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Israel and Africa: The UN and the Patterns of Israel's Relations with Africa

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1. Executive Summary

Israel's relations with Africa since its founding have seen significant periods of close cooperation as well as precipitous decline. Today, during Israel's war in Gaza, South Africa has stood at the forefront, leading the charge against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ). This article aims to fill a void by analyzing Israel's relations with the African continent, placing them in a historical context and examining patterns of support for Israel at the United Nations. It also provides recommendations for Israel to improve its standing with its African partners. This article places the developments of Israel's relations with African states into the context of post-October 7 events and subsequent African votes at the UN.

2. Israel and Africa: Historical Background

Following the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, the state's founders sought to build a foreign policy aligned with the West during the early years of the Cold War, while also forming alliances with states that bordered Israel's Arab enemies. With Israel geographically surrounded by enemy Arab states, the strategy that became known as the Periphery Doctrine was based on building alliances with ethnic minority groups in the Middle East, such as the Kurds and Lebanon's Maronite Christians, and with non-Arab states in the Middle East, such as Turkey and Iran.¹ Another integral part of this strategy was forging connections with the newly de-colonized states of Africa. Between 1948 and 1967, Israel through its foreign intelligence service, the Mossad, as well as through diplomats from the Foreign Ministry, invested in expanding relations with African states as a means to diversify Israel's international relations, fostering security, intelligence, and economic and trade partnerships with countries that could project a presence south of Egypt, Israel's paramount Arab enemy. This served as one of the defining strategic interests that facilitated the fostering of ties with Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Kenya, with their location on the Red Sea.² These ties allowed Israel to maintain close security ties that would enable it to guard the entrance to the Red Sea, securing its economic lifeline to the Far East, through the approaches to its strategic Red Sea port, Eilat.

Israel's connections with African states were seen as being part of the "second circle," or "southern periphery" states, and gave it a platform to expand its influence in African states and enhance its strategic depth, enabling it to dent the influence of Israel's Arab enemies, most prominently Egypt, whose involvement in the Non-Aligned Movement and support for anti-colonial nationalism made it a formidable foe in Israel's struggle for influence in Africa.³ The fostering of diplomatic relations also had both political and ideological motivations: to break out of the Arab world's diplomatic embargo by building ties with

¹ For more on the genesis of Israel's foreign relations with Africa see Yossi Alpher, *Periphery: Israel's Search for Middle Eastern Allies*, (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015).

² Ethiopia lost its valuable Red Sea coastline following the independence of Eritrea in 1991.

³ Asaf Siniver and Gerasimos Tsourapas, "Middle Powers and Soft-Power Rivalry: Egyptian-Israeli Competition in Africa," *Foreign Policy Analysis* (2023): 1-22.

African states that could aid Israel in international organizations, while also providing an outlet for Israeli military, technical, and development expertise. Through the lobbying of friendly states such as Burma, Israel sought to gain an invitation to the 1955 Bandung Conference, the inaugural conference of the Afro-Asian Movement, which would later evolve into what became known as the Non-Aligned Movement, a movement of states who ostensibly were not aligned with either the United States or the Soviet Union. Yet the landmark conference ended without the Jewish state's participation and was punctuated by Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser assailing Israel. The conference adopted a one-sided resolution supporting the Palestinians.⁴

The rise of the Non-Aligned Movement made Israel – itself a newly independent state – an attractive potential partner, but also heightened its competition with its main Arab rival, Egypt, which was seen as one of the preeminent leaders of the non-aligned bloc. Nasser's charisma and forceful rhetoric, particularly after the Suez Crisis, made him a hero not only in the Arab world, but also throughout the Third World as a defender of the rights both of Arabs and Africans against the colonial powers. Within the framework of the Cold War and competition between the Soviet Union and the United States, both superpowers sought to capitalize on the newly independent states to expand their influence. The Soviets were particularly effective under the leadership of General Secretary Nikita Khrushchev, who directed the Soviet Union to support national liberation movements in the Third World, fighting for independence against their European colonial overlords. Yet Israel would later find itself at a disadvantage, as throughout the 1960's the initial generation of African leaders would be pushed out by military leaders and politicians who were more radicalized in their outlook and saw, "their native forms of socialism under pressure from a new more radical generation with Marxist ideals."⁵

As a result, within the Cold War context, while allied with the Western anti-Communist bloc, Israel, when developing its relations, deftly "attempted to present itself as a state identified with neither side in the Cold War and primarily as a source of civilian rather than military aid. Israel did so partly in order to prevent the Black African states from joining future anti-Israeli campaigns at the United Nations, based on issues such as water, borders, and refugees, which were components of the Arab-Israeli conflict and of great concern to the Africans."⁶ This strategy made Israel an attractive partner to African states that needed critical technical expertise. At the same time, Israel sought to demonstrate its bona fides as a state that had international legitimacy within the newly independent states of the Third World and that could, in parallel, be a source of technocratic expertise, development aid, and military support. Israel's founding Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion stated to Ehud

⁴ See David Kimche, *The Afro-Asian Movement: Ideology and Foreign Policy of the Third World* (Jerusalem: Israel Universities Press, 1973); Oded, *Africa in Israeli Foreign Policy*, 124.

⁵ Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 108

⁶ Zach Levey, "Israel's Exit from Africa, 1973: The Road to Diplomatic Isolation," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Volume 35 no. 2 (2008), 207.

Avriel, the Israeli diplomat and strategist who also served as Israel's first Ambassador to Ghana, that:

“We must break out of the encirclement by a hostile Arab world and build bridges to the emerging nations on the black continent. We could not allow a situation similar to that of our relations with most Asian nations to develop. There, we had been excluded from the Bandung Afro-Asian conference in 1955. Burma, at the pinnacle of her prestige, was our friend. But almost every other nation on the continent we shared was not. We have more to offer to Africans than just diplomatic niceties—we were prepared to aid in their social and material development.”⁷

In 1957, Israel established its first diplomatic mission in Africa, inaugurating its embassy in newly independent Ghana, a full year before Egypt, its main Arab rival. This enabled Israel to gain a foothold in the important country, ruled by Kwame Nkrumah, one of the preeminent leaders of African anti-colonial nationalism. Immediately after the opening of its embassy, Nkrumah requested that Israel aid in the establishment of the Ghanaian military by providing IDF military advisors and assistance in founding the Ghanaian Air Force's flight school.⁸ In 1958, Israel, also under the aegis of the Foreign Ministry, led by Golda Meir, founded MASHAV, the Hebrew acronym for the Center for International Cooperation, which served as the hub for coordinating technical agreements with African countries and would also serve as an umbrella organization bringing Israeli experts to African states.

Through MASHAV, Israel would help bring African students to Israeli institutions, where they would be taught the latest agricultural and development techniques, and Israeli experts would visit African states, providing on the ground expertise.⁹ By the 1960s, Israel had established diplomatic relations with thirty-three African countries, including all the sub-Saharan states except for the Muslim states of Mauritania and Somalia. MASHAV agricultural training programs were established at the Center for Agricultural Development Cooperation (CINADCO) at Kibbutz Shefayim, and Israel undertook infrastructure projects, meeting the African demand for technical expertise through the use of Israeli advisors and firms. Expanding beyond the initial projects in Ghana, Israel established military delegations in Benin (Dahomey), Burkina Faso (Upper Volta), Zaire (today the Democratic Republic of the Congo), and Tanzania, where IDF delegations were involved in training local forces.¹⁰ Israeli firms also made significant infrastructure investments, including the building of

⁷ Arye Oded, “Africa in Israeli Foreign Policy—Expectations and Disenchantment: Historical and Diplomatic Aspects,” *Israel Studies*, Volume 15, Number 3, (Fall 2010), 123.

⁸ Aryeh Oded, *Africa and Israel: A Unique Case of Radical Changes in Israel's Foreign Relations* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2011), 46.

⁹ Oded, *Africa and Israel*, 34-44.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 44-50.

hotels, airports and ports, utilizing government companies such as the shipping conglomerate Zim and the construction firm Solel Boneh.¹¹

Golda Meir, who as Foreign Minister devoted significant energy and efforts to Israel's African ties, also underscored the ideological importance of Israel's policy in Africa. As Jews, who had suffered centuries of persecution and displacement, there was a natural sympathy towards the Africans, who had also struggled against colonialism and racism. Meir emphasized both the impacts of these two strains – the political and the ideological – in her memoirs, stating, “Did we go into Africa because we wanted votes at the United Nations? Yes, of course, that was one of our motives – and a perfectly honorable one – which I never, at any time, concealed either from myself or from the Africans. But it was far from being the most important motive, though it certainly wasn't trivial. The main reason for our African ‘adventure’ was that we had something we wanted to pass on to nations that were even younger and less experienced than ourselves.”¹²

By 1967, twenty-nine of Israel's ninety-six diplomatic missions worldwide were in Africa, but Israel would soon find itself on the outside looking in. Following the Six-Day War, Israel's relations with African states began to fray as African states considered Israel's occupation of the Sinai Peninsula to be an occupation of African land. Yet, up until 1971, only Guinea (in 1967) had severed diplomatic relations. In 1972, Uganda's Idi Amin abruptly severed diplomatic relations – a blow to Israel, particularly considering its significant civilian and military activities in the country. The severing of diplomatic relations with Uganda would open the floodgates and in the latter part of 1972, Chad, Niger, and Mali announced, following a visit by King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, that they would abruptly end their relations with Israel. By the end of 1973, following the Yom Kippur War, only four states in the Organization of African Unity (OAU) – Lesotho, Swaziland, Malawi, and Mauritius (which would sever diplomatic ties in 1976) – maintained diplomatic relations with Israel. As a result, Israel found itself overextended in a part of the world where it was at a significant cultural disadvantage, and this impacted its broader grand-strategy. The historian John Lewis Gaddis argues that a nation's grand strategy, “is the alignment of potentially unlimited aspirations with necessarily limited capabilities.”¹³

Israel's policy, while high in aspirations, was limited in its capabilities to achieve long-term gains with its limited resources. Israel's inability to retain lasting influence in Africa was dictated by geopolitical factors, most prominently pressure from Arab states and the impact of the Six-Day and Yom Kippur Wars. But it also was unable to convince the Western powers that its expertise, gained from its deep relations with its African partners, could serve their interests in their fight against Soviet influence. As Zach Levey notes, “the Western powers remained almost entirely indifferent to Israel's desire to act as a ‘contractor’ for the West in Africa and would not, on the basis of that role, provide the Israelis with the means they

¹¹ Ibid, 53-54; Oded, “Africa in Israeli Foreign Policy,” 131-132.

¹² Golda Meir, *My Life* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1976), 264.

¹³ John Lewis Gaddis, *On Grand Strategy* (London: Allen Lane, 2018), 22.

needed to combat Arab influence. The Israelis presented themselves a barrier to both 'Nasserist' and 'communist' penetration of the continent, offering to induce African leaders to side with the West in the Cold War and supply them with military training and arms. In fact, the expertise that the Israelis acquired in African affairs earned the respect of the Western powers and their willingness to consult periodically on matters pertaining to the continent. But as we have seen, even U.S. and British officials who acknowledged Israel's determination to fight communist influence in Africa doubted the country's suitability for such a role."¹⁴

The period following the 1973 Yom Kippur War saw Jerusalem make efforts to convince African states to maintain their diplomatic relations, but to no avail. A generation of African leaders who were more radical in their outlook, together with Arab support that induced African states to break diplomatic ties, led African states to see relations with Israel as a disadvantage. As a result, Israel changed strategy, strengthening ties with white-minority ruled South Africa, upgrading its legation in Pretoria officially to the status of embassy in 1974, while still openly criticizing the institution of Apartheid.¹⁵

3. From Camp David to the Abraham Accords

Israel's signing of the 1978 Camp David Accords with Egypt and its subsequent peace treaty began the slow march towards renewal of relations with Africa, as "the Camp David Accords provided the African governments that in the following years resumed ties with Israel the principal justification for doing so."¹⁶ The eventual withdrawal of Israeli troops from the Sinai in 1982, started the slow return of diplomatic relations, with Zaire and Cameroon renewing diplomatic relations in 1982. Many African countries, particularly those that were majority Christian, felt that Arab states had not fulfilled their promises of economic aid, while the rise of radical Islam, aided and funded by countries such as Libya and Iran, forced nations such as Kenya, Tanzania, and Zambia to approach Israel for help. Most importantly, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of what became known as the United States' "unipolar moment," saw previously radical African states, such as Ethiopia and Angola, that had shifted to taking aid from the Soviet Union, renewing or establishing relations with Israel. Another important change in Israel's foreign policy in the post-Cold War years was the shift in Jerusalem's relations with South Africa, which after the transition from white-minority-rule, shifted to being far less supportive, even with strong business and trade ties.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the most significant change in Israel's international status was the transition to a unipolar system, as Israel has sought to restore its ties with Africa, upgrading them through economic and military cooperation, as well as seeking to

¹⁴ Zach Levey, "Israel's Strategy in Africa, 1961-67," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (Feb., 2004), 83.

¹⁵ For more see Naomi Chazan, "The Fallacies of Pragmatism: Israeli Foreign Policy towards South Africa," *African Affairs* Vol 82 No. 327 (April 1983) pp. 169-199

¹⁶ Zach Levey, "Israel's Exit from Africa, 1973: The Road to Diplomatic Isolation," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Volume 35 no. 2 (2008): 226.

utilize these expanded ties to influence votes in international forums. This was done primarily through MASHAV sponsored projects, particularly in East Africa where Israel's actions were primarily focused.¹⁷ In July of 2016, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu embarked on a state visit to Africa, the first by an Israeli Prime Minister in over thirty years. He stopped in Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, and Ethiopia. Netanyahu's stated goals were, on the one hand, to open Africa's developing markets to Israeli products, including agricultural products, software, and military equipment, and on the other hand, to build connections with African leaders that could aid Israel at the UN and other international forums. Netanyahu stated publicly that African states, "could be allies of Israel. They vote at international forums, and I know people don't believe this, but I think we can change the automatic majorities in the UN and so on if you begin to shift this."¹⁸

One example of Israel's efforts to change voting patterns of African states at the United Nations was the December 2014 UN Security Council vote which called for the end of the occupation, Israel's return to the 1967 borders, and the creation of a Palestinian state within three years. The vote did not pass the Security Council due to U.S. opposition, while Rwanda and Nigeria abstained. The two African abstentions led to the resolution falling one vote fewer than the nine votes needed to pass and allowed the United States not to use its veto – which it would have regularly employed in such a situation.¹⁹ Yet the states that were the focus of significant MASHAV projects, particularly in East Africa, most prominently Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, and South Sudan, "are mixed and do not indicate a positive correlation between Israeli aid and voting patterns."²⁰ South Sudan is the one exception: Juba showed improved voting in favor of Israel at the UN General Assembly after receiving development aid from Israel.

Israel has also sought to use its soft power to increase its influence with its African partners. In December 2016, Israel hosted several top ministers and senior bureaucrats from over a dozen West African countries at an agriculture conference sponsored through MASHAV, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' agency for foreign aid, and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) titled, "Enhancing Sustainable Agricultural Productivity in Arid and Semi-Arid Regions." Among the delegates at the conference were the foreign ministers of Nigeria, Togo, Liberia, Guinea, Cabo Verde, Gambia, and Sierra Leone, and senior officials from Benin, Burkina Faso, the Ivory Coast, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, and Senegal. This conference was soon followed by Netanyahu's second trip to Africa in a year, when he

¹⁷ Yaron Salman, "Foreign Aid and Bilateral Relations: The Israel–East Africa case," *Digest of Middle East Studies*, 33 (2024): 63-82.

¹⁸ Jeffrey Gettelman, "In Africa, Benjamin Netanyahu Looks for Friends, and U.N. Votes, for Israel," 6 July 2016, *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/07/world/africa/israel-africa-netanyahu-uganda-kenya-rwanda.html>.

¹⁹ Peter Beaumont, "US and Israeli intervention led UN to reject Palestinian resolution," 31 December 2014, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/31/us-israel-un-reject-palestinian-resolution-nigeria-security-council>.

²⁰ Salman, "Foreign Aid and Bilateral Relations," 74.

attended the ECOWAS summit meeting in Monrovia, Liberia.²¹ Conferences like these allow for greater institutionalization of ties with African countries that are poor and lack diplomatic resources, making interpersonal connections between Israeli diplomats and the leadership of African states all the more crucial for building ties that could impact votes in international forums. Most African countries have smaller foreign policy establishments; as a result, these close personal relations as well as historical ties – such as between Israel and the African states of Cameroon, Rwanda, and Togo – have provided the basis for close diplomatic cooperation in international forums.

Israel's relations with Cameroon have served as a case study for close cooperation and support. Cameroon routinely abstains from votes that impact Israel at the United Nations, and it has been the only African country that has not recognized a Palestinian state. Cameroon's longtime President, Paul Biya, has been in office since his ascent to power in 1982. Israel has developed close security relations with the Cameroonians, providing training to the country's armed forces and presidential guard.²² Israel's close relations and long-standing ties with Cameroon have yielded significant results, with Cameroon arguably Israel's strongest African ally at the United Nations. Yaoundé has consistently either voted with Israel or abstained from voting on resolutions condemning or critical of Israel at the UN General Assembly. A critical example was the 2022 UN General Assembly vote supporting the Palestinian right to self-determination, which the Cameroonians abstained from.²³ Cameroon's votes on the UN Human Rights Council have also been highly supportive of Israel; it abstained on all votes during the 2023 session condemning all resolutions related to Israel and its conflict with the Palestinians, including the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the human rights situation in the "occupied Palestinian Territories." The only other African country on the UN Human Rights Council that voted in favor of Israel was Malawi, which voted in favor of accepting the Palestinian right to self-determination, but voted against motions condemning Israeli settlement building, rejecting Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights, and criticizing Israel over the human rights situation in the Palestinian territories.

Close security cooperation between Israel and Rwanda, has also led to increased diplomatic cooperation. Rwanda's history of ethnic strife and the Rwandan genocide in 1994 have made for a natural connection between the two states, and Rwandan President Paul Kagame has seen deepening security ties with Israel as a path towards better relations with Washington. Israel also sought to deport thousands of African immigrants to Rwanda in an agreement with its government that was eventually not enacted. Most importantly, Kagame's significant economic reform program has sought Israeli expertise in technology

²¹ Raphael Ahren, "Netanyahu to travel to Africa for second time in year," 26 March 2017, *The Times of Israel*, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-to-travel-to-africa-for-second-time-in-year/>; Moran Azulay and Itamar Eichner, "Netanyahu Met in Liberia with West African Leaders," 4 June 2017, *Ynet*, <https://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4971173,00.html>.

²² Franck Foute, "Paul Biya, Israel's Strongest Ally in Africa?" 31 October 2023, *The Africa Report*, <https://www.theafricareport.com/326317/paul-biya-israels-strongest-ally-in-africa/>.

²³ See attached Chart.

and start-ups, and he has sought to position Kigali as a hub for hi-tech development and investment.²⁴ Close relations between Israel and Rwanda were furthered with the opening of Israel's embassy in the African state in 2019, and strengthened with President Isaac Herzog's visit in April of 2024, commemorating the thirtieth anniversary of the Rwandan genocide, while also raising awareness of the plight of Israel's hostages in Gaza.²⁵ Much like Israel's relations with Cameroon, Israel's close relations with Rwanda have influenced the African state's votes at the United Nations. Historically, Rwanda has also consistently been one of the African countries most supportive of Israel with significant abstentions, or not voting on critical issues at the UN General Assembly. This includes critical abstentions during a 2021 vote condemning Israeli policy and settlement in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the occupied Syrian Golan Heights, and a 2022 vote in favor of Palestinian self-determination.

Another African state that has been a stalwart supporter of Israel is the small west African state of Togo. Strong diplomatic ties between the two states continued after Togo renewed its diplomatic relations with Israel in 1987 and saw President Faure Gnassingbé visit Jerusalem in 2017. Togo-Israel relations have also been boosted by the strong connections and support of Foreign Minister Robert Dussey. He trained as a Catholic monk and is a member of a Catholic sect called the Community of Beatitudes, for which the support and welfare of Israel and the Jewish people are top priorities and that regularly prays in Hebrew.²⁶ Togo was the only African state to vote against the UN resolution asking nations not to locate their diplomatic missions in Jerusalem following the Trump administration's decision to move the U.S. Embassy to Israel's capital.²⁷

The Abraham Accords, particularly the signing of normalization agreements with Sudan and Morocco, could serve as platforms for Israel to expand relations in Africa. While Israel and Morocco have exchanged ambassadors and have deep and long-standing ties that stem both from the substantial Jewish presence in Morocco, as well as covert defense and intelligence ties, Israel's ties with Sudan have yet to lead to the establishment of full diplomatic relations – particularly as the state has devolved into a violent civil war between the central government led by General Abdel Fattah Burhan and the opposition led by the Rapid Support Force (RSF) militia under the command of Mohammad Hamdan Dagalo, better known as Hemedti.²⁸ The Abraham Accords, signed in 2020-2021, came following significant Israeli investment on expanding relations on the continent, including the

²⁴ Rina Bassist, "Israel and Rwanda's Emerging Alliance: A Mutual Strategic Choice," 27 March 2018, *Ifriqia: The Moshe Dayan Center*, <https://dayan.org/content/israel-and-rwandas-emerging-alliance-mutual-strategic-choice>.

²⁵ "Herzog visits Rwanda for genocide memorial; will highlight hostages, terrorism," 7 April 2024, *The Times of Israel*, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/herzog-visits-rwanda-for-genocide-memorial-will-highlight-hostages-terrorism/>.

²⁶ Erez Lin, "Togolese Foreign Minister: We Need You in Africa," (Hebrew) 21 June 2018, *Yisrel Hayom*, <https://www.israelhayom.co.il/article/565567>.

²⁷ "General Assembly Overwhelmingly Adopts Resolution Asking Nations Not to Locate Diplomatic Missions in Jerusalem," 21 December 2017, *The United Nations*, <https://press.un.org/en/2017/ga11995.doc.htm>.

²⁸ For more on the Abraham Accords and Israel's relations with Sudan see, Eline Rosenhart, "Sudanese Perceptions of the Sudan-Israel Rapprochement," 22 March 2021, *Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies*, <https://dayan.org/content/sudanese-perceptions-sudan-israel-rapprochement>.

restoration of diplomatic relations with Chad. To date, the Abraham Accords have not afforded Israel concrete benefits in its relations with Africa, but the United Arab Emirates' significant investments in African infrastructure, including its ownership of the port of Berbera in the breakaway Republic of Somaliland could lead to greater strategic cooperation in a critical geopolitical area that would give Israel a foothold at the entrance to the strategic Bab-el-Mandeb strait.²⁹ Somaliland has been a self-declared country since 1991 and has been a rare success story in the Horn of Africa's turbulent politics, particularly in contrast to its neighbor Somalia. For Israel, there would be significant strategic value in expanding relations with Somaliland. Yet the likelihood of Israel forging diplomatic relations with the breakaway state is low, as they would potentially harm Israel's relations with other African states which would consider recognition of a separatist entity and the establishment of diplomatic ties with it as a provocation.³⁰

In the aftermath of the October 7 Hamas attack, Israel's relations with Africa have come into focus, with South Africa bringing Israel before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague on charges of genocide and withdrawing its ambassador from Israel. This has been in part due to the ruling African National Congress (ANC) which has outwardly supported Hamas and identified itself with the Palestinian cause.³¹ Undoubtedly, Israel's previous support for the apartheid government also plays a role influencing the ANC's historical memory of its struggle, but the current roots of South Africa's geopolitical alignment are more complex. The ANC's historical anti-colonial roots and links with the then-Soviet Union, which provided aid to its military struggle against the apartheid regime, have seen it move closer to Russia, as well as Iran, refusing to condemn the Russian invasion of Ukraine and increasingly taking a more strident anti-Western line. Another significant development was the withdrawal of Chad's diplomatic delegation in Israel in protest of Israel's actions in Gaza. Israel renewed diplomatic relations with the Muslim-majority state in 2019 and had invested significant diplomatic capital in renewing relations. The withdrawal of Chad's diplomatic delegation thus constituted a significant blow to Israel.³²

Several African states openly condemned Hamas' actions, including Kenya, Ghana, Togo, Cameroon, Zambia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.³³ The October 27 vote at

²⁹ David Pilling, Chloe Cornish, and Andrew Schipani, "The UAE's Rising Influence in Africa," 30 May 2024, *The Financial Times*, <https://www.ft.com/content/388e1690-223f-41a8-a5f2-0c971dbfe6f0>.

³⁰ Irit Back, "Israel and the Horn of Africa: What are the Odds with the Countries That Still Don't Recognize Israel?" 29 April 2021, *The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies*, <https://dayan.org/content/israel-and-horn-africa-what-are-odds-countries-still-dont-recognize-israel>.

³¹ Irit Back, "At the Tribunal in The Hague, the South African Government is Reviving Mandela's Legacy for its own Political Purposes," 15 January 2024, *Haaretz* (Hebrew), <https://www.haaretz.co.il/news/world/africa/2024-01-15/ty-article/.highlight/0000018d-03aa-d832-a59d-17bf4bfa0000>.

³² Ignatius Anor, "After Chad, South Africa Recall Diplomats from Israel, Will Others Follow?" 13 November 2023, *Voice of America*, <https://www.voaafrica.com/a/after-chad-south-africa-recall-diplomats-from-israel-will-others-follow-7349771.html>.

³³ Asher Lubotzky, "Africa and the War in Gaza: Analyzing Israel's Current Standing and Future Prospects in Africa," *Strategic Assessment*, *The Institute for National Security Studies (INSS)*, (January 2024), https://www.inss.org.il/strategic_assessment/africa-gaza/.

the UN General Assembly following Hamas' actions on October 7 called for an "immediate, durable and sustained humanitarian truce leading to a cessation of hostilities" as well as calling for the "immediate and unconditional release of all civilians being illegally held captive, demanding their safety, well-being and humane treatment in compliance with international law."³⁴ This vote did not contain any condemnation of Hamas and saw widespread support from African countries, including Ghana and Kenya, with which Israel has close relations. Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Ethiopia, South Sudan, and Zambia all abstained in the vote. However, this vote was also accompanied by a Canadian-sponsored amendment that condemned Hamas.³⁵ The vote saw six African states (Cabo Verde, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, and South Sudan) voting in favor of the amendment; nine others abstained (including Angola, Cameroon, and Ivory Coast), while 15 countries did not vote on the amendment.³⁶ This vote was followed by the December 12 UN General Assembly vote on a non-binding resolution calling for an "immediate humanitarian ceasefire, the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages, as well as ensuring humanitarian access."³⁷ Liberia was the only African country to vote against the resolution, which saw abstentions from Cameroon, South Sudan, Malawi, Cabo Verde, Equatorial Guinea, and Togo. Like the October vote, the December 12 vote was followed by an Austrian-backed amendment condemning Hamas. In comparison to the previous vote in October, Rwanda, Ethiopia, and Liberia supported the amendment, in addition to Cabo Verde, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi and South Sudan, while Nigeria switched its vote, opposing the December 12 amendment. While a majority voted in favor, the amendment did not have the two-thirds majority needed to pass, and Cameroon and Togo, two of the African countries closest to Israel abstained, which had a significant impact on the outcome.³⁸

When looking at the voting patterns of African states at the General Assembly, the 2023 votes fit into a wider pattern of votes, while the amendments condemning Hamas, sponsored by Canada and Austria respectively, are more accurate representations of Israel's support from particular African countries. For example, states like Ghana and Kenya throughout both 2022, and 2023, following the October 7 attack, voted against Israel on UN General Assembly resolutions, but voted with Israel on the specific amendments condemning Hamas. States such as Cameroon and Togo have almost consistently abstained on all votes related to Israel, showing a consistent voting pattern, regardless of the subject of the vote.

³⁴ "Gaza Crisis: General Assembly Adopts Resolution Calling for 'Humanitarian Truce', Civilian Protection," 27 October 2023, *United Nations*, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/10/1142932>.

³⁵ For a comprehensive overview see Asher Lubotzsky, "Africa and the War in Gaza: Analyzing Israel's Current Standing and Future Prospects in Africa," *Strategic Assessment, The Institute for National Security Studies (INSS)*, (January 2024), https://www.inss.org.il/strategic_assessment/africa-gaza/.

³⁶ See Chart Attached.

³⁷ "UN General Assembly Votes by Large Majority for Immediate Humanitarian Ceasefire During Emergency Session," 12 December 2023, *United Nations*, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/12/1144717>.

³⁸ See Chart Attached.

Yet, even with the war in Gaza, Malawi announced the opening of its embassy in Israel, fulfilling a promise made in 2020. The embassy opening also heralded the launch of an agricultural cooperation program between the two states and could pave the way for other embassy openings, with the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sierra Leone openly declaring their desire to establish embassies in Jerusalem.³⁹

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Israel's relations with Africa have gone through periods of success and significant decline. Today, in the aftermath of the October 7 attacks, Israel has received support from some of its African allies at the UN, yet its relations are far from secure. The steep decline in Israel's relations before and after the Yom Kippur War underscores the fragility of Israel's ability to influence the external orientations of African states. As a result, Israel stands at a significant juncture that demands consistent engagement with its African partners if it seeks to grow its support in the international arena.

A critical component is Israel's continued engagement with African leaders through trade and investment, which can also yield greater support at the United Nations. Additional efforts can also be made through outreach by Israel's diplomatic staff at the United Nations and its parallel international organizations to deepen relations with its African counterparts. Success stories such as Israel's relations with Cameroon, Rwanda, and Togo have been built on longstanding connections that have also been fostered by considerable personal investments by Israel's political leadership, which have been parlayed into votes that have served Israel's national interests at international forums. Yet, it is also important to emphasize the limits of Israel's influence. Israel's support for African states, including through development aid and expanded economic ties, does not necessarily lead to wholesale changes in voting patterns at the UN, as many states do not have any issue "with the duality of maintaining ties with Israel, while at the same time not supporting it in the UN."⁴⁰

Upgrading Israel's diplomatic presence in Africa could lead to increased investment, outreach, and closer relations. Israel still has not recovered from the severing of diplomatic ties with the majority of African states following the 1973 Yom Kippur War, and to date Israel only has twelve permanent embassies on the continent (which include Egypt and Morocco). With greater engagement and contact with the relevant parties, Israel will be better able to shape public opinion and influence decision makers.

Another important aspect that Israel can utilize is the importance and impact of the Abraham Accords, and Israel's relations with Morocco, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates could serve as a bridge for Israel to expand its ties with African states, particularly

³⁹ "We will continue to support Israel' Malawi FM during embassy inauguration ceremony," 18 April 2024, *Jerusalem Post*, <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/article-797765>; "Sierra Leone to open embassy in Jerusalem," 25 August 2023, *The Times of Israel*, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/sierra-leone-to-open-embassy-in-jerusalem/>.

⁴⁰ Salman, "Foreign Aid and Bilateral Relations," 74.

those with large Muslim populations. The UAE's considerable strategic investments, particularly in the Horn of Africa could offer Israel considerable strategic benefits, all the more so following the Houthi attacks on shipping transiting through the Bab-el-Mandeb to Eilat. Thus, continued Israeli investment and outreach can be tied to improved diplomatic efforts that will provide a critical base of support for Israel beyond the traditional focus of its diplomatic efforts among western states.

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