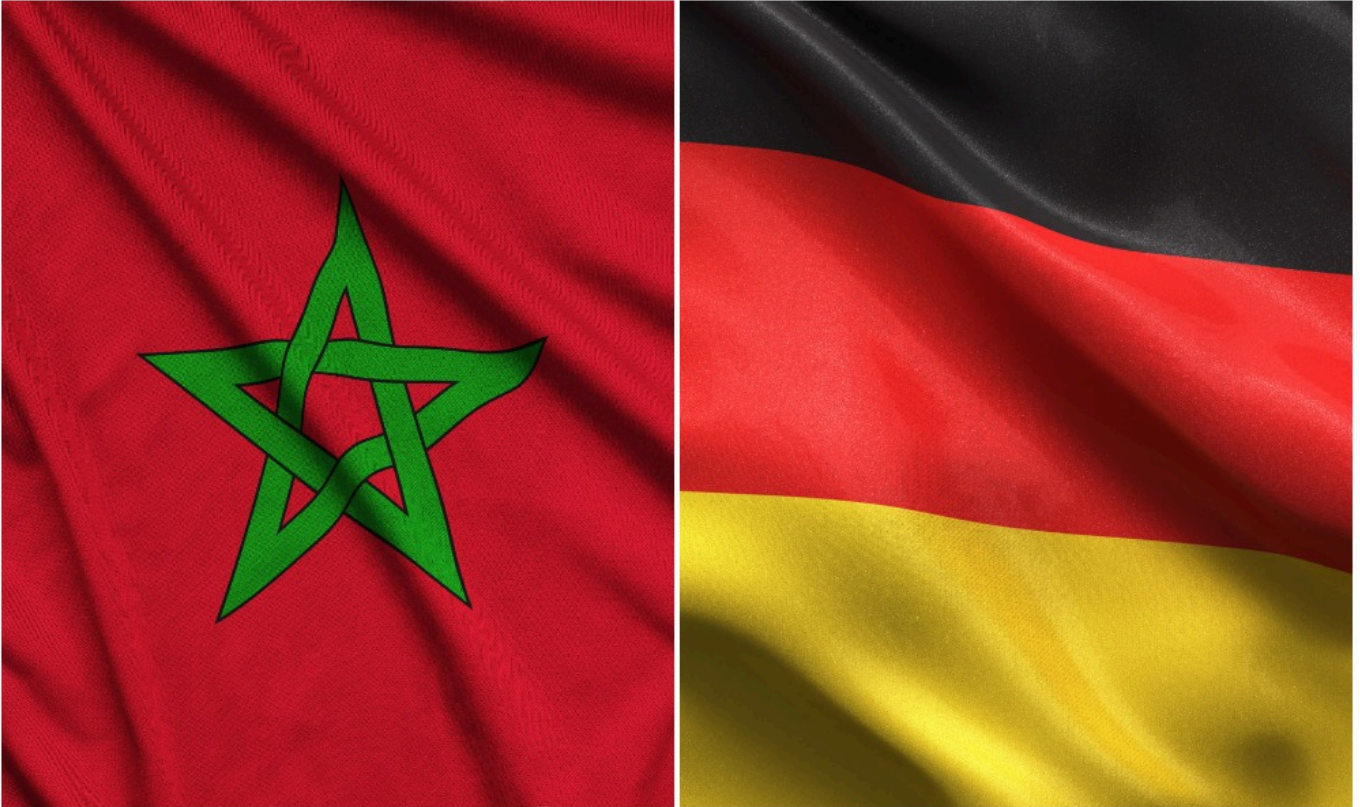
RABAT: Morocco said on Wednesday it expected a return to normal cooperation and diplomatic ties with Germany after Berlin expressed support for Rabat's autonomy plan for the disputed Western Sahara territory.

Morocco had recalled its ambassador to Germany in May in protest over what it described as Berlin's "antagonistic activism" after the United States in December 2020 recognized Moroccan sovereignty over the territory, which is also claimed by the Algeria-backed Polisario Front movement.

In March, Morocco ordered all governmental departments and bodies to abstain from any cooperation and contacts with the German embassy and German political organizations.

But last week, the diplomatic situation improved after the German foreign ministry issued a statement describing Morocco's autonomy plan as an "important contribution" to finding a political solution to the Western Sahara conflict, in line with United Nations Security Council resolutions. The Moroccan foreign ministry said in a statement that it welcomed the "positive statements...which bode well for a resumption of bilateral cooperation and a return to normalcy in the work of diplomatic representations of the two countries in Berlin and Rabat."

Morocco has been assertive in pushing European countries and the European Union to follow the United States on its Western Sahara stance. King Mohammed last month said Morocco would not agree "any economic or commercial step that excludes the Moroccan Sahara."



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Sahara tension: Moroccan row deepens with Germany Morocco cuts contacts with German embassy in WSahara spat

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## [Israel PM meets US national security adviser on Iran](#)

Wed, 2021-12-22 18:53

JERUSALEM: The US national security adviser held talks Wednesday with Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, who warned that negotiations in Vienna on Iran's nuclear program had "profound ramifications" for Israeli security. Bennett's government has remained firmly opposed to ongoing international efforts to revive a 2015 accord that saw Iran agree to curbs on its nuclear activities in exchange for sanctions relief.

Jake Sullivan, national security adviser to President Joe Biden, said his visit to Israel had come at "a critical juncture."

"It's important that we sit together and develop a common strategy, a common

outlook, and find a way forward that fundamentally secures your country's interests and mine," Sullivan said, according to an Israeli government statement.

He did not directly mention Iran but the Israeli statement said the meeting focused on the Vienna talks.

Pleased to meet with President Abbas. I highlighted the Biden administration's interest in strengthening engagement with the Palestinian Authority and deepening ties with the Palestinian people. [pic.twitter.com/hevA5HNDtg](https://pic.twitter.com/hevA5HNDtg)

– Jake Sullivan (@JakeSullivan46) [December 22, 2021](#)

Later, Sullivan and his Israeli counterpart Eyal Hulata led a meeting of delegations from both countries, a joint statement said. They discussed the need to confront "all aspects of the threat posed by Iran, including its nuclear program, destabilising activities in the region, and support for terrorist proxy groups," the statement added. The US and Israel "are aligned in their determination to ensure that Iran never gets a nuclear weapon," it said. Bennett has called for the nuclear deal negotiations to be halted, accusing Iran of "nuclear blackmail" and charging that revenue it gained from sanctions relief would be used to acquire weapons to harm Israelis. Lead US Iran negotiator Rob Malley told CNN Tuesday that there are only "some weeks" left to revive the deal if Tehran continues its nuclear activities at the current pace. Negotiations to restore the pact known as the Joint Collective Plan of Action resumed in November. Washington was a party to the original agreement, but withdrew under president Donald Trump in 2018. The Biden administration has warned it may soon be too late to revive the JCPOA. "It really depends on the pace of their nuclear process," said Malley, the US special envoy for Iran. "If they halt the nuclear advances, we have more time. "If they continue at their current pace, we have some weeks left but not much more than that, at which point the conclusion will be there's no deal to be revived," he said. Iran says it only wants to develop a civil nuclear program. Sullivan is also scheduled to meet Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas in Ramallah, in the Israeli-occupied West Bank.



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## [Permanent ‘Year Zero:’ Red Cross chief paints bleak picture of Mid-East conflict zones](#)

Author:

Wed, 2021-12-22 01:40

NEW YORK: Although to outside observers the Middle East might appear to be experiencing a period of renewed, active diplomacy, including a host of new peace initiatives, “our teams on the ground see no difference,” according to

Fabrizio Carboni, regional director of the International Committee of the Red Cross for Near and Middle East.

During a virtual briefing in New York, he painted a bleak picture of a region that continues to struggle with protracted conflicts, collapsing economies and dire financial predicaments, on top of efforts to battle a COVID-19 pandemic that continues to rage amid vaccine scarcity in many countries. Only 5 percent of Syrians have had their first dose of a vaccine, and 2 percent of Yemenis, for example.

This amid “donor fatigue,” said Carboni, as conflicts proliferate elsewhere in the world, including Afghanistan and Ethiopia, and donor nations divert resources that would previously have gone to help people in the Middle East.

“For the time being, we are \$8 million short of what we need for a full slate of humanitarian activities in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories,” Carboni said, by way of an example.

“In Iraq, we are short of \$20 million. And even if these countries are not in the top headlines on a daily basis, the families (there) continue to suffer and need massive help.”

Adding to the difficulty of funding humanitarian work in some parts of the region is the fact that “we are moving from true emergency, like distributing food, to another phase – let’s call it ‘early recovery’ – where we need to work on systems to allow people to be autonomous and get back on their feet. And this is a more complex activity to finance and it costs a lot because of the size of the destruction.”

The destruction caused by a decade of conflict in Syria is reminiscent of that caused in Europe during the Second World War, according to Carboni.

“Every time I go back to Syria I always have the feeling that the conflict ended the day before,” he said. “There is this permanent state of ‘Year Zero’ and it’s really heartbreaking.

“And the financial crisis hitting Syria today is an additional layer of vulnerability and complexity, and it is hitting very, very hard the average Syrian.”

Warning that the freezing winter temperatures are making conditions even harsher for displaced Syrians, both internally and as refugees, Carboni in particular highlighted the plight of children as the worst-affected by the crisis. The situation in northeast Syria represents “one of the largest child-protection crises in the world today,” he said.

At the Al-Hol camp, for example, which the official recently visited, he said the vast majority of residents are children under the age of 12. Many of them were separated from their families during transfers to other camps. These children need to be reunited with their families, repatriated alongside them, or have alternative care provided for them, Carboni added.

The packed Al-Hol camp is home to more than 60,000 women and children, many

of them the wives and children of defeated Daesh fighters. The majority of states where they originally came from, including the UK, refuse to repatriate them.

Carboni called for “collective action to have a long-term view for those populations who are still stranded in northeast Syria in a legal limbo.” He encouraged all states to repatriate their citizens and “do it lawfully, according to standards and principles, including support to returning children and their families.”

He added: “Family unity should be the norm during repatriation. Keeping families together is usually in the child’s best interest and it’s what international law requires, unless otherwise justified by a rigorous assessment.”

Referring to the political process, Carboni lamented the lack of will to make sacrifices for the sake of peace.

“Peace agreements are about compromise,” he said. “My fear around Syria, but also generally speaking, is that parties to the conflict try to find a painless solution.

“Oftentimes, there is a political price to pay when you decide to make peace. You always need a form of political courage; giving in on something. What we see in Syria (is) there is no will to make this compromise. That’s why the situation is frozen, rotting, and the ones who are paying the price are Syrians.”

In Yemen, where “all basic services are down,” seven years of conflict have come on top of other chronic challenges facing the nation that have nothing to do with war, such as climate change and an education crisis, Carboni said.

In the absence of basic healthcare, with 24 million people in need of assistance and three-quarters of the population living in near-famine conditions, what is needed is for “states with influence to help reach an agreement to shut down this conflict and to allow the people of Yemen to focus on rehabilitating their country and the existential challenges it is facing,” he added.

Turning to the COVID-19 crisis, Carboni said that while the pandemic is the major threat facing the West, it is just one additional layer of vulnerability in places such as Syria, Iraq and Lebanon, where people are trying to cope simultaneously with multiple crises.

Preventive measures such as social distancing become an absurd demand at overcrowded refugee camps and shelters, he pointed out. Sheltering at home is out of the question for Yemenis, who have to venture out every day to find food for their families. Frequently washing hands might sound a simple precaution for people in Western nations, but for those in Tikrit, Mosul, Hodeida or Aden, water is often not so readily available, he said.

Reaching vulnerable populations with vaccines remains an “an absolute necessity” in efforts to end the global pandemic, Carboni added.



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[International Committee of the Red Cross \(ICRC\)](#)

[Fabrizio Carboni](#)

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Red Crescent says bodies of 17 people washed ashore in Libya

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## [Palestinian tries to ram Israel soldiers in West Bank, shot dead](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

1640120712837396100

Tue, 2021-12-21 00:07

JERUSALEM: A Palestinian who tried to ram Israeli soldiers with his car in the Israeli-occupied West Bank late Tuesday was shot dead by the soldiers, the army and Palestinian sources said.

The man crashed his car into a military jeep after being shot, causing both vehicles to burst into flames, a statement from the military said of the incident near the northern West Bank city of Jenin.

The Palestinian health ministry later announced the death of a "citizen."

The army said “a terrorist accelerated his car toward a manned military post adjacent to the community of Mevo Dotan” in the West Bank. “IDF troops who were at the point operated to stop the assailant by firing toward the vehicle,” the statement said. “The vehicle crashed into a military vehicle that was in close proximity to the post. As a result, the vehicles caught on fire,” it added. An army spokesman told AFP the military believed the assailant had died as a result of gunshot wounds, but was unable to confirm this.



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## [Sudan's PM Hamdok intends to resign within hours, say sources](#)

Author:  
Reuters  
ID:  
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KHARTOUM: Sudan Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok has told a group of national political and intellectual figures that he intends to resign in the coming



hours, two sources close to Hamdok told Reuters on Tuesday.

Hamdok was reinstated on Nov. 21 following a coup a month earlier that saw the military take power and end a transitional partnership with political parties.

While several political forces took part in drafting the agreement, according to the sources, it has faced widespread criticism from parties and the general public.

On Saturday, hundreds of thousands of people marched on the presidential palace rejecting both military rule and Hamdok's decision to return, which he had said he took to preserve gains made during the transition and to end bloodshed.

Some 47 people have died in crackdowns on protests against military rule, including two as a result of Saturday's protest. The United Nations said on Tuesday that it had received reports of rape or gang rape of 13 women and girls.

Sources close to Hamdok had said previously he would only remain in office if he had political support and if the agreement was enforced. It called on the military to release political detainees, protect freedom of expression and allow Hamdok to independently appoint a new cabinet.

In a statement over the weekend, Hamdok said Sudan was inching toward "the abyss," blaming political intransigence and lack of consensus on a new political agreement.

The group Hamdok spoke to on Tuesday called on him to stay in his position but he insisted he would leave, the sources added.



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