

UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI PADOVA

DIPARTIMENTO DI SCIENZE POLITICHE, GIURIDICHE E  
STUDI INTERNAZIONALI

Corso di laurea *Triennale* in  
SCIENZE POLITICHE, RELAZIONI INTERNAZIONALI, DIRITTI UMANI



THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN ISRAEL AND  
THE AFRICAN STATES

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A.A. 2021/2022

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# INTRODUCTION

Due to its history and roots, Israel is largely considered as a Western outpost within the Middle Eastern region. As a matter of fact, scholars and media usually focus on the relations that the Jewish state maintains with Europe, the United States, as well as with its neighbouring countries, such as Lebanon, Syria or Iran.

What is instead often overlooked is Israel's relationship with the continent placed at its gates: Africa. However, there are several reasons why this topic should draw more attention.

Firstly, the African states are becoming, and will become, increasingly relevant in the international context, due to their demographic and economic growth expected in the next decades. These developments will necessarily have an impact on the adjacent regions and countries, including Israel.

Secondly, Israel has sought to strengthen ties with several African countries since the first years after its creation. Thus, the Jewish state played a part in the history of the African continent, in the same way as the African states had an influence on Tel Aviv during the decades. In the recent years too, especially under the presidency of Netanyahu, Israel has continued to establish and further ties with the African nations. Therefore, in order to understand the future development of these countries, it is important to take into consideration their past and current foreign policies.

Lastly, Israeli-African relations could also affect other international issues. Indeed, as it will be further described in the following chapters, Israel, through many of these relationships, aims to find new allies to support its expansion in Palestine, and to reduce the Iranian influence in the region.

For the reasons expressed above, the relationships between Israel and the African states are considered relevant and this thesis aims to analyse them. While attempts were made to focus equally on the African and Israeli perspective, not every African country has been taken into consideration: indeed, the chapters focus more on general trends and main developments.

The work is composed of three chapters.

The first chapter deals with the evolution of African-Israeli relations, from the late 1950s to 2020s. It describes how these relationships passed from being centred on

formal and aid-focus cooperation during the 1960s to being influenced mainly by private and security actors, as well as by economic interests, in the 1990s. In each paragraph, the rationale behind Israel's engagement with Africa has been studied, analysing the changes occurred during the decades and evidencing the impact of several historical events on the foreign policy of the Jewish state. The purpose of this chapter is to provide the reader with a historical background of Israel's relations with the African states, necessary to have a better understanding of current trends in international politics.

The second and third chapter address the same issue, i.e., the reasons of African-Israeli rapprochement in the last two decades, from opposite perspectives.

The second chapter focuses on the principal interests that drive the Jewish state to strengthen ties with several African countries. As mentioned above, the paragraphs refer mainly to events, data and tendencies emerged in the 2000s. From the study of several researches on the topic, three drivers have been identified as significant in the current Israeli foreign policy towards Africa: the willingness to influence the voting patterns within multinational fora; economic interests (mostly lied to the fact that African markets are expected to grow in the next decades); a desire to establish strategic alliances with the aim of curbing the influence and presence of Iran and Islamist fundamentalist groups within several African regions.

The third chapter, instead, examines the main reasons that lead several African states to establish or foster relations with Israel; as in Chapter 2, the focus is on the recent decades. Improving relations with the United States is one of these reasons, followed by the impact of evangelical communities and rationale on the foreign policy of many African countries. In addition, several states in Africa are interested in Israeli development expertise and aid, as well as in Israeli security assistance.

# CHAPTER I: THE ISRAELI INFLUENCE IN AFRICA: FROM 1957 TO PRESENT DAY

## 1.1. *The golden age of African-Israeli relations*

The decade which goes from 1957 to 1966 is sometimes referred to as the “golden age” or the “honeymoon” of African-Israeli relations and it marks the beginning of Israel’s engagement with African states.<sup>12</sup> The opening of an embassy in Ghana in 1957 represents the starting point for this period of flourishing relationships. As a matter of fact, Israel’s presence there had been already established the year before, in 1956, with the creation of a consulate in Accra. However, it is only after the Ghanaian independence from the United Kingdom in 1957 that the Jewish state began to foster strong ties with the new-born state and other African countries.

Two are the main events that led to this Israeli engagement. The first is the occasion where 29 African and Asian countries met in Bandung (Indonesia) in April 1955, in order to discuss the role of the so-called Third World in the Cold War and to address issues such as decolonization and self-determination; this event is known as the Bandung Conference and it constitutes a major step towards the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement. Among the participants, there were 14 Arab and Muslim countries, as well as Palestinian leaders who took part in the Conference as members of the Yemeni and Syrian delegations.<sup>3</sup> Israel, instead, was excluded. Moreover, the Final Communiqué of the Asian-African conference expressly declared the countries’ “support of the rights of the Arab people of Palestine and called for the implementation of the United Nations Resolutions on Palestine”.<sup>4</sup> In this context, it became clear to the Jewish state that it was isolated not only from the Arab world, but also from a newly “united Afro-Asian ‘Third World’”.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Yotam Gidron, *Israel in Africa: Security, Migrations, Interstate Politics*, (London: Zed Books, 2020), 33

<sup>2</sup> Naomi Chazan, ‘Israel and Africa: challenges for a new era’, in The Africa Institute of the American Jewish Committee and Harold Hartog School of Government and Policy (eds), *Israel and Africa: Assessing the Past, Envisioning the Future* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2006), 3

<sup>3</sup> Arye Oded, “Africa in Israeli Foreign Policy—Expectations and Disenchantment: Historical and Diplomatic Aspects”, *Israel Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 3, (Fall 2010): 123

<sup>4</sup> Final Communiqué of the Asian-African conference of Bandung (24 April 1955)

<sup>5</sup> Yotam Gidron, *Israel in Africa: Security, Migrations, Interstate Politics*, (London: Zed Books, 2020), 17

Therefore, Israel sought new allies in several African countries who were on the path of independence, in order to limit the influence of Arab and North African states on the continent as soon as possible.<sup>6</sup>

The second event that drove Israel into Africa is the Israeli regaining of shipping rights in the Straits of Tiran, the only access point to the Red Sea for the Jewish state. These shipping rights had been limited since 1950, when Egypt occupied the islands of Sanafir and Tiran (originally held by Saudi Arabia) and they were completely denied in 1955 through the Egyptian naval and aerial blockade of the Straits.<sup>7</sup> The situation was eventually resolved after the Suez Crisis, when the Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula was accorded in return for the recognition of its freedom to navigation. Thus, together with the regaining of this right, Israel obtained in 1956 access to East and southern Africa.

Against this background, on the one hand Israel turned to Africa and, on the other hand, “Africa welcomed Israel with unembarrassed warmth”, to such an extent that by the end of the 1960s Israel already maintained diplomatic relations with about thirty-three countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>8</sup> Yotam Gidron goes as far as defining this growth “extraordinary”, considering that “Israel was a small, young country, whose ties in Africa did not build on any existing diplomatic networks from the colonial period”.<sup>9</sup>

The Israeli strategy adopted during this first phase of fostering ties had a focus on technical cooperation and diplomacy. The former was (and still is) promoted by the MASHAV (the Hebrew acronym for Israel’s Agency for International Development Cooperation), a special unit created in the 1960s. This department supports development projects, mainly directed to areas in which Israel has

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<sup>6</sup> Zach Levey, “The Rise and Decline of a Special Relationship: Israel and Ghana, 1957-1966”, *African Studies Review*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (April 2003): 157

<sup>7</sup> Eitan Barak, “Between Reality and Secrecy: Israel's Freedom of Navigation through the Straits of Tiran, 1956-1967”, *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 61, No. 4 (Autumn 2007): 659-660

<sup>8</sup> Michael Brecher, « Israel and "Afro-Asia" », *International Journal*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (Spring 1961): 122

<sup>9</sup> Yotam Gidron, *Israel in Africa: Security, Migrations, Interstate Politics*, (London: Zed Books, 2020), 20

expertise, such as agriculture, water resource management, public health, education and rural development.<sup>10</sup>

What is more, the military sector has played a key role in Africa-Israel relations since the first years, when the new-born states relied on the Israeli know-how and assistance; indeed, Abel Jacob reminds that “by 1966 ten African states had received some form of direct military assistance from Israel”.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, the role of paramilitary youth organizations, mainly the Nahal (Fighting Pioneer Youth) and the Gadna (Youth Battalions) must be considered. African countries were particularly interested in these Israeli programmes because they combined education, vocational training and, as regards the Nahal, agricultural education; then, they were considered ideally suited models for the modernization of African agriculture headed by national youth movements. Even in this case, Israeli assistance was extended to several African countries. However, this model of paramilitary training youth was not as successful as it had been within the Jewish state, due to the high costs of the programmes and other factors, such as ethnic tensions.<sup>12</sup> Overall, though, military aid contributed to extending Israeli influence on the continent and, thereby, to partly overcoming the political isolation of the Jewish state.

Another part of the Israeli strategy adopted during the 1960s to reduce regional isolation was the “periphery doctrine” (known also as “alliance of the periphery”), namely the establishment of ties with non-Arab countries that surrounded its hostile Arab neighbours. These states were Turkey, Iran and Ethiopia. The latter was strategically important, given its closeness to the southern opening of Red Sea (the straits of Bab el-Mandeb) and the waters of the Nile flowing within its territory; moreover, it shared with Israel a fear towards its Muslim populated neighbours, especially towards Egypt.<sup>13</sup> All this has led to the fact that “for many years, Ethiopia

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<sup>10</sup> Haim Divon, ‘MASHAV in Africa: the Israeli Government’s Development Cooperation Program’, in The Africa Institute of the American Jewish Committee and Harold Hartog School of Government and Policy (eds), *Israel and Africa: Assessing the Past, Envisioning the Future* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2006), 18

<sup>11</sup> Abel Jacob, “Israel’s Military Aid to Africa, 1960-66”, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (August 1971): 165

<sup>12</sup> Yotam Gidron, *Israel in Africa: Security, Migrations, Interstate Politics*, (London: Zed Books, 2020), 26

<sup>13</sup> Rahul Burman, “Israel and Africa”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 9, No. 14 (April 1974)



would be the closest African ally to Israel among others”: this relationship started in 1956, when Israel opened a consulate general in Addis Ababa, and focused largely on military and security assistance.<sup>14</sup> For instance, the Jewish state played an important role in the struggle over Eritrea, who was fighting for its independence from the Ethiopian federal state.

In addition, the establishment of ties during the 1960s between African states and Israel was encouraged not only by strategic and pragmatic interests, but also by ideological aspects. As regards to Israel, there was a “sense of identification and partnership of fate with the Africans”.<sup>15</sup> This had already been stated in 1902 by Theodor Herzl, the founder of Zionism, who wrote: “There is still one question arising out of the disaster of the nations which remained unresolved to this day, and whose profound tragedy only a Jew can comprehend. This is the African question.”<sup>16</sup> African states, on the other hand, viewed Israel as a “developing, not yet a developed, country”, who could serve as a model of a new, modern, independent nation. Moreover, also given its small size, Israel was considered devoid of colonial ambitions, making it a preferable ally to the former colonial powers.<sup>17 18</sup> Israeli propaganda aimed to support these ideas as well as to counteract the opposed Arab propaganda who identified Zionism with imperialism.

## ***1.2. The impact of Israel’s wars on African-Israeli relations***

In 1967, the golden years of Israeli-African relations ended due to the Six-Day War. On this occasion, the Jewish state launched a surprise attack against Egyptian and Syrian forces on the 5th of June, as a reaction to the decision of the Egyptian leader Nasser to mobilize troops in the Sinai and to close the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping. Six days after the attack, the war was over and Israel had occupied the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip (previously part of the Egyptian state), the

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<sup>14</sup> Jean-Loup Samaan, *Israel’s Foreign Policy Beyond the Arab World - Engaging the Periphery*, (New York: Routledge, 2018), 86

<sup>15</sup> Arye Oded, “Africa in Israeli Foreign Policy—Expectations and Disenchantment: Historical and Diplomatic Aspects”, *Israel Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 3, (Fall 2010): 125

<sup>16</sup> Golda Meir, *My Life*, (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1975), pp. 308-309.

<sup>17</sup> Netanel Lorch, “Israel and Africa Author”, *The World Today*, Vol. 19, No. 8 (August 1963), 360

<sup>18</sup> Arye Oded, “Africa in Israeli Foreign Policy—Expectations and Disenchantment: Historical and Diplomatic Aspects”, *Israel Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 3, (Fall 2010): 127

Jordanian West Bank, and the Syrian Golan Heights. If, on the one hand, this offensive constituted a major victory for Israel, on the other hand, it can be considered the first step which led to the rupture of almost all its relations with African countries in the following years.

The African state most affected by the war was Egypt, who suffered major territories' loss and a military defeat. The conflict increased the animosity between the Arab country and Israel to such an extent that Nasser imposed an eight-year blockade of the Suez Canal and waged, against the Jewish state, the so-called War of Attrition. The latter, fought from 1969 to 1970 with the support of the Soviet Union and Sudan, proved to be inconclusive: as a matter of fact, it has led neither to the liberation of the Sinai Peninsula, nor to the weakening of the Israeli forces. Nonetheless, the conflict had far-reaching consequences on other African states. Indeed, the Six-Day War and the consequent War of Attrition changed the Israeli approach to southern Sudan's aspirations for independence. If before 1967 Israel denied its support to southern secessionists in order to preserve its diplomatic ties with Africa, after the war it undertook a covert operation aimed to undermine Sudan and, indirectly, Egypt. In fact, the Mossad promoted air droppings of supplies and arms at the headquarters of the southern Sudanese rebel group, Anya-Nya, and contributed secretly to the anti-Arab propaganda of the secessionists.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda were aware of and part of the operation, allowing the Israeli experts to use their territories to get into southern Sudan.

This situation shows how the 1967 war did not immediately bring about a break-up in relations between Israel and the African states. In 1971 Israel still had diplomatic relations with 32 African states: Guinea was the only one who severed ties with Israel.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, most of the African allies continued to receive and donate support to the Jewish state. For instance, in July 1967, within the context of the UN General Assembly, 17 African countries endorsed an US-backed resolution, which was

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<sup>19</sup> Yotam Gidron, "'One People, One Struggle': Anya-Nya propaganda and the Israeli Mossad in Southern Sudan, 1969–1971", *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, Vol. 12, No.3 (April 2018)

<sup>20</sup> Zach Levey, "Israel's Exit from Africa, 1973: The Road to Diplomatic Isolation", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (August 2008), 207

more conducive to Israel than to the Arab states, while just 9 African states supported a Soviet-backed and more Arab-friendly resolution.<sup>21</sup>

However, the war did modify the way Israel was perceived by the African states. Before 1967, the Jewish state had been accused of being an imperialist and neo-colonialist nation during the Casablanca Conference. It was 1961 and Egypt, Morocco, Libya, Algeria, Guinea, Ghana, and Mali took part in the conference; however, at the time several other African countries distanced themselves from the accuses.<sup>22</sup> The invasion and the occupation of the Sinai Peninsula, meaning African territory, bolstered the accusations of colonial ambitions, part of the Arab propaganda against the Jewish state. Thus, several countries, aware of the abundant border disputes within the African continent and unwilling to set an undesirable precedent, changed their approach to Israel.<sup>23</sup>

When Muammar al-Gaddafi became the de facto leader of Libya in 1969, he leveraged these sentiments and fears in order to curb the Israeli influence in Africa. He pursued his aim both by threatening jihad against Israel's allies both by giving financial rewards when the ties with the Jewish state were severed. This diplomatic offensive, combined with numerous other factors, showed its results in 1972 when Uganda broke its relations with Israel, followed by Chad and Congo, and other countries the year after.<sup>24</sup>

The situation further deteriorated in October 1973 due to the Yom Kippur War, a conflict started by Egypt and Syria with a surprise attack. Eventually, supported by the US, Israel succeeded both to defend itself and go on the offensive. However, together with a military victory, Israel experienced a diplomatic defeat; indeed, Levey reminds the “psychological and symbolic impact of the rupture in relations that 27 states effected in less than one year and 21 of them during a period of 40 days”.<sup>25</sup> These disruptions of ties were prompted by a sense of solidarity with Egypt, as well as by the OPEC's decision to increase the prices of oil and impose

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<sup>21</sup> Yotam Gidron, *Israel in Africa: Security, Migrations, Interstate Politics*, (London: Zed Books, 2020), 38

<sup>22</sup> Arye Oded, “Africa in Israeli Foreign Policy—Expectations and Disenchantment: Historical and Diplomatic Aspects”, *Israel Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 3, (Fall 2010): 123

<sup>23</sup> Ivi, p. 134

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Zach Levey, “Israel's Exit from Africa, 1973: The Road to Diplomatic Isolation”, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (August 2008), 224

an oil embargo against all the countries backing Israel. The Jewish state reacted by calling back the majority of the experts present within the continent and by promoting trade as the central element of the Israeli presence in Africa; as a matter of fact, while remaining relatively small, the trade between Israel and Africa grew in the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War.<sup>26</sup>

In addition, while during the 1960s Israel's role in Africa was centred on diplomacy and cooperation, in the 1970s it was based on informal ties, as well as on security and intelligence networks. The latter were especially reinforced after the 1973 conflict, when Israel faced the need to restore its deterrence and its army. This necessity generated a series of consequences that changed the Israeli policy towards Africa in a few years. Following the Yom Kippur War, Israel's defence industry had such a remarkable growth that new buyers had to be found in order for the expansion to remain sustainable. These buyers were mainly identified in South Africa and Ethiopia.

Prior to 1973, the relationships with the former were generally negative, principally because of Israel's formal opposition to apartheid. However, after the war, pragmatic considerations made the besieged and isolated South Africa a suitable ally for the Jewish state. Ties between the two countries were focused mostly on covert arms trade and military cooperation; indeed, at the end of the 1980s South Africa constituted Israel's largest arms client, receiving about 35% of Israeli military exports.<sup>27</sup>

As regards to Ethiopia, a secret bilateral cooperation had already been promoted in the preceding decade and it even increased after the Six-Day War, despite the official denunciation of Israel occupation.<sup>28</sup> In 1974 Israel fostered a covert relation with the newly established socialist Derg regime, after the death of the Emperor Haile Selassie. Israel was the only country that has accepted weapons sales to Ethiopia, mainly because the two states shared the common interest of hindering Eritrea's independence. Thus, the Jewish state provided Ethiopia with arms and military training, while Ethiopia agreed to the access of Israeli shipping to Ethiopian

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<sup>26</sup> Ivi, p. 223

<sup>27</sup> Yotam Gidron, *Israel in Africa: Security, Migrations, Interstate Politics*, (London: Zed Books, 2020), 45

<sup>28</sup> Jean-Loup Samaan, *Israel's Foreign Policy Beyond the Arab World - Engaging the Periphery*, (New York: Routledge, 2018), 90

ports in the Red Sea. However, this cooperation eventually deteriorated at the end of the 1970s, due to the brutality of the new military junta.<sup>29</sup>

### ***1.3. The African comeback***

While the 1970s were characterized by a complete rupture of ties between Israel and the African states, the eighties represented a first period of relations' restoration. The main event which prompted this African comeback was the signing of a peace treaty between Israel and Egypt in 1979. With this accord, Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin agreed to withdraw from the Sinai Peninsula within three years, while President Anwar al-Sadat of Egypt promised mutual recognition, the establishment of full diplomatic relations with the Jewish state and the right of free passage for Israeli shipping through the Suez Canal; moreover, the Straits of Tiran and the Gulf of Aqaba were recognized as international waterways.

In 1982, the withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula was completed, which meant that the principal justification for the rupture of ties (i.e., solidarity with Egypt) was now absent. However, in contrast to what Israel's public opinion had expected and hoped, the restoration of ties had not been as rapid as the break-ups in the 1970s.<sup>30</sup> Various factors slowed down this process. Among these, Naomi Chazan has identified Israeli and African diverging aspirations and "the constant tug-of-war between the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the one hand and the Israeli defence establishment and private businessmen on the other hand"; furthermore, Joel Peters has pointed out the importance of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Palestinian problem.<sup>31 32</sup>

In addition, the South Africa-Israeli relationships curbed the African comeback. Despite the formal opposition to apartheid, during the years the ties between the two countries have been strengthened to the point that, according to Makhura B.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid

<sup>30</sup> Joel Peters, *Israel and Africa: The Problematic Friendship* (London: The British Academic Press, 1992): 107

<sup>31</sup> Naomi Chazan, 'Israel and Africa: challenges for a new era', in The Africa Institute of the American Jewish Committee and Harold Hartog School of Government and Policy (eds), *Israel and Africa: Assessing the Past, Envisioning the Future* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2006), 7

<sup>32</sup> Joel Peters, *Israel and Africa: The Problematic Friendship* (London: The British Academic Press, 1992)

Rapanyane, the Jewish state “played a vital role in maintaining the apartheid regime”.<sup>33</sup> This relationship was no longer discreet or secret: in 1984, Israel was condemned through the UNGA Resolution 3972 for its military support to South Africa. It was only at the end of 1980s that the Jewish state started to limit its connections with the African country, mainly due to the US threat to suspend military aid to any state violating the U.N. arms embargo.<sup>34</sup> As a response, in 1987 Israel imposed the U.N. sponsored sanctions against the apartheid regime; however, the (mainly military) cooperation between the two countries lasted until a new government was established in 1994.<sup>35</sup>

An element which instead encouraged African countries to restore ties with Israel was Gaddafi’s aggressive diplomacy. The latter, like the strategy adopted in 1973, was centred on preventing Israel from extending once again its influence over the continent. However, in the 1980s the Jewish state managed to “capitalize on the antagonism and fears” raised among several African countries, offering its cooperation and aid to counter the Libyan menace.<sup>36</sup> In the same way, African leaders leveraged the Israeli-Libyan competition in order to obtain military support. Thus, during the ‘80s about twenty African countries cut off diplomatic relations with Libya, while around seven countries restored their ties with Israel.

The first of these was Zaire in May 1982, a month before Israel’s invasion of Lebanon. The war, which originally should have been just a limited operation, damaged the international perception of the Jewish state and destroyed the possibility of exploiting the breakthrough with Zaire to extend Israeli influence in other African states. The latter were also discouraged by a diplomatic offensive launched by the Arab states soon after Zaire rapprochement with Israel, a strategy which would be used even afterwards.

What instead further prompted African countries to approach Israel was the disappointment for the assistance the Arab states gave to them after 1973: not only

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<sup>33</sup> Makhura B. Rapanyane, “Consistency and inconsistency in the foreign policy of the Republic of South Africa towards Israel”, *Journal of Public Affairs* (August 2021), 4

<sup>34</sup> Lawrence P. Frank, “Israel and Africa: The Era of Tachlis”, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (March 1988), 154

<sup>35</sup> Yotam Gidron, *Israel in Africa: Security, Migrations, Interstate Politics*, (London: Zed Books, 2020), 52

<sup>36</sup> Ivi, p. 51

it was extremely limited, but it was also unequally distributed among the states (as the majority of the funds were directed to predominantly Muslim countries).<sup>37</sup> All this was combined with the fact that the 1970s economic crisis affected and damaged numerous countries within the continent. Thus, economic and strategic interests underpinned both African and Israeli rationales. Indeed, soon after the Egyptian-Israeli treaty, in 1980 and 1981, the volume of Israel's exports to Africa increased by about 60 per cent.<sup>38</sup> According to Naomi Chazan, "the privatization of the Israeli presence in Africa, which took shape in the 1970s, was institutionalized".<sup>39</sup> In particular, Israel provided arms, equipment, and expertise, which contributed to the survival of several African leaders; for instance, in 1990 Samuel Doe, Liberia's leader whose bodyguards had been trained by Israel personnel, "claimed to have survived almost 40 assassination or coup attempts".<sup>40</sup> Indeed, while both in the 1960s and in the 1980s African countries requested aid from the Jewish state, in the latest period they sought mainly security and intelligence assistance, rather than development assistance; the relationships which followed were then more limited and pragmatic than the ones established during the honeymoon period.

Furthermore, numerous African leaders viewed the Israel comeback as an occasion to enhance their relationships with "Israel's patron", meaning the US; as a matter of fact, they hoped that improving their ties with the Jewish state would consequently boost aid and investment from the US.

Diplomatic considerations were taken into account also by Israel. In particular, it was David Kimche, one of the most important Israeli spymasters and former representative of the Mossad in Africa, that prompted Israel's search for diplomatic recognition in Africa. Designated director-general of the Israeli foreign ministry in 1981, Kimche modified the Israeli strategy in Africa, adopting a more determined

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<sup>37</sup> Arye Oded, "Africa in Israeli Foreign Policy—Expectations and Disenchantment: Historical and Diplomatic Aspects", *Israel Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 3, (Fall 2010): 137

<sup>38</sup> Joel Peters, *Israel and Africa: The Problematic Friendship* (London: The British Academic Press, 1992): 93

<sup>39</sup> Naomi Chazan, 'Israel and Africa: challenges for a new era', in The Africa Institute of the American Jewish Committee and Harold Hartog School of Government and Policy (eds), *Israel and Africa: Assessing the Past, Envisioning the Future* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2006), 8

<sup>40</sup> Yotam Gidron, *Israel in Africa: Security, Migrations, Interstate Politics*, (London: Zed Books, 2020), 51

approach. The core of this new strategy was still the need to break its political isolation, by finding allies in the African continent.

The decade ended with the resumption of relations with Ethiopia, “the first African state clearly not identified with the West to take this step”.<sup>41</sup> This decision was viewed as a confirmation of the worth of Israel's African policy and as a further step into the continent.

However, with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the end of the Cold War, the African continent ceased to be the strategic asset it was in the preceding decades. The superpowers consequently focused their attention elsewhere, and so did Israel.

#### ***1.4. After the end of the Cold War: the diminished interest in Africa***

The 1990s started with the disintegration of the Soviet Union and a consequent change in the approach towards Israel from radical and pro-Soviet African states (for example Mozambique, Angola and the Seychelles Islands). African countries had less constraints in establishing relations with the Jewish state; actually, the unipolar system, set up just after 1989, pushed even more states to strengthen ties with Israel for the ultimate purpose of improving its relationship with the US. At the same time, the political importance of the African continent declined during the 1990s.

By the late 1990s Israel fostered formal relations with 42 African countries; among the latter, there was even the Islamic state of Mauritania, the third member of the Arab League to recognize Israel as a sovereign state in 1999. The end of the Cold War marked then the period of Israel’s “full diplomatic comeback in Africa” and, more generally, in the world.<sup>42</sup> As a matter of fact, during the 1990s the Jewish state developed further relations with 58 countries around the globe, especially with India and China. Therefore, the Israeli necessity of breaking its international isolation diminished throughout the years, and so did the importance of establishing ties with African countries.

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<sup>41</sup> Joel Peters, *Israel and Africa: The Problematic Friendship* (London: The British Academic Press, 1992): 182

<sup>42</sup> Yotam Gidron, *Israel in Africa: Security, Migrations, Interstate Politics*, (London: Zed Books, 2020), 53



In addition, two further events affected the Israel comeback in Africa: the Israeli–Jordanian peace agreement and the signature of the Oslo Accords.

In 1994, Israel’s Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and King Hussein of Jordan agreed to end the state of war, existing between the two countries since 1948, and to establish mutual diplomatic relations. With this treaty, Jordan became the second Arab state who recognized the Jewish state.

Historically significant, the Oslo Accords marked a full-fledged turning point for the Israeli-Palestinian issue by instituting a president and a council of the Palestinian Authority, and by announcing the Israeli withdrawals from the main Palestinian urban centres in the West Bank and Gaza. The Accords were signed between 1993 and 1995 by the Jewish state and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and included a series of agreements.

The signature of these two documents on the one hand “removed the last political barriers that had prevented a diplomatic rapprochement in the past”; on the other hand, they made the “periphery doctrine” less important within Israel’s foreign policy.<sup>43 44</sup>

For the reasons addressed above, during the 1990s Israeli government was less concerned in establishing formal diplomatic ties with African states than in the past. In the footsteps of an approach adopted in the previous decades, the Jewish state left space to informal actors, such as businessmen and private companies. That is why, “Israeli regional embassies were opened in key political and economic centres on the continent and based on strategic interest”, in contrast to the 1960s when they were present in every state.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, according to Naomi Chazan, in 2006 the majority of Israel’s ten ambassadors had non-resident status in neighbouring countries; this was consistent with the pragmatic idea that “actual formal relations with many states are intermittent”.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Naomi Chazan, ‘Israel and Africa: challenges for a new era’, in The Africa Institute of the American Jewish Committee and Harold Hartog School of Government and Policy (eds), *Israel and Africa: Assessing the Past, Envisioning the Future* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2006), 9

<sup>44</sup> Yoel Guzansky. “Israel’s periphery doctrines: then and now”, *Middle East Policy* (2021)

<sup>45</sup> Yotam Gidron, *Israel in Africa: Security, Migrations, Interstate Politics*, (London: Zed Books, 2020), 54

<sup>46</sup> Naomi Chazan, ‘Israel and Africa: challenges for a new era’, in The Africa Institute of the American Jewish Committee and Harold Hartog School of Government and Policy (eds), *Israel and Africa: Assessing the Past, Envisioning the Future* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2006), 10

It can be stated that the process of privatization, already observed during the previous decade, continued in the 1990s and afterwards; indeed, it was encouraged by the global process of economic liberalization and the corresponding development of informal markets, as well as by the growth of the Israeli arms industry.

A central and non-obvious element is what Yotam Gidron emphasized by saying: “what the term ‘privatisation’ fails to grasp, however, is the thick informal ties between private actors and the Israeli formal security sector and political elite”.<sup>47</sup> The root of such ties is mainly linked to the 1967 and 1973 wars: since these moments, within the Jewish state, security and military elites started to gain political weight and influence over the country’s interests.

Thus, the Israeli approach towards Africa during the 1960s and after the Cold War is markedly different: in the “honeymoon period”, the relationships between Israel and several African states were characterized by a formal, government-to-government cooperation; since the 1990s instead, the African comeback has been defined by the central role of private security enterprises, often linked to the Ministry of Defence. What is more, together with arms trade, in the 1990s diamond mining emerged as a fundamental sector in which Israel firms were involved.

In the 2000s, the international image of Israel and its presence in Africa deeply changed due to several events and transformations occurred in the world. Throughout the years, it became clear how the Jewish state was not willing to ease a two-state solution or to end the occupation of the Palestinian Territories. As this awareness was spreading, in September 2000 the Second Intifada broke out, followed by a violent reaction by Israel. This, together with the post-9/11 tightening of Israel’s counterterrorism measures within the Occupied Territories, damaged the international standing of the Jewish state.

However, another factor pushed African states (and not only) to support and strengthen ties with Israel: the rise of Iran as a regional and international power.

Indeed, Iran went from being part of the “periphery doctrine” (from the 1950s to the birth of the Islamic Republic in 1979) to representing an actual enemy for the

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<sup>47</sup> Yotam Gidron, *Israel in Africa: Security, Migrations, Interstate Politics*, (London: Zed Books, 2020), 54

Jewish state after the Cold War, when it started to support Syria, Hamas and Hezbollah. As a strategy to break its isolation on the global scene, the Islamic Republic turned to several African countries, among other states. This strategy worked particularly with Mauritania, which severed ties with Israel in 2010 in order to join up with Iran (and as a reaction to the Gaz War of 2008), and Sudan, which during the 1990s largely supported members of various Islamist militant groups (and then started to support more the US interests in the 21st century).

As a response, in the last two decades Israel has developed a “reverse periphery” doctrine, based on the idea that “today the biggest threats emanate from Israel’s periphery of non-Arab states”.<sup>48</sup> This new version of the strategy has broader targets: it is not limited to the Middle Eastern and African states, but it addresses countries such as Azerbaijan, Greece, India and China. Despite this, the African states, in particular the Eastern ones, are still considered as a major asset by Israel “due to their geographical proximity and large number” and to the “Iran’s growing influence in the Red Sea and East Africa”.<sup>49</sup>

### ***1.5. Israel’s new rhetoric in Africa under Netanyahu***

“Israel is coming back to Africa; Africa is coming back to Israel”.<sup>50</sup> With these words, pronounced to celebrate the launch of the new ‘Knesset Lobby for Relations between Israel and African Countries’ in 2016, the then Prime Minister Netanyahu stated the new Israeli engagement in Africa. A greater visibility and publicity are what sets this recent strategy apart from those subsequent to the Yom Kippur War. Indeed, the rhetoric pursued by Netanyahu shares more similarities with the 1960s’ one. It is centred on the same idea of an Israeli model of development suitable for every African state: defining itself as “Start-Up Nation”, Israel is offering its know-how and expertise, mainly in the fields of agriculture, technology, energy, irrigation and education. This cooperation is expected to be mutually beneficial; as Netanyahu

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<sup>48</sup> Yoel Guzansky. “Israel’s periphery doctrines: then and now”, *Middle East Policy* (2021), 95

<sup>49</sup> Yotam Gidron, *Israel in Africa: Security, Migrations, Interstate Politics*, (London: Zed Books, 2020), 60-63

<sup>50</sup> “PM Netanyahu attends launch of Knesset caucus for Israel-Africa relations”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (February 29, 2016) <https://www.gov.il/en/departments/news/pm-netanyahu-attends-launch-of-knesset-caucus-for-israel-africa-relations-29-feb-2016>

has affirmed: “It is happening now because it is so clear that this is good for Africa and it is good for Israel”.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, Israel aims to achieve the support of African States within the international forums, especially in the UN, in return for its help. The new narrative lied to African-Israeli relations highlights also the competence of the Jewish state in terms of counterterrorism and security. The latter serves both African and Israeli interests: by collaborating with African leaders, Israel on the one hand contributes to the stabilization of the regimes; on the other hand, it tackles the Islamist terrorist cells present within the continent. In addition, this defence partnership is sustained by a specific concept: that Israel and African countries share a common ally, “an axis of evil that stretches from the Middle East to West and East Africa”, and a common history of “being unfairly criticised by a two-faced and hypocritical international community”.<sup>52</sup>

What distinguishes the current Israeli engagement with African states from the one had during the 1960s is the prominent role of Israel’s civil society organizations and of private actors. Indeed, in the last decade the Jewish state has not allocated higher funds for development aids or operations in Africa, and neither for humanitarian assistance.<sup>53</sup> This is consistent with the gradual undermining of Israel’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, described by many as weakened by several budget cuts and reforms, as well as by the decision of Netanyahu to become Israel’s foreign minister (from 2015 to 2019) while he maintained his position as Prime Minister.<sup>54</sup>

Thus, the new rhetoric of an historical African comeback has remained mainly a political discourse and government institutions are largely relying on the private sector for developing and supporting Israeli-African relationships.<sup>55</sup>

Nevertheless, albeit not having an elaborated African policy, Netanyahu has obtained considerable diplomatic achievements through the Abraham Accords. The

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<sup>51</sup>“Netanyahu tells African envoys: This will mark Israel’s return to continent”, The Jerusalem Post (March 1, 2016) <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/politics-and-diplomacy/netanyahu-tells-african-envoys-this-will-mark-israels-return-to-continent-446492>

<sup>52</sup> Yotam Gidron, *Israel in Africa: Security, Migrations, Interstate Politics*, (London: Zed Books, 2020), 73

<sup>53</sup> Ivi, p. 85

<sup>54</sup> Benjamin Augé, « Relations Israël-Afrique. Que retenir de la décennie de Netanyahou ? », *Etudes de l’Ifri* (November 2020), 14-15

<sup>55</sup> Yotam Gidron, *Israel in Africa: Security, Migrations, Interstate Politics*, (London: Zed Books, 2020), 86

latter established a political process of normalization of relations between the United Arab Emirates and Israel; they were signed in August 2020 by the two countries, together with the United States. Bahrain joined the Accords one month after, in September 2020, becoming the fourth Arab country to recognize Israel.

These Accords, strongly supported by Donald Trump, are a culmination of the relations established among Israel and Gulf states, which impacted the African continent too. Indeed, in the last decade these actors have developed both a cooperation and a competition with regard to Africa, lied to the increased urge of countering the Iranian influence and the Muslim Brotherhood after the 2011 Arab Spring. This was mainly due to the war in Yemen, started in 2015 and defined as a proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia; the geographical proximity between the war theatre and the Horn of Africa, immediately led the Gulf states and Iran into the region.

Moreover, the hostility against the Islamic Republic and the consequent search for allies in Africa grew with the Gulf Crisis of 2017. On this occasion, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt severed all relations with Qatar and imposed an embargo on the country (ended only in 2021); among the factors which lead to this decision, there was Qatar's closer ties with Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood.

Thus, since the mid-2010s both the Jewish state and the Gulf countries have strengthened their influence in Africa with the same aim of curbing Iranian influence and this brought them to foster closer ties (to the point that some Gulf states are now considered part of the “reverse periphery”).<sup>56</sup>

The Abraham Accords are relevant in the matter of African-Israeli ties too. As a matter of fact, Sudan and Morocco, two of the main Muslim-majority African countries, followed the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain in normalizing their relations with the Jewish state.

Sudan signed the agreement in October 2020, just one month after the Abraham Accords and about one year after al-Bashir's overthrow. The latter event fundamentally modified the international stance of Sudan, given that it brought to a fall of the Islamist regime and to a stop in the support of Islamist terrorist

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<sup>56</sup> Yoel Guzansky. “Israel's periphery doctrines: then and now”, *Middle East Policy* (2021), 92-100

organization, such as Hamas and Hezbollah. These developments alone represented a notable achievement for Israel, who was a declared enemy of the al-Bashir regime and against which Sudan had fought in 1948 and 1967. The process of normalization (even though already considered in the last years of Bashir's presidency) is then an ulterior diplomatic success, made possible also by the US.<sup>57</sup> According to Yoel Guzanski, in fact, "today's periphery is similarly shaped by American influence".<sup>58</sup> Moreover, soon after the signature of the agreement, the US State Department removed Sudan from its list of state sponsors of terrorism.

In December 2020, the process of normalization of relations began also in Morocco. Even in this case, the American role was fundamental: as part of the deal, the US formally recognized Moroccan sovereignty over the disputed Western Sahara region.

Together with these political accomplishments, Netanyahu also obtained diplomatic defeats. As a matter of fact, his African strategy has not resulted in a radical change on the African voting bloc in the UN, which is still largely sided with the Palestinian.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, as reminded by Benjamin Augé, Israel is still opposed by three of the African economic giants: South Africa, Algeria and Nigeria.<sup>60</sup>

The cause of these negative outcomes has to be found in two main trends of Israel's engagement in Africa: the increasingly restricted funds reserved for the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the subsequent limited number of officials who can serve in the African continent.

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<sup>57</sup> Abdulgani Bozkurt, Mayada Kamal Eldeen, "Normalization of Sudanese and Israeli relations: From hostility to pragmatic conciliation", *İçtimaiyyat Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 6(1), (November 2022), 337-340

<sup>58</sup> Yoel Guzansky. "Israel's periphery doctrines: then and now", *Middle East Policy* (2021), 94

<sup>59</sup> Benjamin Augé, « Relations Israël-Afrique. Que retenir de la décennie de Netanyahou ? », *Etudes de l'Ifri* (November 2020), 24-25

<sup>60</sup> Ivi, p. 35



## CHAPTER II: THE DRIVERS OF ISRAELI FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS AFRICA

Israel has had several interests related to the African continent. Many of these have changed throughout the years, others are still present. In the following paragraphs, the main drivers of Israeli foreign policy towards Africa will be addressed, with a particular focus on the current African strategy and the events occurred in the 2000s.

### 2.1. *Diplomatic recognition and the African voting bloc*

“I used to look around me at the United Nations in 1957 and 1958 and think to myself: «We have no family here»”.<sup>61</sup> These words, pronounced by Golda Meir (Israel’s foreign minister from 1956 to 1966 and fourth Prime Minister of the Jewish state), highlight the feeling of diplomatic and political isolation which Israel suffered, in particular during the first decades of its existence. This “enduring perception of inextricable isolation”, to use Jean-Loup Samaan’s expression, is exactly what has driven Israel’s diplomacy since the very first years.<sup>62</sup> With regards to the African countries, the strategy to curb the seclusion is centred on influencing the voting patterns in the multinational fora.

#### *Israel in the United Nations General Assembly*

Above all, Israel wants to break the “giant bloc of 54 African countries” (out of a total of 193) present within the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA).<sup>63</sup> The principal reason for this is that the UNGA is the main political arena used by Palestinians to further their goals and question the Israeli occupation (in particular after being recognized as a non-member observer state in 2012).<sup>64</sup> For instance, in

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<sup>61</sup> Golda Meir, *My Life*, (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1975), 263-264

<sup>62</sup> Jean-Loup Samaan, *Israel’s Foreign Policy Beyond the Arab World - Engaging the Periphery*, (New York: Routledge, 2018), 4

<sup>63</sup> “What are Israel’s goals in West Africa?”, *Al Jazeera* (July 7, 2017) (<https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2017/7/7/what-are-israels-goals-in-west-africa>)

<sup>64</sup> Yaron Salman, “Israel-East Africa Relations”, *Strategic Assessment*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (July 2019), 97



the 76th Session (2021-2022) alone, the General Assembly adopted fourteen resolutions against the Jewish state, while only five resolutions passed concerned human rights situation in other countries in the world (specifically Iran, North Korea, Myanmar, Crimea and Syria).<sup>65</sup> As pointed out by Yotam Gidron, “the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is a diplomatic war of attrition, and Israel wants Africa on its side in this war”.<sup>66</sup>

This goal of changing the voting balance, which Netanyahu defines as the “first interest” of Israel’s foreign policy, appears only marginally achieved.<sup>67</sup> Throughout the years, even after the 1990s’ African comeback, African countries tendentially have maintained their formal opposition to Israel within the UNGA. However, some countries started to abstain or be absent with regard to pro-Palestinian voting and, accordingly to Yaron Salman, this is perceived by the Jewish state as a “positive change in voting patterns”.<sup>68</sup> For instance, in December 2017, Togo decided not to vote for the UN resolution condemning the US decision to move its embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. It was the only African state, among nine countries, to do so, while other 16 African countries abstained or refrained from voting.<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, even if Israel has considered this outcome as positive, the numbers remain relatively low.

Indeed, the bulk of the African states still vote against Israel within the General Assembly. According to Arye Oded, this could be a demonstration of a “balancing policy” developed by these countries, which “maintain the view that it is more reasonable to have relations and receive aid and benefits from both sides, the Arabs and Israel”.<sup>70</sup> Thus, for them, supporting the Palestinian cause in the United Nations

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<sup>65</sup> “2021-2022 UNGA Resolutions on Israel vs. Rest of the World”, *UN Watch* (November 29, 2021) <https://unwatch.org/2021-2022-unga-resolutions-on-israel-vs-rest-of-the-world/>

<sup>66</sup> Yotam Gidron, *Israel in Africa: Security, Migrations, Interstate Politics*, (London: Zed Books, 2020), 154

<sup>67</sup> “The pyramid of our foreign policy interests in Africa is as high as it has ever been”, Consulate General of Israel to the Midwest <https://embassies.gov.il/chicago/News/CurrentAffairs/Pages/PM-Netanyahu-meets-with-Israel's-ambassadors-to-African-countries.aspx>

<sup>68</sup> Yaron Salman, “The UN and Israel: From Confrontation to Participation”, *Strategic Assessment: A Multidisciplinary Journal on National Security*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (July 2020), 49

<sup>69</sup> Yotam Gidron, *Israel in Africa: Security, Migrations, Interstate Politics*, (London: Zed Books, 2020), 95-96

<sup>70</sup> Arye Oded, “Africa in Israeli Foreign Policy—Expectations and Disenchantment: Historical and Diplomatic Aspects”, *Israel Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 3, (Fall 2010), 139

and cultivating stable relations with the Jewish state are not mutually exclusive nowadays.

Moreover, Elliott Abrams has suggested that the “symbolic nature of votes” in the UN (in particular lied to the non-binding UNGA resolutions) and the publicity of these decisions could be an explanation for the invariability of the voting patterns.<sup>71</sup>

### *Israel and the African Union*

Another multinational institution where Israel is eager to gain influence is the African Union (AU), the pan-African organization that in 2002 succeeded the Organization of African Unity (OAU). The Jewish state enjoyed observer status in the latter, but it lost this position with the passage from OAU to AU; the main opponent to Israel’s access to the new institution has been Gaddafi, “who donated to the new institution and sought to use it to project his influence in Africa”.<sup>72</sup> Since then, Israel has sought to re-establish its presence in the African Union, presenting in 2003 a bid for AU observer status, which was rejected and further reiterated throughout the years. Eventually, in July 2021 the AU Commission Chair Moussa Faki Mahamat decided unilaterally to grant Israel observer status. This choice has been promptly opposed by several countries (in particular Algeria and South Africa), which complained about not having been “properly consulted”.<sup>73</sup> Thus, the AU has decided to open a debate on whether to withdraw Israel’s status; in February 2022, this debate has been postponed to AU’s next official meeting (that will occur in 2023), due to the fear of creating a remarkable division within the body. Moreover, a committee of eight heads of state and governments has been established in order to build consensus on the matter. However, until the final decision, Israel will maintain its observer status in the African Union.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Elliott Abrams, “Is Israel’s International Isolation Diminishing?”, *Council on Foreign Relations* (January 17, 2018) <https://www.cfr.org/expert-brief/israels-international-isolation-diminishing>

<sup>72</sup> Yotam Gidron, *Israel in Africa: Security, Migrations, Interstate Politics*, (London: Zed Books, 2020), 67

<sup>73</sup> “African Union postpones debate on Israel’s observer status”, *Al Jazeera* (February 7, 2022) (<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/7/african-union-postpones-debate-on-israels-observer-status>)

<sup>74</sup> Rina Bassist, “African Union chief says Israel has role to play in Africa”, *Al-Monitor* (June 10, 2022) <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2022/06/african-union-chief-says-israel-has-role-play-africa>

The importance given by the Jewish state to the African Union is proportional to the role of the institution in the Palestinian issue. Indeed, Palestine enjoys observer status too (since 2013) and, thanks to that, it has used the AU as a “platform to criticize Israel” and to coordinate African countries’ voting against the Jewish state in other international organizations, such as the UN.<sup>75</sup> For instance, in 2012 the Assembly of the AU supported Palestine’s request for observer status in the United Nations; as a consequence, no African country sided with Israel.<sup>76</sup> Thus, gaining influence within this international forum is an additional way to affect decisions on the Palestinian matters or against Israel. Moreover, as affirmed by Irit Back, the status has a considerable meaning for the Jewish state, given its geographical proximity to Africa and its economic relations with the continent.<sup>77</sup> Nonetheless, Jean-Loup Samaan reminds that “the status itself is in effect no more than symbolic”, considering that it does not give the right to intervene in the decision-making process of the Union.<sup>78</sup>

Having regard to the widespread protest against the observer status, what could be the reasons behind this decision? Samaan refers to some speculations on the role of Democratic Republic of Congo, “which currently holds the rotating chair of the AU and whose leader Felix Tshisekedi visited Israel in October”.<sup>79</sup>

In addition, the Abraham Accords are believed to have played an important part in prompting the AU choice. Al-Monitor goes as far as saying that, without the normalization of relations with Jewish state, the acceptance of Israel as a non-member observer state would probably never have occurred.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Steven Gruzd, Carmel Rawhani, Larry Benjamin, “Israel’s ties with Africa: a focus on Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa”, *South African Institute of International Affairs* (July 2018), 11-12

<sup>76</sup> Yotam Gidron, *Israel in Africa: Security, Migrations, Interstate Politics*, (London: Zed Books, 2020), 68-69

<sup>77</sup> “Israel-Africa Relations: New Challenges and Opportunities-Three questions to Irit Back”, *Institut Moutaigne* (April 6, 2022) <https://www.institutmoutaigne.org/en/analysis/israel-africa-relations-new-challenges-and-opportunities>

<sup>78</sup> Jean-Loup Samaan, “The Long History of Israel’s Outreach to Africa” (December 2021) <https://trendsresearch.org/insight/the-long-history-of-israels-outreach-to-africa/>

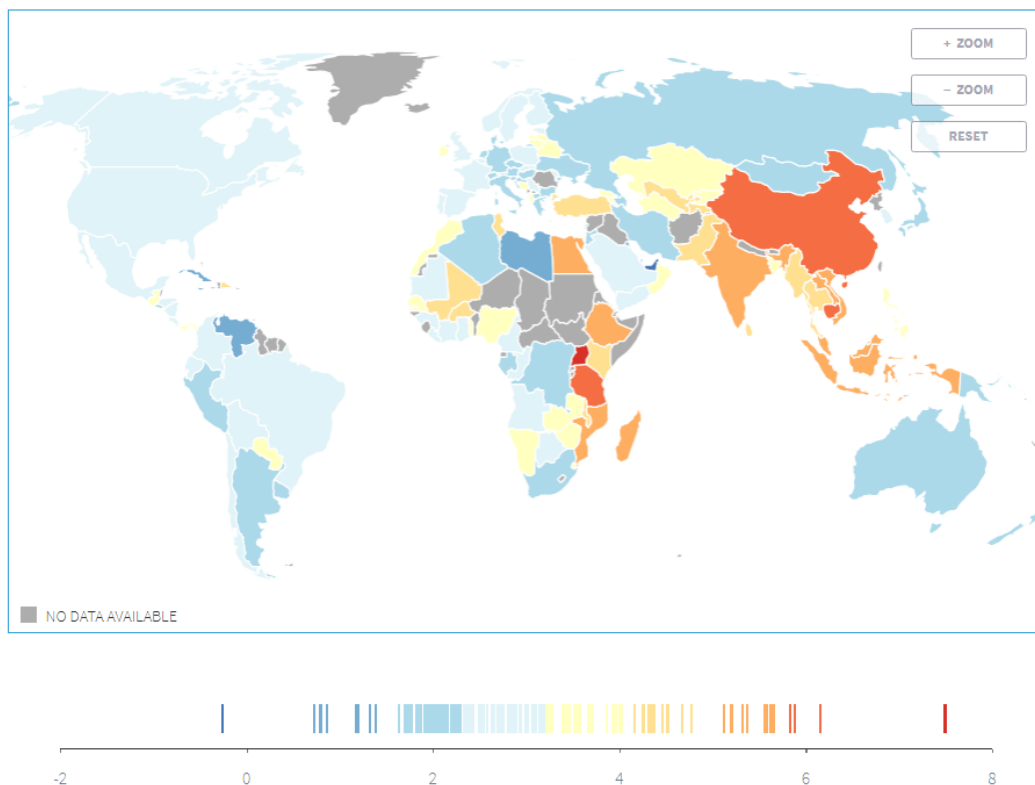
<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Bassist, Rina, “Abraham Accords accelerate Israel-Africa rapprochement”, *Al-Monitor* (June 1, 2022) <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2022/06/abraham-accords-accelerate-israel-africa-rapprochement#ixzz7cVslNUaD>

## 2.2. The African market

Since the 1960s, economic and commercial interests have driven Israel into the African continent. As a matter of fact, the latter has represented a land of rising opportunities, in which to sell Israeli products and from which to import raw materials, oil and minerals. According to the data available to date, five East African states are expected to be among the ten fastest growing economies in the world (considering the annual growth to 2030): Uganda will be on the lead, followed by Tanzania, Mozambique, Egypt and Madagascar (Figure 1).<sup>81</sup> This makes Africa a “potentially huge export market”.<sup>82</sup>

Figure 1: Growth Projections to 2030 (Annual Growth, %)  
Source: <https://atlas.cid.harvard.edu/growth-projections>



<sup>81</sup> “Growth Projections”, Atlas of Economic Complexity (July 26, 2022) <https://atlas.cid.harvard.edu/growth-projections>

<sup>82</sup> Yossi Melman, “Analysis: Israel’s renewed interest in Africa, *The Jerusalem Post* (April 17, 2016) <https://www.jpost.com/Jerusalem-Report/Return-to-Africa-447993>

Yet, despite that, commercial exchanges between Israel and the African countries are still minimal and, as stated by the Israel Export & International Cooperation Institute, over the last decade “Israeli exporters failed to capitalize on Africa's rapid economic growth”.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, by analysing the tables developed by the Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC) in 2019, it can be noticed that Africa is in the fifth place out of six, with regard to the continental groupings where Israel exports its products (Figure 2).<sup>84</sup> In the same way, Africa is the next-to-last continental grouping for Israel’s import origin (Figure 3).<sup>85</sup>

Figure 2: Israel’s export destinations by amount and country (2019)

Source: OEC, ‘Where does Israel export to? (2019)

[https://Oec.World/En/Visualize/Tree\\_Map/Hs92/Export/Isr/Show/All/2019/](https://Oec.World/En/Visualize/Tree_Map/Hs92/Export/Isr/Show/All/2019/)

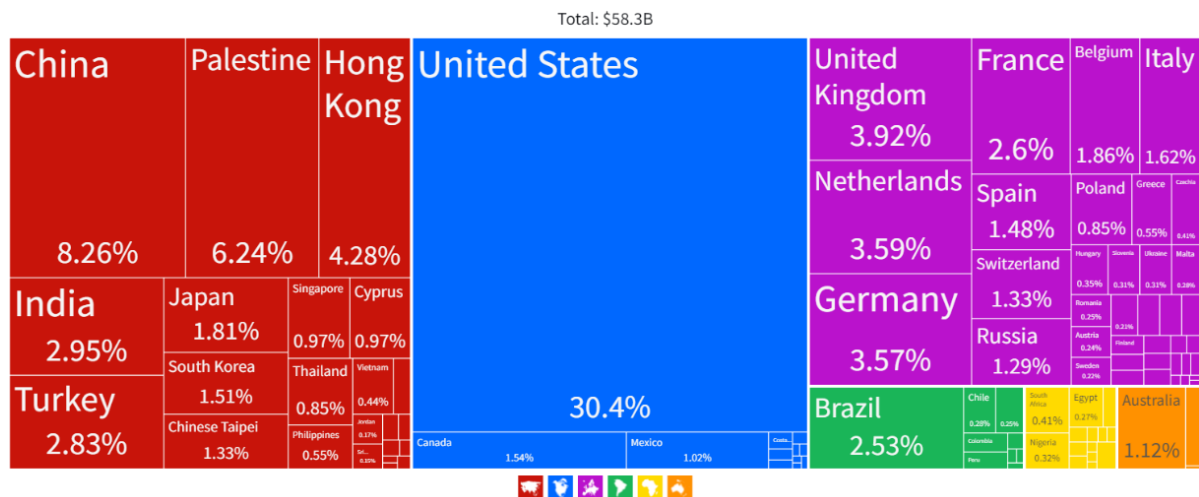
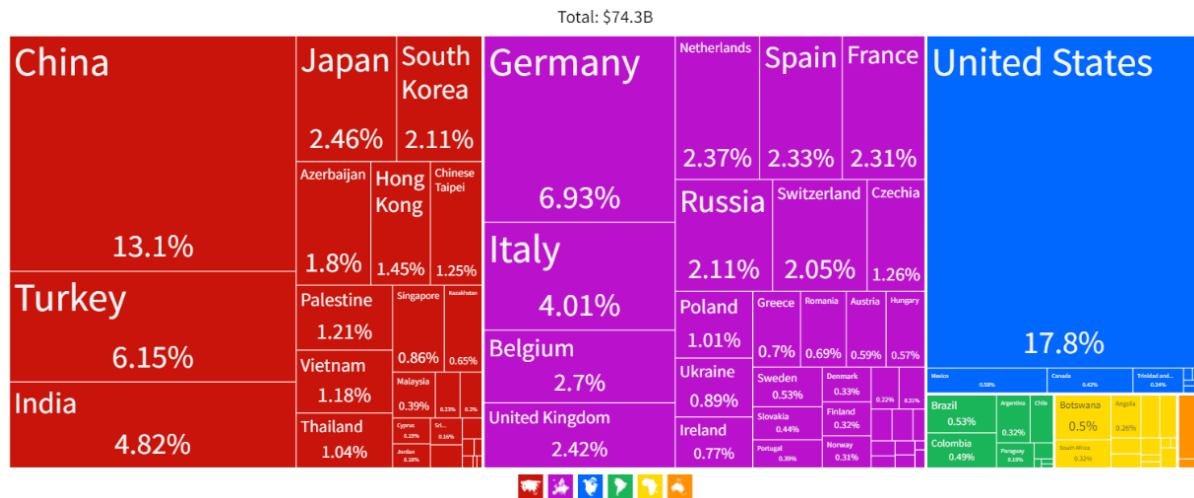


Figure 3: Israel's import origins by amount and country (2019)  
 Source: OEC, 'Where does Israel import from?' (2019)



[https://oec.world/en/visualize/tree\\_map/hs92/import/isr/show/all/2019/](https://oec.world/en/visualize/tree_map/hs92/import/isr/show/all/2019/)

Moreover, in 2017 only 1.5% of Israeli total exports were directed to Africa; in 2021 this figure ultimately fell to 1.3%.<sup>86 87</sup> Israel's imports from Africa are decreasing too, as opposed to the ones from Europe and Asia.<sup>88</sup>

Nonetheless, the Jewish state, especially through the African strategy undertaken by Netanyahu, has declared the intention of further fostering economic relations and trade with the African countries.

In June 2017, the then Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu attended the 51st Summit of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), a regional group composed of 15 members who seek to promote economic integration in West Africa. Doing so, he became the first non-African leader to participate in the meeting. Although the main declared goal of the trip was to garner support in the international fora, Israel exploited the event to pursue its economic interests too.<sup>89</sup> On that occasion, indeed, the Israeli solar energy company Energiya Global

<sup>86</sup> Yotam Gidron, *Israel in Africa: Security, Migrations, Interstate Politics*, (London: Zed Books, 2020), 74-75

<sup>87</sup> Philippe Leymarie, « Israël à la reconquête de l'Afrique », *Le Monde diplomatique* (23 juin 2022)

<sup>88</sup> Steven Gruz, Carmel Rawhani, Larry Benjamin, "Israel's ties with Africa: a focus on Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa", *South African Institute of International Affairs* (July 2018), 17

<sup>89</sup> <https://www.gov.il/en/departments/news/spokeliberia030617>

presented its plan to deploy \$1 billion in investments in ECOWAS member states over a period of four years.<sup>90</sup>

An additional element which points out the redesigned goals of the Jewish state is the Resolution 1585 adopted by the Israeli government in 2016. With this decision, Israel allocated NIS 50 million (\$13 million) to the strengthening of economic ties and cooperation with African countries. Furthermore, this resolution has prompted the opening of two ulterior Israeli economic and trade missions: one in Accra and one in Nairobi (being Kenya a significant market for the Jewish state). These were added to the (only) missions already present within the continent: the ones in Egypt and South Africa. The declared aim of these missions, driven by the Ministry of Economy and Industry, is to “advance our [Israeli] industries in foreign markets”.<sup>91</sup> Moreover, the Jewish state intends to strengthen trade relations with the African countries and to assist Israeli companies also through the Israel Foreign Trade Risks Insurance Corporation (ASHRA). The latter, established in 1957 and operating principally in developing countries, is a government-owned company who seek to “encourage exports from Israel, to help minimize political and commercial risks, to raise export financing for the mid and long terms and to finance Israeli investments abroad”.<sup>92</sup> In October 2017 this institution, following on from the highly touted African comeback, has chosen to allocate a further \$700 million insurance coverage for Israeli companies operating in Africa, for a total amount of \$1.4 billion.<sup>93</sup> According to the information gathered by Benjamin Augé, “it is estimated that half of the funds guaranteed by ASHRA are meant for Africa, or nearly \$2 billion”.<sup>94</sup> Ultimately, Israeli firms will be furtherly helped by an agreement signed in December 2017 with the United States’ Agency for International Development (USAID): thanks to this accord, Israeli companies can finance power projects in Africa through the Power Africa Program, an assistance mechanism launched by

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<sup>90</sup> “ECOWAS, Israel sign \$1 bn solar energy for member states”, *Vanguard* (June 3, 2017) <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2017/06/ecowas-israel-sign-1-bn-solar-energy-member-states/>

<sup>91</sup> “Foreign Trade Administration”, *Ministry of Economy and Industry* [https://www.gov.il/en/departments/Units/foreign\\_trade](https://www.gov.il/en/departments/Units/foreign_trade)

<sup>92</sup> “ASHRA” <https://www.ashra.gov.il/eng/?CategoryID=862>

<sup>93</sup> Eytan Halon, “Israeli businesses, exporters encouraged to expand Africa operations”, *The Jerusalem Post* (October 17, 2018) <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/israeli-businesses-exporters-encouraged-to-expand-africa-operations-569631>

<sup>94</sup> Benjamin Augé, « Relations Israël-Afrique. Que retenir de la décennie de Netanyahu ? », *Etudes de l’Ifri* (November 2020), 19

former US president Barack Obama in order to provide electricity to approximately 60 million African household by 2030.<sup>95</sup>

These decisions not only highlight renewed efforts to deepen economic ties with the African continent, but also emphasize the entanglement of governmental and private interests, as well as the role of the private sector within the African countries. Further evidence is shown by the fact that “Israeli high-profile diplomatic visits to Africa regularly double as marketing and networking tours for Israeli civilian businesses and security firms”.<sup>96</sup> In addition, in some cases, Israeli companies operating in the continent are led by former Israeli officials or former members of Israel’s security networks. For example, the businessman Daniel Pinhasi, whose company “Green 2000” is running projects in Africa, previously served as ambassador in Senegal between 2004 and 2006 and as diplomat in South Africa.<sup>97</sup> This situation of blurred distinction between different interests is also due to the fact that, as Gidron affirms, “there is no formal Israeli policy that governs the relationship between Israeli officials and private actors”.<sup>98</sup>

### *Key industries for Israeli-African relations*

On the subject of the role of Israeli firms in Africa, it can be observed that the bulk of Israel’s exports to the Sub-Saharan Africa is related to the chemicals industry (23% according to the annual average 2015-2019) and fields associated with the Agritech (being the Jewish state one of the world leaders in this sector), such as machinery equipment, rubber, and metal (Figure 4).<sup>99</sup> For instance, companies like Innovation: Africa and NUFiltration have implemented water purification systems

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<sup>95</sup> Benjamin Augé, « Relations Israël-Afrique. Que retenir de la décennie de Netanyahou ? », *Etudes de l’Ifri* (November 2020), 19

<sup>96</sup> Yotam Gidron, *Israel in Africa: Security, Migrations, Interstate Politics*, (London: Zed Books, 2020), 76

<sup>97</sup> Benjamin Augé, « Relations Israël-Afrique. Que retenir de la décennie de Netanyahou ? », *Etudes de l’Ifri* (November 2020), 33

<sup>98</sup> Yotam Gidron, *Israel in Africa: Security, Migrations, Interstate Politics*, (London: Zed Books, 2020), 113-114

<sup>99</sup> “Trade between Israel and Sub-Saharan Africa”, *The Israel Export & International Cooperation Institute*, 1

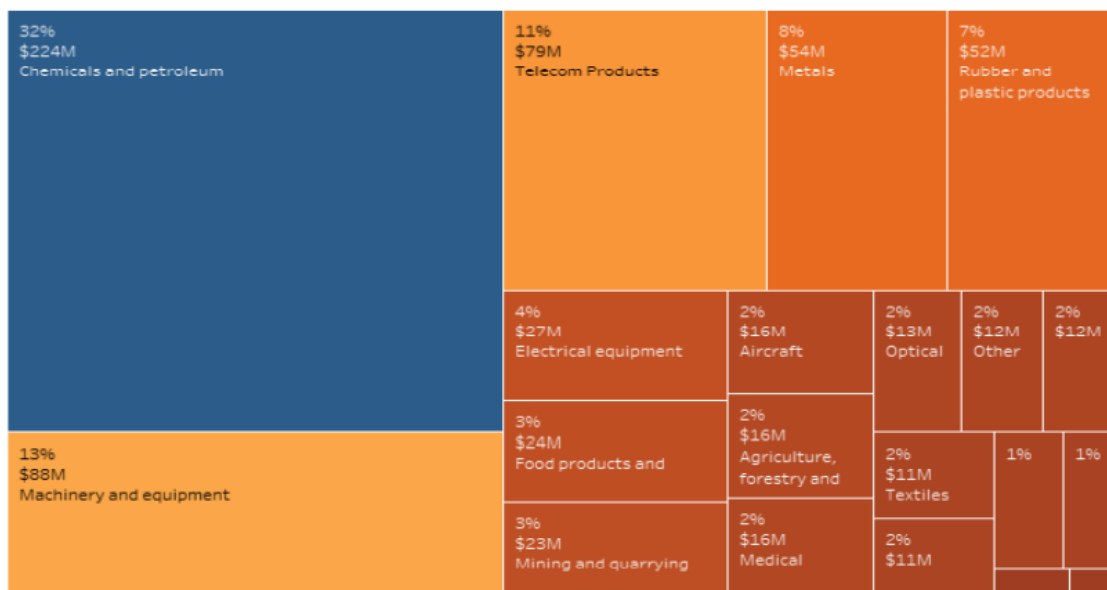


in several countries, like Cameroon and Ghana.<sup>100</sup> Moreover, Israeli firms are also active in the fields of communication, infrastructure and computerization.<sup>101</sup>

Figure 4: Export by sectors | Annual average 2015-2019, goods exclude diamonds

Source: Israel Export Institute

[https://www.export.gov.il/en/ArticlesAndNews/SingleArticle/economy\\_trade-between-israel-and-sub--saharan-africa\\_eng](https://www.export.gov.il/en/ArticlesAndNews/SingleArticle/economy_trade-between-israel-and-sub--saharan-africa_eng)



An additional sector important for the Jewish state is the mining one. As a matter of fact, Israel is one of the main centres for the trade and manufacture of diamonds, to such an extent that these commodities were the first most exported product and the second most imported in Israel in 2020.<sup>102</sup> Although it has long been a significant sector in Israel, diamond polishing’ business passed from relying on the importation of rough diamonds by foreign companies to becoming more tied to African mining operations during the 1990s.<sup>103</sup> Adding to this, several episodes of corruption and bribery linked to Israeli businessmen involved in diamond mining emerged. Particularly known is the affair that implicated, in the early 2000s, the

<sup>100</sup> Jatin Kumar, “Israel’s Changing Africa Relations”, *Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses* (January-June 2020)

<sup>101</sup> Arye Oded, “Africa in Israeli Foreign Policy—Expectations and Disenchantment: Historical and Diplomatic Aspects”, *Israel Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 3, (Fall 2010): 139

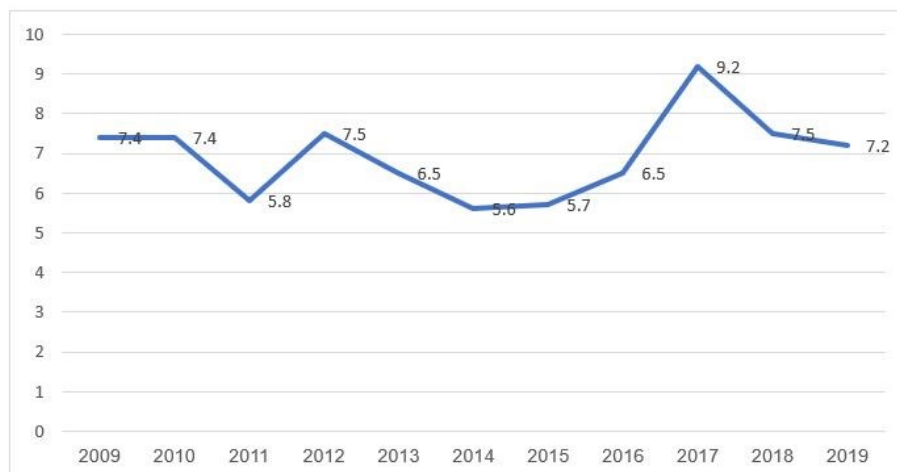
<sup>102</sup> “Diamonds in Israel”, OEC <https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-product/diamonds/reporter/isr>

<sup>103</sup> Yotam Gidron, *Israel in Africa: Security, Migrations, Interstate Politics*, (London: Zed Books, 2020), 56

billionaire Dan Gertler; the latter, grandson of the former president of the Israeli Diamond Bourse, has been accused of promising 20 million dollars and military support from Israeli security advisors to the Congolese president, Laurent-Désiré Kabila (1997-2001), in exchange for a monopoly on diamonds.<sup>104</sup> Moreover, Dan Gertler also invested in oil blocks in the country and became the DRC’s honorary consul in Israel; eventually, in 2017 Washington imposed sanctions on him for his activity of “opaque and corrupt mining and oil deals” in the DRC.<sup>105</sup>

Within the context of Israel’s trade with the African continent, the defence and security industry still plays an important part. This is due to economic and political reasons. As a matter of fact, Siemon T. Wezeman reminds that “Israeli arms industry is extremely export dependent, and maintaining the industry is considered vital for both Israel’s economy and security”; moreover, through military commerce, the Jewish state aims to strengthen ties with African countries and curb the Iranian and Islamist influence in the region.<sup>106</sup> These factors could explain the rise in defence exports in the recent decades, in a context of declining general trade with Africa.

*Figure 5: Total Security Exports, 2009-2019 (in billions of dollars)*  
*Source: Azoulai, 2013; Dagoni, 2011; Milman, 2018; Mack, 2019;*  
*MOD website, 2017, 2018, 2019*

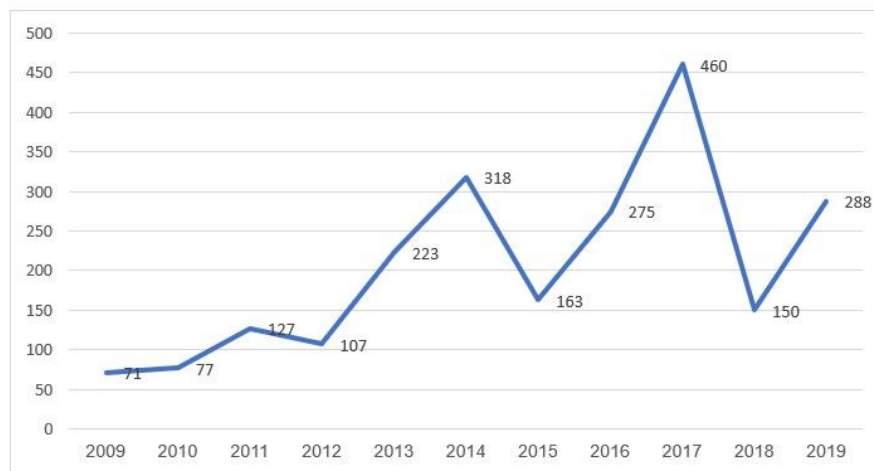


<sup>104</sup> Benjamin Augé, « Relations Israël-Afrique. Que retenir de la décennie de Netanyahu ? », *Etudes de l'Ifri* (November 2020), 31

<sup>105</sup> Yotam Gidron, *Israel in Africa: Security, Migrations, Interstate Politics*, (London: Zed Books, 2020), 56

<sup>106</sup> Siemon T. Wezeman, “Israeli arms transfers to Sub-Saharan Africa”, *SIPRI Background Paper* (October 2011), 14

Figure 6: Security Exports to Africa, 2009-2019 (in millions of dollars)  
 Source : Azoulai, 2013; Dagoni, 2011; Milman, 2018; Mack, 2019;  
 MOD website, 2017, 2018, 2019



Indeed, by observing the graphs provided by the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), it can be noticed that, while still relatively minimal, Israeli security exports to Africa have experienced a consistent growth between 2009 and 2019, despite some fluctuations throughout the years (Figure 6).<sup>107</sup> In fact, they increased by more than 300 per cent over the ten-year period, passing from an amount of \$71 million to \$288 million dollars. What is more, it is noticeable that “while general security exports declined, security exports to Africa increased” in the decade at stake; as a matter of fact, general security exports fell from \$7.4 billion in 2009 to \$7.2 billion in 2019 (Figure 5).<sup>108</sup> However, it should be taken into account that these figures do not involve information on light weapons deals, which are, according to Yaron Salman, more prevalent due to characteristics such as lower cost, wider distribution and easy operation. Furthermore, Salman warns about Israel’s lack of transparency (aimed at limiting controversies on violation of human rights) and specifies that his study “refers only to openly available data, and the estimate is that the real figures are higher”.<sup>109</sup>

<sup>107</sup> Yaron Salman, “The Security Element in Israel-Africa Relations”, *Strategic Assessment - A Multidisciplinary Journal on National Security*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (April 2021)

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

### *The Abraham Accords and trade*

Even the Abraham Accords respond in part to an economic rationale, as the normalization of ties between Israel, Morocco and Sudan could lead to a growth in the volume of trade of each country.

With regard to Morocco, four agreements were signed after the normalization deal: an accord concerning visa procedures; a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in the field of civil aviation; a MOU concerning technical cooperation in water management and development; a MOU on the “promotion of economic relations between the two countries through trade and investment”.<sup>110</sup> Through these deals, the two states aim to four-fold increase the commerce, from the current value of 130 million to 500 million dollars per year.<sup>111</sup> <sup>112</sup> This could be possible given the fact that Morocco is one of the top four African countries from which Israel imports goods and it ranks tenth in exports with \$149 million in trade between 2014 and 2017.<sup>113</sup> Among the fields in which the two countries could collaborate, there is the energy sector: indeed, on the one hand, Morocco has limited energy resources (to the point that it has been importing about 90 percent of its energy needs since 2013) and wants to increase the use of renewable energy; on the other hand, Israel exports technical know-how in the solar energy sector, as well as natural gas.<sup>114</sup> Moreover, as Marie-France Réveillard points out, the relationship between the countries will be based on the “trityque” of “vocational training and skills transfer in the fields

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<sup>110</sup> “The Kingdom Of Morocco And The State Of Israel Concluded Four Agreements”, *Kingdom of Morocco Ministry of Foreign Affairs African Cooperation and Moroccan Expatriates* (December 22, 2020) <https://www.diplomatie.ma/en/kingdom-morocco-and-state-israel-concluded-four-agreements>

<sup>111</sup> Mersiha Nezcic, « Israël se relance sur le continent africain », *Tv5Monde* (May 31, 2022) <https://information.tv5monde.com/info/israel-se-relance-sur-le-continent-africain-458538>

<sup>112</sup> Marie-France Réveillard, « Géopolitique : quelles relations entre Israël et l'Afrique après les accords d'Abraham ? », *La Tribune Afrique* (08 Juin 2022) <https://afrique.latribune.fr/politique/2022-06-08/geopolitique-queelles-relations-entre-israel-et-l-afrique-apres-les-accords-d-abraham-920969.html>

<sup>113</sup> Khalil Al-Anani, “Moroccan Normalization with Israel: Temporary Deal or Permanent Peace?”, *Arab Center Washington DC* (July 8, 2021)

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

of agriculture, security and new technologies”, while Morr Link mentions also the auto sector as an important part of future economic ties.<sup>115 116</sup>

According to data and figures from the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, these expectations have been met: the Abraham Accords have had a positive impact on Israeli-Moroccan trade, as Israel’s exports to Morocco rose from \$3.9 million in 2019 to \$30 million in 2021.<sup>117</sup> Nonetheless, Khalil Al-Anani warns that the normalization process “remains a high-risk gamble”, which could further alienate the regimes from their own people, largely opposed to the Abraham Accords.<sup>118</sup>

### ***2.3. Establishing strategic alliances: a reaction to Iranian influence and Islamist fundamentalism within the region***

Israel’s new strategy in Africa is driven not only by economic and diplomatic interests, but also by a strategic logic, based on curbing the increasingly widespread Iranian influence on the continent, as well as Islamist terrorism and extremism.

As a matter of fact, the Israeli redesigned will to strengthen ties with African states mirrors the Iranian expansion of relations with non-Western countries undertaken during the last decades. Indeed, Iran has started to focus on Africa in particular since the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005-2013), who pursued a “policy of resistance”.<sup>119</sup> The latter is centred on the concept, formulated by the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, of “axis of resistance”: according to that, the Islamic Republic has found itself in a “geopolitical structure of international relations”, imposed by the United States and the “dominant powers” allied with them, which constitutes a threat to the Islamic Republic's existence.<sup>120</sup> From this discourse, a counterbalancing strategy has been developed, in order to improve

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<sup>115</sup> Marie-France Réveillard, « Géopolitique : quelles relations entre Israël et l'Afrique après les accords d'Abraham ? », *La Tribune Afrique* (08 Juin 2022), <https://afrique.latribune.fr/politique/2022-06-08/geopolitique-queelles-relations-entre-israel-et-l-afrique-apres-les-accords-d-abraham-920969.html>

<sup>116</sup> Morr Link, “A Gateway to Africa? Economic Opportunities in Israel-Morocco Relations”, *INSS Insight*, No. 1604 (May 26, 2022)

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Khalil Al-Anani, “Moroccan Normalization with Israel: Temporary Deal or Permanent Peace?”, *Arab Center Washington DC* (July 8, 2021)

<sup>119</sup> Amin Naeni, “Iran and Africa: Why Tehran will boost its ties with the continent under the Raisi administration”, *Middle East Institute* (August 11, 2021)

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

Iran's deterrence through forging new alliances mainly with the East and the "Global South". Thus, the Islamic Republic started to extend its influence over the African countries driven by rationales similar to the Israeli ones: overcoming its international isolation, weakening the international community's opposition within the United Nations and the International Atomic Energy Agency, and developing deeper economic ties for circumventing sanctions. Moreover, Tehran's action in Africa seeks to limit the extended influence of its regional rivals, meaning Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Israel.

For the reasons expressed above, during the last decades the African continent has become an arena of conflict between Tehran and Tel Aviv. In West Africa, the Islamic Republic is exploiting the presence of the large Lebanese diaspora and Hezbollah activity, as well as "poor governance, weak economies, porous borders, and instability"; moreover, it is also leveraging African anti-colonial politics, positioning itself as an alternative to the West and backing the "cause of African Shi'a minorities as an oppressed class".<sup>121</sup> For instance, Mauritania turned to Iran in 2009, after having cut ties with the Jewish state as a consequence of the Operation Cast Lead (2008-2009) in Gaza and the anti-Israeli sentiment prevalent among the people.<sup>122</sup>

However, it is in East Africa and in the Horn of Africa that the Jewish state reacted mainly to Teheran's influence. Indeed, these regions have a greater strategic importance for Tel Aviv, given their proximity to the Red Sea (the main conduit for Israeli trade with Asia and a route for the Iranian arms' smuggling to terrorist organization).<sup>123</sup> What is more, Iran is also drawn in East Africa by the vast natural resources' reserves, in particular the uranium ones (whose presence has led to an "oil-for-uranium policy" with several countries in the area).<sup>124</sup>

In particular, until mid-2010 the closest state to Iran was Sudan, which served as a base for members of Islamist militant groups, such as HAMAS and Islamic Jihad,

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<sup>121</sup> Toulou Akerele, "The Iranian Revolutionary Apparatus and Hezbollah in West Africa", *Hudson Institute* (October 22, 2021)

<sup>122</sup> Alessandro Balduzzi, "Tra la piazza e il portafoglio: storia dei rapporti Israele-Mauritania", *Limes* (October 5, 2020)

<sup>123</sup> Yaron Salman, "Israel-East Africa Relations", *Strategic Assessment*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (July 2019), 94, 102

<sup>124</sup> "Iranian presence in East Africa: Goals, Tools and Prospects", *EPC* (January 31, 2020) <https://epc.ac/en/details/featured/iranian-presence-in-east-africa-goals-tools-and-prospects-1>

and as a territory through which Iranian weapons flowed to the Sinai and the Gaza Strip; furthermore, between 1992 and 1996 Sudan hosted Osama bin Laden and other Al-Qaeda leaders.<sup>125</sup> Although the relationship between Iran and Sudan had already deteriorated in 2015 due to Khartoum's rapprochement with Saudi Arabia (in return for financial assistance), the Abraham Accords represented a victory for Tel Aviv in its confrontation with the Islamic Republic.<sup>126</sup>

Partly linked to the Iranian influence, Islamist fundamentalism represents another factor which drives Israel into Africa, in particular in the Eastern states. Indeed, during the mid-2000s the Islamist insurgency group al-Shabaab emerged in Somalia, prompting Israel to create a "buffer zone" intended to stop the further expansion of terrorism in the region. This zone is mainly composed of Kenya, Ethiopia and Eritrea (together with South Sudan, Uganda and Tanzania), countries who claim for Israel's experience in counterterrorism and foster a security cooperation with the Jewish state.<sup>127</sup> <sup>128</sup> For instance, Kenya constitutes one of the principal strategic partners of Israel in the African continent; their relationship deepened after the 1998 US embassy bombings in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam (Tanzania) from al-Qaeda, and even more after the 2002 Mombasa attacks against the Israeli-owned Paradise Hotel and an Arkia Airlines airplane carrying Israeli nationals. These events pushed the two countries to conclude an Agreement on Cooperation in Public Security Issues in 2011.<sup>129</sup>

Another region where Israel security expertise is significant is West Africa, especially north-eastern Nigeria where the Islamist terrorist organisation Boko Haram has arisen in the early 2000s. There, the Jewish state has contributed indirectly to facing this group: as Yaron Salman reminds, Israeli role can be found in the "cooperation between Nigerian armed forces and the Cameroonian army,

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<sup>125</sup>Abdulgani Bozkurt, Mayada Kamal Eldeen, "Normalization of Sudanese and Israeli relations: From hostility to pragmatic conciliation", *İçtimaiyyat Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 6(1), (November 2022), 334

<sup>126</sup> Giorgio Cafiero, « Is a Sudanese-Iranian rapprochement possible? », *Middle East Institute* (May 9, 2019)

<sup>127</sup> Herman Butime, "Shifts in Israel-Africa Relations", *Strategic Assessment*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (October 2014), 83

<sup>128</sup> Yaron Salman, "The Security Element in Israel-Africa Relations", *Strategic Assessment - A Multidisciplinary Journal on National Security*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (April 2021)

<sup>129</sup> Herman Butime, "Shifts in Israel-Africa Relations", *Strategic Assessment*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (October 2014), 88

which was formerly trained by Israeli military advisers and whose basic equipment is of Israeli manufacture”.<sup>130</sup>

From these examples, it can be observed that Israel is keen to intervene against terrorist groups in defence of its own security and existence, as well as of its material interests in Africa (in particular ensuring a military and economic cooperation with the African countries).

In addition, according to some, through its counterterrorism assistance the Jewish state is producing a discourse that compares Palestinian resistance movements labelled as “terrorists” to violent West African movements.<sup>131</sup> In this way, Tel Aviv would like to weaken the African support to the Palestinian cause, also by exploiting “the fact that Africa’s political elite, swayed by Western media advancing an Israeli agenda, may not possess a deep knowledge of the Arab-Israeli conflict”.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Yaron Salman, “The Security Element in Israel-Africa Relations”, *Strategic Assessment - A Multidisciplinary Journal on National Security*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (April 2021)

<sup>131</sup> “Turning the tide: Israel’s strategy in Africa”, *Fanack*, (June 5, 2019) <https://fanack.com/international-affairs-en/israels-strategy-in-africa~113837/>

<sup>132</sup> “What are Israel’s goals in West Africa?”, *Al Jazeera* (July 7, 2017) <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2017/7/7/what-are-israels-goals-in-west-africa>





## CHAPTER III: THE DRIVERS OF AFRICAN SUPPORT TO ISRAEL

As stated by several scholars, African countries are not passive actors within international relations. As a matter of fact, these nations often exploit “the geostrategic needs of more powerful states” and pursue their own geopolitical and cultural interests by engaging with other actors.<sup>133</sup> This applies also to African-Israeli ties. Evidently, each country is driven towards the Jewish state by several and peculiar factors and, as Yotam Gidron reminds, “it is impossible to speak of a single dynamic that characterises Israeli–African engagements”.<sup>134</sup> Thus, the aim of the following chapter is to analyse only the principal drivers of African support to Israel, which can be found in the agenda of many African states.

### *3.1. Improving relations with the United States*

Among the reasons that have pushed African countries to get closer to the Jewish state since the 1950s, there is the hope of a rapprochement with the United States. As a matter of fact, since the 1960s (in particular since 1967) Tel Aviv has enjoyed with Washington a “special relationship”, that it is sometimes referred to as a “patron-client relationship”, given the military, financial and political support which Israel regularly receives.<sup>135</sup> Several strategic reasons explain this relation; for instance, during the Cold War the Jewish state contained the influence of the Soviet Union in the Middle East and nowadays it continues to serve the American interests in the region.<sup>136</sup> Moreover, the role of pro-Israel lobbies should be taken into consideration in analysing this relationship, in particular when it comes to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the most powerful pro-Israel lobby group of the United States.<sup>137</sup> Although lobbies’ actual impact is highly

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<sup>133</sup> Yotam Gidron, *Israel in Africa: Security, Migrations, Interstate Politics*, (London: Zed Books, 2020), 9

<sup>134</sup> Ivi, p. 88

<sup>135</sup> Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, “The United States and Israel since 1948: A “Special Relationship”?”, *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (Spring 1998), pp. 231-262

<sup>136</sup> Stephen Zunes, “Why the U.S. Supports Israel”, *Foreign Policy in Focus* (May 1, 2002) [https://fpif.org/why\\_the\\_us\\_supports\\_israel/](https://fpif.org/why_the_us_supports_israel/)

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

controversial, they play an important part in the American politics, operating through “grassroots organising, advocacy and fundraising among American Jews in the US as well as Christian evangelical churches”.<sup>138</sup> Even more influential in the US-Israel relations is the arms industry: as a matter of fact, according to Shir Hever, “each of the five biggest arms companies spend between three and five times as much on lobbying in the US as AIPAC”.<sup>139</sup>

Aware of this connection between American and Israeli politics, several African countries have sought to exploit it to their advantage, just as the Jewish state has used it to gain African support; in particular, these conducts have become more common after the fall of the Berlin Wall, when the United States appeared as the sole superpower.<sup>140</sup>

Yotam Gidron goes as far as saying that “much of the leverage Israel has in Africa, therefore, comes from Washington rather than Jerusalem”.<sup>141</sup> Indeed, many of the Israeli achievements with regards to Africa in the last decades have been obtained with the (not always subtle) aid of the United States.

With respect to the voting patterns within the United Nations, the US is attracting support for the Jewish state by proving themselves as “Israel's guardian in multilateral fora”.<sup>142</sup> The clearest example of this practice has been Trump's effort to block the UN resolution condemning the US decision to move its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in 2017. Indeed, on this occasion, Nikki Haley (US ambassador to the UN) expressly affirmed: “On Thursday there'll be a vote criticizing our choice. The US will be taking names.”; moreover, Trump went on with the intimidation against the countries by saying: “[T]hey take hundreds of millions of dollars and even billions of dollars and then they vote against us. Well,

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<sup>138</sup> William Roberts, “Why is the US unequivocal in its support for Israel?”, *Al Jazeera* (May 18, 2021) <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/18/short-answer-why-is-the-united-states-so-pro-israel>

<sup>139</sup> Shir Hever, “Israel, Iran and the US arms industry”, *Middle East Eye* (May 29, 2015) <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/israel-iran-and-us-arms-industry>

<sup>140</sup> Naomi Chazan, ‘Israel and Africa: challenges for a new era’, in The Africa Institute of the American Jewish Committee and Harold Hartog School of Government and Policy (eds), *Israel and Africa: Assessing the Past, Envisioning the Future* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2006), 9

<sup>141</sup> Yotam Gidron, *Israel in Africa: Security, Migrations, Interstate Politics*, (London: Zed Books, 2020), 94

<sup>142</sup> Ivi, p. 95

we're watching those votes. Let them vote against us; we'll save a lot".<sup>143</sup> <sup>144</sup> According to an analysis by Erik Voeten, these threats could do have affected the votes of some African countries (pushing them towards pro-Israel positions), especially the ones of those states who represents "aid recipients where Israel is not a major domestic issue and/or where governments are more favourably disposed toward Trump".<sup>145</sup>

Anyhow, the circumstance where African countries evidently drew closer to the Jewish state with the ultimate goal of impacting the American foreign policy is represented by the Abraham Accords.

With regards to Morocco, the United States has played an important part in the normalization of relations with Israel.<sup>146</sup> The Trump presidency has indeed recognized Moroccan sovereignty over the territory of Western Sahara (becoming the first country in the world to do so and upending decades of US policy), in exchange for Morocco's signature of the agreement; the territory at stake has been disputed between Morocco and the Polisario Front (supported by Algeria) since Spain departed from the area in 1975.

The United States has brokered the Sudanese rapprochement to Israel, too. In respect of this case, the Trump administration has used the removal of Sudan from the US list of "state sponsors of terrorism" as a bargaining chip for the recognition of the Jewish state. As a matter of fact, this label was negatively affecting the Sudanese economy, by cutting it off from financial markets and "prevent[ing] it from accessing much-needed financial aid and limit[ing] potential foreign investment".<sup>147</sup> This Washington decision was formally proclaimed on 14 December 2020, while the normalization deal took place on 7 January 2021. Moreover, Washington and Khartoum also signed a memorandum of understanding

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<sup>143</sup> Peter Beaumont, "US will 'take names of those who vote to reject Jerusalem recognition'", *The Guardian* (December 20, 2017) <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/dec/20/us-take-names-united-nations-vote-to-reject-jerusalem-recognition>

<sup>144</sup> Erik Voeten, "Did Trump try to lose today's United Nations vote on Israel?", *The Washington Post* (December 21, 2017) <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/12/21/did-trump-try-to-lose-todays-united-nations-vote-on-israel/>

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Ana Salas Cuevas, "A new era in Israel-Morocco relations", *Universidad de Navarra* (March 26, 2022) <https://www.unav.edu/web/global-affairs/a-new-era-in-israel-morocco-relations>

<sup>147</sup> Arwa Ibrahim, "Netanyahu-Burhan meeting slammed in Sudan, exposes divides", *Al Jazeera* (February 5, 2020)

to provide Sudan with a 1 billion US dollar bridge loan (in order to help the country clear its debt to the World Bank) and to access \$1 billion in annual funding.<sup>148</sup> Thus, as pointed out by Magdi El-Gizouli, “Washington presented Khartoum with a straightforward quid pro quo”.<sup>149</sup> Evidently, the Jewish state did play a role in the normalization of its ties with Sudan, but it was the United States who actually made it possible.

In addition, there are other cases in which the American influence over Israel’s relations with African states is less obvious, but still relevant. For instance, Yotam Gidron reminds that in 2008, the former Burkinabe president Blaise Compaoré (in office from 1987 to 2014) “attended Israel’s Independence Day celebrations in Jerusalem in order to ‘demonstrate his integrity’ to the US prior to a visit to Washington”.<sup>150</sup> Moreover, in 1982 the president of Zaire (the current Democratic Republic of the Congo), Mobutu, decided to re-establish diplomatic relations with the Jewish state in order to gain further support from Washington.<sup>151</sup>

Thus, it can be stated that Israel’s special relationship with the United States is, in the words of Benjamin Augé, “transactional”, as multiple times it has prompted African countries to improve ties with Israel with the ultimate goal of impacting the American foreign policy and decisions.<sup>152</sup>

### ***3.2. The political weight of Evangelical communities***

In the last decade, in some African states the support to Israel has gone together with the diffusion of a pro-Israeli Christian rhetoric. Indeed, according to Yotam Gidron, one of the elements which condition some African countries to support the Jewish state is the role of Evangelical and Christian communities within their

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<sup>148</sup> “Sudan quietly signs Abraham Accords weeks after Israel deal”, *Reuters* (January 7, 2021) <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-sudan-usa-israel-idUSKBN29C0Q5>

<sup>149</sup> Magdi El-Gizouli, “Sudan’s Normalization with Israel: In Whose Interests?”, *Arab Reform Initiative* (August 17, 2021)

<sup>150</sup> Yotam Gidron, *Israel in Africa: Security, Migrations, Interstate Politics*, (London: Zed Books, 2020), 99

<sup>151</sup> Ivi, p.49

<sup>152</sup> Benjamin Augé, « Relations Israël-Afrique. Que retenir de la décennie de Netanyahou ? », *Etudes de l’Ifri* (November 2020), 23

territory.<sup>153</sup> As a matter of fact, these movements have usually sided with Israel, in the same way as Christian groups in the US, and their growing importance within the continent is impacting on the politics of the states too.<sup>154</sup> African Christian organizations support Israel in a variety of ways, but the Pentecostal and neo-charismatic churches that have sprung up in West Africa since the 1980s are by far the most influential.<sup>155</sup>

Christian Africans' support to Tel Aviv comes from a continuous association of modern Israel with the biblical narratives, the ancient people of Israel and Christian holy sites.<sup>156</sup> Moreover, several evangelical pro-Israel groups advance theological and biblical explanations for their Zionist positions and their closeness to Jewish people. Indeed, these communities commonly interpret the Bible in its literal sense and, according to their understanding, God's covenant with the people of Israel is still valid. Thus, their stance on Zionism usually results from the conviction that "the Jews are still God's 'Chosen People' and have a unique right over the 'Promised Land'".<sup>157</sup> In addition, from this belief follows an enduring support to the modern state of Israel, based on the passage from Genesis 12:3, where God promises to Abraham (meaning the Jewish people) to bless whoever blesses him and curse whoever curses him.<sup>158</sup>

The Christian Zionist theologies analysed above had an impact also on African Pentecostal churches. Indeed, the Pentecostal emphasis on healing, entrepreneurship, prosperity, and the favourable powers of the Holy Spirit, is consistent with the idea that pro-Israel activism can have positive and beneficial outcomes.<sup>159</sup> What is more, the literal interpretation of the Bible makes the Jewish

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<sup>153</sup> Yotam Gidron, *Israel in Africa: Security, Migrations, Interstate Politics*, (London: Zed Books, 2020), 99-108

<sup>154</sup> Yotam Gidron, "The politics of blessings", *Africa Is a Country* (February 19, 2021) <https://africasacountry.com/2021/02/the-politics-of-blessings>

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Kwame Boafo Arthur and E. Gyimah-Boadi, "Africa's Evolving Relations with Israel", in The Africa Institute of the American Jewish Committee and Harold Hartog School of Government and Policy (eds), *Israel and Africa: Assessing the Past, Envisioning the Future* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2006), 28

<sup>157</sup> Yotam Gidron, *Israel in Africa: Security, Migrations, Interstate Politics*, (London: Zed Books, 2020), 101

<sup>158</sup> Yotam Gidron, "The politics of blessings", *Africa Is a Country* (February 19, 2021) <https://africasacountry.com/2021/02/the-politics-of-blessings>

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

state an “undisputed index of divine truth and revelation” for those spiritual movements interested in biblical authenticity.<sup>160</sup>

As Yotam Gidron points out, these religious ideas lead to “several implications of political significance”.<sup>161</sup> Indeed, these convictions impact on the society and the political scene at various levels. Faith-based organizations operates at a bottom level: the Africa–Israel Initiative, for instance, was created in 2012 by Norwegian evangelists in order to promote in several African countries pro-Israel events, such as pilgrimage trips to Israel for Africans, mass prayers and conferences, and to perpetuate a pro-Israel theological discourse.<sup>162</sup> This discourse is undertaken also at an institutional level, by political actors who pursue a “politics of blessings” towards Israel (meaning a faith-based politics conducive to the Jewish state); in some states, then, it can be seen a “fusion of pro-Israel advocacy and religious rhetoric”.<sup>163</sup>

Nigeria is a striking example of how the growth of Pentecostalism in recent decades has influenced Israeli-African relationships. This state is indeed referred to as the “epicentre of Africa’s ‘Pentecostal revolution’” and largely contributes to the African pilgrimage to Israel.<sup>164</sup> Many of the members of Nigeria’s Pentecostal elite also play an important role in the country’s politics and help to perpetuate a positive image of the Jewish state. Moreover, between 2010 and 2015 the Christian President Goodluck Jonathan concretized the Pentecostal support for Israel within Nigerian politics. As a matter of fact, he proved himself as “Nigerian Pentecostal president”, courting the country’s most powerful Pentecostal pastors and exploiting their significant leverage on the people.<sup>165</sup> Under his presidency, Nigeria strengthened ties with Israel, promoting official visits, as well as pilgrimage. An actual case of Nigerian support to Tel Aviv is represented by Nigeria’s abstention to the vote on a resolution calling for Israel to withdraw from the Palestinian

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Yotam Gidron, *Israel in Africa: Security, Migrations, Interstate Politics*, (London: Zed Books, 2020), 100-101

<sup>163</sup> Ivi, p.107

<sup>164</sup> Yotam Gidron, “The politics of blessings”, *Africa Is a Country* (February 19, 2021) <https://africasacountry.com/2021/02/the-politics-of-blessings>

<sup>165</sup> Yotam Gidron, “The politics of blessings”, *Africa Is a Country* (February 19, 2021) <https://africasacountry.com/2021/02/the-politics-of-blessings>

Territories in December 2014 (when the African country was a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council); doing so it “enabled the prevention of the unilateral Palestinian resolution to pass”.<sup>166</sup> It is interesting to note that in the months before the vote Goodluck had met with Netanyahu, discussing also “Nigeria's way of voting in the UN Security Council”.<sup>167</sup> Thereafter, the African country modified its foreign policy with the change of presidency in 2015, when the newly elected Muhammadu Buhari distanced Nigeria from Israel.<sup>168</sup>

What is more, Yotam Gidron mentions the Democratic Republic of Congo as an example of an African country where a “politics of blessings” is implemented.<sup>169</sup> As a matter of fact, its president Felix Tshisekedi has largely adopted a religious rhetoric in its discourse during the AIPAC Policy Conference 2020, when he presented his willingness to open an embassy to Israel with an economic section in Jerusalem as well. Recalling his own Christian faith and the passage from Genesis 12:3, he said: “I want to build strong connections with Israel and an alliance in which my country will be a blessing for the nation of Israel, in accordance with the promise of the Almighty God”.<sup>170</sup>

One final example of pro-Israel religious rationale applied to African politics can be found in Ghana. Indeed, in 2016 Ami Timor, the adviser to the newly elected president, Akufo-Addo, affirmed that the new agenda would be based on strengthening the relations with Israel and conducting Ghana’s foreign affairs agenda according to “deep religious [Christian] conviction.”<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Itamar Eichner, “Behind the UN vote: How the Palestinian bid was defeated”, *Ynet* (December 21, 2014) <https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4609884,00.html>

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Herb Keinon, “Nigeria putting brakes on Israeli participation in West African summit”, *The Jerusalem Post* (August 24, 2016) <https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Politics-And-Diplomacy/Nigeria-putting-brakes-on-Israeli-participation-in-West-African-summit-464856>

<sup>169</sup> Yotam Gidron, “The politics of blessings”, *Africa Is a Country* (February 19, 2021) <https://africasacountry.com/2021/02/the-politics-of-blessings>

<sup>170</sup> “Felix Tshisekedi AIPAC 2020” (March 2, 2020) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pl6jNdF-l-U>

<sup>171</sup> Tamara Zieve, “Adviser: Israel has a friend in Ghana’s president-elect”, *The Jerusalem Post* (December 12, 2016) <https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Politics-And-Diplomacy/Adviser-Israel-has-a-friend-in-Ghanas-preident-elect-475174>



### 3.3. *Development assistance: search for expertise and investments*

Since the golden years in the late 1950s, African countries have seen in Israel a developing, and then a developed, state which could serve both as a model and a source of expertise and assistance. So far, technical cooperation still plays a part in African-Israeli relations, as it drives several African states closer to Tel Aviv. As a matter of fact, for these nations strengthening ties with Israel represents a way to “establish their influence on the global scene and accelerate their development process”.<sup>172</sup>

Israeli know-how and commodities are particularly suited to the African market, as they can be used to address many issues that African states face, such as desertification, for instance.<sup>173</sup> In fact, among the principal Israeli industries, there are the ones linked to Foodtech, Life Science, Clean Water Technology and Agro Technology (fields in which many African leaders are interested in).<sup>174</sup> With regards to the latter two, it should be noted that Israel, in the same way of several African nations, suffers from shortage of water and cultivable land: for this reason, it has developed methods for improving agricultural productivity, such as irrigation technologies for arid and semi-arid lands, desalination and wastewater recycling systems.<sup>175</sup> <sup>176</sup> Moreover, from the African perspective, in particular the one of the Togolese President Faure Essozimna Gnassingbe, “while Israel may not be the sole nation to master the expertise required to allow the development of the continent, it also is the most dynamic and the most competitive”.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Robert Dussey, “The State of Israel: A Partner in the Development of the African Continent”, *Jewish Political Studies Review*, Vol. 28, No. 3/4 (Fall 2017), 25

<sup>173</sup> Steven Gruzd, Carmel Rawhani, Larry Benjamin, “Israel’s ties with Africa: a focus on Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa”, *South African Institute of International Affairs* (July 2018), 8

<sup>174</sup> “Israel’s Leading Industries-The Driving Sectors in Israel’s Economy”, *Camera di Commercio e Industria Israel-Italia*, 2-11 <https://www.italia-israel.com/sites/default/files/2019-07/Tech%20profile%20Israel.pdf>

<sup>175</sup> Israel-Africa Relations: New Challenges and Opportunities-Three questions to Irit Back”, *Institut Montaigne* (April 6, 2022) <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/analysis/israel-africa-relations-new-challenges-and-opportunities>

<sup>176</sup> Liviya David, “An Israeli Pivot to Africa”, *Atlantic Council* (November 7, 2016) <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/africasource/an-israeli-pivot-to-africa/>

<sup>177</sup> “Israel holds the key to Africa’s development” (September 22, 2016) <https://www.republicoftogo.com/toutes-les-rubriques/in-english/israel-holds-the-key-to-africa-s-development>

Two more aspects concerning African-Israeli development cooperation should be considered. The first concerns the policy of non-interference in issues of democracy or human rights that the Jewish state pursues: this approach (made possible also by the fact that Israel's assistance is directed "on more technocratic and seemingly less political fields") further encourages African rapprochements with Tel Aviv.<sup>178</sup> The second aspect regards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): being it a high priority for the African countries (according to Joseph Ayee), it constitutes an additional element that draws these states closer to Israel.<sup>179</sup> All the factors considered above make the Israeli expertise attractive and lead many African countries to sign cooperation agreements with the Jewish state. Some of the public projects and initiatives set by these deals are still run by the Israel's Agency for International Development Cooperation (MASHAV), in the form of human capacity-building courses and other knowledge sharing methods. One example is an eleven-month Agri-training Internship Program in Israel, addressed to students in the fields of agriculture from Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Malawi, or the three-week project that, in 2016, provided 45 Kenyan students with a scholarship to study irrigation technologies in the Jewish state.<sup>180 181</sup> According to Robert Dussey words, this Israeli-African cooperation in the field of education "is expected to advance significantly".<sup>182</sup>

Many scholars, however, point out that the role of MASHAV has radically changed throughout the decades: "practical considerations, economic output, and political rewards" constitute the new rationale behind the adoption of projects and the Agency is underfunded compared to the past.<sup>183 184</sup> As a result, African leaders are

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<sup>178</sup> Yotam Gidron, *Israel in Africa: Security, Migrations, Interstate Politics*, (London: Zed Books, 2020), 73, 81

<sup>179</sup> Joseph Ayee "Africa's Perception of Israel", in Alfred Wittstock (ed.), *The World facing Israel – Israel facing the World: Images and Politics* (Berlin: Frank & Timme GmbH Verlag für wissenschaftliche Literatur, 2011)

<sup>180</sup> « MASHAV Flagship Program », *Embassy of Israel in Nairobi* (May 24, 2021) <https://embassies.gov.il/nairobi/mashav/Pages/MASHAV-Flagship-Program.aspx>

<sup>181</sup> Kenya, The Presidency, '45 students for irrigation training in Israel' (February 20, 2016) <http://www.president.go.ke/2016/02/20/45-students-for-irrigation-training-in-israel/>

<sup>182</sup> Robert Dussey , "The State of Israel: A Partner in the Development of the African Continent", *Jewish Political Studies Review*, Vol. 28, No. 3/4 (Fall 2017), 28

<sup>183</sup> Arye Oded, "Africa in Israeli Foreign Policy—Expectations and Disenchantment: Historical and Diplomatic Aspects", *Israel Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 3, (Fall 2010): 138

<sup>184</sup> Yotam Gidron, *Israel in Africa: Security, Migrations, Interstate Politics*, (London: Zed Books, 2020), 82-83

turning to Israeli private companies to foster their national development. However, this permits them to obtain Israeli technologies and know-how even without formal diplomatic relations with Tel Aviv.<sup>185</sup> Nonetheless, Melanie Kent reminds that, having “Israel abandoned the model of aid in favour of the model of trade”, “economic diplomacy is the heartbeat of the Africa-Israel connection today”.<sup>186</sup> This is particularly true for the states that have experienced a significant economic growth since the early 2000s and where previously established personal connections ensured that Israelis had direct access to the highest political levels.<sup>187</sup> With regards to these personal ties between Israeli businessmen and African leaders, Yotam Gidron specifies that is not about a relationship where the former are the “puppeteers” of the latter; indeed, African leaders, too, take advantage of these connections in order to attract “foreign capital and expertise in specific areas to advance their domestic political, developmental and financial agendas”.<sup>188</sup> Private Israeli companies in Africa, similarly to the MASHAV, operate mainly in fields such as agriculture, housing, health, telecommunication and water management. For instance, Marathon Group (a global investment holding group) has largely operated in Rwanda with the goal of making it the “African Start-up Nation”; in particular, it has invested in the telecommunication sector, obtaining joint holdings in Tigo, “the country’s fastest growing cellular provider”.<sup>189</sup> <sup>190</sup> Moreover, Marathon group is known also for being founded and headed by the Israeli businessman Hezi Bezalel: working in the African continent since the 1980s, Bezalel has developed a close relationship with Rwandan President Paul Kagame, as well as with other political figures, and now serves as the honorary consul of Rwanda in Israel.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Ivi, p. 108, 114

<sup>186</sup> Melanie Kent, “A Dynamic Moment in Israel-Africa Relations”, *American Jewish Committee* (July 3, 2018)

<sup>187</sup> Yotam Gidron, *Israel in Africa: Security, Migrations, Interstate Politics*, (London: Zed Books, 2020), 108

<sup>188</sup> Ivi, p. 113-114

<sup>189</sup> Shterny Isseroff, “From tragedy to tech: Israelis and Rwandans partner to build the ‘African Start-up Nation’”, *The Jerusalem Post* (March 18, 2017)

<sup>190</sup> “Israel-Business Delegation to Africa: Rwanda, Ghana, Ethiopia, Kenya & Ivory Coast”, *The Israel Export & International Cooperation Institute* (June 2014), 61

<sup>191</sup> Yotam Gidron, *Israel in Africa: Security, Migrations, Interstate Politics*, (London: Zed Books, 2020), 55, 112

Another type of actors that contribute to draw African countries closer to Tel Aviv are the Israeli civil society actors, notably the NGOs. They too operate to increase the national development of numerous states and offer humanitarian aid when needed. Some examples of organizations that provide development assistance are “Innovation: Africa” and “CultivAid”. The first NGO has the aim of transferring “Israeli solar, water and agricultural technologies to rural African villages”; it has operated since 2008 in 10 African countries.<sup>192</sup> CultivAid, instead, is active in East Africa, where it pursues projects of capacity building and technology transfer in the fields of agriculture, water, and nutrition.<sup>193</sup>

Meanwhile, among the humanitarian aid organizations in Israel, the leading one is IsraAID: created in 2001 as “a coalition of Israeli organizations working in disaster relief and international development”, it then became an independent NGO aimed at handling major humanitarian crises all over the world, including Sub-Saharan African countries.<sup>194</sup>

### ***3.4. Security assistance***

An additional driver of the African support to Israel is the security assistance offered by the Jewish state. Indeed, as already stated in the second chapter, the African-Israeli relationship is deeply affected by military and strategic concerns. According to Yotam Gidron, several African states are attracted to Israel arms and security expertise on two counts: the flexibility of cooperation with the Jewish state (related to the policy of non-interference in issues of democracy or human rights) and the quality of these products.<sup>195</sup> With regards to the latter reason, it must be considered that the defence industry is “one of the most well developed among emerging economies” and that Cybertech and Homeland Security industries are

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<sup>192</sup> “Innovation: Africa” <https://innoafrica.org/about-us.html>

<sup>193</sup> “CultivAid” <https://www.cultivaid.org/>

<sup>194</sup> « IsraAID » <https://www.israaid.org/what-we-do/>

<sup>195</sup> Yotam Gidron, *Israel in Africa: Security, Migrations, Interstate Politics*, (London: Zed Books, 2020), 88

among the driving sectors of Israel's economy.<sup>196</sup> <sup>197</sup> Moreover, these technologies and arms are “all battle-proven, tried and tested”.<sup>198</sup>

Several African leaders are pushed to foster security ties with Israel in order to protect their governments from coups d'état or uprisings, as well as to maintain their political independence from former colonial powers.<sup>199</sup> Moreover, Israeli military assistance is requested to combat terrorist groups who are spreading in many African countries. Indeed, the “Global War on Terror”, namely the global counterterrorism campaign launched by the US right after the terrorist attacks of September 2001, gave emphasis to the threat posed by African groups, such as al-Shabaab, and led to an “increased securitisation of African politics”.<sup>200</sup> As a consequence, African reliance on Israeli expertise has grown during the last decades.

As in the case of Israel's developmental aid, African leaders refer more to Israeli security firms, rather than to the Jewish state, in order to get security know-how and equipment. However, it must be considered that private and public actors maintain strong ties and that many arms or technology deals are supposed to be approved by the government. In addition, the Mossad, Israel foreign intelligence service, still plays an important role in African-Israeli security relations, as it provides assistance for Israeli businessmen in return for information, building “bridges between former agents who work in the private sector and the Israeli state”.<sup>201</sup>

Examples of Israeli firms operating in Africa are the company Global CST, which in 2009 trained the presidential guard of Guinea's leader Moussa Dadis Camara (without the previous consent of the Israeli Ministry of Defence) and whose leader is the former IDF major general Israel Ziv; Four Troop, that provided military

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<sup>196</sup> Mark Broude, Saadet Deger, Somnath Sen, « Defence, innovation and development: the case of Israel », *Journal of Innovation Economics & Management*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (2013), 43

<sup>197</sup> “Israel's Leading Industries-The Driving Sectors in Israel's Economy”, *Camera di Commercio e Industria Israel-Italia*, 2-11 <https://www.italia-israel.com/sites/default/files/2019-07/Tech%20profile%20Israel.pdf>

<sup>198</sup> Yotam Gidron, *Israel in Africa: Security, Migrations, Interstate Politics*, (London: Zed Books, 2020), 88

<sup>199</sup> Benjamin Augé, « Relations Israël-Afrique. Que retenir de la décennie de Netanyahu ? », *Etudes de l'Ifri* (November 2020), 30

<sup>200</sup> Yotam Gidron, *Israel in Africa: Security, Migrations, Interstate Politics*, (London: Zed Books, 2020), 88

<sup>201</sup> Benjamin Augé, « Relations Israël-Afrique. Que retenir de la décennie de Netanyahu ? », *Etudes de l'Ifri* (November 2020), 14

training for the Nigerian Air Force, especially in the field of counterterrorism; Magal Security Systems, which operated in the ports of Mombasa and in Nairobi's Jomo Kenyatta International Airport.<sup>202</sup>

One additional case that highlights the importance of the security element in African-Israeli relations, and emphasizes the strong connections between Israeli firms and government actors, is related to the Pegasus spyware. The latter, elaborated by the Israeli technology company NSO Group, is a “zero click” spyware (which means it does not require any action from the “victim” to be activated); it gives access to much information collected on the device infected, such as personal and location data, photos and passwords, and it can also “control the phone’s microphones and cameras without the user’s knowledge or permission”.<sup>203</sup> While NSO Group’s technologies are formally directed to “help government agencies prevent and investigate terrorism and crime”, this spyware has been used by 26 states to monitor private communications of more than 1,000 individuals across 50 countries, according to an investigation published by Forbidden Stories and Amnesty International.<sup>204</sup> <sup>205</sup> Among African countries, many are likely to be Pegasus operators, such as Morocco, Rwanda, Togo and Ghana.<sup>206</sup> <sup>207</sup> Suraya Dadoo claims that these kinds of technologies are used as a “precious diplomatic currency” by the Jewish state to achieve its goals in Africa, to such an extent that Pegasus spyware “may have also played a role in Israel securing its observer status at the African Union”.<sup>208</sup> As a matter of fact, the NSO Group is supposed to sell its products only upon approval of Israel’s defence ministry.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Yotam Gidron, *Israel in Africa: Security, Migrations, Interstate Politics*, (London: Zed Books, 2020), 90-93

<sup>203</sup> “Pegasus: What you need to know about Israeli spyware”, *Al Jazeera* (February 8, 2022) <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/8/what-you-need-to-know-about-israeli-spyware-pegasus>

<sup>204</sup> “NSO Group” <https://www.nsogroup.com/>

<sup>205</sup> “Pegasus: What you need to know about Israeli spyware”, *Al Jazeera* (February 8, 2022) <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/8/what-you-need-to-know-about-israeli-spyware-pegasus>

<sup>206</sup> Nathaniel Allen, Matthew La Lime, “How digital espionage tools exacerbate authoritarianism across Africa”, *Brookings Institution* (November 19, 2021)

<sup>207</sup> Suraya Dadoo, « Israel’s Spyware Diplomacy in Africa », *OrientXXI* (September 12, 2022)

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>209</sup> “Pegasus: What you need to know about Israeli spyware”, *Al Jazeera* (February 8, 2022) <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/8/what-you-need-to-know-about-israeli-spyware-pegasus>



## CONCLUSION

The history of African-Israeli relationships dates back to the 1950s when the Jewish state sought to overcome its diplomatic and geopolitical isolation by finding new allies within the African continent. However, due to international events, such as the Six-Day War or the fall of the Berlin Wall for example, these relations have not remained static over the decades and they changed multiple times.

Today, as observed by media and scholars, we are witnessing a new Israeli “African comeback”, particularly prompted under the presidency of Netanyahu. Indeed, although not isolated as in the past, Israel is still looking at African countries as possible supporters in the multinational fora and in the international sphere. A clear example of this is represented by the Abraham Accords, the normalization agreements signed in 2020 by Tel Aviv with Sudan and Morocco (with regard to Africa).

Moreover, Israel is interested in exploiting the African market, in particular by exporting arms and security equipment. As a matter of fact, data shows that Israel’s security exports to Africa have increased over the last decade.

In addition, several African-Israeli relationships are centred on curbing the ongoing expansion of the Iranian influence in the continent. The latter, indeed, has become an arena of conflict between the two regional powers: Israel and Iran.

The strategic alliances fostered by Israel with several African countries, in particular the Eastern ones, are also aimed at preserving the stability of the area by intervening against the Islamist terroristic groups present there. The rationale behind this action is to ensure its own existence (against HAMAS and the Islamic Jihad for example) and to defend its material and economic interests in Africa.

The trends addressed above, and the resulting African-Israeli relationships, are expected to continue and evolve in the next decades, given the considerable and increasing relevance of the African countries in the international sphere, as well as the importance of the Iran-Israel hostility for the region and the world.

Furthermore, the drivers of African support to Israel could remain significant in the future decades too. For instance, the “special relationship” between Tel Aviv and



Washington, which often lead the African countries closer to Israel, is expected to last and continue to play a role in African-Israeli relations.

Clearly, several factors could intervene and halt this African comeback. The domestic political crisis that the Jewish state is facing could constitute one of these factors, while a different evolution of the Palestinian question could be another one. Moreover, the current privatization of the Israeli presence in Africa must be considered when examining possible future developments of the Israeli-African relationships. Indeed, the significant role of Israeli private actors within several African countries enhances the fostering of less formal ties and makes these ties subject both to private and public interests.

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