

ISRAEL'S TIES WITH AFRICA: A FOCUS ON ETHIOPIA, KENYA, NIGERIA AND SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

Despite close ties in the 1950s and 1960s, an almost complete rupture in relations between Israel and African states occurred around the oil crisis and Yom Kippur War in 1973, over Israel's captured land and the Palestinian issue. Relations had gradually been restored by the 1990s, but Africa was still generally neglected by Israeli policymakers. Since 2016 Israel has pursued a more visible and vigorous African engagement strategy; a diplomatic drive that was to culminate in the first Africa-Israel Summit in Togo, in October 2017 (since postponed). This paper approaches Israel's push into the continent from an African perspective in an effort to highlight what African leaders can gain from Israel, and vice versa. Despite successfully courting East African countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya and Rwanda, Israel has a long way to go to show African leaders how they will benefit from closer ties. Although Israel does face objections from regional powerhouses, including South Africa and Nigeria, this is by no means a threat to its overall foreign policy goal of drumming up continental support, especially from smaller African states. However, winning their consistent loyalty in forums such as the UN remains elusive. By demonstrating the benefits it could bring to Africa in these less contested countries, Israel could motivate African leaders to take its offers of friendship and cooperation seriously.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ANC	African National Congress
AU	African Union
BDS-SA	Boycott, Divest and Sanctions–South Africa
DA	Democratic Alliance
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FDI	foreign direct investment
GERD	Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam
Mitvim	Israeli Institute for Regional Foreign Policies
OAU	Organization of African Unity
OEC	Observatory of Economic Complexity
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
UN	United Nations
UNGA	UN General Assembly
UNSC	UN Security Council

INTRODUCTION

Diplomatic and political relations between Israel and sub-Saharan African states have fluctuated in the 70 years since Israel's independence in 1948. Despite enjoying relatively close ties in the 1950s and 1960s, when over 1 800 Israeli experts ran development programmes in Africa, an almost complete rupture occurred in the 1970s. Newly-independent African states came under pressure from Arab countries to support the Palestinian struggle for statehood following the Yom Kippur War in 1973 and the introduction of an oil embargo against the Western countries that supported Israel during that war.¹ Of the 30 African countries in which Israel had missions or representation, all but four severed formal relations (Lesotho, Malawi, Swaziland and apartheid South Africa). Despite this estrangement, Israel continued to enjoy observer status at the Organization of African Unity (OAU). This was only rescinded at the insistence of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi when the OAU became the AU in 2002. While trade continued throughout, diplomatic relations had gradually been restored by the 1990s, after the end of the Cold War, the demise of apartheid and the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993. However, Africa was still largely neglected by Israeli policymakers. Israel today has 11 embassies in Africa, and diplomatic relations with 42 of the 50 sub-Saharan African states. Sixteen African states, including the four explored in this paper, have embassies in Tel Aviv.

Since 2016 Israel has pursued a more visible and vigorous African engagement strategy. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu embarked upon three trips to Africa in less than 18 months in 2016/17. First, he visited Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda in July 2016 with a large Israeli business delegation. A few months later, in September, he held several meetings with African leaders on the fringes of the UN General Assembly (UNGA). In December 2016, seven ministers and several top officials from West Africa attended an agricultural conference in Jerusalem, co-hosted by Israel's Agency for International Development Cooperation and ECOWAS. This paved the way for Netanyahu's second trip, when he became the first non-African head of state to address the 15-member ECOWAS summit in Monrovia, Liberia in June 2017.² His opening remarks focused on Africa's potential. Here he promised the heads of state that a technical team from Israel would visit each of their countries, assessing the best avenues for cooperation and consulting with each state on how best to use Israeli knowledge and technology, specialising in agriculture,

Diplomatic and political relations between Israel and sub-Saharan African states have fluctuated in the 70 years since Israel's independence in 1948

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- 1 This was part of an Israeli effort to build diplomatic dams, a strategy designed to hold off a flood of Arab diplomatic pressure. Chazan N, 'Israel and Africa: Challenges for a new era', in The Africa Institute, American Jewish Committee & The Harold Hartog School, Tel Aviv University, *Israel and Africa: Assessing the Past, Envisioning the Future*, 2009, pp. 1–15, https://secdip.tau.ac.il/sites/socsci-english.tau.ac.il/files/media_server/government/pdf2/2006/3-%20IsraelAfrica.pdf, accessed 2 July 2018.
 - 2 Attendees included heads of state (or their representatives) from Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo, Niger and Nigeria. ACSRT (African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism), 'Final communiqué of the fifty-first Ordinary Session of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government', 14 June 2017, <http://caert.org.dz/?p=2265>, accessed 2 July 2018.

water management, energy, public health and security.³ His third trip was in November 2017, again to Kenya, for the inauguration of controversially elected President Uhuru Kenyatta. He said before his departure,⁴

I am now leaving for my third visit to Africa within a year and a half. I will meet with re-elected Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta and with 10 African leaders as well. Our intention is to deepen ties with Africa also by forging links with countries that we do not have diplomatic relations with.

TABLE 1 AFRICA–ISRAEL DIPLOMATIC REPRESENTATION

Israeli embassies in African countries (11)	African countries with embassies in Israel ^a (14)
Angola	Angola
Cameroon	Cameroon
Côte d'Ivoire	Côte d'Ivoire
–	Democratic Republic of Congo
–	Republic of Congo
Egypt	Egypt
Eritrea	Eritrea
Ethiopia	Ethiopia
Ghana	Ghana
Kenya	Kenya
–	Liberia
Nigeria	Nigeria
–	Rwanda
Senegal	–
South Africa	South Africa
–	South Sudan
–	Zambia

^a In November 2017 Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced that Israel would open an embassy in Rwanda. Namibia has an honorary consul in Haifa, and Tanzania is reportedly seeking to open an embassy in Israel. *The Times of Israel*, 'In first, Tanzania to open embassy in Israel', 5 July 2016, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/in-first-tanzania-to-open-embassy-in-israel/>, accessed 2 July 2018.

Source: Israel, Israeli Missions Around the World, 'Diplomatic missions', <http://embassies.gov.il/Pages/IsraeliMissionsAroundTheWorld.aspx>, accessed 2 July 2018

³ IsraeliPM, 'PM Netanyahu's speech at the ECOWAS Africa–Israel Summit in Liberia', YouTube, 4 June 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sFRsPT-OTFY>, accessed 6 October 2017.

⁴ Asamba M, 'Israel PM Netanyahu flies in, fails to attend Uhuru's inauguration', *Standard Digital*, 28 November 2017, <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2001261556/israeli-pm-netanyahu-flies-in-fails-to-attend-uhuru-s-inauguration>, accessed 8 March 2018.

However, he did not attend the actual event owing to security concerns.⁵ These were the first trips to Africa by an Israeli prime minister since Yitzhak Shamir visited Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia and Togo in 1987.

This diplomatic outreach initiative was to have culminated in the first Africa–Israel Summit in Lomé, Togo from 23–27 October 2017, to which more than half of African states were expected to send high-level delegations, defying calls to boycott the event by Morocco, South Africa and the Palestinian Authority. Many Israeli businesses – which continued to operate and flourish in African markets even when diplomatic relations disappeared – also planned to exhibit in Lomé. On 11 September 2017, however, the summit was indefinitely postponed, likely owing to rising mass protests against embattled Togolese President Faure Gnassingbé.⁶ Pressures to boycott, the level of security and organisation required and the fact that countries were invited directly rather than through the AU may also have played their part.⁷

After briefly discussing the key tenets driving Israel's foreign policy, particularly toward Africa, this paper examines Israeli ties with four important African states – Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa – to establish whether its Africa outreach is bearing fruit. Relations with the first two – Ethiopia and Kenya – are deepening, driven by geopolitics, security and anti-terrorism concerns, as well as commercial opportunities. Jerusalem's relations with Abuja and Pretoria are, however, more complex, with rhetoric frequently obscuring reality. Solidarity with the Palestinian cause currently finds more resonance in South Africa than in West or East Africa and continues to strongly influence the tone and temperature of South Africa's relationship with Israel. Finally, the paper considers what Africa can gain from a closer relationship with Israel.

DRIVERS OF ISRAELI FOREIGN POLICY TOWARD AFRICA

In September 2016, the Israeli Institute for Regional Foreign Policies (Mitvim) published The 2016 Israeli Foreign Policy Index. This is the fourth edition of this annual survey of a representative sample of 600 Israeli Jews and Arabs (men and women over 18). Unsurprisingly, the Israeli public sees strengthening relations with the US as Israel's highest priority, followed by progress in Israeli–Palestinian negotiations, and shoring up ties with moderate Arab states. After the US, the countries seen as most important for Israel are (in order) Russia, Germany, the UK, France, China and Egypt.⁸ 'Relations with

5 *Ibid.*

6 Smith J, 'Togo deals blow to Israel's Africa quest', *Mail & Guardian*, 15 September 2017, <https://mg.co.za/article/2017-09-15-00-togo-deals-blow-to-israels-africa-quest>, accessed 20 September 2017.

7 Gruzd S & C Rawhani, 'Togo or not to go?', *South African Jewish Report*, 7 September 2017, <http://www.sajr.co.za/news-and-articles/2017/09/07/togo-or-not-to-go>, accessed 19 October 2017.

8 Mitvim (Israeli Institute for Regional Foreign Policies), *The 2016 Israeli Foreign Policy Index*, September 2016, http://www.mitvim.org.il/images/Report_-_2016_Israeli_Foreign_Policy_Index_of_the_Mitvim_Institute.pdf, accessed 19 October 2017.

African countries' garnered only 3% of responses, by far the lowest (except for 'none of the above/no opinion'). Clearly, Africa is not a priority for Israel in the public imagination, and it may be too early to discern tangible gains from Israel's recent outreach to Africa. Nevertheless, 'Relations with African countries' was included for the first time in the 2016 survey.

A 2017 report supports the view that Israel's most important relationship is with the US, but adds that⁹

'[e]merging countries' also play a role in the shifting balance of power, mainly in Asia and Latin America ... Israel's foreign policy should prepare for the unfolding new reality by expanding the breadth of its diplomatic, military, economic and commercial ties, to include emerging countries on all continents.

Israel has indeed been strengthening its relations with rising powerhouses and members of the BRICS – China, Russia and especially India – in recent years. The report argues that 'developing countries should be viewed as markets of the future', that their rapid growth also brings 'accelerated urbanization; sharp increases in the consumption of water, energy and food; and climate change' and that 'Israel possesses unique knowledge and expertise in fields relevant to these developments', including in 'desertification, agriculture, increased food production, and emergency medicine'.¹⁰ African states certainly face many problems in areas where Israel could potentially provide solutions.

In another paper by Mitvim, Yoav Stern contends that,¹¹

'[f]or six decades, Israel developed all kinds of creative ways to cope with the regional political isolation that has been its lot since its very inception: in other words, an 'island mentality'. Communities that live on islands, real or imagined, naturally tend to try to form close social connections with communities further away.

Owing to the hostility in its immediate neighbourhood, Israel has felt 'it should ignore these areas or, at worst, should view them with hostility and suspicion'.¹² Stern argues that this disengagement 'is the direct result of the attitude of its Arab neighbours toward it, and a mindset saying that there is no "dry land" that is possible, or worthwhile, to connect to' (with the obvious exceptions of Jordan and Egypt, the only two neighbouring states with which it has formal diplomatic relations). Therefore, Israel drew closer to the US and Western Europe, and 'several times over recent years, Israel has considered deepening its

9 Eiran E & M Surowicz, 'An Outward-looking Israeli Foreign Policy', Mitvim, February 2017, p. 6, http://www.mitvim.org.il/images/An_Outward-Looking_Israeli_Foreign_Policy_-_Ehud_Eiran_and_Mireille_Surowicz_-_February_2017.pdf, accessed 20 October 2017.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

11 Stern Y, 'A Multi-Regional Israeli Foreign Policy', Mitvim, February 2017, p. 2, http://www.mitvim.org.il/images/A_Multi-Regional_Israeli_Foreign_Policy_-_Yoav_Stern_-_February_2017.pdf, accessed 20 October 2017.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 2.

ties with countries in other regions of the world, such as in Africa and Eastern Europe'.¹³ He also criticises Israel for viewing the world through a dominantly security prism, rather than actively looking for opportunities to build relations. Stern says Israel should concentrate on strengthening ties in the Middle East, Europe and the Mediterranean Basin (which would include the five North African Maghreb states stretching from Morocco to Egypt). Again, sub-Saharan Africa is not a priority. However, Stern concludes with the observation that Israel lies at the intersection of three continents, Africa, Asia and Europe, and¹⁴

it must strengthen its connection to each and every one of them and avoid exclusivity ...
Should Asia or Africa become more relevant to Israel in the future, then Israel should follow these same principles and take similar actions in these regions as well.

Prof. Ran Greenstein outlines four imperatives driving Israeli foreign policy, including towards Africa: diplomatic recognition (owing to its controversial origins and oft-questioned legitimacy); trade (especially finding markets for its military hardware and technology); strategic alliances (targeting mostly non-Muslim and non-Arab states beyond its immediate and hostile neighbourhood); and connecting with Jewish communities (as sources of support and potential immigration to Israel, particularly from South Africa and Ethiopia).¹⁵ Greenstein also notes Israel's desire to break out of its regional isolation in the 1950s and 1960s, which prompted it to forge 'an alliance of the periphery' with the non-Arab states of Ethiopia, pre-revolutionary Iran and Turkey in an effort to counter the anti-Zionism and Arab nationalism it encountered in its region, led by Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser.¹⁶ Inferred in many of these efforts, but particularly those targeting strategic partnerships, is the fear of terrorism and the direct threat it poses to Israel. This is evident in the fact that terrorism is one of the focal concerns of Israeli foreign policy as listed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.¹⁷ Although it does not explicitly label the type of terrorism, it is clearly threatened by radical extremist Islamic terrorism, whether in the Middle East or in Africa.¹⁸

There are several reasons that the Netanyahu government has paid more attention to Africa (Netanyahu also holds the post of foreign minister). First and foremost, it is motivated by the need to gain diplomatic support and allies for Israel in international forums. Netanyahu noted before his ECOWAS visit, 'The purpose of this trip is to dissolve

13 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

15 Greenstein R, Presentation at the 'Israel–Africa Summit: Benefit or Burden?' seminar, AMEC (Afro-Middle East Centre), Pretoria, 30 August 2017.

16 Hadar L, 'The collapse of Israel's "periphery doctrine"', *Foreign Policy*, 26 June 2010, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2010/06/26/the-collapse-of-israels-periphery-doctrine/>, accessed 20 September 2016.

17 Israel, MFA (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), 'Foreign policy', <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Pages/default.aspx>, accessed 11 October 2016.

18 Wittes TC, 'Israel imperiled: Threats to the Jewish state', Brookings, 19 April 2016, <https://www.brookings.edu/testimonies/israel-imperiled-threats-to-the-jewish-state/>, accessed 11 October 2017.

Recent voting patterns in UNESCO are showing increasing support for Israel from African states, suggesting potentially early successes for Israel's Africa outreach initiative

this majority, this giant bloc of 54 [sic] African countries that is the basis of the automatic majority against Israel in the UN and international bodies.¹⁹ Journalist Herb Keinon points out that sub-Saharan Africa makes up 41% of the 120-member *Non-Aligned Movement*, 'which traditionally, reflexively, has always voted against Israel [in international forums like the UN]'.²⁰ He notes that recent voting patterns in UNESCO are showing increasing support for Israel from African states, suggesting potentially early successes for Israel's Africa outreach initiative.

Keinon identifies this, and four additional reasons, for the current courting of Africa. First, breaking the African voting bloc: the continent currently has three non-permanent seats (out of a total of five reserved for Africa and Asia) on the UN Security Council (UNSC), which could prove valuable in blocking anti-Israel resolutions.²¹ It is hence no surprise that Israel has increased its engagement with Côte d'Ivoire and Equatorial Guinea, who will both serve on the UNSC from 2018–2019.²² On the other hand, UNSC draft resolutions only need nine out of 15 votes to pass (including a supporting vote from each of the five permanent members), so it is unlikely that African support will be enough to protect Israel given that only three of the 15 UNSC seats are ever occupied by African countries, none of which is a permanent member.²³ In fact, draft resolutions on the Middle East and the Palestinian question are usually vetoed (to Israel's benefit) by the US, a UNSC permanent member.²⁴ Africa's support for Israel is far more likely to be needed in the UNGA, where Africa's 55 countries make up a significant bloc out of a total of 193.

The December 2017 UNGA vote against the US decision to recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital and move its embassy there from Tel Aviv shows that Israeli overtures to Africa have a long way to go. The only African state to oppose the resolution was Togo. Just eight African countries – Benin, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Lesotho, Malawi, Rwanda, South Sudan and Uganda – were among the 35 that abstained.²⁵

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- 19 Fulbright A & R Ahren, 'Seeking to boost ties, Netanyahu meets with African leaders', *Times of Israel*, 4 June 2017.
 - 20 Keinon H, 'Five reasons Israelis should care about improved ties with Africa', *The Jerusalem Post*, 6 June 2017.
 - 21 Current African states in the UNSC include Egypt, Ethiopia and Senegal. Dag Hammarskjold Library, 'How are the non-permanent members of the Security Council selected?', <http://ask.un.org/faq/14382>, accessed 6 October 2017; UNSC (UN Security Council), 'Current members', <https://www.un.org/en/sc/members/>, accessed 6 October 2017.
 - 22 *Al Jazeera*, 'What are Israel's goals in West Africa?', 7 July 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/07/israel-goals-west-africa-170701021641836.html>, accessed 20 September 2017; Israel, MFA, 'Israel's diplomatic missions abroad: Status of relations', <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/AboutTheMinistry/Pages/Israel-s%20Diplomatic%20Missions%20Abroad.aspx>, accessed 20 September 2017.
 - 23 Dag Hammarskjold Library, 'Voting in the Security Council', <http://research.un.org/en/docs/sc/voting>, accessed 9 October 2018.
 - 24 Dag Hammarskjold Library, 'Veto list', <http://research.un.org/en/docs/sc/quick>, accessed 9 October 2017.
 - 25 See, for example, Masters J, 'How each country voted at the UN on Jerusalem status resolution', *CNN*, 22 December 2017, <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/12/22/middleeast/>

Second, Israel has a material interest in preserving stability in its region, preventing the emergence of failed states where Islamist extremism has taken hold and countering the formidable presence in Africa of Iran, its outspoken enemy.²⁶

Third, the African market is well suited to Israeli products, services and know-how, including in agriculture, power generation, water, communications, healthcare and cyber security.

Fourth, Israel has important and relevant experience, expertise and technology to share with Africa given its model of a small country that has transcended colonialism and the horrors of the Holocaust, and thrived.²⁷

Fifth, Israel can leverage its close relations with the US to attract African support. For instance, in December 2017 Israel officially joined the US' Power Africa programme, which aims to connect 60 million African households to an electricity grid by 2030. Israel signed a memorandum of understanding with the US Agency for International Development in this regard, and Israeli firms will be involved in electricity infrastructure and supply. According to Netanyahu, 'Every time that an African mother will turn on the light or turn on a heater for some water for her children, part of Israel will be there. It's a great, great development'.²⁸

The December 2017 UNGA vote against the US decision to recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital and move its embassy there from Tel Aviv shows that Israeli overtures to Africa have a long way to go

AFRICAN STATES' FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS ISRAEL

While Israel's enduring conflict with the Palestinians, the Yom Kippur War and the oil crisis precipitated a near clean break in its relations with Africa in 1973, the respective approaches of African states to the Middle Eastern nation are far more diverse and nuanced today. There is a much clearer distinction between the AU's stance on relations with Israel and the foreign policies of its individual members. The AU's staunch support for the Palestinians, at least institutionally, is evident in the fact that Palestine has observer status while Israel, once an observer at the OAU, does not. Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas regularly uses this platform to criticise Israel while making a case for a two-state solution based on the 1967 borders, as he did at the AU's 28th Ordinary Summit in January 2017. The following year Abbas lauded African states for supporting the UN vote against the US' recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, praising Egypt, Ethiopia

[jerusalem-vote-united-nations-list-intl/index.html](https://www.timesofisrael.com/jerusalem-vote-united-nations-list-intl/index.html), accessed 8 March 2018.

- 26 Levs J, 'Iran leader's call to "annihilate" Israel sparks fury as nuclear deadline looms', *CNN*, 10 November 2014, <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/11/10/world/meast/iran-annihilate-israel/index.html>, accessed 6 October 2017.
- 27 This stance also coincides with the Jewish concept of *tikkun olam* (repairing the world) as part of its humanistic outreach. *Ibid.*
- 28 See *The Times of Israel*, 'Israel joins USAID's Africa energy development program', 4 December 2017, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-joins-usaids-power-africa-energy-development-program/>, accessed 8 March 2018.

and Senegal, Africa's three non-permanent UNSC members, and incoming members Côte d'Ivoire and Equatorial Guinea.²⁹

The AU regularly makes statements condemning what it labels Israel's aggression towards Palestine. In 2017 at least four statements speaking out against Israel's presence in what the AU deems to be Palestinian territory were published.³⁰ In May 2018 the AU joined in international condemnation of Israel for the extreme violence, loss of life and injuries at the border fence with Gaza.³¹

Israel attempted to address the AU's support for the Palestinians as early as 2003, when it submitted a bid for AU observer status. Despite receiving backing from Ethiopia, Kenya and Nigeria, that bid was not successful.³² Throughout Israel's efforts to gain AU access, the institution has maintained a clear policy on Palestine, as evidenced in its own documents. A 2013 report from its Commission on the Middle East and Palestine called Israel's actions against the Palestinian people racist and colonialist and labelled it an occupier. Celebrating Palestine's admission to the UN as an observer state in 2012, the AU called on states and institutions engaged in business with Israel to boycott the country, and called on Israel to cease and scale back its settlement programmes in Palestinian territory.³³

Israel's decision to co-host the Israel–Africa Summit with Togo may have contributed to the deterioration of its relationship with the AU

Israel's decision to co-host the Israel–Africa Summit with Togo may have contributed to the deterioration of its relationship with the AU. Some interpreted the move as being disrespectful towards the AU, which should not have been bypassed (Israel invited countries directly, rather than through the AU) and undermined Israel's attempts to engage the continent.³⁴ Yet, in light of the AU's stated bias towards Palestine, it is unsurprising that Israel would have chosen to forge its own path in African multilateral cooperation.

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- 29 See Nile TV International, 'Palestinian President Abbas delivers speech in 30th AU Summit', 28 January 2018, <http://www.nileinternational.net/en/?p=88433>, accessed 8 March 2018.
- 30 AU, 'Israel', <https://au.int/en/search/node/Israel?page=1>, accessed 11 October 2017.
- 31 AU, 'Statement of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission on Palestine', 14 May 2018, <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20180514/statement-chairperson-african-union-commission-palestine>, accessed 17 May 2018.
- 32 Ramani S, 'Israel's African Union observer bid: An uphill struggle', *Huffington Post*, 21 September 2017, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/samuel-ramani/israels-african-union-obs_b_12020098.html, accessed 11 October 2017.
- 33 AU Executive Council, 'Report of the Commission on the Middle East and Palestine', 23rd Ordinary Session, 19–23 May 2013, [http://archive.au.int/collect/oau-council/import/English/EX%20CL%20790%20\(XXIII\)%20_E.pdf](http://archive.au.int/collect/oau-council/import/English/EX%20CL%20790%20(XXIII)%20_E.pdf), accessed 11 October 2017; UN, 'General Assembly votes overwhelmingly to accord Palestine "non-member observer state" status in United Nations', 29 November 2012, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2012/ga11317.doc.htm>, accessed 11 October 2017.
- 34 Fakude T, 'Axing of Africa–Israel summit loosens ties', *City Press*, 17 September 2017, <http://www.news24.com/Columnists/GuestColumn/axing-of-africa-israel-summit-loosens-ties-20170915>, accessed 11 October 2017.

Israel remains committed to obtaining AU observer status and Netanyahu often refers to it in press conferences with African leaders.³⁵ A significant part of Israel's work goes beyond pure diplomacy and multilateral foreign policy, and draws on its wealth of resources, in terms of its willingness to provide both development cooperation and technical assistance and skills transfer.

In economic terms, Africa's relationship with Israel also tells an interesting story, as shown in the following figures (please note in all cases yellow has been used to represent Africa).

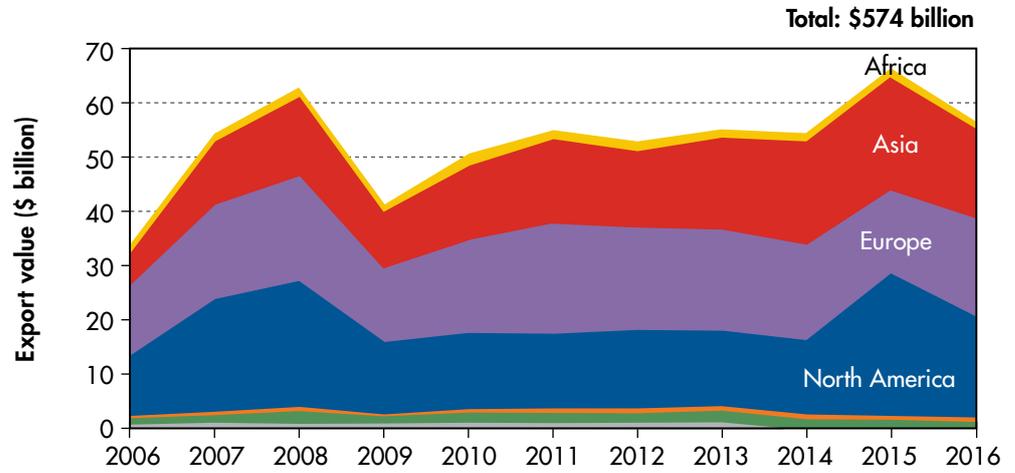
FIGURE 1 ISRAEL'S EXPORT DESTINATIONS BY AMOUNT 2016



Source: OEC (Observatory of Economic Complexity), 'Where does Israel export to? (2016)', http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/visualize/tree_map/hs92/export/isr/show/all/2016/, accessed 10 October 2017

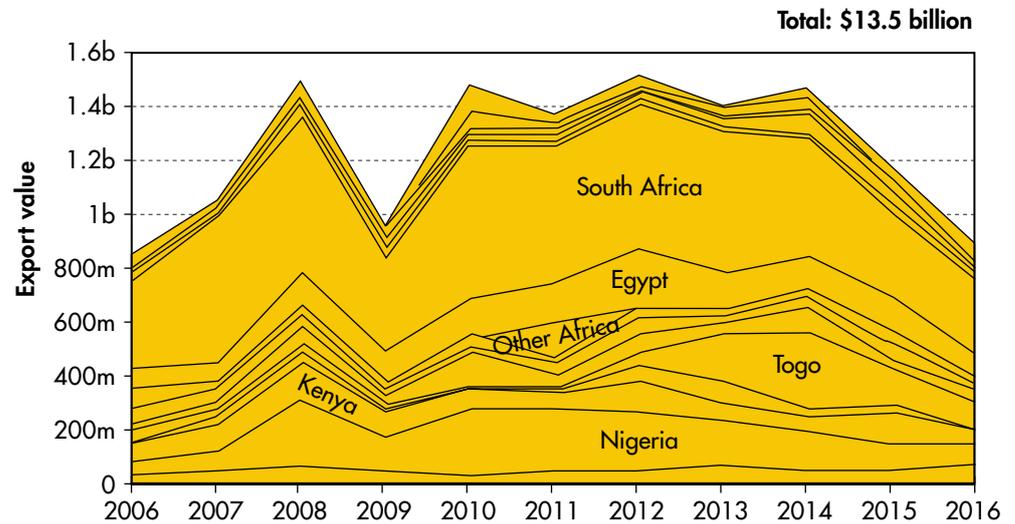
35 Akwei I, 'It's in the interest of Africa for Israel to be reinstated in AU – Netanyahu', *Africa News*, 4 June 2017, <http://www.africanews.com/2017/06/04/it-s-in-the-interest-of-africa-for-israel-to-be-reinstated-in-au-netanyahu/>, accessed 11 October 2017.

FIGURE 2 ISRAEL'S GLOBAL EXPORTS BY CONTINENT 2006–2016



Source: OEC, 'Where does Israel export to? (2006–2016)', <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/visualize/stacked/hs92/export/isr/show/all/2006.2016/>, accessed 10 October 2017

FIGURE 3 ISRAEL'S EXPORTS TO AFRICA BY COUNTRY 2006–2016



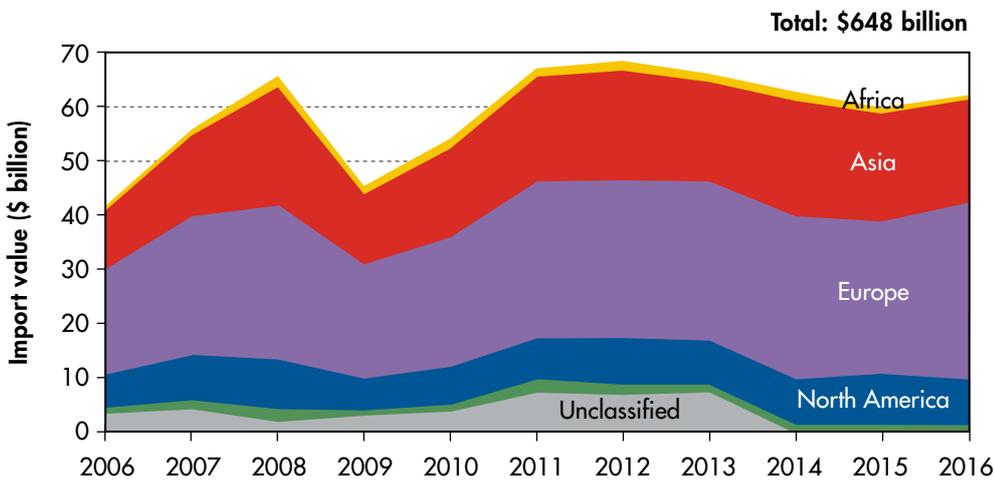
Source: OEC, 'Where does Israel export to? (2006–2016)', <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/visualize/stacked/hs92/export/isr/show/all/2006.2016/>, accessed 10 October 2017

FIGURE 4 ISRAEL'S IMPORT ORIGINS BY AMOUNT AND COUNTRY 2016

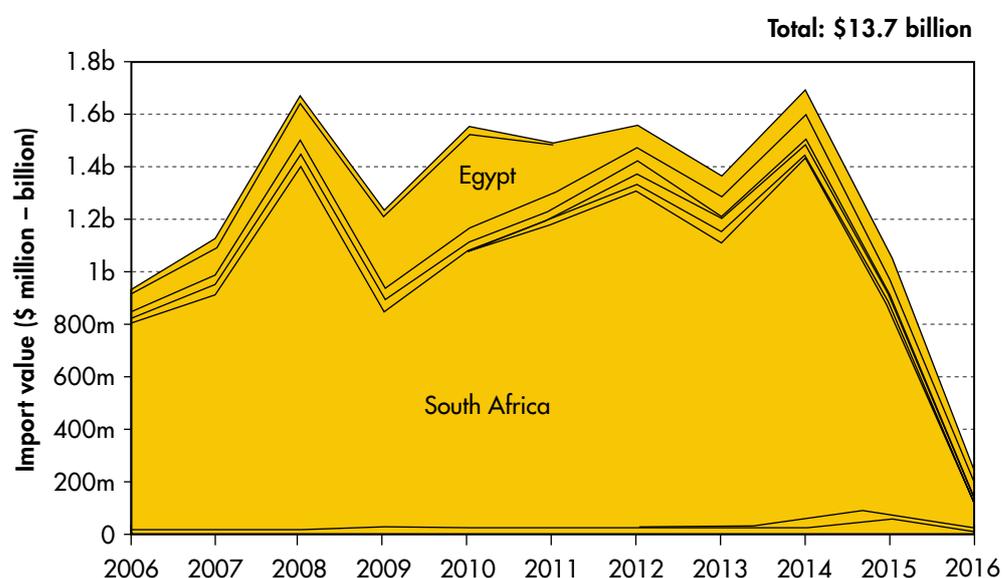


Source: OEC, 'Where does Israel import from? (2016)', http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/visualize/tree_map/hs92/export/ISR/all/show/2016/, accessed 10 October 2017

FIGURE 5 ISRAEL'S GLOBAL IMPORTS BY CONTINENT 2006–2016



Source: OEC, 'Where does Israel import from? (2006–2016)', <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/visualize/stacked/hs92/import/ISR/show/all/2006.2016/>, accessed 11 October 2017

FIGURE 6 ISRAEL'S IMPORTS FROM AFRICA BY COUNTRY 2006–2016

Source: OEC, 'Where does Israel import from? (2006–2016)', <https://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/visualize/stacked/hs92/import/isr/show/all/2006.2016/>, accessed 11 October 2017

Trade-wise Africa's relationship with Israel is minimal at present

While Israel has limited financial resources compared to the entire African continent, it engages many African economies in trade. Furthermore, Israel's small population limits its needs for imports, particularly when faced with Africa's 55 countries, and it has many more established traditional trading partners with which it trades far more extensively. Keeping these contextualising factors in mind, it is nonetheless clear that trade-wise Africa's relationship with Israel is minimal at present. Whether as a consequence of the AU's aversion towards Israel, underdeveloped economic relations, or a lack of a clear Israel strategy on the part of African leaders, Africa ranks fifth out of the six continental groupings both as a source of Israeli imports and as a destination for its exports. African economies desperately need to diversify, and enhanced trade opportunities with countries such as Israel could prove invaluable.³⁶ Inasmuch as this opportunity is clear from the data, it does not appear to have been seized yet. Despite public campaigns and chequebook diplomacy tours to Africa, Israel treats the continent as anything but a priority as far as bilateral trade is concerned. By way of example, Israel imports more from Hungary than it does from the entire African continent.

³⁶ World Bank, 'Africa's Pulse: African Economies Need Deeper Diversification and Better Policies', October 2016, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/region/afr/publication/africa-s-pulse-african-economies-need-deeper-diversification-and-better-policies>, accessed 11 October 2017.

As is evident in the figures above, Israel's trade composition by continent has hardly varied over the past decade, with Africa continuing to account for a marginal amount. What is also clear is that trade with Africa is decreasing – unsurprising given that Israel's global trade has decreased in recent years. What is surprising, given Israel's public declarations of intent to deepen and improve ties between itself and Africa, is the fact that Israel's imports from Africa (where it has the most space to make an impact in its relations with the continent) are decreasing while its imports from Europe and Asia are increasing.

Foreign direct investment (FDI) figures tell a similar story. In 2016, for example, \$13,073 million flowed out of Israel as FDI, with \$10,322 million destined for Europe. While FDI to and from developed economies ebbed in the aftershock of the global financial crisis, pre-crisis average annual FDI figures indicate an enduring trend. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development data also indicates that Israel is becoming increasingly inward-FDI oriented, suggesting it could benefit from marketing itself as an FDI destination for African countries.³⁷

In the wake of Togo's announcement that the Africa–Israel Summit was indefinitely postponed, Israel issued a statement of its own indicating it would pursue strategic bilateral engagements on the continent.³⁸ At this level positions on Israel are far more nuanced, and the four countries explored in the following sections (Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa) exemplify that.

ETHIOPIA

Israel's relations with East African countries, particularly Ethiopia and Kenya, are of strategic importance to its welfare, because of their proximity to both the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. The Horn of Africa and the Bab El-Mandeb straits are vital for Israeli maritime trade with Africa and Asia. Hence, its embassies in Addis Ababa and Nairobi reinforce the elevated status of both countries in the calculus of Israel's Africa policy priorities.

Moreover, the fact that these countries are increasingly targeted by Islamic fundamentalist groups such as al-Shabaab and other al-Qaeda-affiliated groups has also increased their importance. 'Kenya, Ethiopia and Eritrea are three countries which are crucial for Israel because they act as a buffer zone in a region which is seeing Islamic fundamentalism growing at a rapid pace.'³⁹ For this reason, a core element of Israel's quest to improve

Israel's relations with East African countries, particularly Ethiopia and Kenya, are of strategic importance to its welfare

37 OECD.Stat, 'FDI financial flows by partner country', https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=FDI_FLOW_PARTNER#, accessed 19 March 2018; UNCTAD (UN Conference on Trade and Development), 'Country fact sheet: Israel', http://unctad.org/Sections/dite_dir/docs/WIR2017/wir17_fs_il_en.pdf, accessed 19 March 2018.

38 The Africa–Israel Summit, 'The Africa–Israel Summit is postponed', <https://www.africaisraelsummit.org/single-post/2017/09/11/The-Africa-Israel-Summit-is-postponed>, accessed 11 October 2017.

39 *Fox News World*, 'Kenya long seen as key Israeli ally in troubled region', 24 September 2013, <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2013/09/24/kenya-long-seen-as-key-israeli-ally-in-troubled-region.html>, accessed 5 September 2017.

its standing with African countries is the security and strategic objective of expanding its influence in and securing the support of the so-called Nile Basin countries (Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda), although Sudan has long expressed hostility to Israel. Additionally, Israel recognises the region's growing economic vitality and the prospects for trade and investment.⁴⁰

Ethiopia is a natural partner for Israel to pursue given its position as an emerging regional force that maintains good relations with Somalia and Sudan – countries with which Israel has no significant relationship.⁴¹ Ethiopia and Israel also share many security concerns, chiefly the fight against extremism and radical Islamic terrorists (specifically al-Shabaab). However, based on remarks by both countries' heads of state, agriculture (including cattle farming), dairy, water, local development and aquaculture are the most recent focus areas for cooperation.⁴²

'Water', a perhaps purposefully ambiguous umbrella label used by Netanyahu in public speeches, could refer to a range of activities.⁴³ The most obvious (and controversial) is the [Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam](#) (GERD), currently under construction along the Nile. The GERD's predicted negative impact on Egypt downstream has drawn Cairo's ire. While Israel is not building the dam with Ethiopia, its companies have signed contracts to transport the electricity the GERD will create, spurring allegations of its influencing Ethiopia to implement the project.⁴⁴ This controversial project has affected Israel's relationship with Egypt, which fears that Israel would use AU observer status to support Ethiopia's Nile River Basin claim. Egypt staunchly opposed Israel's bid for AU observer status in 2003.⁴⁵

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- 40 The World Bank's Kenya Economic Update of October 2016 projected a 5.9% growth in 2016, rising to 6% in 2017. (See World Bank, 'Kenya Economic Update: October 2016', <https://elibrary.worldbank.org/doi/abs/10.1596/25380>, accessed 5 July 2018.) According to the latest Kenya National Bureau of Statistics quarterly report, Kenya's economy expanded by 5.7% in the third quarter of 2016 compared to 5.8% in the same period in 2015. (See Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 'Quarterly Gross Domestic Product Report: First Quarter 2018', <https://www.knbs.or.ke/>, accessed 5 July 2018.) *Quartz Africa* reported that East Africa experienced an overall growth rate of 5.3% in 2016, by far the highest of any region in Africa. (See *Quartz Africa*, 'Africa's economic growth in 2016 was driven by East Africa', 31 May 2017, <https://qz.com/994526/ethiopia-led-east-africas-economic-growth-in-2016/>, accessed 5 July 2018.)
- 41 Shaban ARA, 'Ethiopia officially starts work on UN Security Council', *Africa News*, 1 January 2017, <http://www.africanews.com/2017/01/01/ethiopia-officially-starts-work-on-un-security-council/>, accessed 7 September 2017.
- 42 Israel, MFA, 'PM Netanyahu meets with Ethiopian PM Hailemariam Desalegn', 6 June 2017, <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/PressRoom/2017/Pages/PM-Netanyahu-Meets-with-Ethiopian-PM-Hailemariam-Desalegn.aspx>, accessed 6 October 2017.
- 43 *Ibid.*
- 44 Bassin M, 'Egypt's water war', *The Times of Israel*, 30 May 2013, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/egypts-water-war/>, accessed 6 October 2017.
- 45 Ramani S, *op. cit.*

Relations between Israel and Ethiopia go a long way back. In the 1950s and 1960s Israel trained Ethiopia's elite military units and made modest arms sales to the country.⁴⁶ Despite the rupture of diplomatic ties in 1973, Ethiopia received military aid from Israel in 1978 during its border war with Somalia and during its offensive against the Eritrean secessionist movement, which was in turn supported by Arab states. This contact led to the successful covert airlift of thousands of Ethiopian Jews to Israel in 1984 and 1991.⁴⁷ Diplomatic relations were restored in 1992, after the defeat of Ethiopia's militarist Derg regime.

The relationship was reinvigorated in 2016 by Netanyahu's state visit to Ethiopia to meet then prime minister Hailemariam Desalegn. In January 2017 Ethiopia began its two-year term on the UNSC. It also permanently hosts the headquarters of the AU. Hence, the decision to actively re-engage Ethiopia makes sense given its strategic importance for two of Israel's objectives in Africa: shoring up UNSC support and making a bid for AU observer status. In 2017 Desalegn returned the courtesy, visiting Israel in June. At a press conference concluding his visit, Desalegn could be seen nodding when Netanyahu expressed his hope that Ethiopia would support Israel's AU observer status bid, but it is unclear whether this will be formalised or whether it was simply a diplomatic gesture.⁴⁸ In July 2016, for example, Desalegn said, 'Israel is working very hard in many African countries. There is no reason to deny this observer position to Israel.'⁴⁹ Since that date, four AU summits have passed and it is not clear whether Ethiopia has formally made a case for Israel's membership as an observer. On the other hand, Israel itself has not submitted a formal request for observer status either.

The recently more active bilateral diplomatic engagement is underpinned by trade, which consists primarily of Israeli exports such as machinery and chemical products, as well as Ethiopian exports such as oily seeds and coffee. The trade balance weighs securely in Ethiopia's favour. Between 2006 and 2016 Israel imported goods worth \$538 million from Ethiopia, while exporting \$338 million.⁵⁰ Overall, Ethiopia is not a particularly significant trading partner for Israel, and vice versa. Only 0.62% of Ethiopia's exports went to Israel in 2016, for example, while 9.9% went to Canada, 9.8% to Saudi Arabia and 8.7% to Germany.⁵¹ Likewise, only 0.085% – down from 0.1% in 2015 – of Israel's 2016 imports

46 Chazan N, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

47 Arthur KB & E Gyimah-Boadi, 'Africa's evolving relations with Israel', in *Israel and Africa*, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

48 Ethiopia Online Videos, 'Ethiopia – Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu meets Ethiopian PM Hailemariam Desalegn in Jerusalem', YouTube, 6 June 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qFPx0XVT-wA>, accessed 7 September 2017.

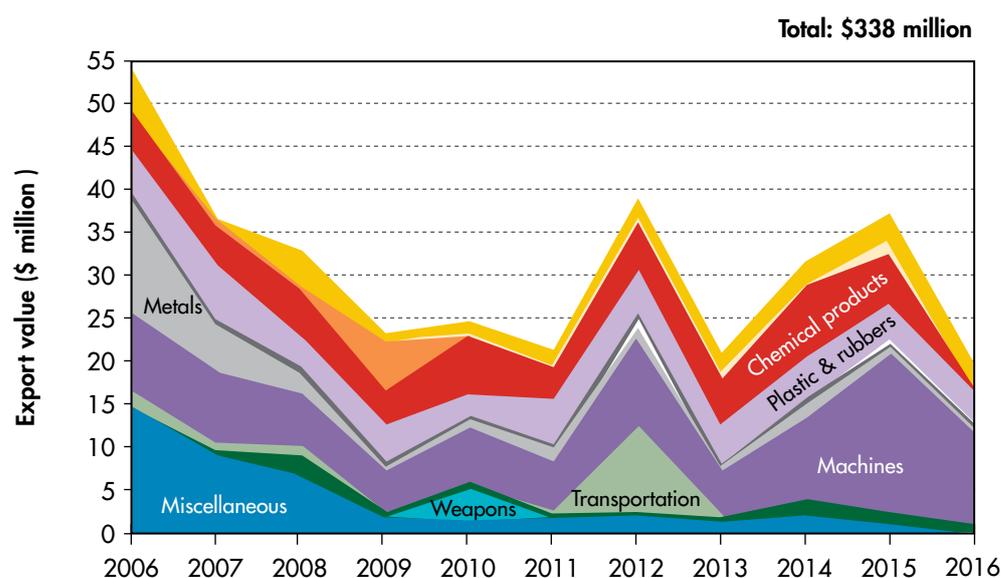
49 Arutz Sheva, 'Israel wins Ethiopian support for African Union "observer" role', 7 July 2016, <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/214647>, accessed 11 October 2017.

50 OEC (Observatory of Economic Complexity), 'What does Israel import from Ethiopia? (2006–2016)', <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/visualize/stacked/hs92/import/isr/eth/show/2006.2016/>, accessed 7 October 2017; OEC, 'What does Israel export to Ethiopia? (2005–2015)', <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/visualize/stacked/hs92/export/isr/eth/show/2005.2015/>, accessed 7 October 2017.

51 OEC, 'Where does Ethiopia export to? (2016)', http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/visualize/tree_map/hs92/export/eth/show/all/2016/, accessed 7 October 2017.

came from Ethiopia. Although it is Israel's third largest trading partner on the continent (after South Africa and Egypt, accounting for 0.12% and 0.092% of Israel's imports respectively), this does not translate into significant benefit for Ethiopia.⁵² As of 2015, Israel was only Ethiopia's 20th most significant trade partner.⁵³ It is still too early to judge the impact of the recent economic and technical cooperation pledges made by Israel to Ethiopia.

FIGURE 7 ISRAEL'S EXPORTS TO ETHIOPIA 2006–2016



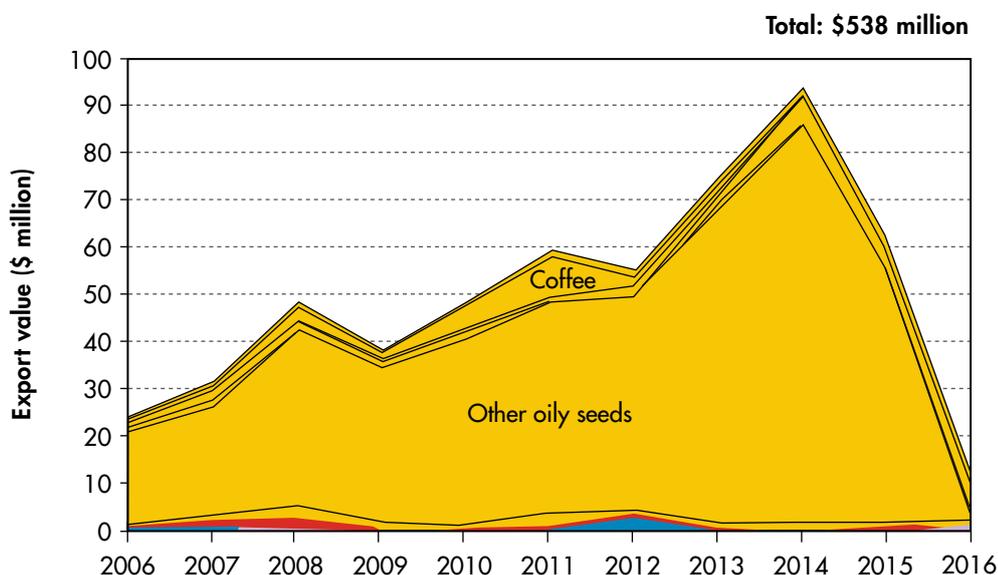
Source: OEC, 'What does Israel export to Ethiopia? (2006–2016)', <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/visualize/stacked/hs92/export/isr/eth/show/2006.2016/>, accessed 10 October 2017

Israel's bond with Ethiopia is also deepened by the approximately 140 000 descendants of the Ethiopian Jews who were airlifted to Israel in 1984 and 1991 in operations Moses and Solomon. Further strengthening this bond at state level is the fact that the Speaker of the Israeli Knesset is from Ethiopia and several Ethiopian Jews occupy prominent positions in society – although many still remain marginalised and discriminated against (so pervasive is this discrimination that Ethiopians not born in Israel cannot donate blood).⁵⁴

52 OEC, 'Where does Israel import from? (2016)', http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/visualize/tree_map/hs92/import/isr/show/all/2016/, accessed 10 October 2017.

53 World Integrated Trade Solution, 'Ethiopia (excludes Eritrea) exports, imports and trade balance by country 2015', ???, accessed 11 October 2017.

54 Mualem M, 'Ethiopian-born Knesset member battles discrimination', *Al Monitor*, September 2014, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/09/penina-tamanu-shata-israel-knesset-ethiopia-racism-children.html>, accessed 6 October 2017.

FIGURE 8 ETHIOPIA'S EXPORTS TO ISRAEL 2006–2016

Source: OEC, 'What does Israel import from Ethiopia? (2006–2016)', <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/visualize/stacked/hs92/export/eth/isr/show/2006.2016/>, accessed 10 October 2017

Multiple public statements from both heads of government and their respective ambassadors indicate a strong desire to continue building this relationship, indicating that Israel's charm offensive in East Africa could be paying off. 'Africa is coming to Israel,' Desalegn said in June 2017, telling Netanyahu to rest assured that Israel had Ethiopia's full support, with engaging Israel a key pillar in Ethiopia's foreign policy and diplomacy. 'We represent truly the African–Israeli relationship as a gateway to Africa. So we will do everything at our disposal to make [the] Israel–Africa relationship ... mature and grow and Ethiopia will take leadership in this regard.'⁵⁵

It remains to be seen if the relationship will continue to strengthen under new Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, sworn in in April 2018.

KENYA

Kenya has become one of Israel's biggest allies and key strategic partners in Africa. Former Israeli ambassador to South Africa Alon Liel said in 2013: 'Kenya is one of the most

Kenya has become one of Israel's biggest allies and key strategic partners in Africa

55 Ethiopia Online Videos, *op. cit.*; Shaban ARA, *op. cit.*; Yohannes R, 'Ethiopia, Israel to broaden areas of cooperation', *allAfrica*, 31 May 2016, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201605311040.html>, accessed 7 September 2017.

important countries for Israel in all Africa ... there are significant historical and economic ties between them, and I would put its importance close to Egypt and Nigeria.⁵⁶ Kenyatta's government has also been one of the foremost advocates of reinstating Israel's AU observer status, stating at a July 2016 press conference: 'Kenya will continue to push, to see how Israel can regain her observer position at the African Union.'⁵⁷ It is not clear if Kenya has made any formal effort to help Israel realise this goal.

While it still supports the Palestinian case for statehood, Kenya's relations with Israel have been less conditioned by questions of solidarity with the Palestinians when compared to other African states. Calls by some Kenyan Muslim clerics to make better relations with Israel conditional on tangible results from resumed peace negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians have fallen largely on deaf ears.⁵⁸

During Netanyahu's visit to Kenya in 2016, Kenyatta stated,⁵⁹

We believe that there is a need for us as a continent once again to re-engage Israel on a more positive basis, with an understanding that our partnership can help make this world that much more secure ... we need to partner with each other ... we need to deal with the security threats we have together.

Israel has been integrally involved in intelligence activities and cooperation with East African states in general and Kenya in particular. In the aftermath of the 1998 US embassy bombings in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, Mossad (Israel's national intelligence agency) became increasingly active in East Africa. In September 2013 Israeli forces intervened in support of Kenyan troops during the al-Shabaab attack on Nairobi's Westgate Shopping Centre, which is part Israeli-owned. The intimate involvement of Israeli experts in negotiations and rescue efforts points to the depth of ongoing security cooperation between the two states.

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- 56 Naylor H, 'Israel quick to protect its sub-Saharan African interests', *allAfrica*, 31 May 2016, <https://www.thenational.ae/world/israel-quick-to-protect-its-sub-saharan-african-interests-1.304584>, accessed 8 September 2017.
- 57 Ahren R, 'Kenya president vows to help Israel strengthen Africa ties', *The Times of Israel*, 5 July 2016, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/kenya-will-help-israel-strengthen-its-ties-in-africa-president-tells-pm/>, accessed 11 October 2017.
- 58 Mwakio P, 'Muslim leaders fault Kenya-Israel relations', *Standard Digital*, 7 July 2016, <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2000207798/muslim-leaders-fault-kenya-israel-relations>, accessed 8 March 2018.
- 59 Israel, MFA, 'PM Netanyahu attends joint press conference with Kenyan President Kenyatta', 5 July 2016, <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/PressRoom/2016/Pages/PM-Netanyahu-attends-joint-press-conference-with-Kenyan-President-Kenyatta-5-July-216.aspx>, accessed 8 September 2017.

Israel's involvement in the Kenyan and Ugandan military is also increasing, with its providing training and advice to their armies and air forces.⁶⁰ Both states acknowledge that Israel's experience in counter-terrorism has offered them a singular opportunity to strengthen their own counter-terrorism capabilities. From Israel's viewpoint, this could be a template for military cooperation with other African states.⁶¹ Additionally, the Kenyan and Ugandan military have purchased Israeli manufactured weapons as well as artillery, gunboats, aircraft, communications equipment and electronic surveillance devices.

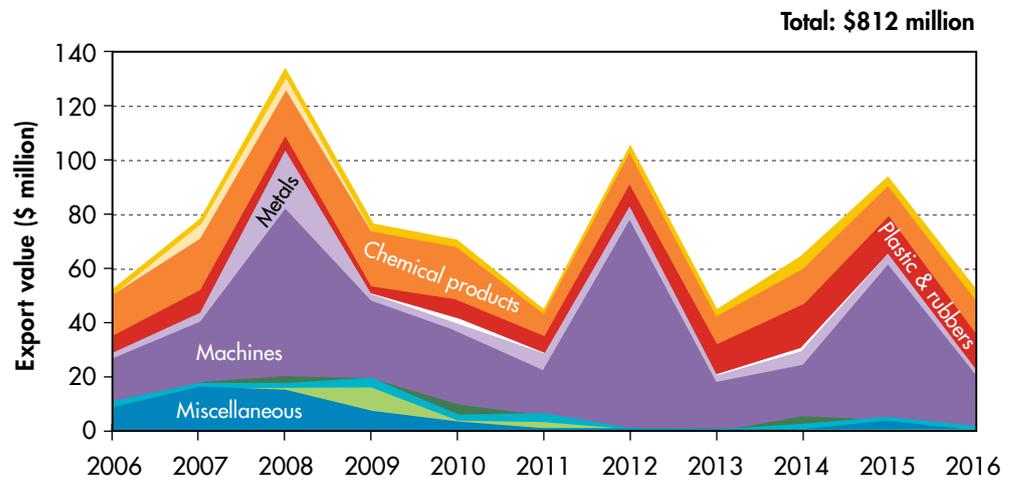
Israel–Kenya trade has grown, with a series of bilateral agreements and memoranda of understanding on a wide range of issues (including defence, security, health, technology, agriculture and water resource management, signed in 2016) promoting greater military and economic interaction.⁶²

Over the past decade a considerable trade surplus has accumulated in Israel's favour, as the country's exports to Kenya totalled \$812 million while it only imported goods worth \$239 million. In 2013 Israel was only Kenya's 73rd most significant trading partner.⁶³ In 2015 trade with Kenya constituted approximately 8% of Israel's total exports to Africa, and 1.2% of its imports (0.14% of its global exports and 0.02% of its global imports). This was set to increase given Kenya's medium-term positive growth performance, projected to be 6.1% in 2019 after briefly decelerating in 2016–2017 owing to drought-driven record-high inflation.⁶⁴ Even after official ties were severed in 1973, Kenya remained one of the countries where Israeli commercial ties continued to expand. Diplomatic relations resumed in 1988.⁶⁵

Israel–Kenya trade has grown, with a series of bilateral agreements and memoranda of understanding on a wide range of issues

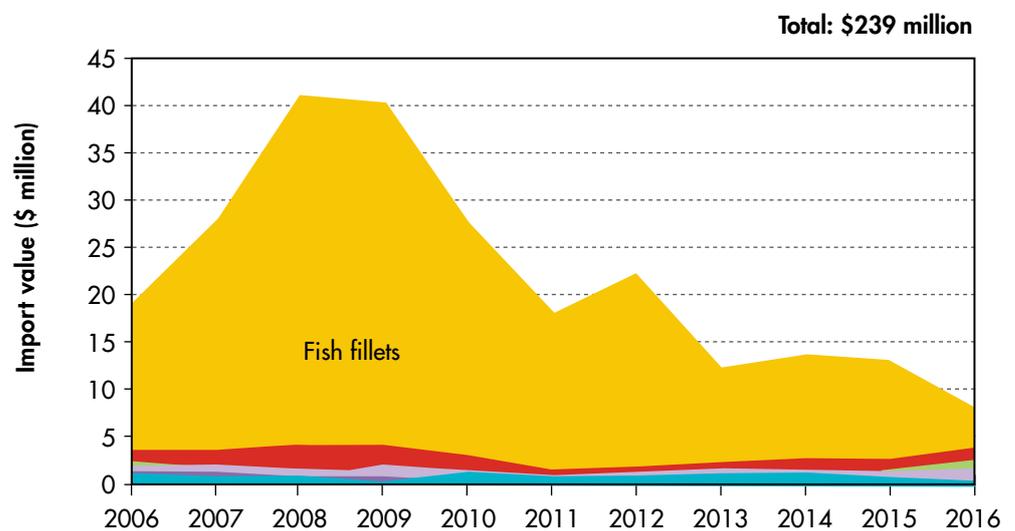
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- 60 Fakude T, 'Forty Years after Entebbe: A New Era of Israeli Relations with Uganda and Kenya', *Al Jazeera Centre for Studies*, 31 May 2016, <http://studies.aljazeera.net/en/reports/2016/05/forty-years-entebbe-era-israeli-relations-uganda-kenya-160531104010933.html>, accessed 6 October 2017; Fernandez B, 'Uganda: Doing Israel's dirty work. Why is Israel sending asylum-seekers to Uganda?', <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2014/04/uganda-asylum-israel-dirty-work-201445141832792192.html>, accessed 6 October 2017.
- 61 *New Vision*, 'Uganda–Israel military chiefs meet', 6 July 2016, https://www.newvision.co.ug/new_vision/news/1428751/uganda-israel-military-chiefs-meet, accessed 8 March 2018.
- 62 *Israel Hayom*, 'Israel, Kenya look to boost bilateral ties', 6 July 2016, <http://www.israelhayom.com/2017/07/20/israel-kenya-look-to-boost-bilateral-ties/>, accessed 8 March 2018.
- 63 World Integrated Trade Solutions, 'Kenya exports, imports and trade balance by country 2013', <http://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/KEN/Year/2013/TradeFlow/EXPIMP/Partner/by-country>, accessed 11 October 2016.
- 64 OEC, 'Where does Israel export to? (2015)', http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/visualize/tree_map/hs92/export/isr/show/all/2015/, accessed 9 September 2016; OEC, 'Where does Israel import from? (2015)', http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/visualize/tree_map/hs92/import/isr/show/all/2015/, accessed 9 September 2017; World Bank Group, 'Kenya's economic outlook to dip in 2017', Press Release, 12 April 2017, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2017/04/12/kenyas-economic-outlook-to-dip-in-2017>, accessed 9 September 2017.
- 65 Chazan N, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

FIGURE 9 ISRAEL'S EXPORTS TO KENYA 2006–2016



Source: OEC, 'What does Israel export to Kenya? (2006–2016)', <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/visualize/stacked/hs92/export/isr/ken/show/2006.2016/>, accessed 10 October 2017

FIGURE 10 KENYA'S EXPORTS TO ISRAEL 2006–2016



Source: OEC, 'What does Israel import from Kenya? (2006–2016)', <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/visualize/stacked/hs92/import/isr/ken/show/2006.2016/>, accessed 10 October 2017

Finally, Kenya has been one of the largest beneficiaries of Israeli technical assistance to developing countries. Many Kenyans study in Israel and acquire specialised knowledge in areas as diverse as integrated pest management, organic farming principles and practice, food management and public health. For example, in February 2016, 25 Kenyan students travelled to Israel to begin irrigation studies. They were to be followed by another 20 upon their return.⁶⁶ A further 102 Kenyan agricultural students returned from an 11-month internship in Israel in June 2017, with another 120 departing to begin the same programme in July.⁶⁷

NIGERIA

Isolating Israel after the Yom Kippur War in 1973 proved unsustainable for Nigeria. In the 1980s Nigeria was Israel's largest trading partner in sub-Saharan Africa. Israel was particularly interested in restoring ties with the country owing to its influential position, especially in ECOWAS. Nigeria could guarantee a supply of oil to its neighbours and friends, and allay their fears of a shortage of Arab oil resulting from their renewing ties with Israel. Nigeria had to balance this with its allegiance with Arab countries against apartheid South Africa, which Israel had not cut ties with and continued to support for some time.⁶⁸ Whether as a result of realising that supporting South Africa came at the cost of other potential bilateral ties on the continent, or because it truly objected to apartheid rule, Israel eventually scaled down its engagements with South Africa. In 1987 then Israeli foreign minister Shimon Peres made a speech to the Knesset outlining a plan to cut back relations with South Africa, condemning apartheid as a system 'totally rejected by all human beings'.⁶⁹ In 1989 Nigeria's then president Gen. Ibrahim Babangida held an impromptu press conference and noted that 'the circumstances, perhaps, that brought about non-recognition [of Israel] are fast dying away, and the situation may be different as time goes on'.⁷⁰ His words proved true when ties were restored in September 1992. The relationship began to further stabilise and grow as a wave of anti-Egyptian sentiment

Isolating Israel after the Yom Kippur War in 1973 proved unsustainable for Nigeria. In the 1980s Nigeria was Israel's largest trading partner in sub-Saharan Africa

66 Kenya, The Presidency, '45 students for irrigation training in Israel', 20 February 2016, <http://www.president.go.ke/2016/02/20/45-students-for-irrigation-training-in-israel/>, accessed 9 September 2017.

67 Embassy of Israel in Kenya, 'Agriculture students return from Israel', 29 June 2017, <http://embassies.gov.il/nairobi/NewsAndEvents/Pages/Agriculture-Students-Return-from-Israel.aspx>, accessed 9 October 2017.

68 CIA (Central Intelligence Agency), Directorate of Intelligence, *Israel's Return to Black Africa: Progress and Prospects*, 9 November 1983, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP85T00287R000500110001-6.pdf>, accessed 10 October 2017.

69 Marshall ES, *Israel: Current Issues and Historical Background*. New York: Noca Science Publishers, 2002, p. 221.

70 Noble KB, 'Nigeria and Israel may restore ties', *New York Times*, 10 March 1989, <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/03/10/world/nigeria-and-israel-may-restore-ties.html>, accessed 10 October 2017.

swept through Nigeria's elite, who noted a distinct lack of benefit from aligning with the Arab world so definitively in 1973.⁷¹

In 2006 Nigeria and Israel signed a memorandum of understanding formalising bilateral consultations on regional and international political concerns, especially combatting Islamic terrorism and diversifying economic cooperation. Nigeria, one of Israel's top 20 importers, imports an average of \$300 million of Israeli goods each year, facilitated by the Nigerian–Israeli Chamber of Commerce and the Israel–Africa Chamber of Commerce. Some 50 Israeli firms, including Motorola Israel Ltd., Sole Boneh International Group and TAHAL group, operate in Nigeria.⁷² Many Christian Nigerians also have a close affinity with Israel for religious reasons and Nigeria is Israel's second biggest source of Christian pilgrims.

In 2013 Goodluck Jonathan became the first Nigerian president to visit Israel to meet then president Shimon Peres; a diplomatic highpoint in the bilateral relationship. Israel's ongoing engagement with Nigeria translated into open support in 2013 when Nigeria, a previously ardent supporter of the Palestinians' right to act in self-defence without being considered terrorists, condemned the kidnapping of Jewish teenagers as an act of terrorism.⁷³ This continued in 2014, when Nigeria surprised many by not supporting a UN resolution calling for an end to the Israeli occupation by 2017.⁷⁴

Israel reciprocated with on-the-ground action, reportedly sending experts to Nigeria to assist in a mission to locate and free over 200 girls kidnapped by Islamic terrorist group Boko Haram in 2014.⁷⁵ In 2015 the spokesperson for Nigeria's National Information Centre praised Israel's assistance in countering Boko Haram, calling it a crucial and loyal ally.⁷⁶ In May 2017 Israel's ambassador to Nigeria cancelled a planned celebration of Israel's Independence Day and devoted the funds to set up a soccer league, named Israel Cares, for

71 Nwogbaga DME, 'Nigeria–Israel relations: Prospects for a diversified and integrated economic development', *African Journal of Political and Administrative Studies*, 5, 1, 2010, pp. 14–34.

72 Yusuf AS *et al.*, 'Nigerian and Israeli systems of government: A comparative study', *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 5, 7, 2015, pp. 313–324.

73 Katsina AA, 'How Israel is gaining a foothold in Nigeria', *Peoples Daily*, 11 September 2014, <http://www.peoplesdailyng.com/how-israel-is-gaining-a-foothold-in-nigeria/>, accessed 7 September 2017.

74 Jewish Virtual Library, 'Israel international relations: Nigeria–Israel relations', <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/israel-nigeria-relations>, accessed 6 September 2017; Nwogbaga DME, *op. cit.*; Yusuf AS *et al.*, *op. cit.*

75 *Israel Today*, 'Israeli forces reportedly on the ground in Nigeria', 13 May 2014, <http://www.israeltoday.co.il/NewsItem/tabid/178/nid/24606/Default.aspx>, accessed 9 March 2018.

76 JNS.org, 'Nigeria: Israel "crucial" in fight against Boko Haram terror group', *the algemeiner*, 20 February 2015, <https://www.algemeiner.com/2015/02/20/nigeria-israel-%E2%80%98crucial%E2%80%99-in-fight-against-boko-haram-terror-group/>, accessed 9 March 2018.

children who had escaped from Boko Haram.⁷⁷ Boko Haram's agenda and activities pose a serious threat to Nigeria and its neighbours.⁷⁸ Given Israel's experience and expertise in counter-terrorism and security, it is surprising that cooperation in this area is not one of the flagships of their relationship. However, it remains a key potential opportunity for Nigeria's new leadership to seize.

Despite these shows of solidarity at the bilateral and multilateral level, domestic tensions in Nigeria remain a potential obstacle to deeper engagement. Religion, for example, is a force to be reckoned with. Nigeria's president Shehu Shagari, who served from 1979–1983, was always concerned about the reaction of his Muslim-dominated National Party, which naturally sided with the Palestinians and against Israel.⁷⁹ In 2006 a public survey found that most Nigerians consider religion to be their most important identifying feature. Most Muslims noted that they supported the Palestinians, while most Christians expressed support for Israel.⁸⁰ Nigeria's President Muhammadu Buhari has publicly declared support for Palestine, most recently at the UNGA.⁸¹

In addition to Nigeria's internal tensions, its foreign policy towards Israel is somewhat lacklustre. Nigeria has been criticised for its poorly formed and oft-misunderstood national interests, which could better establish the country's foreign policy priorities.⁸² This leaves its foreign policy open to the subjective interpretation of the successive heads of state, causing inconsistency.⁸³

As shown in figures 11 and 12, Israel exported approximately \$2 billion worth of goods to Nigeria from 2006–2016, including mineral products (mostly refined petroleum), machines and chemicals. Nigeria's exports to Israel totalled \$41.9 million over the same period, mostly consisting of vegetable products (particularly oily seeds). In 2014 Israel was Nigeria's 52nd most important trading partner.⁸⁴

77 JTA, 'Israeli envoy cancels bash, funds Nigeria refugee kids soccer', *The Times of Israel*, 17 May 2017, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israeli-envoy-cancels-bash-funds-nigeria-refugee-kids-soccer/>, accessed 9 March 2018.

78 Onapajo H, Uzodike UO & A Whetho, 'Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria: The international dimension', *South African Journal of International Affairs*, 3, 19, 2012, pp. 337–357.

79 CIA, *op. cit.*

80 Ruby R & ST Shah, 'Nigeria's presidential election: The Christian–Muslim divide', Pew Research Center, 21 March 2007, <http://www.pewforum.org/2007/03/21/nigerias-presidential-election-the-christian-muslim-divide/>, accessed 11 October 2017.

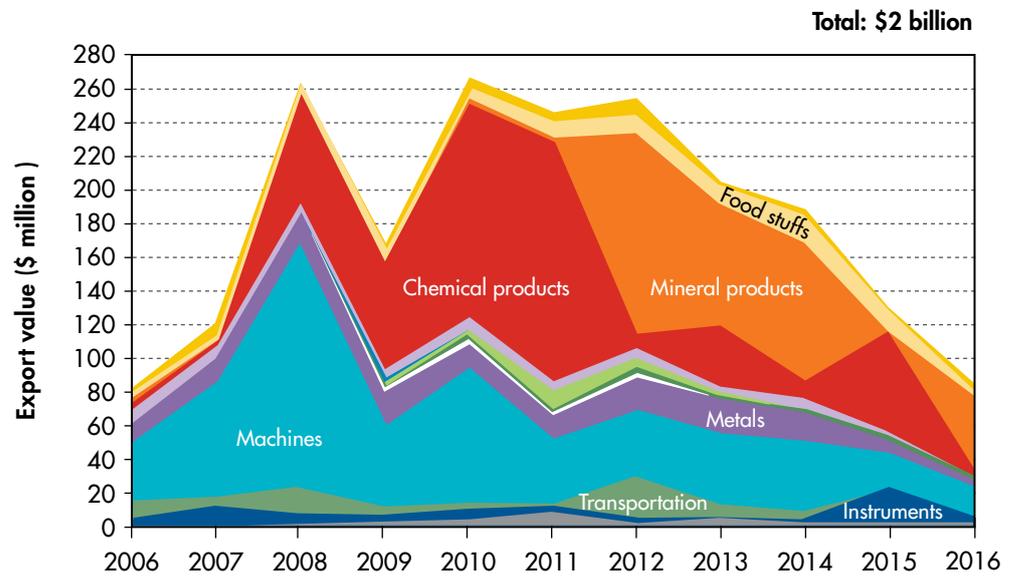
81 Sani, 'President Buhari's in UN calling for an independent state of Palestinians', YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=efbxBJ8csFM>, accessed 11 October 2017.

82 This is not to imply that its current foreign policy has no priorities. Ajayi L *et al.*, 'Nigeria's foreign policy and codification of national interest: A prescriptive analysis', *Covenant University Journal of Politics and International Affairs*, 3, 2, 2015, pp. 68–81.

83 Ekendirichukwu EG, 'Fifty years of Nigeria's foreign policy: A critical review', *African Political Science Review*, 2, 1, 2010, pp. 22–40.

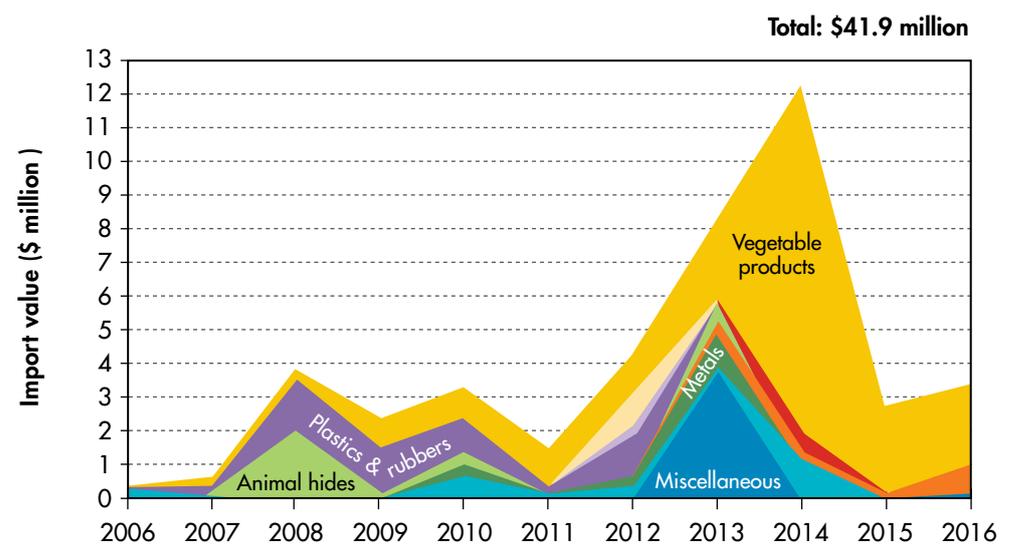
84 World Integrated Trade Solution, 'Nigeria exports, imports and trade balance by country 2014', <http://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/NGA/Year/2014/TradeFlow/EXPIMP/Partner/by-country>, accessed 11 October 2017.

FIGURE 11 ISRAEL'S EXPORTS TO NIGERIA 2006–2016



Source: OEC, 'What does Israel export to Nigeria? (2006–2016)', <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/visualize/stacked/hs92/export/isr/nga/show/2006.2016/>, accessed 10 October 2017

FIGURE 12 NIGERIA'S EXPORTS TO ISRAEL 2006–2016



Source: OEC, 'What does Israel import from Nigeria? (2006–2016)', <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/visualize/stacked/hs92/import/isr/nga/show/2006.2016/>, accessed 10 October 2017

The relationship between the two countries stagnated after Jonathan lost the 2015 election to Buhari, a Muslim candidate.⁸⁵ Further tensions underlie the engagement between the two, such as Israel's perceived support for Nigeria's separatist movement in the Biafra region (both in the 1960s and today).⁸⁶ Although Netanyahu may have hoped to engage his Nigerian counterpart when he attended the ECOWAS summit in June 2017, Nigeria did not attend. As the Israeli government considers deeper cooperation with ECOWAS, it is clear that Nigeria, which houses the organisation's secretariat, needs to be won over more convincingly.

Nigeria's relationship with Israel has always had strong trade links. Even after the official break in relations after the Yom Kippur War, Nigeria was one of a handful of countries on the continent to maintain unofficial ties with Israel, through bilateral business dealings overseen by private companies. At the time Israel maintained a favourable relationship with Nigeria by supplying it with chemicals, medicines, agricultural products, and technical assistance and knowledge.⁸⁷

Today Nigeria's trade targets differ. It seeks to diversify its economy and has created incentives in numerous fields, including agriculture, manufacturing, solid minerals, power and telecommunications, which it expressly hopes Israel will take advantage of.⁸⁸ For Israel this may be an easy win, as Nigeria's areas of need are those where Israel has established renown and leadership, and its imports from Nigeria overwhelmingly consist of vegetable products. Addressing the significant trade deficit between the countries, as well as focusing its trade on areas where Nigeria has expressed a clear interest, would go a long way to further improving their bond.

SOUTH AFRICA

Unlike Kenya and Ethiopia (not to mention Israel's burgeoning ties with Rwanda), the prospects for an improved relationship with South Africa look distinctly less propitious.

South Africa's small but influential Jewish community (about 120 000 strong at its peak in the 1980s, down to some 70 000 today, chiefly owing to emigration) has always been firmly Zionist and supportive of the development of the Jewish state. South Africa was one of the countries that voted in favour of the November 1947 [UN Partition Plan for Israel and Palestine](#), and formally recognised Israel *de jure* in 1949. It was also one of only four African countries to maintain diplomatic relations after the Yom Kippur War.

Unlike Kenya and Ethiopia the prospects for an improved relationship with South Africa look distinctly less propitious

85 Likely also owing to his public statement of total support for Palestine. *Premium Times*, 'Nigeria's President Buhari declares total support for Palestinian state', 28 February 2016, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/199232-nigerias-president-buhari-declares-total-support-palestinian-state.html>, accessed 21 September 2017.

86 Arthur KB & E Gyimah-Boadi, 'Africa's evolving relations with Israel', in *Israel and Africa*, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

87 CIA, *op. cit.*

88 Oroegbu-Chikezie O, 'Nigeria, Israel strengthen non-oil ties', *The Nation*, 18 October 2015, <http://thenationonlineng.net/nigeria-israel-strengthen-non-oil-ties/>, accessed 10 October 2017.

From the 1970s, as apartheid South Africa and Israel became increasingly isolated by the international community, the two states found common cause and increased their cooperation economically, politically and militarily. Israel took many years to officially condemn apartheid. After South Africa's political transition in 1994 relations with Israel were maintained, while the ANC government boosted its ties with the Palestinians, particularly Yasser Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). The ANC saw the PLO as a kindred spirit involved in a liberation struggle analogous to its own.

Over the past two decades South Africa's relations with Israel have mainly, but not exclusively, been impacted by the vicissitudes in Israeli–Palestinian relations, the imperatives of bilateral economic interaction and trade with the Jewish state, and pressure brought to bear on the South African government by various national constituencies seeking to influence and shape government policy.

Since the 2000s the South African government has been on the front lines of the battle between groups opposed to Israel, such as Boycott, Divest and Sanctions–South Africa (BDS-SA), and the local Jewish community. Both have sought to influence South Africa's relations with Israel, with BDS-SA calling for ties to be severed and the Jewish community and its Christian allies calling for these ties to be bolstered. Pretoria has consistently supported anti-Israel resolutions in international forums such as the UN and its Human Rights Council.⁸⁹

While disjunctions invariably exist between declaratory statements and actual relations, official statements and positions by key political parties and individuals serve, at least to some extent, as an indication of the difficulties in the relationship.

For many in the ruling ANC, their view of Israel's occupation of land captured in the 1967 Six Day War and human rights abuses against the Palestinians has been refracted through the prism of their own experience of racist apartheid policies. This has given rise to the strong view in ANC and government circles that Israel – in its treatment of both its own Israeli Arab citizens and the Palestinians – bears all the hallmarks and attributes of an apartheid system. This comparison is vehemently denied by Israel's supporters in the South African Jewish and (some) Christian communities.

Under pressure from various constituencies, including BDS-SA, the South African government has inclined in recent years towards much more vocal criticism of Israel. Ties have unquestionably deteriorated. Given its strong stance against Israeli policies, South Africa is likely to be one of the loudest voices against Israel's bid for AU observer status.

89 Dam P, 'Africa and the Global Human Rights Agenda: The African Group at the UN Human Rights Council', SAIIA (South African Institute of International Affairs) Policy Briefing, 108, October 2014, <http://www.saiia.org.za/policy-briefings/africa-and-the-global-human-rights-agenda-the-african-group-at-the-un-human-rights-council>, accessed 2 July 2018.

A few key examples illustrate this point. In October 2015 Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* commented:⁹⁰

Already high, diplomatic tensions between Israel and South Africa have been raised a notch in the wake of the arrival of Hamas leader Khaled Meshal ... Meshal, making his first trip to South Africa, was invited to participate in a conference held by the ruling party, the ANC, in Johannesburg, where he is expected to meet with South African President Jacob Zuma.

Earlier that year, in May 2015, Israel had refused to allow South Africa's higher education minister at the time, Blade Nzimande, to enter the country, following his fervent public condemnations of Israel. Nzimande had been quoted as labelling 'Israeli-apartheid ... worse than South African apartheid'. He called for the expulsion of Israel's ambassador to South Africa, and the recalling of South Africa's ambassador to Israel.⁹¹

The embassy downgrade issue was debated at the ANC's policy conference in June 2017, without a conclusion being reached, and was deferred to the ANC's 54th national conference in Johannesburg in December 2017. That conference took the following decision: 'Delegates endorsed the proposal that we must give practical support to the oppressed people of Palestine and resolved on an immediate and unconditional downgrade of the SA embassy in Israel to a Liaison Office.'⁹² While this is yet to be translated from an ANC resolution to official South African government policy, high-ranking ministers Naledi Pandor and Lindiwe Sisulu both publicly endorsed downgrading the embassy in Tel Aviv.⁹³ The recall of the South African ambassador to Israel, Sisa Ngombane, in May 2018 following South Africa's outrage at the violence triggered by the opening of the US embassy in Jerusalem could prove the first concrete step in downgrading formal diplomatic relations.

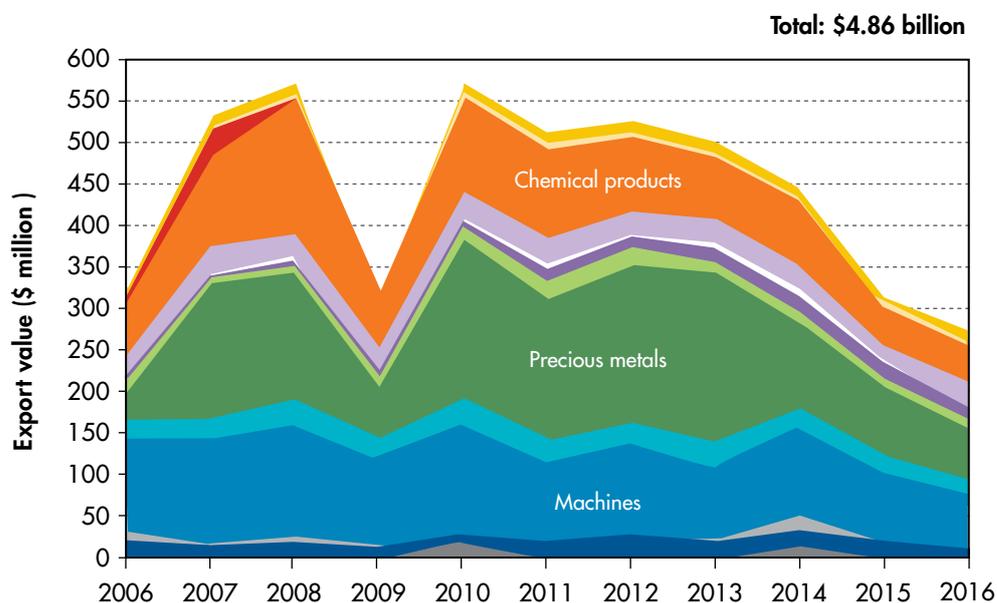
Notwithstanding the relentless condemnation of Israel, trade ties and other forms of bilateral cooperation have remained largely intact. Trade in dollar value is, however, decreasing.

90 Ravid B, 'South African-Israeli rift widens over Hamas visit with President Zuma', *Haaretz*, 19 October 2015, <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.681231>, accessed 5 September 2017.

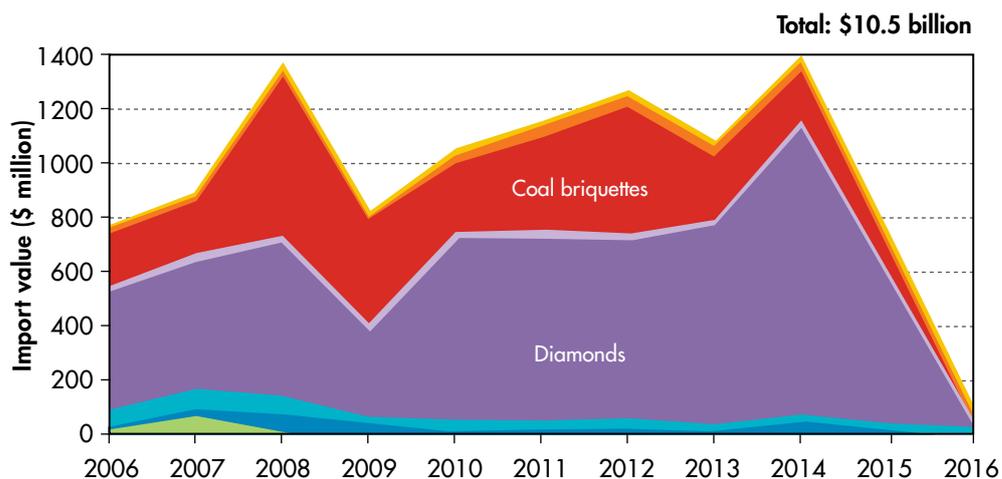
91 *The Jerusalem Post*, Editorial, 30 April 2015, <http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/South-African-ties-400758>, accessed 8 September 2017.

92 ANC, 'Declaration of the 54th National Conference of the African National Congress', 20 December 2017, <http://www.anc.org.za/content/declaration-54th-national-conference-african-national-congress>, accessed 8 March 2018.

93 Feinberg T, 'Pandor drops bombshell about Israel', *South African Jewish Report*, 22 February 2018, <http://www.sajr.co.za/news-and-articles/2018/02/22/pandor-drops-bombshell-about-israel>, accessed 8 March 2018; Miltz N, 'International affairs minister favours cutting ties with Israel', *South African Jewish Report*, 1 March 2018, <http://www.sajr.co.za/news-and-articles/2018/03/01/international-affairs-minister-favours-cutting-ties-with-israel>, accessed 8 March 2018.

FIGURE 13 ISRAEL'S EXPORTS TO SOUTH AFRICA 2006–2016

Source: OEC, 'What does Israel export to South Africa? (2006–2016)', <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/visualize/stacked/hs92/export/isr/zaf/show/2006.2016/>, accessed 10 October 2017

FIGURE 14 SOUTH AFRICA'S EXPORTS TO ISRAEL 2006–2016

Source: OEC, 'What does Israel import from South Africa? (2006–2016)', <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/visualize/stacked/hs92/import/isr/zaf/show/2006.2016/>, accessed 10 October 2017

In 2015 Israel was South Africa's 54th most important trade partner.⁹⁴

In March 2016, Israel's Director-General of Foreign Affairs, Dore Gold, concluded his trip to South Africa by issuing a statement that announced a 'new' relationship:⁹⁵

Israel looks forward to working with South Africa in combining our rich experience in the field of development, in order to promote sustainable growth, development of water resources, adaptation to climate change, food security, civil society empowerment and prosperity in Africa at large.

This engagement between Gold and Ambassador Jerry Matjila marked the highest level of dialogue between the two states in 10 years, despite the increased presence of anti-Israel campaigns and clear government disapproval of Israeli policies.

From one perspective, a resuscitation or expansion of defence relations (or heightened intelligence cooperation) between Pretoria and Jerusalem remains unlikely. From another, there is a possibility of change. If South Africa's ruling ANC were unable to maintain its dominance in the 2019 elections, it could find itself forced to enter into a coalition with the leading opposition party, the Democratic Alliance (DA). While the former's stance is increasingly anti-Israel, the latter remains open to the country. DA leader Mmusi Maimane travelled to Israel in January 2017 to learn first-hand about the situation on the ground, meet Netanyahu and gain a better understanding to inform the DA's support for a two-state solution.⁹⁶ This trip was roundly condemned by the ANC, and Zuma reiterated a call urging senior South African officials not to visit Israel. So averse is the ANC to engaging with Israel that a Knesset delegation was snubbed by ANC parliamentarians in August 2017 (although they were able to meet both then ANC presidential hopeful Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma and former president Kgalema Motlanthe on that trip).

Any improvement in the bilateral relationship, however, is intrinsically tied to the revival of the Israeli–Palestinian peace process. While Pretoria previously sought to play a role as an honest broker, its more recent anti-Israeli rhetoric has rendered this a non-starter.

REORIENTING ISRAEL'S PUSH INTO AFRICA

Israel has made no secret of the fact that it is willing to use its resources to gain the friendship of African countries. Some, including Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda and Uganda, have been specifically targeted as part of Israel's re-engagement with the

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Israel has made no secret of the fact that it is willing to use its resources to gain the friendship of African countries. Some, including Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda and Uganda, have been specifically targeted as part of Israel's re-engagement with the continent

94 World Integrated Trade Solution, 'South Africa exports, imports and trade balance by country 2015', <http://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/ZAF/Year/2015/TradeFlow/EXPIMP/Partner/by-country>, accessed 11 October 2017.

95 Israel, MFA, 'Israel–Africa friendship continues to deepen', 9 March 2016, <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Bilateral/Pages/Israel-Africa-friendship-continues-to-deepen-March-2016.aspx>, accessed 9 September 2017.

96 DA (Democratic Alliance), 'DA Leader Maimane visits Israel and Palestine', <https://www.da.org.za/2017/01/da-leader-maimane-visits-israel-palestine/>, accessed 11 October 2017.

continent. South Africa is already tied to Israel as a result of comprehensive historical and trade linkages and has been courted less explicitly. Israel's overtures to the ANC have been rebuffed. Israel's primary goal has been clear from the outset: break the African bloc at the UN.⁹⁷ What is less clear is whether its efforts are bearing fruit. Africa's leaders are not always certain about what they want from Israel and what Africa stands to gain.

Having begun by touching on the drivers of Israel's push into Africa as a context for discussing Africa's approach to Israel, at both the continental and the national level, Israel's efforts have seen mixed results, while Africa (in general) remains more of a passive observer than an influential shaper of the relationship. Although Israel has clearly reaped some benefits such as promises of support for its AU observer status bid from Ethiopia and Kenya, the likes of South Africa and Nigeria have yet to be convinced, for different reasons.

Nigeria is the less vocally opposed of the two. While it has not adopted a harsh anti-Israel stance, it also has not moved to advertise its friendship with Israel to the same extent as Ethiopia, Kenya and Rwanda. One of the suggested reasons for this is Nigeria's negligible and undiversified trade with Israel. However, a significant trade deficit that favours Israel indicates Nigeria's relationship with the country has considerable room for growth. Stronger support from Nigeria would be a win for Israel not only because it is one of Africa's largest economies but also because of its influential position in ECOWAS. Ironically, in terms of imports Israel's Africa trade has focused overwhelmingly on Egypt and South Africa; two of its most outspoken critics.

As made evident through an examination of Israel's FDI, bilateral trade with African nations, and diplomatic and political statements, the country has both the resources and the will to engage Africa more effectively.⁹⁸ African leaders, particularly those representing countries that currently enjoy a far smaller share of trade with Israel than their continental or even global counterparts, stand to benefit a great deal. More importantly, Africa stands to gain a development partner with experience relevant to its challenges, such as agriculture and water management.⁹⁹ Africa needs to formulate its own terms and be better prepared for Israeli engagement to help the latter take the continent seriously. The UN votes Israel seeks belong to Africa, and it remains up to its leaders to weigh their worth and set the appropriate price for an alliance.

Simultaneously, Israeli leaders and policymakers pursuing African support at the UN would do well to remember that each country, regardless of size, enjoys an equally valuable vote in the UNGA. Following up promises with concrete economic and financial benefits will arguably be easier in Africa's smaller economies, which are eager for trading partners and may have less ideological baggage than their larger counterparts. Here Israeli leaders would do well to heed the analysis of Israeli think tank Mitvim, which advocates for the formulation of a coherent foreign policy aimed at diplomacy that would enable Israel to

97 Fulbright A & R Ahren, *op. cit.*

98 UNCTAD, *op. cit.*

99 World Bank, *op. cit.*

truly start anew in its quest for global friendship. Currently this is something that Israel lacks, owing to the state's security interests subordinating all others, and its diplomatic statements are not always reflected in the reality of its economic relations.¹⁰⁰

Israel's efforts to woo African states could be undermined by the controversy around non-Jewish undocumented African migrants in Israel, chiefly in south Tel Aviv. Some 40 000 crossed the Sinai Desert and entered Israel between 2006 and 2012, after which a border fence in the Sinai was strengthened. Under extreme pressure, the Israeli government had to abandon its scheme of offering single men \$2,500 to be voluntarily repatriated to Africa (Rwanda and/or Uganda, according to rumour). Israel's opponents pounced on these deportations to denounce the Jewish state as racist. Israel will have to hope that this uncomfortable issue does not damage its relations with African states.

CONCLUSION

'Israel's diplomatic relations are undergoing nothing less than a revolution,'¹⁰¹ Netanyahu said at the UNGA in September 2016. He also mentioned the UN's bias: 20 resolutions passed against his country in 2015 with only three passed against all the remaining countries in the world. Thus, Israel has returned to Africa to break the African voting bloc – but has it courted the right friends and is this paying off?

While it is tempting to think that Israel's success story as a vibrant knowledge economy could lead to dramatic changes in development in African states, it remains a small (if ambitious) country. It lies besieged in a hostile and complex neighbourhood and lacks vast natural resources to solve the seemingly intractable problems of Africa. The African continent is also diverse and, in some places, unstable, with a still nascent business culture that does not easily absorb potential Israeli input. Israel and friendly African states should be strategic and look for opportunities to deepen ties, without expecting results that are instantaneous, comprehensive or over-ambitious. Strong relationships develop slowly over time.

Countries with which Israel has actively engaged, such as Ethiopia and Kenya, are not only reciprocating the effort but are also willing to pave the way for further continental penetration through their implied support for Israel's bid to join the AU as an observer. To date these public statements of support have yet to bear fruit, and it remains to be seen whether they will translate into action. African support for the December 2017 UNGA vote condemning US recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, however, illustrates that much work remains to be done to gain consistent, pro-Israel stances from African states.

Israel has returned to Africa to break the African voting bloc – but has it courted the right friends and is this paying off?

100 Mitvim, 'A new foreign policy paradigm', <http://www.mitvim.org.il/israel-and-the-arab-spring3>, accessed 11 October 2016.

101 *The Jerusalem Post*, 'Read: Full text of Netanyahu's speech to UN General Assembly', 23 September 2016, <http://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Benjamin-Netanyahu/READ-Full-text-of-Netanyahus-speech-to-UN-General-Assembly-468500>, accessed 10 September 2017.

South Africa and Nigeria have been far less successfully convinced. In the case of South Africa, strong pro- and anti-Israel lobbies and unwavering ideological sympathy for the Palestinians on the part of the ANC have contributed to a souring of relations, especially as the peace process with the Palestinians has evaporated. Nigeria, although not to the same degree as South Africa, maintains an aloof distance from Israel. In 2016 Nigeria reportedly attempted to block Israel's participation in the ECOWAS summit. Tensions over Israel's perceived support for Biafra, as well as Buhari's pledged support for Palestine, continue to hinder closer cooperation between the two.

To succeed in its ambitious continental aims, Israel will need to replicate its concerted foreign policy efforts in East Africa elsewhere. However, if these initial successes are to be sustainable and replicable, particularly in light of the postponement of Netanyahu's planned meetings with Africa's leaders in Togo, Israel may have to reconsider targeting powerhouses such as Nigeria and South Africa, and instead focus on smaller countries (such as Rwanda) with greater economic needs where its efforts may be received more warmly – and reciprocated. The success of this strategy, which highlights a mutually beneficial relationship for Israel and Africa, rests on the ability of African leaders to ensure cooperation delivers concrete gains in terms of Israel's potential offerings, and on the ability of Israeli leaders to formulate a coherent foreign policy that takes Africa seriously.

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