

Benjamin Neuberger

**Israel's Relations with the Third World
(1948–2008)**



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PREFACE

Naomi Chazan

Israel's relations with the countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America are an exceedingly accurate barometer of the shifts in Israel's global position, priorities, policies and self-perceptions since its inception over sixty years ago. If in the first two decades of its existence it viewed itself as an integral part of the post-war world (combining aspirations for political legitimacy and economic betterment with a concern for the challenges of emerging societies elsewhere), in the second phase of the 1970s and 1980s, it consciously tied itself more closely to the West not only politically and economically, but also culturally. In the last two decades Israel's initial global outreach has been replaced by a far more selective, utilitarian approach—a product of both its economic achievements and its growing misgivings regarding major currents in the contemporary world.

These patterns are apparent, first, in the geographic scope of Israel's connections with countries in the southern part of the hemisphere. With few exceptions, at the outset Israel sought to forge links with as many countries as possible in Latin America, Asia and Africa (in that order). After most African states broke diplomatic relations with Israel, it then reached out more vigorously to Latin America and to the larger states of Asia (Japan, Korea, Thailand and informally to China and India). And when—following the collapse of the Soviet empire and the initiation of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations—Israel's diplomatic horizons expanded, its interests in Africa, Asia and Latin America have focused primarily on the more economically promising and politically powerful states to the detriment of the smaller and weaker countries in each region.

These changes have been accompanied, secondly, by a palpable change in Israel's approach to the non-Western world. As Israel has moved from an underdeveloped to a fully industrialized state about to become a full-fledged member of the OECD, its original internationalism has been replaced by a mental isolationism in an era of economic globalization. Diplomatic ties bolstered by technical assistance, although still important, no longer pave the way for greater economic interchange. To the contrary, practical concerns—primarily related to the size of markets and potential sources of raw materials—now dictate the pace of formal connections.

Third, therefore, the relative prominence of the various actors in Israel's relations with the states of Asia, Africa and Latin America has also undergone significant alteration. Where diplomats and technical experts once spearheaded Israeli connections abroad, now businessmen and security advisors are ubiquitous. Indeed, entrepreneurs and tourists far outnumber officials and state emissaries.

The result of these processes, as Benyamin Neuberger so skillfully charts in the following pages, is a more pragmatic, differentiated, focused Israel

increasingly preoccupied with itself and its immediate interests. The leaders of this Israel, unlike their predecessors, are also more closed to the needs of their less fortunate counterparts elsewhere. Maturation has come with a loss of sensitivity, socioeconomic growth with a concomitant disinterest in large portions of the underdeveloped world.

Nowhere are these processes more apparent than in Israel's relations with the African continent. Once the centerpiece of Israel's international efforts in the 1950s and 1960s, links with the new states of Africa were seen as a step-board not only for Israel's political survival, but also for its moral revival. But with the expansion of Israel's presence on the continent, the gap between expectations and reality grew and mutual disillusion set in. The collapse of the Israeli-African network following the rupture of diplomatic relations in the early 1970s was not followed by a complete estrangement either economically or militarily. Yet today, despite the resumption of diplomatic relations with most of the sub-Sahara and the forging of ties with over a dozen states that never had any links with Israel in the past, its interest in the continent has waned and its energies have turned elsewhere (to China, India and the economic tigers of Asia; to the growing economies of Eastern Europe; and back to Mexico, Brazil and Argentina in the Americas).

Politico-economic distance has bred neglect. Despite the fact that it now boasts full relations with forty-four states on the continent, Israel's diplomatic representation in Africa is scanty and Foreign Service personnel are wary of accepting appointments in what are considered hardship posts in its capital cities. Israel's technical assistance program barely accounts for a meager 10% of its already miniscule international aid. The Israeli presence in Africa is all too frequently determined by opportunistic businesspeople and security consultants carrying Israeli passports rather than by legitimate emissaries of the public and private sectors. And, even though there are still Israelis devoted to tackling the multiple humanitarian challenges facing Africans in the 21st century, they now operate in non-governmental frameworks with little substantive backing and next to no formal support.

Israel's relations with Africa, as with other parts of the so-called Third World, are not only decidedly utilitarian and short-sighted; they also suffer from a lack of vision. As Neuberger's essay demonstrates, there is a direct relationship between an Israeli policy open to the needs and concerns of small as well as large states in the southern hemisphere and the forging of mature links that have stood the test of time. It is not too late to revive this connection, not only for the sake of ongoing interactions with the majority of the independent states of the world, but also for Israel's own character and normative wellbeing in the future.

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I Motivations and interests

Within the framework of this article on Israel's relations with third-world countries, the Third World refers to the developing southern continents, namely Latin America, Asia, and Africa. Although the Arab world is naturally a part of Asia and Africa, it is not included in this definition because its ties with Israel warrant a distinct heading ("Arab-Israeli conflict"). In addition, the West does not view industrialized Japan and burgeoning China to be members of the Third World, while in Israel the ties with these countries are perceived as part of its relations with Asia, i.e. with the non-European world.

Israel's ties with the non-European Third World is not only a matter of diplomacy, interests, strategy, economics, and politics (Lorch, 27–30), but also touch upon the country's identity. Mediterranean Israel is close to Europe, yet located in Asia. Important chapters — both glorious and tragic — in the annals of the Jewish people were written in Europe, but the nation's roots are in the East — in the Land of Israel as well as Babylon and Egypt. While Israel's culture is largely "modern," industrialized, and "Western," its religion and language are Semitic and Middle-Eastern. Roughly half of Israel's Jewish population is comprised of European expatriates and their progeny ("Ashkenazim"), but the rest of the country's citizens are of Asian and African descent. Prominent Zionist leaders, such as Moshe Hess, Theodor Herzl, Chaim Weizmann, and Ze'ev Jabotinsky envisioned the Jewish state in the making as a continuation of Europe, while David Ben-Gurion, Golda Meir, Moshe Sharett, Yigal Alon, and Abba Eban also emphasized Israel's Asian roots (see Sharett, 1958; Gilboa, 80–83). "We are a nation that dwelled in this land hundreds of years before some of the nations living in Asia [today]," said Ben-Gurion. Nevertheless, "we are viewed in their eyes as Europeans — descendents of the white race, the oppressor, the ruler" (Yegar, 64). Ben-Gurion was clearly intimating that Jews are not white Europeans, but Asians who have returned to their land. Sharett also reiterated the fact that the Jews in Israel are not like those Westerners who "have encroached upon the East, but rather citizens of the East returning to their land" (Sharett before the Knesset, 15 June 1953; Yegar, 61–62).¹

Alongside the emphasis on the Jewish people's Asian roots, there was also identification with the non-white world. For example, Herzl, the founder of modern political Zionism, stated thus:

There is an unsolved national problem, a great tragedy of human suffering that only we Jews can fully comprehend. I mean the Negro problem . . . Think of the hair-raising cruelty of the slave trade.

¹ *Israel's first foreign minister and second prime minister.*

Human beings caught, carried off, sold. Their descendants growing up in exile, hated and despised — because they have black skin. I'm not at all ashamed to say what I think . . . even if you laugh at me: Now that I have lived to see the return of the Jews, I wish I could help to prepare the way for the return of the Negroes.

(Herzl, *Altneuland* 129; cited in Oded, 20)

Golda Meir also deeply identified with Africa:²

I am prouder of Israel's International Cooperation Programme and of the technical aid we gave to the people of Africa than I am of any other single project we have ever undertaken.

Moreover, she explained that

We did what we did in Africa not because it was just a policy of enlightened self-interest — a matter of quid pro quo — but because it was a continuation of our most valued traditions . . .

(Golda Meir, *My Life* 265; cited in Oded, 19)

In fact, Julius Nyerere, the first president of Tanzania, dubbed Golda Meir the “mother of Africa” (Pundak, 175).

It is hardly coincidental that the golden era of Israel's relations with the Third World took place during a period in which the country was stewarded by the pioneer leaders of socialist Zionism, as these individuals deeply identified with the awakening of the nations of Asia and Africa. In consequence, they aspired to forge an alliance between the victims of white racism and the victims of anti-Semitism and felt that the Jewish people shared a common destiny with the national liberation movements fighting against colonialism and imperialism. This legacy was passed on to a generation of idealistic Israeli diplomats who were active from the 1950s to the 1970s and identified with Asia (Yaacov Shimoni, Daniel Levin, and David Hacohen) and Africa (Shlomo Hillel, Ehud Avriel, Hanan Yavor, and Hanan Aynor) (see Merhav in Ofaz, 177–180). That said, this worldview was not championed by either the Zionist and Israeli right wing, which put an emphasis on Israel's “Europeanism,” or the Labor Party's pragmatic technocrats that succeeded the movement's founding fathers in the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War (October 1973).

Although Israel valued its relations with the Third World, it never headlined Israel's national and international agenda. The primary objective of Israeli foreign policy has always been to bolster the country's security and

2 The Israeli foreign minister between 1956 and 1965 and prime minister from 1969 to 1974.

guarantee its existence. Therefore, over the course of Israel's existence, the most crucial states have always been those that can supply it arms (the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia during the War of Independence, France and Britain in the 1950s, West Germany in the early 1960s, and the United States since 1960) and deter hostile powers (the United States since the 1960s) on the one hand, and those liable to join an anti-Israeli military coalition (the Soviet Union) or supply sophisticated weapons to the Arab states (the Soviet Union, the United States, France, and Britain) on the other. Israel also ascribed great importance to those states that had the wherewithal to thwart dangerous groupings against it in the UN General Assembly or Security Council, either by cobbling together a blocking coalition or vetoing radical anti-Israeli decisions (such as ousting Israel from the UN, economic sanctions, military embargoes, or military interventions).

There are countless examples attesting to the fact that Israel's third-world policy takes a back seat to its relations with the Great Powers: during the 1960s, the countries of Africa sought to garner international support in condemnation of France's atomic experiments in the Sahara Desert, but Israel decided to back the French. Golda Meir, the Israeli foreign minister at the time, explained that "Israel will always vote with Africa, but it cannot vote against France, its principal ally [in the early 1960s, B.N.]" (Pundak, 237). In the early 1950s, Israel passed up an opportunity to establish ties with China lest it risk its relations with the United States (which was antagonistic towards the communist regime in Beijing). Similarly, Israel was forced to cancel a major weapons deal with China in 2000 (the sale of the Falcon surveillance system) due to Washington's objections. Africa's low ranking on Israel's foreign policy agenda since the turn of the century is evidenced by the following figures: though Israel maintains diplomatic relations with forty-two African countries, it has only eleven resident ambassadors on the continent and an additional 31 non-resident ambassadors today, while in comparison there were over thirty Israeli embassies in Africa during the 1960s (Oded, 233–234).

Another important Israeli foreign-policy objective is to secure economic assistance and maintain extensive commercial relations with developed markets, for the purpose of ensuring its economy's growth and reducing the large deficit in its balance of payments. Here too, the United States and the European Union, rather than the Third World, are of utmost importance. Yet, Israel's economic relations with China and India have taken on an ever greater significance since the beginning of the new millennium. Indeed, Israel is now China's second largest arms supplier (Shai, 13). Nor is Israel's trade with Latin America to be scoffed at, having surpassed the \$1 billion dollar mark per annum at the turn of the century (Inbar, 185).

A third Israeli priority is to cultivate its ties with the large Jewish communities in the Diaspora, in order to encourage aliyah (Jewish immigration) to Israel and attract donations, investments, know-how, and political support. From this standpoint as well, the United States, the Soviet Union/Russia, France, and Britain have been more important to Israel than, say, China, India, Japan, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo/Zaire, and Brazil. We may thus conclude that, with all due respect to the Third World, the United States, the Soviet Union/Russia, Western Europe, and even Eastern Europe (“the gateway to the Soviet Union” until 1989) have always been the prime focus of Israel’s foreign policy.

At the outset, Israel’s relations with Africa were endowed with an ethical-humanistic dimension that stemmed from Jewish commiseration with the plight of black Africans. Ben-Gurion and Golda Meir frequently spoke about Israel’s “moral obligation to” and “historical mission in” Africa. The former also displayed much interest in “the Asian awakening” and Asian cultures, Buddhism and Hinduism in particular. Yigal Alon, for instance, was profoundly influenced by Gandhi and Nehru’s autobiographical works, *My Experiments with Truth* and *Towards Freedom*, respectively (see Yegar, 63–67; Oded, 110).³

Besides the idealistic-cum-emotional bond — whose relevance should not be understated, at least in the 1950s and 1960s — Israel’s desire for close relations with the Third World stemmed from a diverse array of motives and interests. First and foremost, Israel’s efforts to be involved in the Third World cannot be fathomed without understanding the centrality of the Israeli-Arab conflict to the country’s international relations. This conflict was hardly a “normal” border dispute, or a violent struggle aimed at gaining a strategic advantage or safeguarding an economic interest. It was an all-out war — a campaign waged by the Arab world against Israel’s very existence by means of terrorism, an economic boycott, and a concerted effort to politically delegitimize the “Zionist entity.” One of Israel’s responses to these attempts at delegitimization was to forge a sprawling network of international relations.

The Third World encompasses most countries in the world, including no less than fifty-four countries on the African continent — six Arab and forty-eight African — as of 2008. Therefore, the legitimacy of a country lacking relations with the Third World is fundamentally flawed. During the decolonization era, a country that was ostracized by the Third World was of low standing, even if it had ties with the “first” (North America and Western Europe) and “second”

3 Alon was commander of the Palmach elite unit during the War of Independence, and a senior member of the ruling Labor movement until the late 1970s.

(the communist bloc) worlds. The 1955 Afro-Asian Bandung Conference in Indonesia, which did not tender an invitation to Israel, constituted a warning sign and spurred the Israeli government to cultivate its ties with the nations of Asia and Africa.

Israel would not have been able to defend itself at the UN and muster so much as a blocking minority in decisive votes if it had failed to gain support from the Third World. For example, following the Six Days' War in June 1967, a motion was introduced calling on Israel to immediately withdraw from the occupied territories, notwithstanding the absence of a peace agreement with its neighboring states. However, Jerusalem managed to assemble an obstructing third in the UN Assembly with the help of several African states. In the 1970s and 1980s, a majority in the General Assembly, which was comprised nearly entirely of third-world countries, foiled every attempt to expel Israel from the organization. Had any of these measures succeeded, the edifice of Israeli legitimacy would have collapsed. While most of the third-world states consistently voted against Israel at the UN after 1967 and the country's situation was far from comfortable, its predicament would have been immeasurably worse if not for its ties in the Third World. In fact, Israel's standing might have fallen to the depths of Apartheid South Africa, which was expelled from the UN and most international institutions.

During Israel's formative years (the 1950s and early 1960s), some Israeli policy makers even viewed the Asian and African states as a bridge to peace with the Arab world. It was widely, perhaps naively, assumed that "the road to Cairo passes through Bamako" (the capital of Mali). In 1963, Shimon Peres spoke about "our efforts to make peace . . . which also include surrounding the circle of hatred with a circle of newfound friendship with new countries" (Oded, 17). Some Israeli leaders hoped that the Africans and Asians would have a moderating influence on their Arab partners in the third-world bloc. Some — among them Ben-Gurion, Sharett, Eshkol, and Golda Meir — even reasoned that the Africans and Asians would be more acceptable to the Arabs as honest brokers for their countries, too, had been liberated from the yoke of colonialism. However, this idealistic belief was evidently mistaken.

Besides its "grand strategy" in the Third World, there were also practical and regional considerations — such as political, economic, and strategic interests — which made it necessary for Israel to develop close ties with various third-world countries. Since the days of Kautilya,⁴ it is widely accepted that a state surrounded by enemies must align itself with a second circle of countries surrounding the first (see Weinbaum, 1070–87; Gruen, 33–43). Accordingly,

4 *Chanakya (generally known as Kautilya), Indian philosopher and statesman (ca. 350–283 BC)*

the underlying objective of Israel's Near Eastern policy was "to prevent a consolidation of hostile forces in the region" (Toledo, 212), which comprised not only the Arab Middle East and North Africa, but also other states in the continents of Africa and Asia. Consequently, Turkey, Iran, and Ethiopia — states that bordered Israel's hostile circumference — were strategically important to Jerusalem. From Iran, Turkey, Ethiopia, and Uganda, Israel was capable of supporting uprisings, such as the Kurdish and African insurrections in Iraq and Sudan, which sapped the military strength of the Arab world. Ties with Ethiopia (and Eritrea since 1993) have been instrumental in protecting Israel's access to shipping lanes in the Red Sea and through the straits of Bab-el-Mandeb. Since Muslim Pakistan became a nuclear power, Israel has attached great importance to the strategic relations with India (Inbar, 97). Moreover, working relations with large oil exporters (Mexico, Iran, and Nigeria) have been crucial to a country that is dependent on energy imports, frequently finds itself under threat of war, and is embroiled in conflicts with the large Arab oil producers.

In order to prevent the Arab-Israeli conflict from spilling over into the Muslim world at large, Israel has endeavored to cultivate ties with Muslim states in Asia and Africa. This undertaking yielded dividends in countries on the outer borders of the Middle East (Iran until 1978 and Turkey) and in Black Africa (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Chad, Senegal, and Nigeria), but failed in southeastern Asia (Afghanistan, Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Bangladesh). In 1992, Israel managed to establish diplomatic ties with all the Asian Muslim republics that had gained independence in the aftermath of the Soviet Union's collapse (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kirghizia, and Azerbaijan). That same year, Israel reestablished diplomatic ties with Nigeria, the largest and most important African country with a Muslim majority. Thereafter, in the early 1990s, relations were restored with other Muslim states. In this context, the institution of diplomatic ties with Mauritania, a member of the Arab League, was a major diplomatic coup for Israel. The rise of fundamentalist Islam in the 1980s and 1990s again turned the spotlight on the Muslim states, and on the need to block the formation of an anti-Israeli Islamic bloc.

As a rule, Israel's relations with the Third World seem to have stemmed largely from what are basically political motives; in fact, strategic-military interests were germane to only a limited number of states, while economic considerations have remained only of secondary importance. Furthermore, the cultural aspect of ties with the Third World, and the importance of the Jewish communities, which play such an essential part in Israel's relations with North America and Europe, are marginal with respect to Africa and Asia. In this respect, Catholic-Christian Latin America, with its relatively large concentrations of Jews, is more similar to Europe (Shapira, 564–606).

II Ups and downs in Israel's relations with the three continents

One can distinguish between different periods of Israel's third-world relations, based on the depth of the ties and the continent that was given the highest priority. On the eve of the foundation of the state, the Jewish Agency, which at that time conducted the foreign policy of the Jewish community in Palestine (the Yishuv), placed a premium on relations with Latin America. At the time, more than a quarter of UN members were Latin American, so that their ballots were critical to the Zionist movement's success, both in passing the Partition Plan in November 1947 and in gaining Israel's acceptance into the UN two years later (Glick, 1968). To wit: the three Latin American countries (Guatemala, Peru, and Uruguay) whose representatives served on the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) indeed supported the Partition Plan. When the decision was subsequently brought before the plenum of the UN Assembly, thirty-three countries voted in favor, including thirteen from Latin America (only Cuba abstained) (see Lorch, in Yegar, Govrin and Oded, 2002, 723–753). Kaufman notes that Israel enjoyed wall-to-wall support in Latin America — from the right wing to the communist left — and that committees were set up on behalf of Hebrew Palestine throughout the continent (Kaufman in Ofaz, 181–185).

Before Israel's establishment, there were only two independent states in Black Africa (Liberia and Ethiopia), both of which were relatively friendly to the Zionist cause. The situation in Asia was more challenging. Its persistent efforts notwithstanding, the Zionist movement failed to secure the backing of India (Yegar, 21–38). Mahatma Gandhi reasoned that Palestine "belongs to the Arabs just as England belongs to the English and France to the French" (Kumarswamy 2002, 193), and Pandit Nehru, Gandhi's right-hand man and the first prime minister of India, also considered Palestine an "Arab land" and the Zionists to be allies of British imperialism. Against this backdrop, it is little wonder that India voted against partition both in UNSCOP and in the UN General Assembly. The Philippines were the only Asian country to support partition, while the other states opposed the measure (India, Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan), abstained (China), or were absent (Thailand).⁵

Between 1949 and 1956, the center of gravity of Israel's third-world policy shifted to Asia. During this period, ties were formed with states on the periphery of the Middle East (Turkey and Iran). Warm relations developed between Israel and Burma in the 1950s, as Jerusalem extended its support to Burma in many

⁵ *Japan was not a member of the UN at the time.*

fields. Milestones in these relations were the visit of the Burmese prime minister, U Nu, to Israel in 1956 and Ben-Gurion's reciprocal visit to Burma in 1961. On the occasion of his visit, Ben-Gurion declared, "Our ties with the continent of Asia — economic, political, and cultural — will determine our fate and international status more than any other factor" (Yegar, 135; for more on Israel's relations with Burma, also see Hacothen, 1963). Concomitantly, Israel sought to normalize its relations with India, which had recognized the Jewish state in 1950. Although an Israeli consulate was opened in Bombay in 1953 and meetings were held between Israeli leaders and Nehru, these events did not lead to full diplomatic ties or close cooperation with India in other areas (see Padmanbaham, 11–14). Instead, the relations between Jerusalem and Delhi remained tense and acrimonious. For example, Nehru viewed the Sinai Campaign — Israel's invasion of the Sinai Peninsula in 1956 — as cutting proof that Israel was an ally of imperialism.⁶ During the early 1950s steady contacts were also established with Communist China. Though Jerusalem had recognized the People's Republic of China in 1950 (Shai, 6–14), the secret contacts did not result in the institution of diplomatic ties, primarily due to Israel's apprehension about the possible response of the United States, which had imposed a diplomatic boycott on Maoist China in the 1950s and 1960s (Medzini, 5–22; Brecher, 212–217). Lastly, Israel opened diplomatic legations in Burma, Thailand, Nepal, the Philippines, and Japan, but the feelers it put out towards Pakistan and Indonesia were summarily rejected (for more on Israel-Asia relations, see Shimoni, 26–32; Kochan 1970; Yegar, 5–28).

In general, it can be said that Israel's efforts in Asia during the 1950s reaped mixed results, as it failed to establish meaningful ties with the continent's three most important countries: from the preliminary stage in the early 1950s, relations with China deteriorated into a state of open animosity after 1956; ties with India, which were partial and strained from the outset, slipped even further after 1956; and Japan did not display any signs of amity, while fervently upholding the Arab boycott. Israel's third-world relations reached a nadir at the above-mentioned Bandung Conference, to which all the countries of Asia and Africa were invited, save for Israel and South Africa. The attendees issued a joint declaration expressing their "support for the Arab rights in Palestine," and called for the implementation of the UN resolutions (the intent was apparently to the borders set forth in the Partition Plan and to the "right of return" of Palestinian refugees") (Yegar, 84).

⁶ *Israel's campaign was accompanied by British and French attacks in and around the Suez Canal.*

From 1957 to 1973, Africa was the preferred continent of Israel's third-world policy. Its relations with Ghana, the first sub-Saharan African colony on the continent to gain independence (in 1957), constituted a landmark in Israel's ties with Africa. Under Kwame Nkrumah — the charismatic ruler who harbored pan-African aspirations — independent Ghana developed close ties with Israel in myriad fields: military training (including preparatory programs for high-school students), maritime shipping and aviation, agriculture and irrigation, and housing and settlement. Israel's close ties with Nkrumah paved the way to ties with other African leaders — Tanganyika's Nyerere, Kenyatta and Mboya from Kenya, Malawi's Banda, and Lumumba of the Congo. Israel also managed to establish relations with Ethiopia's Emperor Haile Selassie and the leaders of francophone Africa, foremost among them Senghor of Senegal and the Ivory Coast's Houphouët-Boigny. In the early 1960s, at the peak of its relations with Africa, Israel could point to a number of significant achievements. To begin with, all the independent states of sub-Saharan Africa (with the exception of Mauritania and Somalia, both of which joined the Arab League) established diplomatic ties with Israel, thereby rejecting the fundamental Arab position with respect to the Arab-Israeli conflict. During this period, Israel had diplomatic ties with thirty-three countries in Africa, all of which hosted an Israeli embassy. Israel thus had more embassies in Africa than any other country but the United States. Most impressively, Israel managed to maintain relations with the countries of the Muslim Sahel Belt. A group of African states even formed the vanguard of Israel's diplomatic struggle in the UN in the early 1960s to enter into direct negotiations with the Arab states (for more on Israel's "honeymoon" with Africa, see Lorch, 1962, 1–18; Decalo 1970; and Avriel, 69–74).

Africa's importance in Israeli foreign relations was also manifested in Jerusalem's qualified attitude towards "white" South Africa. For years, there had been an ongoing dispute in the Israeli Foreign Ministry between the adherents of *realpolitik*, who called for maintaining relations with South Africa, even if they were liable to endanger the ties with the sub-Saharan African states, and the "Africanists" who objected to cordial relations with the apartheid regime. During the 1960s, the "Africanists" gained the upper hand: throughout this period there was neither an Israeli embassy in Pretoria nor a South African embassy in Tel-Aviv, and Israel regularly voted against South Africa's racist policy in the UN (Oded in Ofaz, 204).

Despite its warm ties on the continent, the Yom Kippur War engendered a complete reversal in Israel-Africa relations. Although there were signs of erosion even before the war — between March 1972 and September 1973, seven African nations broke off their relations with Jerusalem — the real upheaval became evident during the war and in its immediate aftermath. From October

to November 1973, no less than twenty-one countries broke off ties with Israel as a sign of solidarity with Egypt, the “African sister” and in protest of the Israeli army’s crossing of the Suez Canal and penetration into the African continent. By the end of 1973, only relations with Swaziland, Malawi, Lesotho, and Mauritius were still intact (the latter was to join the rest of the continent in 1976).

Reasons for the African states’ severance of ties with Israel

	State	Date	Reasons for the Severance			
			Identification with “African” Egypt during and after the war	Libyan-Saudi bribe	A radical or pro-Soviet regime	Muslim pressure
1.	Guinea	6.6.67*	+		+	
2.	Uganda	30.3.72		+		+
3.	Chad	28.11.72		+		+
4.	Congo	31.12.72		+		
5.	Niger	5.1.73		+		
6.	Mali	5.1.73		+		
7.	Burundi	16.5.73		+		
8.	Togo	21.9.73		+		
9.	Zaire (Congo)	4.10.73	+			
10.	Rwanda	8.10.73	+			
11.	Benin	9.10.72	+		+	
12.	Burkina Faso	10.10.73	+		+	
13.	Cameroon	13.10.73	+			
14.	Equatorial Guinea	14.10.73	+			
15.	Tanzania	19.10.73	+			
16.	Madagascar	20.10.73	+		+	
17.	Central African Republic	21.10.73	+			
18.	Ethiopia	23.10.73	+	+		+
19.	Nigeria	25.10.73	+			+
20.	Gambia	26.10.73	+	+		+

21.	Zambia	26.10.73	+	+	+	
22.	Sierra Leone	27.10.73	+	+		
23.	Ghana	28.10.73	+	+		
24.	Senegal	28.10.73	+	+		
25.	Gabon	29.10.73	+	+		
26.	Kenya	1.11.73	+			
27.	Liberia	2.11.73	+			
28.	Ivory Coast	8.11.73	+			
29.	Botswana	12.11.73	+			
30.	Mauritius	15.6.76**	+			

** during the Six Days' War. ** after Operation Entebbe*

(The data herein are primarily based on Oded, 628)

The wholesale severance of ties with the African states triggered a complete about-face in Israeli-South African relations, as this time round it was the standard bearers of realpolitik who gained the upper hand at the Israeli Foreign Ministry. In 1974, Israel and South Africa opened embassies in Pretoria and Tel-Aviv; the South-African prime minister was invited to Israel, and the two countries upgraded both their security and economic relations. Notwithstanding the official estrangement, many African states continued to maintain trade and economic relations with Israel. In fact, while commercial activities with countries like Nigeria, Angola, Cameroon, and Zaire ballooned, Israel also continued to maintain "interest bureaux" in Ghana, the Ivory Coast, and Kenya (Chazan 2006; Oded in Ofaz; Liba).

Following the collapse of relations with Africa in 1973 and the recurring failure to court the Asian giants India and China, since the 1950s, Israel's attention once again became diverted towards Latin America in the 1970s (Kaufman 1979). Given the abysmal state of its Asian and African ties, had a corresponding rift taken shape in Israeli-Latin American relations, Israel would essentially have been ostracized by the entire Third World, and its international legitimacy torn to shreds.

During the 1970s, most of the governments in Latin America were military regimes. Israel collaborated with many of these governments on security matters, so that relations were increasingly predicated on Israeli weapons exports. The arms sales to Argentina's military dictatorship (e.g. jets and torpedo boats) aroused sharp criticism, for this was a regime that killed thousands of its own citizens, including many Jews (Barromi, in Yegar, Govrin

and Oded, 770–779). Israel even continued to supply the regime with arms during the war that broke out between Argentina and Britain when the former invaded the Falkland Islands in 1982. At the same time, the ties between Israel and Latin America that revolved around international aid and cultural relations steadily tapered off. Despite the efforts that it invested in Latin America, Israel was on the receiving end of a couple of political bombshells. Much to Israel's astonishment, Mexico and Brazil voted in favor of the UN General Assembly 1975 resolution equating Zionism with racism. And, following the Knesset's decision to annex East Jerusalem in 1981, the Latin-American embassies left Jerusalem and moved to Tel-Aviv.

The UN resolution equating Zionism with racism served as a preview of what Israel could expect should its standing in the Third World slip any further. In any event, Israel stemmed the tide in the 1980s: Jerusalem preserved its relations with most of Latin America (except for Marxist Cuba, Guyana, and Nicaragua) and began to mend its relations with Africa, restoring ties with Zaire, Liberia, Central African Republic, Togo, Cameroon, the Ivory Coast, Kenya, and Ethiopia.

The renewal of ties with some of the African states mainly stemmed from the aggressive policy that was being pursued by Libya, whose regime made no effort to conceal its territorial and political intentions in the Sahel region and West Africa. This was accompanied by the disappointment with Libya's unfulfilled promises of aid and the Christian states' concern over Islamic fundamentalism in the wake of the Iranian Revolution (1979). Israel's peace agreement with Egypt (1979) also contributed to the rapprochement, as there was no longer any need to display solidarity with the "Egyptian sister." Arye Oded and Naomi Chazan attribute the partial restoration of ties to two members of the Israeli Foreign Ministry — the director general, David Kimche, and the director of the African Division, Avi Primor — both of whom valued the relations with Africa and feverishly toiled to get them back on track (Oded in *Ofaz*, 203–207; Chazan 2006, 1–15).

The 1980s bore witness to an improvement in Israel's standing in Asia as well. One of the manifestations of this shift was the fastening of economic ties with Japan, in spite of the Arab boycott (Shichor, 496–527; Shiloni, 17–24). At the same time, Israel developed expansive security ties with China — exporting weapons, constructing missile boats, and refurbishing tanks on behalf of the Chinese military. China nevertheless continued to act as a major arms supplier of the Arab states throughout the 1980s. The informal relations with China were also bolstered, especially following the opening of the Israeli consulate in Hong Kong in 1983.

Diplomatic relations with Asian states in the 1960s — subsequently severed in the 1970s⁷

Country	Year*	Cause
Ceylon (Sri Lanka)	1970	election victory of the anti-Israeli Freedom Party
Cambodia	1975	communist takeover
South Vietnam	1975	unification with Communist North Vietnam
Laos	1976	communist takeover

* year when relations were broken off

The Asian states with which Israel maintained diplomatic relations throughout the 1980s were Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, Burma, and Nepal.⁸

During the 1990s, there was a dramatic improvement in Israel's relations with Asia and Africa: Israel finally established full diplomatic ties with China and India, inaugurated diplomatic relations with Mongolia and a unified Vietnam, and restored ties with Cambodia, Laos, South Korea, and Sri Lanka. Moreover, ties were instituted with fourteen states in the Pacific Ocean, among them Papua and the Fiji Islands.⁹ The only Asian countries that Israel still has no full relations with at the beginning of the twenty-first century are the Arab states (excluding Jordan), non-Arab Muslim states (Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, the Maldives, and Iran), and communist North Korea (Yegar, 395).

The primary reason for the turnaround in Israel-Asia relations was the collapse of the Soviet Bloc, which had exerted pressure against Israel throughout the Third World. The bipolar world wherein third-world countries could play the West and the communist East off against each other has been relegated to the history books. In consequence, the Third World's position as a unified bloc of states has weakened since the 1990s, and some observers even predict the end of the Third World. Accordingly, Moshe Yegar avers that the collapse of Soviet and East European communism has engendered a "new situation" in which the international community "no longer needs to fervently adhere to the rituals of the Third World, among them the ostracizing of Israel and its condemnation" (Yegar, 2004, 392).

⁷ Israel maintained partial relations with Iran until the Islamic revolution in 1979.

⁸ Israel maintained consular relations with India (namely an Israeli consulate in Bombay)

⁹ Israel has maintained its relations with Australia and New Zealand since the 1950s. Due to their affluence and the fact that the majority of their populations are of European descent, these countries are not included in the article's designation of the Third World.

In Shelef's estimation, just as the "domino theory" was responsible for the tailspin in African-Israeli relations after the Yom Kippur War, so did China's decision to institute full relations with Israel goad the Indian government into following in Beijing's footsteps. In fact, the two giants made it easy for Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and Mongolia to get on the bandwagon too (Shelef, 192–196).

The institution of relations with India was indeed a breakthrough for Israel's standing in Asia. Along with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the negotiations between Israel and the PLO in Madrid (1991) and the ensuing Oslo Accords (1993) removed India's fears of a hostile reaction on the part of the Arab states and the large Muslim minority within its borders. The loss of Moscow's support and the subsequent dismemberment of the Soviet Union ratcheted up the importance of India's relations with the US (as well as its Jewish community), and undoubtedly influenced Delhi's decision to put an end to a period of over forty years during which relations with Israel were not normalized and remained limited. With the establishment of normalized relations, comprehensive ties rapidly evolved in the field of security, agriculture, medicine, culture, science, and aviation (Yegar, 163–178).

Another major landmark in the transformation of Israel's standing in Asia was the establishment of relations with Communist China in 1992. These ties developed slowly but surely following the death of Mao Zedong in 1976. Three years after the chairman's passing, China established its first contacts with IMI (Israel Military Industries). Other significant steps along the way to full relations were the opening of an Israeli consulate in Hong Kong (1983), arms sales to China in the 1980s, and the launching of an Israeli "academic liaison office." As in the Indian case, the tightening of relations between Washington and Beijing should not be underestimated, for this enabled the United States and American Jewry to exert its influence on China. Upon instituting diplomatic relations with Communist China, Israel committed itself to refraining from any official ties with the Nationalist Republic of China (Taiwan) and the Dalai Lama's Tibetan government in exile. Moreover, Israel and China formed numerous joint ventures in the fields of security, commerce, agriculture, science, and medicine. The visits of President Herzog (in 1992) and Prime Minister Netanyahu (1998) to China and senior-level Chinese visits to Israel signified the burgeoning relationship between the two nations (see Yegar and Shichor).

Relations with the third Asian power, Japan, also markedly improved — especially in all that concerns bilateral trade — during the course of the 1990s, in the wake of the collapse of the Arab economic boycott. The ties, which had been lukewarm in the past, became increasingly open and cordial.

Israel-Africa relations also picked up steam in the 1990s. Eighteen countries renewed their ties and another eleven established relations with Israel for the first time.

African States that Restored Relations with Israel in the 1990s*		African States that Inaugurated Relations with Israel in the 1990s	
State	Year	State	Year
Congo (Brazzaville)	1991	Angola	1992
Zambia	1991	Eritrea	1992
Benin	1992	Seychelles	1992
Gambia	1992	Mozambique	1993
Nigeria	1992	São Tomé and Príncipe	1993
Sierra Leone	1992	Zimbabwe	1993
Botswana	1993	the Comoros	1994
Burkina Faso	1993	Equatorial Guinea	1994
Gabon	1993	Guinea-Bissau	1994
Mauritius	1993	Namibia	1994
Ghana	1994		
Madagascar	1994		
Rwanda	1994		
Senegal	1994		
Uganda	1994		
Burundi	1995		
Tanzania	1995		
Niger	1996		

* The data were taken from *Israel-Africa: Renewal of Relations*, the Israeli Foreign Ministry's African Division, 2006.

The preservation of ties with South Africa, following the ascension of the Black majority in 1994, was quite an achievement for Israeli diplomacy. Given the close relations, particularly the tight military cooperation, between Israel and the apartheid regime in the 1970s and 1980s, South Africa could have been expected to break off relations with Israel. This did not come to pass, *inter alia* because Jerusalem had nevertheless complied with the framework of international sanctions against South Africa in 1987 and because the government had had the foresight to forge ties with the leaders of the black majority before the transfer of power, via non-governmental organizations (such as the Histadrut, Israel's dominant labor union, and the Institute for International Cooperation). Moreover, insofar as Nelson Mandela and his colleagues were concerned, the Oslo Accords in 1993 were a sign that change was underway in Israel. What is more, if the PLO was maintaining relations and honoring agreements with Israel, why should South Africa steer a more radical course than the Palestinians? (Chazan, 2006, 1–15)

As in Asia, the wholesale restoration of ties with African countries mainly stemmed from the Soviet Bloc's collapse and the end of the Cold War. The Soviet Union and its vassal states ceased to prop up the radical countries (e.g. Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar, Congo [Brazzaville], Namibia, Zimbabwe, and Tanzania), and the pro-Western states (e.g. Nigeria, Botswana, Senegal, and Gabon) were no longer wary of a backlash from domestic or foreign extremists. Furthermore, the shift in Israel's policy towards Pretoria in 1987 and the apartheid regime's subsequent demise removed the South African obstacle from Israel-Africa relations. The Madrid Conference (1991), the Oslo Accords (1993), and the peace treaty with Jordan (1994) convinced the last wavering states that the time had come to reestablish relations with Israel (Oded in Ofaz, 203–207).

By the mid-1990s, Israel had diplomatic ties with forty-two of the forty-five sub-Saharan states, but the quality of these relations did not return to the level of the 1960s. In light of the continent's daunting economic and political problems, and in light of the renewal of Israel's ties with Russia and Eastern Europe and the institution of relations with India, China, and a myriad newly independent states (e.g. the Baltic countries, Ukraine, and the republics of Central Asia), Israel did not put a high premium on its relations with Africa. Since the 1990s, Jerusalem has limited itself to eleven embassies in Africa with a resident ambassador, in contrast to thirty-three in the 1960s. Each of these embassies (in Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Angola, Cameroon, Nigeria, the Ivory Coast, Senegal, Mauritania, South Africa, and the Democratic Republic of Congo) cater to several states in the region (for instance, the resident ambassador in Kenya is also the ambassador to Uganda, Tanzania, the Comoros, and Zambia,

and the ambassador in South Africa also oversees Israeli interests in Swaziland, Lesotho, Botswana, Zimbabwe, and Malawi). In turn, the states of Africa have a mere twelve embassies in Israel.

As it now stands, most of the relations between Israel and Africa involve “practical” concerns in the field of private enterprise. Israeli business people — many of them ex-army officers interested in arms deals — are active in countries such as Kenya, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Liberia, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone. The Israeli Foreign Ministry’s Department of International Cooperation (MASHAV) still provides assistance in the fields of irrigation, medicine, agriculture, and economic cooperation, but the scope is rather modest. For instance, out of the 19 Israeli experts working on long-term and 214 on short-term contracts throughout the world, only 5 and 24 respectively are stationed in Africa. In other words, only about ten percent of MASHAV’s worldwide activities are currently taking place in Africa (Oded, 2002, 23–24). Lastly, the shutting down of the country’s African studies departments at the Hebrew University (in 2001) and Tel-Aviv University (in 2006) is indicative of Israel’s priorities.

In sum, the years from pre-statehood to 1956 can be viewed as the period of nascent Israeli-Third World contacts, namely the period of “courtship.” The ensuing decade bore witness to a full-fledged “honeymoon,” primarily between Israel and Africa. Between 1967 and 1973, relations with the Third World dampened down and ultimately led to a divorce between Israel and Africa that was to last from 1973 to the 1980s. Although the two sides have since rekindled the ties, they have not returned to the cordial relations of the 1950s and 1960s, and today’s relations are based on practical considerations. Since the 1990s, we have witnessed another breakthrough in both Asia and Africa, especially in all that concerns official diplomatic relations, and commercial and business ties.

III Israel's ties with the Third World: bilateral and multilateral, open and secret

Israel's relations with the Third World are highly multifarious. As a rule, the bilateral ties between Israel and individual states are much better than its multilateral ones. Following the Bandung Conference in 1955, Israel's standing in the Third World's international organizations was generally precarious, as evidenced by the policies and declarations of the following bodies: the Arab-African Casablanca Bloc during the early 1960s; the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organization; the non-aligned movement; the Tricontinental Organization; the Group of 77; the OAU (Organization of African Unity) between 1967 and 2002, and its successor the African Union; and of course the Islamic Conference Organization. The exceptions included certain African organizations from 1958 to 1967, such as the Conference of Independent African States and the OAU in its early years (Kochan, 247–269). Israel's travails in a number of third-world multilateral frameworks are rooted in the preponderance of Arab member states (the Arab League accounts for about a fifth of all third-world countries), and their political, military, and economic sway (Egypt, Algeria, the Sudan, Libya, and Morocco are economic and political "powers" in Africa). On many occasions, however, countries that talked, acted, and voted against Israel in the Third World's international organizations were simultaneously on good terms with Israel from a bilateral standpoint. Likewise, the actions of third-world countries in universal organizations, such as the UN, UNESCO, and the International Labor Organization, have been known to contradict the understandings that are reached with Israel on a bilateral basis. According to Oded, there is still a noticeable disparity between the hostile stance adopted by the African states in the UN or the African Union and the more amicable bilateral relations with Israel even after the large-scale Israel-Africa détente in the 1990s (Oded in Yegar, Govrin, and Oded, 615–629).

In general, it can be said that public attitudes toward Israel were often merely a guise for the true relations conducted *sub rosa*. States that had tight military, political, and economic relations with Israel often issued anti-Israeli propaganda declarations in order to placate the Arab world: until 1978 Iran's ties with Israel were informed by a cavernous gap between rhetoric and actions, as Teheran maintained clandestine relations with Israel in the military, intelligence, political, and economic spheres, including the supply of oil, but eschewed official and full-fledged ties. India and China maintained relations with Israel in the fields of security and military procurement long before they agreed to transform the relations into official ties. Singapore also understated its tight military and security collaboration with Israel due to its fear of a bellicose

reaction on the part of its Muslim neighbors (Indonesia and Malaysia); certainly the same also holds true for Turkey. Likewise, close cooperation with many African states, among them Uganda, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, and Chad, was kept out of the public eye for years.

The Indian scholar P.R. Kumaraswamy even reports of secret ties between Israel and Pakistan, which is considered a quintessential pro-Arab state. In his estimation, there were contacts and ties during the reign of the dictators Ayub Khan (1958–1969), Yahya Khan (1969–1971), and Zia-ul-Haq (1977–1988), as well as the premierships of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (1972–1977), Benazir Bhutto (1994–1996 and 1988–1990), and Nawaz Sharif (1990–1993 and 1997–1999). Moreover, Kumaraswamy asserts that Foreign Minister Zafrullah Khan (1947–1954) maintained contacts with Jerusalem and that there was even an unofficial Israeli interest bureau in Pakistan during the 1980s (Kumaraswamy 2005, 2).

According to Kumaraswamy, Israel's unique situation gave rise to different models of public and clandestine relations, including the following: official recognition while concealing the true nature of the relations (Iran during the period of the Shah); secret ties without official recognition (Jordan before 1994); and covert military relations in the absence of political ties (China prior to 1992) (*ibid.* 10–11).

Israel's image in the Third World has been disproportionate to its actual size, strength, and global sway. Chaim Weizmann, Israel's first president, advised Israeli ambassadors not to go out of their way to share information concerning the true dimensions of the country's territory or its population. In that sense, Israeli diplomacy in the Third World succeeded beyond expectations. In the 1960s, Israel was perceived in Africa to be a medium-sized power, on a par with France, Britain, West Germany, and China. Many countries formed an image of Israel (which was perhaps fueled by latent anti-Semitic notions of the power of "international Jewry") as a country capable of moving mountains in the American Congress and the White House and of securing credit, stipends, and investments to its heart's desire. For instance, a senior Japanese minister told Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, "You have unlimited access to every place and boundless influence. You have tremendous power. You've got the United States in your pocket" (Yegar, 306). Israel indeed wielded a "diplomacy of presence" well beyond its size and importance. In fact, there were years in which this undersized country had the second largest diplomatic presence in Black Africa and Latin America.

IV Conditions and variables

What were the reasons behind the nature and depth of Israel's assorted relations with third-world countries? In general, we can point to three variables: first, the internal political, demographic, and economic situation in each country; second, the global status quo, particularly the level of friction between the major blocs, the extent of Third World's coalescence as a political bloc, and the standing of the Arab world; and third, Israel's policies, deeds, and not least its image in the Third World.

A highly consequential internal factor is religion. Even after the peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan and the Oslo process, Israel did not manage to forge ties with the Muslim countries in Asia (Pakistan, Afghanistan, Malaysia, Bangladesh, Brunei, Indonesia, and the Maldives Islands). This primarily stems from these countries' concerns with radical Islam and from the sense that Israel is still not truly at peace with the Arab world, Egypt and Jordan included (Yegar, 394). Likewise, India's obdurate resistance to normalizing relations with Israel was largely due to its fear of the reaction of the Muslim world and the country's large Muslim minority. In any event, official relations were established between the two countries in 1992 and even bolstered following the rise to power of the BJP (the Bharatiya Janata Party) in the late 1990s. In contrast to the Congress Party of Nehru and his successors, which considers India to be a suprarreligious secular state, the BJP is seen as a Hindu party that is hostile to Islam and tends to underscore the religious differences between India and its Muslim neighbors, Pakistan and Bangladesh. As a result, the BJP identified India's shared religious-national interests with Israel. Singapore's tight relations with Israel also largely derive from its leadership's perception that both countries are surrounded by hostile Muslim states, as the former is worried about being engulfed by Muslim Indonesia and Malaysia. In addition, Aron Shai notes that China's Muslim minority in Xinjiang — many of whom view the region to be "occupied" by the Chinese" — has similarly served to unite Beijing and Jerusalem behind a common, anti-Muslim cause.

As is to be expected, Israel's dealings in Asia are smoother in countries that have a Christian (the Philippines), Buddhist (Burma, Thailand, and Sri Lanka), or Hindu (India) majority than in Muslim-dominated states. On the other hand, the fact that India, Sri Lanka, and Thailand must take into account the sensitivities of their Muslim minorities has taken its toll on the relations with Israel.

Africa also features several varieties of the "Islamic variable" which touch upon the relations with Israel. While in the 1960s Israel managed to forge ties with the majority of mostly Muslim (e.g. Niger, Mali, and Senegal)

or partially Muslim (e.g. Nigeria and Chad) African states, there were Islamic elements working against Israel in quite a few countries. Islam in Black Africa was still for the most part moderate and apolitical. Over the next two decades, however, the Muslim faith became politicized throughout the continent, and the first African states to sever ties with Israel, even before the Yom Kippur War, were either mostly (Guinea, Niger, and Mali) or partially (Chad) Muslim. Conversely, the first countries to renew relations with Israel in the 1980s and early 1990s were predominately led by Christians (an exception being Nigeria under President Ibrahim Babangida). As in Asia, hostility towards Islam could occasionally work to Israel's advantage. During Haile Selassie's Christian reign, and to some extent during that of his revolutionary successors, the Ethiopian government felt hemmed in by Muslim enemies — both from the outside and from within — and thus sought to build a close relationship with Jerusalem. The disintegration of Israel's relations with Uganda came about during the rule of a Muslim, Idi Amin, whereas the prospects of restoring ties with Cameroon presented themselves once the government of a Muslim president, Ahmadou Ahidjo, was replaced by that of the Christian Paul Biya. Likewise, Arye Oded, who was Israel's ambassador to Zambia in the 1990s, points to a Christian angle in the country's decision to renew relations in 1991. Its president, Frederick Chiluba, was a devout Christian who declared Zambia to be a "Christian state," suspected that Islamic elements were involved in subversive activities in his country, and consequently shut down the Iraqi and Iranian embassies (Oded, in Yegar, Govrin and Oded, 625). Throughout the continent, Israel usually had greater success forging ties with Christian countries (or those with a Christian majority or government), such as Malawi, the Democratic Republic of Congo (Zaire), Ghana, Liberia, Swaziland, and Lesotho, than in Muslim states.

Islam in Africa*

Muslim-Arab States	Significant Muslim Minority (10–20%)
Algeria	Burkina Faso
Egypt	Ghana
Libya	Ivory Coast
Morocco	Kenya
Sudan**	Mauritius
Tunisia	Mozambique
	Uganda

Muslim States (100%) Comoros Djibouti Mauritania Somalia	Small Muslim Minority (5–10%) Gabon Liberia Rwanda Togo
Muslim Majority (50–80%) Chad Eritrea Gambia Guinea Mali Niger Senegal	Negligible Muslim Minority (under 5%) Angola Botswana Burundi Cape Verde Congo (Brazzaville) Democratic Republic of Congo Lesotho Madagascar Malawi Namibia São Tomé and Príncipe Seychelles South Africa Swaziland Zambia Zimbabwe
Large Muslim Minority (25–45%) Benin Cameroon Central African Republic Equatorial Guinea Ethiopia Guinea-Bissau Nigeria Sierra Leone Tanzania	

* *Data from Oded, in Yegar, Govrin and Oded, 628.*

** *Despite the fact that it has a very large non-Arab, African, non-Muslim minority, Sudan is regarded as an Arab state because its government has been always Arab-Muslim. Sudan is also a member of the Arab League.*

Nevertheless, it is worth reiterating that Islam in Asia and Africa does not pose an insurmountable obstacle, as evidenced by the following examples: Israel's relations with Turkey since the founding of the Jewish state; Iran during the period of the Shah; the countries of the African Sahel before the Yom Kippur War; and the Muslim-African states since the 1990s (as well as Israel's relations with Egypt and Jordan).

Relations with Israel are also connected to the nature of a country's political regime. Ties with the communist and Marxist regimes on the three southern continents have been disastrous. Communist China was outright hostile towards Israel after the latter refused to institute diplomatic ties with Beijing in the early 1950s. In the 1960s, China steered a radical anti-Israeli

policy course, even going so far as to grant recognition and assistance to Arab terrorist organizations (Shichor in Neuberger, 496–527; Shichor 1979). However, by the mid-1980s, there were signs of a thaw in Chinese-Israeli relations; this process would eventually culminate with the establishment of diplomatic ties in February 1992. It is hardly coincidental that this about-face ran parallel to the rightward and Westward lurch in China's political and economic policies. In contrast, Israel did not have ties with Asia's other "veteran" communist states — Mongolia, North Korea, and North Vietnam — so long as they were ruled by "devout" regimes. Mongolia established diplomatic ties with Israel in 1991, after opening up to the West. Israel established relations with unified Vietnam in 1993, when Hanoi was in the midst of executing an about-face in the direction of capitalism and ties with the West. During the first two and a half decades of its existence, Israel maintained diplomatic relations with Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam, but the ties were severed when these states fell into communist hands over the course of the 1970s. Stalinist North Korea still does not have any relations with Israel. The "revolutionary" states of Latin America (Cuba, Guyana, and Nicaragua) also broke off their ties with Israel in the 1970s¹⁰ though Cuba would only do so in 1973 (Shapira and Kaufman, 22–23). Similarly, Israel-India relations reached a low point between 1966 and 1977, as New Delhi was not only on good terms with the Soviet Union, but the communists were members of the country's ruling coalition. In Africa, many radical states only restored relations with Israel upon the dismemberment of the Soviet Union, which spawned far-reaching changes in the world order. Procommunist Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau did not have any relations with Israel whatsoever until the fall of the Iron Curtain, whereas other states, such as Benin, the Malagasy Republic (Madagascar), and Congo (Brazzaville), which positioned themselves in the radical camp, continued to shun Israel after the mass severance in 1973. Israel's standing in Marxist Ethiopia became unhinged, but Mengisto Haile Mariam renewed relations in 1989.

Until 1967, Israel maintained working and occasionally cordial relationships with a number of countries — Ghana, Mali, Guinea, Tanzania, Uganda, and Guyana, among others — that viewed themselves to be socialist (not Marxist-Leninist) and considered Israel a socialist state and a model for their own development. Throughout this period, Israel also maintained friendly relations with social-democratic countries (Burma in the 1950s, Nepal under Koirala, Singapore, the Malagasy Republic in the 1960s, Senegal until 1973, and Costa Rica), liberal countries (Argentina under Alfonsín and Jayewardene's

¹⁰ Under Castro's leadership, Cuba had maintained official relations with Israel since 1960.

Sri Lanka), and conservative states (Kenya, Malawi, the Ivory Coast, Thailand, and Japan). In Latin America, Kaufman found a positive correlation between the extent of democracy in a country and the strength of its relationship with Israel (Kaufman, 189). Unfortunately, Israel also maintained good relations with an array of sinister and reactionary regimes (Nicaragua headed by Somoza, Haiti under the Duvaliers, the Philippines during the Marcos era, Zaire during the Mobutu reign, and Chile under Pinochet). The overall picture that emerges from Israel's relations is quite clear: far-left regimes usually did not establish ties with Israel; a regime that swung leftwards soft-pedalled the relations; and a rightward lurch on the part of a radical regime harbored the possibility of improved relations (China in the 1980s). In practice, Israel maintained relations at varying degrees of closeness with a wide range of regimes, from the far right to the moderate left. Ties with radical leftist states (Cuba from 1960 to 1973 and Ethiopia from 1989 to 1991) were anomalous.

Along with a regime's attributes, the personality of the leader is also likely to constitute a significant factor in relations with Israel. Third-world regimes tend to be highly personal, and the same could be said for a leader's approach to Israel. Therefore, a country's ties with Israel can stem from its leader's acquaintance with Jews, a visit to Israel, his or her religious beliefs, or vital support that he or she received from Israel in a time of need. For instance, Haile Selassie (Ethiopia), U Nu (Burma), Houphouët-Boigny (the Ivory Coast), Senghor (Senegal), Kenyatta (Kenya), Tubman (Liberia), Mobutu (Zaire), Macapagal (Philippines), and Chiluba (Zambia) were all staunchly pro-Israel leaders who had a major impact on their countries' policies towards Israel. In the case of Eritrea, personal connections played a decisive role in the establishment of ties. Before his nation embarked on the road to independence, the Eritrean leader Isaias Afewerki was stricken by a virulent strain of malaria and was flown to the Hadassah Medical Center in Jerusalem for treatment. Given Israel's alleged involvement in Ethiopia's repression of the Eritrean uprising from 1962 to 1992, it is reasonable to assume that, if not for Isaias' personal experience, Eritrea would not have forged ties with Israel (Eli Schwartz, 985–987). Needless to say, the personal factor has also worked in the opposite direction, as hostile leaders stood in the way of the establishment of relations (e.g. India's Indira Gandhi) or caused the ties to be severed (Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia in 1973, and Idi Amin of Uganda in 1972).

The history of a nation, state, or region can also have an impact on a government's attitude towards Israel. For example, Asia lacks any deep historic, religious or cultural bonds with the Jewish people. The "Christian connection," by way of the Bible, only exists in the Philippines. This, then, explains why Israel had such a hard time penetrating the Asian continent, as half of the countries are

controlled by Muslims possessing antagonistic feelings towards Jewry and the other half is dominated by Asian cultures lacking any “Jewish connection.” The situation is different in Latin America, which more or less shares the Christian-European tradition. In consequence, many Latin Americans consider Judaism a part of a single Judeo-Christian culture, and “the land of the Bible” and “the people of the Book” are hardly alien to Latin-American Catholicism.

The African nationalist elites of the 1950s and 1960s truly admired Israel. These sentiments drew sustenance from several historical parallels: the exile of the Jews and the dispersion of the blacks; pogroms against Jews and lynchings of Afro-Americans; the Jewish and Black ghettos; slavery and the Holocaust; Zionism and “Black Zionism.” Moreover, the active involvement of Jews in liberal, socialist, antiracist, and anticolonialist movements in America and Europe fostered goodwill between Jews and blacks. Above all, African nationalism’s founding fathers — Du Bois and Padmore, Nkrumah and Nyerere, Césaire and Senghor, Kenyatta and Mboya, Banda and Tubman — firmly believed that the enemies of the Jews were also the enemies of the blacks. In other words, there was a connection between anti-Semitism and white racism.

The involvement of Arabs and Swahilis in the East African slave trade (i.e. Southern Sudan, Uganda, Kenya, Tanganyika, Zanzibar, and eastern Congo) facilitated Israel’s efforts to win over the sympathy of black leaders in the 1950s. Ethiopia’s history of internecine warfare against Muslim invaders (Somalis, Danakil, and Oromo) laid the foundations for its ties with Israel, as did the myth concerning the bond between the age-old dynasty that ruled Ethiopia until 1974 and the Biblical monarchy of Judah.

At times, the historical experience of a nation impinged upon the development of cordial relations with Israel. Gandhi and Nehru, for example, adamantly opposed the idea of partitioning British India — the majority of whose populace was Hindu — into Muslim and Hindu states (Shimoni 1977). For that same reason, they were also dead set against dividing Palestine. The leaders of “one indivisible India” fully sympathized with the Palestinian Arabs, who in 1947 — the very same year India gained its independence — also demanded “one indivisible Palestine” under the control of the Arab majority (Pant).

The special requests for assistance by third-world countries left their mark, for better or for worse, on the relations with Israel. Apprehension caused by Nasser’s aspirations in the 1950s and 1960s gave rise to special relations between Israel and the following countries: Ethiopia, Uganda, Tanzania, Ghana, Kenya, Chad, the Ivory Coast, and Liberia. Similarly, the need for military and intelligence support against the machinations of Libya’s Muammar Gaddafi prompted states like Cameroon, Togo, Liberia, Chad, and the Ivory Coast to reach out to Israel in the 1980s. On the other hand, Libya and Saudi Arabia

used financial assistance to coax countries with urgent financial needs, such as Uganda, Chad, Mali, Niger, and Burundi, into severing all ties with Israel in 1972 and 1973.

The presence of Jewish and Arab communities can also have an impact on a country's relations with Israel (Inbar in Ofaz, 181–185). It is no coincidence that Latin American states, with their sizable, affluent, and organized Jewish communities (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico), are generally amicable towards Israel, but the Diaspora's mark can even be felt in countries where the Jewish population is smaller (e.g. Panama and Guatemala). The "Jewish factor" should not be neglected, nor should it be overemphasized. Thus, Venezuela's strong Jewish community could not prevent the deterioration of relations between Hugo Chávez's Venezuela and Israel (which eventually led to the expulsion of the Israeli embassy in 2009) because of Venezuela's fierce anti-Americanism and its alliance with the vehemently anti-Israeli Iranian regime. Further evidence of the correlation between the fate of a country's Jews and its relations with Israel may be gleaned from the Marxist states (Cuba and Sandinistan Nicaragua), where the Jewish communities nearly ceased to exist after the governments broke off their ties with Israel. It is also worth noting that individual Jews have at times also been known to influence a country's relations with Israel. For instance, Reuven Merhav notes the contribution of individual Jews to the establishment of relations in India, the Philippines, and Hong Kong (Merhav in Ofaz, 177–180).

Although Black Africa has no large Jewish communities, several tiny communities and individual Jews have occasionally played a key role in cultivating Israel's ties with African leaders (as in the case of Ethiopia, Zaire, Ghana, Tanzania, and Kenya). One such figure was Yisrael Suman, a Jewish businessman and the mayor of Nairobi, who introduced Israeli leaders to their African counterparts in Kenya and Uganda, before Kenya was granted independence (Oded, in Yegar, Govrin and Oded, 615–629).

Both Latin America and Africa are home to substantial Arab minorities, some of which complicate matters for Israel. In contrast, there are also Arabs who have assimilated in their countries of immigration to the point where their origins no longer constitute a stumbling block in all that concerns relations with Israel. For instance, the Syrian origins of Argentina's President Carlos Menem did not keep the two countries from maintaining good relations during his tenure. The situation in Africa is more complicated. In some cases, the Arab minorities are despised by the African masses and governments, and therefore do not constitute a political "asset" for the Arab world. The Lebanese-Syrian communities in Ghana, the Ivory Coast, and Sierra Leone along with the Arab oligarchy in prerevolutionary Zanzibar testify to the fact that vilified Arab

minorities can even further Israel's interests — in the sense that hostility towards the local Arabs translates into hostility towards the Arab states and friendship towards Israel.

Movements, institutions, political parties, and organizations have also been known to exert an influence on relations between Israel and third-world countries: In the 1950s and 1960s, Israel was lauded by professional unions that maintained close relations with the Histadrut (Israel's dominant labor union) and marveled at the union's accomplishments. Similarly, Christian churches in many African and Latin American nations sympathized with Israel (in spite of the fact that the Vatican's reservations toward Israel — especially in all that concerns Jerusalem — percolated down the ranks of the Latin American Catholic Church in the 1950s).

Israel's reputation for "professionalism" spread among the upper echelons of many armies in the wake of its striking military success in 1967 and its rich experience in the war on terrorism. Israel's cooperation with defense establishments was a rather prominent part of its relations with Africa in the 1980s, China since the 1980s, and India after the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1992. Other military regimes, however, severed or downgraded their ties with Israel (e.g. Idi Amin's Uganda in 1972 and General Ne Win's in Burma after 1962 respectively). Furthermore, there were also some populist-Nasserite officer cliques in Latin America that toed an anti-Israeli line (Inbar, 181–185).

External international factors that were to some degree connected to internal regimes also had an impact on Israel's relations with third-world countries. During the Cold War, states that were close to the West and to the United States in particular (e.g. Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, the Ivory Coast, and Kenya) tended to have cordial relations with Israel, whereas pro-Soviet states (e.g. Cuba, Sandinistan Nicaragua, Angola, Mozambique, Vietnam, and North Korea) were more antagonistic. Finally, neutralist countries (e.g. India, Nyerere's Tanzania, Burma under Ne Win, Cambodia during the days of Sihanouk, and Mali during Keita's tenure) were ambivalent towards Israel.

Another international factor that weighs heavily on relations with Israel is the nature and depth of a country's ties to the Arab world. A military alliance with an Arab state (Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan during the period of the Baghdad Pact), heavy dependence on Arab oil (Japan), a struggle over the Arab states' support in a regional conflict (India and Taiwan within the framework of their imbroglios with Pakistan and Communist China respectively), and allegiance to Nasser in his capacity as the leader of the non-aligned bloc (India, Indonesia, Mali, Guinea, Cuba, and Guyana in the 1950s and 1960s) are several of the factors that inhibited countries from drawing close to Israel.

It also bears noting that Israel's relations with the Third World have always been predicated on its policies, deeds, and image. The much-heralded technical assistance that Israel provided in the fields of regional development, agriculture, irrigation in arid regions, public housing, economic cooperation, and the organization of youth movements contributed immensely to its enhanced standing in Burma of the 1950s, Africa of the 1960s, and Latin America during the 1970s. Israeli experts were considered true professionals with a knack for improvisation. Moreover, they were known for their lack of colonial hauteur and their willingness to shoulder their fair share of physical labor. The unique Israeli models in the fields of settlement and society — the kibbutz and the moshav (agricultural cooperative communities), GADNA¹¹ (a program that provides military training for high-school students), and NAHAL¹² (an infantry brigade that combined military service with the establishment or bolstering of agricultural communities on the periphery), the Histadrut, and youth movements — were foci of attraction for third-world leaders who sought solutions for the problems of underdevelopment, poverty, ignorance, and tribalism. Much importance was attributed to special institutes that were set up in Israel for researching and enhancing the assistance it provided to the Third World, such as the Afro-Asian Institute for Labour Studies and Cooperation in Tel-Aviv, the Mount Carmel International Training Center for Community Services (the Golda Meir Institute) in Haifa, the Center for Regional Development in Rehovot, the International Center for Agricultural Development in Tel-Aviv, and the International Center for Training in Ramat Rachel (for more on Israeli aid, see Amir 1974; Kreinin 1964; Hershlag 1973; Laufer 1967; Curtis and Gitelson, 392–400; Egar, 75–80). Africa's enthusiasm for renewing its ties with Israel in the 1990s was connected to the positive memories of the efficient aid Israel had extended during the 1960s. Quite a few members of the African elite were familiar with the aid programs, so that the goodwill Israel had earned endured through the years of estrangement.

Israel's policies toward major powers obviously affected its relations with the countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Its warming up to the United States in the early 1960s, for instance, put a damper on its ties with "leftist" states (Cuba, Guyana, Guinea, Nkrumah's Ghana, Mali, and Burma). Though Israel's budding relationship with South Africa in the early 1970s did not rupture its ties with the rest of the African states in the years 1972 and 1973, it did hamper attempts to restore relations in the 1980s. In addition, Jerusalem's recognition of China in 1950 cast a shadow on the relations with Taiwan,

11 A Hebrew acronym for Hebrew Youth Brigades.

12 A Hebrew acronym for Fighting Pioneer Youth.

while its unwillingness to institute diplomatic ties with Communist China in 1954 negated the possibility of establishing ties with Beijing for many long years.

Above all, one cannot ignore the impact of Israel's policies in all that concerned the Israel-Arab conflict on its relations with Africa and Asia, as the majority of these countries are members of the Afro-Asian coalition and the Third World, both of which naturally include the Arab states as well. The Sinai Campaign, for example, basically ruined Israel's prospects of building a working relationship with India, as Nehru viewed the Tripartite Aggression to be a new form of colonialist gunboat diplomacy. Israel's policies after the Six Days' War caused significant damage to its standing among third-world countries, for its actions were interpreted as an attempt at expansion and annexation. For instance, the vast majority of OAU member states backed the Egyptians, especially after a delegation the organization had dispatched to Israel in 1971, and which included the presidents of Senegal, Zaire, Cameroon, and Nigeria, failed to convince the Israeli leadership to withdraw from the territories it had seized during the Six Days' War (Gitelson 1973, 413–420). What is more, Africa increasingly identified itself with the "Palestinian cause." Many black leaders considered it a moral and just cause, and the Israeli David, who had been so popular in Africa from 1957 to 1967, began to be seen more and more as a Goliath pitted against the Palestinian David. However, the subsequent changes in Israeli policy — the peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan and the Oslo Accords — helped renew and inaugurate ties with African and Asian countries. Similarly, the improvement in relations with Japan during the 1990s can also be ascribed to the Israeli volte-face on the Palestinian issue (Yegar, 393).

V Concluding remarks

In summary, Israel's third-world policy did not carry through with its promising start in the 1950s. Over the years relations underwent profound changes affected by inter-bloc relations; the standing of Israel and the Third World; and Israel's international reputation.

Throughout the 1950s, Israel was perceived as a humanistic, socialist, neutral, and anticolonialist state. The Holocaust, the UN Partition Resolution on Palestine, both blocs' support for Israeli statehood, and the status of Israeli socialism as a third way between capitalism and communism were all responsible for the state's attractive image. As a result, Israel merited the esteem of socialist leaders such as Nkrumah, Nyerere, Mboya, Kaunda, U Nu, Koirala, and to a certain extent even Nehru and Castro. However, from the mid 1960s, Israel's image underwent a dramatic transformation. Israel was now seen as a developed, Western, European, technologically advanced, militaristic, right-wing, and anticommunist country. Although this turnabout was the product of the radicalization of the Third World, the political activism of the Arab world, and Soviet propaganda, it also derived from Israel's pronounced shift to the right and the West, and the Third World's sobering realization that Israeli aid was, and would remain, but a drop in the ocean (for more on the decline in Israel's reputation, see Gitelson 1974; Decalo 1976, 89–117).

The falloff in Israel's stock among the Third World's "left wing" was but one side of a coin, as Jerusalem concomitantly tightened its relations with conservative, right-wing countries (e.g. Malawi, Zaire, Liberia, South Vietnam, Taiwan, the Philippines under Marcos, Argentina under the military dictatorship, and Nicaragua during the Somoza reign). Third-world support for Israel rose among conservatives in the military, the bureaucracies, and in economic circles, whereas the support of intellectuals, students, union leaders, and members of the left diminished.

"Israeli socialism," which had been a major attraction for the Third World in the 1950s and 1960s, lost its charm during the "end-of-ideology" era (correspondingly, Israel's penchant for neoliberal capitalism steadily intensified). Moreover, the relevance of technical assistance predicated on Israel's unique socialist models waned, while the value of "practical deals" in the military, intelligence, economic, and political spheres mounted. Security and intelligence services for African presidents, cooperation in the war on terror, the provision of weapons, commercial and economic relations, and assurances that Israel would exert its influence over the American Congress on its allies' behalf are the sort of "merchandise" that Israel has been promoting since the 1980s.

Some pundits aver that Israel's current third-world relations lack the ideological belief that the country shares an affinity with the nations of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. In their estimation, Israel's yearning to bring succor to the world and the notion that a "fellowship of the persecuted" suffices to form a basis for close relations have both become anachronisms. However, there are those who argue that this new form of ties constitute an opportunity for forming more practical, stable, and "mature" bonds. Such businesslike relations are characteristic of the new ties with India and China, and also of the renewed ties with sub-Saharan Africa since the 1980s. Be that as it may, many Israelis feel that the loss of the romantic and idealistic component of their ties with the Third World also reveals a great deal about the substantive differences between present-day Israel and the Israel of the 1950s.

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