The impact of Israel's Sub-Saharan relations on African migrants in Israel

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on African migrants in Israel

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A search for allies in a hostile world [2]

Source: © David Simonds, The Economist, 4 February 2010

Abstract: In the 1960s, sub-Saharan Africa experienced a major diplomatic offensive by Israel. Kwame Nkrumah's Ghana was the first country to establish diplomatic and economic relations. Others soon followed, so that by the mid-1960s some forty African countries were receiving agricultural and military aid from Israel and benefiting from scholarships for their students. Israel's involvement was facilitated by the CIA's activities in Africa at the time, which were conceived and funded by the United States and other Western powers as their 'third force' in Africa. Since then, the situation has evolved due to Africans' growing solidarity with the Palestinians and their rejection of Israel's "apartheid" system of systematic discrimination against non-Israeli populations. Israel lost the support of most SSA countries in the early 1970s because it collaborated with apartheid South Africa. As Nelson Mandela said, "South Africa will never be free until Palestine is free". At its 12th Ordinary Session in Kampala in 1975, the OAU for the first time identified Israel's founding ideology, Zionism, as a form of racism. Nevertheless, several African countries continued to maintain low-level contacts through thirteen foreign embassies, for example in Ethiopia, Tanzania, Uganda and Zaire, while educational and commercial exchanges continued, albeit on a much-reduced scale and away from the public eye. However, the scourge of Islamist terrorism necessitated a revival of relations. Military and security cooperation, including cyber security, is particularly intensive with Ethiopia, Zaire, Uganda, Ghana, Togo and South Africa, for example. It has also often served to prop up despotic African regimes. Today, sub-Saharan Africa is a lucrative market for the Israeli defence industry. Cameroon, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Lesotho, Nigeria, Rwanda, Seychelles, South Africa and Uganda all received arms from Israel between 2006 and 2010. In 2014, 40% of Israeli arms exports went to African countries. After the end of the Cold War and the beginning of the Israeli-Arab peace process, most African states resumed relations with Israel after Netanyahu became prime minister in 2009, under the slogan "Israel comes back to Africa, Africa comes back to Israel". Israel now has relations with 40 sub-Saharan states, some of which are more pro-Israel than before. The stabilisation of the Horn of Africa was seen as crucial because it was directly related to the immigration pressures Israel had been facing since the middle of the last decade. An estimated 40,000 African refugees live on Israeli soil, most of them from Sudan and Eritrea. Israel's international reputation has been affected by its determined policy to limit the number of migrants by building a wall on its border with Egypt. Since 2013, the government has attempted to deport around 4,000 migrants to Rwanda and Uganda between 2014 and 2017 as part of a 'voluntary departure' programme. Almost all fled Rwanda again and made the dangerous journey to Europe.

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[1] Dirk Kohnert, associated expert, GIGA-Institute for African Affairs, Hamburg. *Draft*: 29 October 2023
[2] "Iran's proclaimed ambitions in Africa are particularly worrying for Israel, which once had a lot of friends on the continent and wants to keep the few that remain.", *The Editor*, The Economist, 4 February 2010.

1. Introduction

Cartoon 2: *Agreed -- not to use the sword* [3]
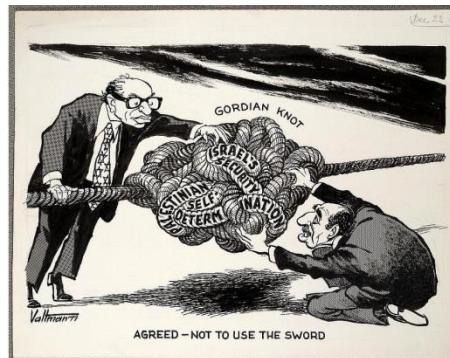
Source: © Valtman, Edmund S., Library of Congress, 22 December 1977

Already long before the creation of Israel, the father of modern political Zionism, the Austrian Theodor Herzl (1860-1904), promoted Jewish immigration to Palestine in an effort to create a Jewish state (1897). Also, he wrote that Jews and Black people shared a common point in terms of suffering. Many Africans, then still under colonial rule, therefore saw Israel as an example to follow. However, once the Jewish State was created (1948), the Arab–Israeli conflict, in the context of the Cold War, put an end to Herzl's illusory vision of human solidarity at the expense of the strategic interests of nationalist states (Nouhou, 2003). For most Africans, lagging in development, Israel's victories over the Arabs could not be the work of a third-world country. Instead, Israel was considered as one of the regional powers and even a coloniser. Once the weak changed sides, the gaze turned to the Palestinians as a point of reference and as a concept of suffering (Nouhou, 2003).

Graph 1: *World map showing status of Israel's diplomatic relations, 2020*
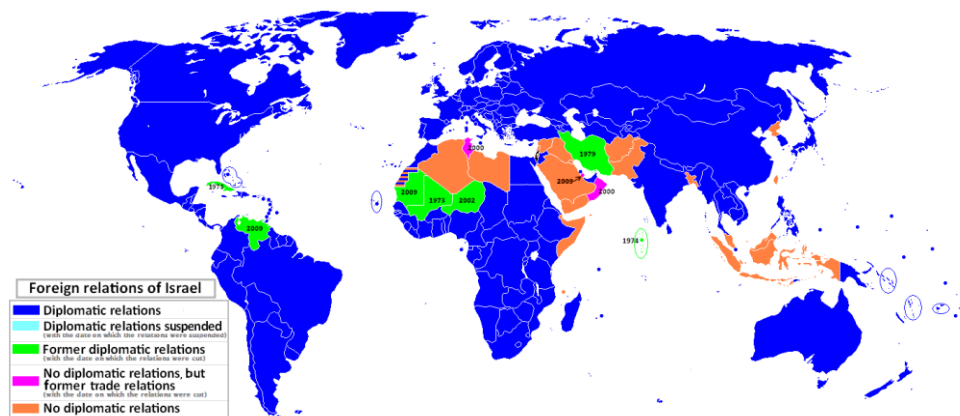
Source: © Davshul, Foreign relations of Israel, Wikipedia, August 2020

In the following, this paper analyses the evolution of Israel's relations with sub-Saharan Africa, using case studies of South Africa, Nigeria, Eritrea and Rwanda. This will serve as a background for assessing the impact of Israel-SSA relations on the plight of African migrants in Israel.

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[3] "The cartoon shows Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin examining a huge knot, labelled 'Gordian Knot.' Begin plucks at strands labelled 'Israel's Security', while Sadat fingers strands labelled 'Palestinian Self-Determination'. … In 1972, Sadat and Begin took steps for the first time to try to solve the problems of the hostility of the Arab states to Israel and the settlement of the Palestinian refugee problem. In November 1977, Sadat visited Israel, and he and Begin pledged -- unlike Alexander -- to settle their differences without resorting to arms." Library of Congress, 22 December 1977.

2. History and main drivers of Israeli relations with Sub-Saharan Africa

Cartoon 3: *'Racist' cartoon by Israel's Foreign Ministry depicting Israel as a futuristic city and the Arab world as a backward people* [4]

Source: © Nimrod Reshef (*Nimi*), Lieber, 2017

Soon after the independence of African states in the early 1960s, an all-out Israeli offensive began in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), not least to gain support from key international organisations like the UN. In 1958, Kwame Nkrumah's Ghana was the first to establish diplomatic and economic relations with Tel Aviv, including support for the development of Ghana's armed forces. Other countries soon followed, so that by the mid-1960s, some forty African nations had agricultural and military cooperation agreements with Israel and benefited from scholarships for their students (Onana, 2006).

Israel's initial goals in SSA were to reduce its diplomatic isolation and to gain the support of the African bloc, or at least its neutrality in the UN, for the Israeli position in the Arab-Israeli dispute. Tel Aviv also sought to counter the influence of the Arab and Eastern bloc, which threatened its interests in SSA, and to resist pressure from Egyptian President Nasser. But there was another, covert side to building good relations with SSA. Israel hoped to demonstrate its willingness and ability to promote Western interests and to enter into a strategic dialogue with the U.S. in the Cold War (Tal, 2012). Therefore, Israel's efforts to overcome its isolation in international organisations, particularly the UN, were exploited by the CIA's activities in Africa at the time. Israel's activities on the continent were shaped and funded by the United States and other Western powers. Israel was seen as a *'third force'* in Africa, between the West and the Communist bloc, but at the same time, its activities were of benefit to the Western world (Tal, 2012).

But also authoritarian African regimes profited from this constellation to upkeep their despotic rule. Thus, the Zairian president, Mobutu Sese Seko (1965-1997) requested Israeli

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[4] "Anti-BDS cartoon by Israel's foreign ministry depicts Jewish state a futuristic city with flying cars and the Arab world as a stubborn man on mule … The Foreign Ministry on Sunday published a cartoon in Arabic aimed at convincing readers that if the Middle East ceased its diplomatic boycott of the Jewish state, regional cooperation would lift the Arab world out of the 'Middle Ages.' … an Arab man on a mule angrily declaring 'I boycott you Israel.' The mule, in a play on words, tells the boycotter that he is 'as stubborn as a mule.' The other half of the cartoon shows a futuristic metropolis underneath which is written, 'Welcome to Israel.'- The cartoon was slammed as a 'racist,' caricature that sought to convince readers to exit the 'Middle Ages' and cooperate with ultramodern Israel (Arabic Facebook of Israel's foreign ministry)" (Lieber, 2017); referring to the pro-Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, supported also by the African Union.

military assistance, including military experts and advisors. Israel contributed significantly to the modernisation of the Zairian army, supplying advanced equipment, training elite units and participating in the five-year plan to rebuild the Zairian army. At the same time, Mobutu sought to improve his standing in Washington. By gaining the support of American Jewish Organizations through Israeli mediation, he sought to influence the US Congress, lobby for Zaire and encourage Jewish businessmen to invest in his country. Other SSA regimes, notably Eyadéma's Togo, Samuel Doe's Liberia and Paul Biya's Cameroon followed the Zairian model (Heller, 2012).

Simultaneously, a competition developed between the neighbouring two middle powers of the Global South, Israel and Egypt, the latter representing Palestinian and Arab interests, across Sub-Saharan Africa for almost two decades, from 1957 to 1974 (Siniver & Tsourapas, 2023). The Israeli and Egyptian soft power strategies did not explicitly aim to change the target states' position on the Arab-Israeli conflict. Instead, both sought to support the socio-economic development of these states. Israel's aid cooperation with SSA has been instrumental in breaking its isolation in the region, and bilateral relations enjoyed a so-called 'golden age' (Akçayi & Anli, 2013). SSA thus became a proxy area of ideological and strategic competition between the two rivals. While Israel focused on development aid, provided by the Agency for International Development Cooperation (MASHAV), founded in 1958. Egypt concentrated on educational exchanges and public campaigns. The coalition building continued unabated despite Egypt's military and economic collapse following the 1967 Arab–Israeli Six-Day War. However, Israel's seizure of Syria's Golan Heights, the West Bank (including East Jerusalem), and Egypt's Sinai Peninsula as well as the Egyptian-occupied Gaza Strip and the subsequent large-scale displacement of civilian populations had long-term consequences. Israel's open violation of the internationally established principle of territorial integrity, which was of great importance to African countries in the context of disputed colonial borders, as well as political pressure from the Soviet Union and Arab states (e.g. Libya), often combined with financial and economic support from these countries, hampered cooperation severely (Wojnarowicz, 2017). Despite the dramatic break in diplomatic relations with Israel in the early 1970s, several African countries maintained contacts with Israel at a lower level. They used foreign embassies as intermediaries (e.g. the Swedish embassy in Ethiopia and Tanzania, the Italian embassy in Uganda and the Danish embassy in Zaire), while educational and commercial exchanges continued, albeit at a much-reduced level and away from the public eye. Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere, the founder of Ujamaa socialism, for example, remarked that Africans would not allow their friends to decide who their enemies should be. As late as May 1973, Arab members of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) were frustrated by the refusal of their African counterparts to take a united stand against Israel (Siniver & Tsourapas, 2023).

Yet, the Israel-African cooperation only unravelled definitely when it came into conflict with the growing international self-image of African states in the early 1970s (Siniver & Tsourapas, 2023) and the Yom Kippur War of 1973, when most Sub-Saharan states broke off relations with Israel, except for Apartheid South Africa. The negative perception of Israel was also influenced by its security cooperation, including nuclear armament, established in the 1970s with the apartheid regime in Pretoria. Only in 1987, when Israel, which found itself isolated by the developed Western nations, notably the EU and U.S., in still maintaining strong relations with apartheid South Africa, it joined the West in opposing apartheid (Tal, 2012; Mizroch, 2006). All this resulted in Israel's political and economic withdrawal from Africa, although limited cooperation was maintained with key allies, such as Kenya (Wojnarowicz, 2017).

However, ten years later, in September 1983, after the Israel-Lebanese Peace Accord (17 May 1983), SSA countries like Senegal, Togo, Ivory Coast, Gabon, Central African Republic and Cameroon announced their intention to re-establish foreign relations (Nouhou, 2003). Since the 1990s, relations have improved considerably, following the end of the Cold War and the start of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. However, the return to closer relations with SSA only began after Benjamin Netanyahu became prime minister in 2009. In 2016, he announced an intensification of political activity in this direction under the motto *Israel is coming back to Africa, Africa is coming back to Israel*. Israel now maintains relations with 40 Sub-Saharan African states, some of which have adopted a more pro-Israeli stance than before (Wojnarowicz, 2017).

At the 51st ordinary ECOWAS summit, held in early June 2017 in Liberia, Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was one of the speakers at the summit. This was the first visit of an Israeli prime minister to Sub-Saharan Africa in 30 years. The renewed Israeli interest was last, but not least, due to its desire to secure Africa's diplomatic backing on Israel-related issues in international forums such as the UN. Israel also offered cooperation on counterterrorism and economic development. Among others, it signed a four-year US$ 1bn treaty to develop green energy projects across the (ECOWAS). During the ECOWAS summit, Netanyahu urged West African leaders to vote for an African-Israel summit in October to be held in Lomé to intensify cooperation. This summit, the first-ever, was meant to consolidate the rapprochement between Israel and several African states which had been made a diplomatic priority of the Israeli government. Togo had longstanding friendly ties with Tel Aviv, notably concerning close cooperation with Israel's security services (Mossad) that had provided sophisticated advice, hard- and software already since the reign of late General Eyadéma. In 2021, the internationally renowned Citizen Lab (Toronto), revealed that the government in Lomé, as well as other SSA states like Rwanda, had used a highly sophisticated Israeli spyware 'Pegasus' to target Catholic clerics and Civil Society militants to spy on mobile phones and internet traffic of the opposition. Officially, the software had been sold to the government in Lomé to fight terrorism and serious crime. South African president Cyril Ramaphosa was revealed to have been selected as a potential target of Pegasus surveillance, possibly by Rwanda (Jones & Abramov & Patrucic, 2022). Another remarkable provision had been already in 2013 when Israel delivered Lomé listening and security material to the tune of more than € 144 m, i.e. about double the budget of Togolese's army. Togo counted also to the few developing countries that voted along with the U.S. against the UN resolution condemning President Trump's decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel at the end of 2017. However, there was a controversy about the expediency of the Israel-Africa summit. It was questioned because of reservations of Maghreb Africa, South Africa and the Arab world concerning Israel's position on the Palestine question. Some Islamic African countries like Gabon, Niger, Mali, and Mauritania looked at the official intrusion of Israel into Africa as a provocation and called for a boycott of the summit. Still, in September, Senegal condemned Israel's creeping colonisation of Palestine territory. Member states of the OCI (Organisation de la Conference Islamique), to which Togo belonged already since 1997, furiously demanded reprisals against Togo. Faure Gnassingbé, who had visited Jerusalem in September 2019 succeeded nevertheless in convincing most of his pairs to hold the Africa-Israel summit. The conference took place in Lomé from 24. to 26. October 2019, with about 30 of 55 African states represented, among them Rwanda, Kenya, Uganda, Congo Brazzaville, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana (Kohnert, 2019).

A crucial factor in Israel's new Africa strategy was also the desire to limit Iran's influence on the continent. Israel attached great importance to developing security cooperation, especially against Islamic terrorism. For example, it assisted Kenya in its fight against the terrorist group al-Shabab and remained a supplier of arms to the region (Wojnarowicz, 2017).

Another important issue for Israel was the stabilisation of the Horn of Africa, which was of geostrategic importance to 'secure its flank'. Tel Aviv wanted to prevent the closure of the Straits of Bab-el-Mandeb and thus ensure freedom of navigation through the Red Sea. This led, among other things, to the development of close military cooperation with Ethiopia. Both countries had a common interest in preventing Eritrean separatists from succeeding, as an independent Muslim Eritrea could collaborate with Arab states to close the Red Sea. The leftist Ethiopian military regime of the Derg era (1974-1991) did not deter Tel Aviv because of its overriding national interests in the Red Sea region. Israel therefore also supported Ethiopia in its border war with Somalia (1977–1978 Ogaden War). Later on, Israel became particularly worried by Iran's eagerness to improve relations with Eritrea and by Eritrea's arming of fanatically anti-Israeli Somali Al-Shabaab jihadists (Tal, 2012).

Moreover, Israel's interest in the Horn of Africa was directly linked to the immigration pressures that had been affecting Israel since the 2000s. In 2016, there were an estimated 40,000 African refugees in Israel, mostly from Sudan and Eritrea (Wojnarowicz, 2017). But so far, no Sub-Saharan African country has renounced support for the Palestinian call for independence or criticism of Israeli policy in the occupied territories. Israel's involvement in Africa is perceived as a threat to the continent's own interests by the Arab states of North Africa, especially Morocco. Also, South Africa maintains a policy critical of Israel, opposes granting it observer status in the African Union and supports the pro-Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, modelled after the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa (Wojnarowicz, 2017). Moreover, anti-Semitism is on the rise in SSA, particularly in South Africa, which has the largest concentration of Jews on the continent. They played an important role in promoting diplomatic and military relations between Israel and South Africa (Mizroch, 2006). Ironically, the anti-Jewish stereotype of 'the Jew' developed by the Christian tradition was ultimately far more pernicious and entrenched than that developed in Islam. Today, Muslim anti-Semitism, generally couched in anti-Zionist terms, appears the more threatening of the two (Hellig, 2000).

Finally, Israel's extended periphery strategy included the Sudan as early as the 1950s. In 1956, Israel established contact with the pro-Western Umma Muslim Party, a nationalist party that distanced itself from close ties with Egypt. In 1963, Tel Aviv began a covert operation to support separatist rebels in southern Sudan. These covert operations were coordinated with the U.S. After the 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement on Southern Sudan, Israel continued to maintain friendly relations with Khartoum, though mostly in secret. Mossad's activities in Sudan in the 1980s were coordinated with the CIA. The 1985 Sudanese coup d'état put an end to Israel's activities in that country (Tal, 2012). Sudan became all the more important because Iran equally regarded it as crucial because of its geostrategic position. It was close to the Arab world, especially Egypt, and served as a back door into SSA. Tehran used Sudan as a gateway for weapons smuggling. The weapons were delivered through Sudanese sea ports into Egypt and finally to the Gaza Strip and thus posed a serious security risk to Israel (Tal, 2012). Also, Iran invested considerable effort in developing its relations with Kenya, Eritrea, Somalia, Djibouti, Tanzania and the Comoros. Tehran aimed to establish an active naval presence in the Red Sea leading to the Gulf of Eilat and the Suez Canal, making the Red Sea a major Iranian-Israeli line of confrontation (Tal, 2012).

Tel Aviv sought to counter this by reinforcing its East-African relations focusing on security ties (Salman, 2019). It deliberately limited as much as possible the public debate on Israel's security relations in general and with Africa in particular. Nevertheless, in contrast to the official efforts of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to emphasise civil relations and the country's foreign aid to Africa, security ties play a more important role (Salman, 2021). This was in line

with the interests of African regimes that sought Israeli security assistance as a means of ensuring their own survival. Israel's contentious relations with countries on the continent were part of a wider diplomatic effort to block Palestine's bid for international recognition. The diplomatic jostling over Palestine and the pervasive rivalry with Iran are playing out in SSA (Gidron, 2020).

Another motive, at least in some African countries, was that good relations with Israel were seen as positive by the U.S. South Sudan's unwavering political support for Israel at the UN, for example, stemmed in part from its attempts to forge closer ties with the U.S. The same was true of Israel's relations with Rwanda, which reached new heights with the opening of the Israeli embassy in Kigali in April 2019. Rwanda tended to identify with Israel against the backdrop of a shared history of genocide. Relations have grown closer in recent years, largely due to Israel's security exports to Rwanda, which officially began in the early 1990s (Salman, 2021).

Graph 2: *Israel's security exports to Africa, 2009-2019*
*(in billions of US dollars)*
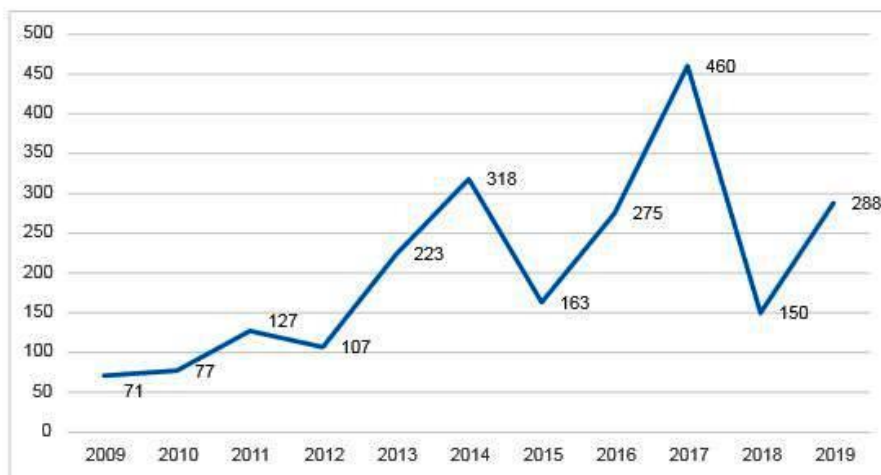
Source: Azoulai, 2013; Dagoni, 2011; Milman, 2018; Mack, 2019; MOD
website, 2017, 2018, 2019, quoted in Salman, 2021, p.46

Security exports to Africa, which amounted to 2 % of all deals in 2018, even doubled in 2019 to 4 %. However, information about the types of weapons, the destination countries, or sales brokered by third parties is lacking. The average annual value of Israel's security exports in the past decade was about US$ 7.5 bn, of which US$ 200-400 million annually were allotted to Africa. While security exports to Africa totalled US$ 71 million in 2009, they had reached US$ 288 million by 2019, an increase of 306%. Moreover, while general security exports remained stable and even declined slightly, from $7.4 billion in 2009 to $7.2 billion in 2019, the volume of security exports to Sub-Saharan Africa grew more significantly, especially in recent years. This shows that security ties are a fundamental and important building block in Israel's relations with African countries, largely because Israel's security interests coincide with those of African states and the survival of their (often autocratic) regimes (Salman, 2021). Nigeria is SSA's leading importer of Israeli arms, accounting for nearly 50 % of all Israeli security exports to SSA. Israel was also one of the top six suppliers of light weapons to Africa, along with Russia, China, the U.S., Germany and Belgium. One of the bestsellers was the Galil assault rifle, which has been widely used, for example, in the South Sudanese Civil War (Salman, 2021).

Jewish population in SSA

Having said this, the Jewish population in SSA has also played an important role in Israel's consideration of SSA.

Graph 3: Proportion of Jewish population in Africa, 2005
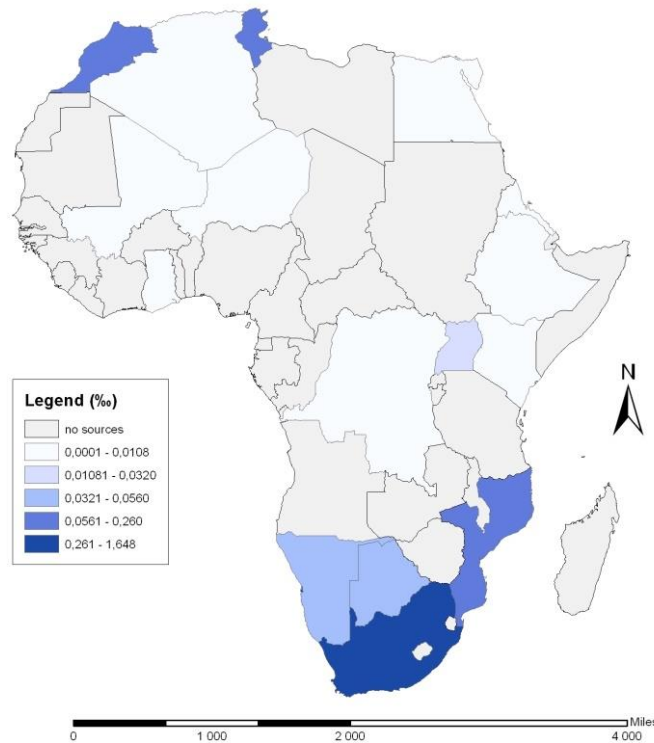
Source: © Faigl Ladislav, 27 December 2007, Wikipedia

Graph 4: World Jewish population by region, 2010 and 2050

	YEAR	REGION'S TOTAL POPULATION	REGION'S JEWISH POPULATION	% JEWS IN REGION
North America	2010	344,530,000	6,040,000	1.8%
	2050	435,420,000	5,920,000	1.4
Middle East-North Africa	2010	341,020,000	5,630,000	1.6
	2050	588,960,000	8,200,000	1.4
Europe	2010	742,550,000	1,420,000	0.2
	2050	696,330,000	1,200,000	0.2
Latin America-Caribbean	2010	590,080,000	470,000	< 0.1
	2050	748,620,000	460,000	< 0.1
Asia-Pacific	2010	4,054,940,000	200,000	< 0.1
	2050	4,937,900,000	240,000	< 0.1
Sub-Saharan Africa	2010	822,730,000	100,000	< 0.1
	2050	1,899,960,000	70,000	< 0.1

Source: The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050
Population estimates are rounded to the nearest 10,000. Percentages are calculated from unrounded numbers.

Source: PRC, 2015

On the other hand, Jewish communities contracted in SSA. In 2010, they were estimated at about 100,000, to shrink to 70,000 in 2050. This negative growth rate of 29 % contrasts sharply with SSA as a whole, where the population is expected to grow by 131 % over the coming decades (PRC, 2015). Their centre shifted from long-established South African (estimated between 52,000 and 88,000 Jews) [5] and Ethiopian communities, known as Beta Israel, from the area of the former Kingdom of Aksum and the Ethiopian Empire, which is currently divided between Eritrea and the Amhara and Tigray regions of Ethiopia, with an estimated number of 8,000 Jews in 2019 [6] (Dolsten, 2019), to emerging ones in West and Central Africa[7]. An outer circle included African ethnic groups that claimed ancient Hebrew lineage but still adhered to institutionalized Christianity (Protestant or Catholic) or indigenous African belief systems, or a combination of these. A middle circle encompassed groups that modified their practices and beliefs to resemble Jewish or Israelite religion but in fundamentally non-religious ways, for example, by practising priestly sacrifice or retaining Jesus Christ as a messianic criterion. The core ring represented those African communities that adopted normative Judaism, albeit with Africanized accretions (Miles, 2019).

Graph 5: Jewish population growth compared with overall growth by world region, 2010 to 2050
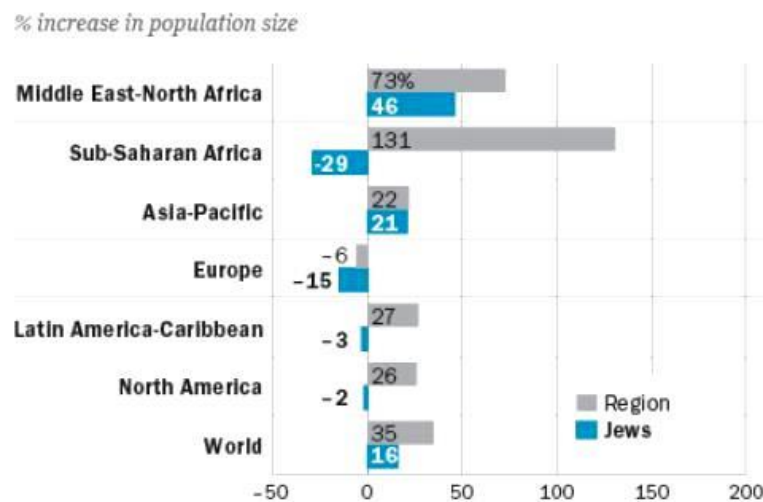
Source: The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050

Source: PRC, 2015

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[5] The number of South African Jews peaked during the apartheid era with an estimated 125,000. At the end of the apartheid regime, many Jews emigrated to the USA.

[6] Since 1975 tens of thousands of Ethiopian Beta Israel Jews were air-lifted to Israel. Significant immigration to Israel continued into the 21st century, producing an Ethiopian Jewish community of around 81,000 immigrants, who with their 39,000 children born in Israel itself, numbered around 120,000 by early 2009 (History of the Jews in Africa, Wikipedia). Most of the community made aliyah from Ethiopia to Israel in two waves of mass immigration assisted by the Israeli government: Operation Moses (1984), and Operation Solomon (1991) (Weil, 2011); see also Ethiopian Jews in Israel, Wikipedia.

[7] For renowned Jewish personalities in SSA see the List of Jews from Sub-Saharan Africa, Wikipedia.

3. Case studies of Israel's relations with Africa

What follows is an analysis of the problems and potential of Israel's foreign relations with Sub-Saharan Africa, based on case studies of the two most important SSA countries, South Africa and Nigeria, supplemented by Eritrea and Rwanda, both of which have special, albeit different, relations with Israel, the former as a major source of African migrants in Israel, the latter as the host of African migrants deported by Israel in exchange for money, as will be shown below.

3.1 South Africa

Cartoon 4: *Still, apartheid exists*

Source: © Sabaaneh, *Middle East Monitor*
South Africa stands with Palestine, Baroud, 2023

Israel had contacts with South Africa already during the late colonial period, between 1948 and 1961. At the time of independence of most African nations, in the 1960s, Israel joined several United Nations anti-apartheid initiatives and reduced its representation in Pretoria to a consular level. In keeping with its efforts to court the new states of Sub-Saharan Africa, Israeli officials avoided any unnecessary association with the South African apartheid regime. Following the 1967 Arab-Israeli Six-Day War, Israel's attitude towards South Africa softened. In a period of transition, between 1967 and 1973, Tel Aviv made efforts to re-establish trade and commercial contacts. However, the Yom Kippur War of October 1973 marked a turning point in Israeli-South African interactions. The subsequent Arab oil embargo in 1973, and the fact that by the end of 1973, all but four African states had severed diplomatic relations with Israel, led to a drastic reversal of previous trends (Tal, 2012).

Israel's condemnation in the Arab world, followed by the rejection of continuing foreign relations with Israel by most SSA states, led to a reversal of Israel's relations with Pretoria. Israel equally absented itself from anti-apartheid votes at the UN. Bilateral foreign relations with South Africa blossomed into a full-grown relationship embracing economic and military support, including nuclear cooperation. South Africa had bilateral agreements with the United States, the United Kingdom and Israel for uranium supply to construct six nuclear devices, in violation of a UN arms embargo against South Africa of 1977, at which the United Nations General Assembly resolutions expressed alarm (Das, 2020).

Israel and South Africa became strategic partners. This lasted until 1987, when Israel, who found itself alone among the developed nations, notably the EU and U.S., in still maintaining

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strong relations with apartheid South Africa, joined the West in opposing apartheid to prevent further isolation, mainly as a consequence of American pressure (Tal, 2012; Mizroch, 2006).

With the dawn of the apartheid regime and the 1994 South African general election, the first in which citizens of all 'races' were allowed to take part, the sting of accusations directed towards Israel in Africa due to its prior cooperation with the apartheid regime weakened (Tal, 2012). Relations remained cordial under Nelson Mandela, South Africa's first black president (1994-1999). Since then, however, they have deteriorated sharply, with South Africa's position tipping in favour of the Palestinians, thanks in part to the historic alliance between the African National Congress and the Palestine Liberation Organisation, concerning its common enemy, the 'Apartheid regime' in South Africa and Israel (Polakow-Suransky, 2010; Tal, 2012).

The deterioration of Israeli-South African relations culminated on 18 February 2023 at the opening ceremony of the African Union (AU) in Addis Ababa, when the Israeli ambassador, Sharon Bar-Li and her delegation who had an unofficial observer status[8], were escorted out of the opening. In a matter of seconds, twenty years of Israeli diplomacy courting SSA countries were exposed as a failure in Africa. Tel Aviv was furious, accusing a 'small number of extremist states such as South Africa and Algeria' of spearheading a campaign to block Israel's observer status. It claimed that Iran had masterminded the move by African governments 'driven by hatred' of Israel (Baroud, 2023).

But in fact, already the OAU, the forerunner to the AU, had identified Israel's founding ideology, Zionism, as a form of racism at its 12th ordinary session in Kampala in 1975. Three weeks after the AU's 2023 decision, the South African parliament voted in favour of a motion to downgrade the country's embassy in Tel Aviv to a mere liaison office. This, too, was described as a 'first step' aimed at compelling Israel to 'respect human rights, recognise the rights of the Palestinian people (and) their right to exist' (Baroud, 2023).

Cartoon 5: *'Apartheid' in South Africa and Palestine*

Source: © Carlos Latuff, *jadaliyya.com*, Reynolds, 2011

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[8] Israel's observer status at the AU had been discussed controversially by African member states. It has caused a rift among AU members. Approval was given unilaterally by the Chair of the AU Commission, the Chadian Moussa Faki Mahamat, in July 2021. Because of the sharp protest of other members, the observer status was suspended. Later-on, Mahamat even came up with the claim that 'we did not invite Israeli officials to our summit.' (Baroud, 2023).

Also, the question, of whether Israeli rule in Palestine should be characterised as an apartheid regime was disputed. According to an oft-quoted diction of Nelson Mandela, *"South Africa will never be free until Palestine is free"*[9]. The comparison emerged with a vengeance in the mid-1990s and early 2000s, notably when the 2002 Rome Statute defined apartheid as a crime in 2002, and thereby shifted attention to the question of international law. In December 2019, the UN Committee on the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination announced the opening of a review of Palestinian complaints that Israeli policies in the West Bank amount to apartheid (Staff, 2019).

In April 2021, Human Rights Watch became the first major international human rights organisation to accuse Israel of apartheid, calling for Israeli officials to be prosecuted under international law and for an investigation by the International Criminal Court. Amnesty International followed suit on 1 February 2022 (Holmes, 2021). There are worldwide some of the most renowned Holocaust and anti-Semitism researchers from Israel, the United States and the European Union who share this conviction. A recently published petition, co-initiated by the Israeli-born historian Omer Bartov, one of the most respected Holocaust and genocide researchers, states that 'there can be for Jews in Israel no democracy as long as Palestinians live under what Israeli lawyers have characterized as an apartheid regime.' (Goldberg, 2023). The European Commission, and other scholars, on the other hand, consider the ascription as 'not appropriate' (Zilbershats, 2013; Würdemann, 2023). In short, it seems as if *raison d'état* and *Realpolitik* have a significant influence on the academic discussion of this controversial issue.

Yet, there were enough similarities or approximations between 'apartheid' in South Africa and Israel to belong to the same family of settler colonialism, built on various forms of exclusion, exploitation, displacement and confinement. While apartheid as an ideological and governmental system was eventually dismantled in South Africa, in Palestine settler colonialism continues apace within a state that has adapted well to neoliberal economic imperatives and continues to receive almost unqualified support from the U.S. (Peteet, 2016). This comparison, and the pro-Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, modelled on the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, which draws upon it, prompts alternative cognitive frames of understanding. By undermining claims of uniqueness, the comparison has a potency that goes well beyond moral endorsement. It has the capacity to mobilise people to action. Above all, apartheid is no longer portrayed as the sole South African form of colonialism. In doing so, it challenges the notion that the Jewish state is a unique historical phenomenon, somehow inherently different from other social formations and therefore above the usual fray of debate, critique and sanction (Peteet, 2016).

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[9] Here, and in the following see Israel and apartheid, Wikipedia.

3.2 Israel-Nigeria relations

Graph 6:. *Security cooperation driven by greed* [10]
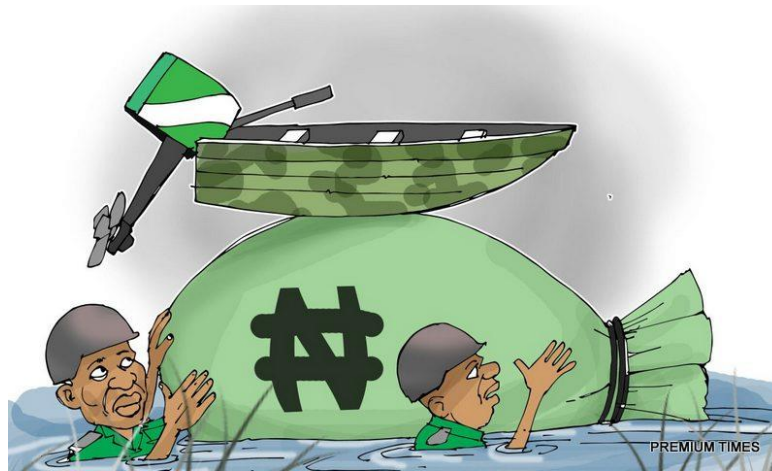
Source: © Premium Times, Emmanuel, 2018

As Nigeria gained independence in 1960, the dealings between its political elite and its post-colonial imaginaries were inspired by Israel, and Israeli diplomats helped advance the ideological aspirations, economic ventures, development schemes and political agendas that defined the era (Schler, 2022). Israeli diplomats first arrived in Lagos in 1957, offering support for a variety of economic and political ventures. Israel's commercial interests and technical expertise coincided with the search for resources, strategies and alliances to meet the challenges of decolonisation. Beyond material aid, the relationship reflected broader ideological currents that sought alternatives to the metropole-colonial axis within the global system of the Cold War era. This outreach was part of Israel's broader incursion into Africa. It aimed to offset the hostilities emanating from the Middle East conflict by winning over allies among the newly established nations of the postcolonial era. Relations between Lagos and Tel Aviv during the First Nigerian Republic (1963-1966) were primarily driven by the specific political circumstances in Nigeria and the challenges that Nigeria's political elite faced in the highly contested process of nation-building. Nigeria was burdened with a political structure that was regrettably incapable of delivering on the promises of autonomy, democracy and sovereignty (Schler, 2022). Until 1973, Nigerian farmers, educators, students, academics, doctors, community workers and engineers received training in Israel, which in turn sent experts to help with the development and modernisation of Nigeria (Paul, 2014).

Moreover, during much of the Cold War, Egypt and Israel were actively engaged in a rivalry for influence in African affairs that affected Nigeria to varying degrees. Nigeria had the largest Muslim population and economy in Sub-Saharan Africa. It was a member of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) among other political, economic, or cultural groupings. Thus, Nigeria had a great deal of influence not only on the continent but also beyond that geographical region as a middle power like South Africa (Bishku, 2021).

The Biafran war (1967-1970) presented Israel with an acute dilemma. It sought to maintain proper relations with the federal government of Nigeria, which regarded any support for the Biafran separatists as an act of hostility. At the same time, the plight of the Igbo people

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[10] Nigerian military chiefs, politicians, and contractors (including Israelis) are believed to have stolen more than Naira 3.1 trillion (US $ 4.05 bn.) through arms procurement contracts (Emmanuel, 2018).

reminded many Israelis of the Holocaust. The Israeli public, press and parliament called for aid to Biafra, citing their country's deep moral obligation to help a people in need. Israel did provide aid to Biafra, including the covert supply of weapons demanded by the secessionists, as well as humanitarian aid. At the same time, Israel also sold arms to Nigeria to avoid a diplomatic rupture with the government in Lagos, which would have affected Israel's position throughout black Africa (Levy, 2012).

Thus, the security and military dimension reflected Israel's relations with Nigeria back to the 1960s. Israel's Defence Ministry encouraged these ties and began to penetrate the Nigerian weapons market immediately after independence (Levy, 2012). In the period 2006-2010, for example, Israel supplied various types of large weapons to several SSA countries, including Nigeria. Nigeria was the leading African importer of Israeli weapons, accounting for almost 50 % of all Israel's security exports to SSA. Israel was also one of the six main suppliers of light weapons to Africa, together with Russia, China, the United States, Germany, and Belgium. Evidence of Israeli-manufactured weapons (improved Galil, Uzi, and Tavor rifles and Negev machine guns) in the hands of Africans, including Nigerian soldiers and Islamists was probably also an indicator of covered arms trade (Salman, 2021). Nigeria's security contracting was penetrated by large-scale corruption, including Israeli contractors (Emmanuel, 2018). Moreover, Israel trained the Nigerian navy. Israel's security expertise remained very relevant for Nigeria, because of threats from radical Islamist groups that were flourishing in West Africa (Salman, 2021).

At the time of the Yom Kippur War (1973), Lagos broke diplomatic relations with Tel Aviv on 25 October 1973, citing the latter's cease-fire violations of UN Security Council Resolution 338 as it sought to gain more territory on the west bank of the Suez Canal at the close of the conflict. Also in 1982, Nigeria allowed the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to open an office in Lagos because it was upset with Israel's war in Lebanon (Bishku, 2021).

Diplomatic relations were resumed in September 1992, and the following year Nigeria opened its first embassy in Tel Aviv, and Israel in the new capital Abuja. Since then, booming trade, bilateral relations and strong diplomatic ties have made Nigeria Israel's strongest African ally (Paul, 2014). In 2013, Goodluck Jonathan (2010-2015) became the first Nigerian president to visit Israel. He went on a pilgrimage and signed bilateral air services agreements with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (Cashman, 2013).

3.3 Israel-Eritrea relations

Graph 7: *Photos of Eritrean refugees in Israel*

Source: © The Washington Post, 10 September 2022

Eritrea once had a considerable Jewish community. Asmara's buzzing Jewish community, for example, peaked at about 500 people in the 1950s. The history of the Jews in Eritrea goes back many centuries. In recent decades it has been fuelled by immigrants who have come for economic reasons and to escape persecution. The community flourished for several decades before mass emigration began during the Eritrean War of Independence with Ethiopia (Harris, 2006).

Egypt and the Arab League took the Eritrean War of Independence as an integral part of the Arab-Israeli conflict and considered the Eritrean insurrection as a struggle against Zionism. The Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) fought against Emperor Haile Selassie, who claimed descent from Solomon, the king of ancient Israel (Bekele, 2022). Therefore, Tel Aviv considered the Eritrean liberation struggle as supported by Arab states and feared that a pro-Arab independent Eritrea would block Israeli passage through the Red Sea. By 1967, Ethiopian troops, trained by Israeli advisors, had taken control over much of Eritrea (Eritrea–Israel relations, Wikipedia).

However, for geo-strategic reasons, Israel and Eritrea established diplomatic relations in 1993 following Eritrean independence. The basis for the Israeli strategy was the understanding by the involved parties that, despite specific political disagreements, they share certain security and economic interests for which an alliance can provide concrete, mutual benefits, especially countering the growing regional influences of Iran and Turkey (Guzansky, 2021). Bilateral relations between Israel and Eritrea improved considerably since the life-saving hospitalisation of Eritrean President Isaias Afewerki in Israel in 1993. The relationship is complex, given Israel's historic support for Ethiopia in suppressing the Eritrean revolt against Ethiopian imperial and then revolutionary rule after the fall of Emperor Haile Selassie. However, it is vital to Israel's security interests, given its proximity to Somalia and its ability to act as a barrier against Somali Islamist organisations working with Hamas and Iran (Lubotzky & Mehari, 2021).

Unlike other countries, which see Eritrea primarily as a partner for economic cooperation, Israel's interest is largely security-based. This is due to Eritrea's geo-strategic location on the Horn of Africa and its access to the Red Sea at the strait of Bab-el-Mandeb, i.e. the mouth to

the Red Sea at the Gulf of Aden, the sea route to Israel's harbour at the Red Sea, Eilat, and to Yemen and Saudi Arabia. In Eritrea, Israel operates shipping ports and a monitoring station as part of efforts to stop Iranian arms smuggling to Hamas and Hezbollah (Salman, 2023; Lubotzky & Mehari, 2021).

But Israel is also a close ally of Ethiopia and one of its main arms suppliers and Tel Aviv backed Addis Ababa in the Eritrean–Ethiopian War (Salman, 2021). Also, in the Tigray War (2020-2022), fought in the Tigray Region, bordered by Eritrea to the north, between forces allied to the Ethiopian federal government and Eritrea on one side, and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) on the other, Israel and the Gulf states were in a dilemma regarding how to relate to the events in Ethiopia (Salman, 2023). On the one hand, Addis Ababa is a regional ally. On the other hand, both have no substantive ideological objection to the Tigrayan rebels. In a scenario of a Tigrayan victory and an eventual removal of Ethiopia's Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed, who was awarded the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize for his decisive initiative to resolve the border conflict with neighbouring Eritrea, Egypt and Israel do not want to be damaged by a to close identification with the regime. They also had to consider the position of the U.S., which has been critical of Ethiopia's involvement in the Tigray War and were concerned about the strengthening of Ethiopian-Turkish and Ethiopian-Russian relations. Israel has good relations with Addis Ababa, for example, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed visited Israel in 2019. Israel is interested in a strong and united Ethiopia as a basis for regional stability and as a force against Islamist extremism, as well as a potential civilian and military client. The collapse or significant weakening of the Ethiopian state could lead to instability around the Red Sea, which in turn could affect Israeli interests and encourage the strengthening of forces hostile to Israel, such as Iran or global jihadist groups (Lubotzky & Mehari, 2021).

Moreover, the hydro-politics of the Nile and its riparian states had a decisive impact on Ethiopia's relations with Eritrea and, by extension, Eritrea's foreign relations with Israel. The downstream states, mainly Egypt and Sudan, used various means to obstruct Ethiopia's water development programmes, thereby fanning the flames of Eritrean independence and its armed struggle. The moral and material support of the two downstream states for the Eritrean secessionists was a direct result of Nile hydro-politics (Bekele, 2022).

Cartoon 8: *The Israeli Intervention in Africa* [11]
Israel protects Ethiopia's water resources: the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam

Source: © in cartoon, *Daily News Egypt*, 10 July 2016

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[11] Cartoon tagged: *Ethiopia, GERD, Israel, Netanyahu, water.*

This has had an impact on the ongoing struggle between Ethiopia and the downstream states over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), backed and secured by Israeli aid, including the advanced mobile Spyder-MR air defence system. By extension, this impacted also Eritrea's foreign relations with Israel (Zaher, 2019; DEBKA-file, 2019).

Since Ethiopia announced the construction of the GERD in April 2011, under Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki had been vocal in his opposition to the dam. As a result, Addis Ababa has repeatedly accused Cairo of using Eritrea to pressure and destabilise Ethiopia. However, since the inauguration of Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ali in 2018 and the signing of the peace agreement with Asmara in July 2018, there have been signs of rapprochement between Ethiopia and Eritrea. When Afwerki visited the site of the GERD during his official visit to Ethiopia on 13 October 2020, he showed approval of the dam (Aman, 2020). Given Eritrea's own dispute with the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), good relations with Addis Ababa served Afwerki's own interests. The shift in Eritrea's position came amid escalating tensions within Ethiopia, where Abiy Ahmed's government was facing difficulties from the Tigrayan opposition. Afwerki's visit to the dam site was primarily linked to conditions at home in both Ethiopia and Eritrea, namely the confrontation with the TPLF, which threatened peace between the two countries. However, the change in the Eritrean president's stance from opposition to support for the GERD could not be considered final, given the dynamics of the region, which are closely linked to historical components and ethnic problems (Aman, 2020).

Already before, the ELF had used the Nile issue to play off Sudan against Ethiopia, by granting land concession near or around Ali Ghidir, at the Ethiopian border region in Eritrea, irrigated from the Gash River, to extend its cultivable area for the Italian Agricultural Company B.I.A. Moreover, the Sudanese government in Khartoum suspected that the Ethiopian government had given an agricultural land concession to the Israelis in Western Eritrea, particularly near the Gash River (Bekele, 2022).

According to the official figures of Israel Population and Immigration Authority, there are currently about 25,500 adult asylum seekers living in Israel (compared with the unofficial estimates of about 40,000 African migrants in Israel). The majority (91%) are from dictatorial Eritrea and war-torn Sudan, i.e. about 20,000 from Eritrea and about 4,000 from Sudan. In addition, it is estimated that there are about 8,000 children of asylum seekers growing up in Israel, most of whom were born in Israel (ASSAF, 2023). The Africans began arriving in Israel through its porous border with Egypt between 2005 and 2012 after Egyptian forces violently suppressed a refugee demonstration in Cairo and word spread of safety and job opportunities in Israel. Tens of thousands crossed the desert border, often after enduring perilous journeys (Staff, 2023). However, Israel's recognition rate of asylum seekers is very low. In 2020, authorities had granted asylum to less than 0.1% of applications (Ahmedin, 2023).

On 2 September 2023, riots broke out in Tel Aviv between rival groups of Eritrean migrants, in a fight split along the lines of supporters and opponents of the country's autocratic regime (Staff, 2023). Israeli police suppressed the riots, and Benjamin Netanyahu called again for the asylum seekers to be deported (see also the following section on Rwanda). Israel has a long-standing policy of protecting spies of the Eritrean regime in Israel. Already in 2019, Amnesty International published a report on the long reach of the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), the ruling and sole legal political party in Eritrea, and the way it extorts refugees who have fled the country (Dolev-Hashiloni, 2023).

3.4 Israel-Rwanda relations

Graph 9: *Cordial 'joint-greeting' of [Kagame](#) visiting Israel by President [Reuven Rivlin](#) and Prime Minister [Netanyahu](#)* [12]

Source: © John Nyagah, NMG, Kayumba, 2107

Israel's diplomatic relations with [Rwanda](#) were established in 1962, shortly after the African state's independence. They were broken off by the Rwandan government on 8 October 1973 because of the [Yom Kippur War](#). But in the [post-Cold War era](#), especially after the 1994 [Rwandan genocide](#) against the [Tutsi](#) minority, which eventually brought President [Paul Kagame](#) to power, Rwanda established a reputation as one of [Israel's](#) best friends in [Sub-Saharan Africa](#) (Bishku, 2019). The two countries resumed relations in 1994. Since the genocide, the government in [Kigali](#) has taken a more progressive stance on the division of power and religious institutions and the promotion of religious freedoms, which has benefited the local Muslim population.

[Judaism](#), a previously unknown religion in the region, influenced Rwandan identity formation through the shared experience of [genocide](#). Jewish identity was increasingly linked to the nation's own reconstructed identity, with a strong focus on historical persecution, post-genocide reconstruction and development (Beloff, 2022). In 2016, [Benjamin Netanyahu](#) paid an official visit to Rwanda. The following year, Kagame became the first African leader to address the annual forum of the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee ([AIPAC](#)) in Washington D.C. Israel subsequently announced that it would open an embassy in Rwanda, one of less than a dozen in Africa (Bishku, 2019).

Before the genocide, Rwanda's main ally in the international system was [France](#). After the genocide, [Paris](#) was not only hostile to the Rwandan Patriotic Front ([RPF](#))-led government but also refused to acknowledge any role in the genocide. This motivated the country's new leaders to find 'new' friends. [Great Britain](#), for example, which didn't even have an embassy in Rwanda before the genocide, became a key ally and major donor alongside the [United States](#). Rwanda even joined the [Commonwealth](#) and adopted English as one of its three official languages (Kayumba, 2107).

The Rwandan government's support for Israel and its right to self-defence during the 2014 Israel-Hamas [Gaza war](#) should be seen in the context of the ever-growing relationship between the two states. However, by strategically supporting Israel's response to Hamas attacks, Rwanda was also able to justify its own actions against the ethnic [Hutu](#) group [FDLR](#).

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[12] When President Paul Kagame visited Israel in July 2017, *The Jerusalem Post* reported that he enjoyed a "rare joint greeting" by both the country's President [Reuven Rivlin](#) and Prime Minister [Netanyahu,](#) something not even accorded to US President [Donal Trump](#) or India's PM [Narendra Modi](#) (Kayumba, 2107).

In addition, Rwandan officials hoped that their commitment to Israel's security would give them preferential access to Israeli military and security technological development in the future. Within the Rwandan government and defence forces, there was a strong desire for the relationship to continue to grow and develop (Beloff, 2016).

Rwanda opened an embassy in Tel Aviv, only to close it six years later for budgetary reasons. But it reopened it in 2015. In April 2019, Israel opened its first embassy in Kigali as part of its efforts to improve relations with African countries. It was its 11th in Sub-Saharan Africa, where Israel maintains full diplomatic relations with 41 out of 46 SSA countries. The occasion was used to announce that Rwanda's national airline, RwandAir, would begin direct flights to Israel (Lazaroff, 2019).

Currently, Rwanda and Israel are enjoying their best relations ever. While Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu received a hero's welcome when he visited Kigali in July 2017, when President Paul Kagame made his return visit one year afterwards, the Jerusalem Post reported that he enjoyed a 'rare joint welcome' from both the country's president, Reuven Rivlin, and Prime Minister Netanyahu, something not even afforded to US President Donal Trump (Kayumba, 2107).

Because relations between the two countries haven't traditionally been warm, due to Cold War politics and Israel's siding with the apartheid system in South Africa, the closeness has caused some discomfort. Some SSA politicians see Rwanda's closeness to Israel as disloyalty to the continent (Kayumba, 2107).

Cartoon 10: *Deal markers in hosting asylum seekers:*
Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu and Rwandan General Paul Kagame

Source: © *The Rwandan*, Mugisha-Fitzpatrick, 2017

Rwanda had accepted tens of thousands of refugees from neighbouring African countries like Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Somalia and South Sudan. Also, it had accepted to receive refugees mostly from Eritrea and Sudan, who had been refused asylum in Israel and who had agreed to a financial settlement to leave the country 'voluntarily'. But Kigali, at least publicly, refused to accept those who would be forcibly deported, as the Israeli government has since December 2017 (Bishku, 2019). For hosting what Benjamin Netanyahu called 'infiltrators' mostly from Eritrea and Sudan, Israel was prepared to pay the Kagame regime US$ 5,000 for every deported 'infiltrator'. In addition, Israel would pay each

'infiltrator' US$ 3,500 and their airfare in case he should leave out of own consent (Himbara, 2023; Mugisha-Fitzpatrick, 2017).

Around 4,000 migrants have left Israel for Rwanda and Uganda under a 'voluntary' programme since 2013, but Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has come under pressure from his right-wing electoral base to expel thousands more. After pulling out of an UN-backed relocation plan in 2017, Israel shifted its efforts to finalising a deal to send the migrants to Uganda against their will. Several migrant rights groups have petitioned the Israeli Supreme Court to block such a policy (Editors MEM, 2018).

The long-standing controversy in international refugee law over the concept of safe third countries is particularly challenging, in part because it allows host states to deny protection obligations by arguing that the hardships that compel the movement if they do not amount to a violation of the fundamental principle of international law of non-refoulement, are not fundamentally different from those faced by the national urban poor. Since 2005, increasing numbers of Sub-Saharan African refugees have crossed the Sinai border from Egypt into Israel, most reporting that the harsh living conditions and acute vulnerability to violence and exploitation in Egypt left them with no choice but to move on illegally (Wankel, 2021). These migrants risked their lives passing through Egyptian Sinai. Israel's response to the flow of refugees as well as potential Islamist terrorists has been the construction of a hermetically sealed fence along its border, built and reinforced from 201 to 2013 (Anteby-Yemini, 2013).

By 2018, however, Israel's human trafficking deal with a 'third country' had collapsed. Under pressure on Kigali from the U.S. New Israel Fund and persuasion from the European Union, Rwanda withdrew from the agreement and refused to accept 'infiltrators' from Israel (Tingle, 2022). Of the estimated 4,000 African refugees who have been deported to Rwanda and Uganda, almost all have fled and made the dangerous journey to Europe. Along the way, many faced brutal human traffickers, ISIS militants and a deadly Mediterranean crossing. Others have been imprisoned, beaten and subjected to slavery in Libya (Tingle, 2022).

4. African migrants in Israel

Cartoon 11: *Forced deportation of African asylum seekers by Israel*

Source: © Sabaaneh, *Middle East Monitor*, 24 April 2018

Labour migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa began arriving in Israel in the early 1990s. Since the 'Arab Spring' in 2011, the entry of migrants through the Sinai desert increased, pushing the Israeli government to take drastic measures to close the borders. On 7 June 2012, the Israeli government obtained authorisation from an Israeli court to extradite Ivorian and South Sudanese migrants present on the territory, considering that they could now be returned to their country of origin without any threat to their safety. They were given two weeks to surrender to the authorities in return for a free return flight and 'compensation' of € 1,000 per adult and € 400 per child. After this two-week deadline, the formation of the Israeli Interior Ministry's immigration and border control authority, the Oz unit, then launched a hunt to stop the recalcitrant people to avoid deportation (Lagarde, 2012).

International Refugee Rights Initiative (IRRI) findings showed that there were two main factors pushing asylum seekers to leave Israel: the country's detention policy and the inability of asylum seekers to obtain a status that would guarantee their rights and provide them with stability in Israel. In reality, they did not receive any legal status. They were left without valid legal documents upon arrival in Kigali and were either encouraged to leave the country, to live under the radar and without legal status, or to hide the fact that they came from Israel. Testimonies collected by IRRI suggested that most, if not all, asylum seekers in Rwanda were smuggled out of the country by land to Kampala (Uganda) within days of arriving in Kigali. They were not given the opportunity to apply for asylum, and even if they wished to stay in Rwanda, their refugee claims could not be assessed because the National Refugee Status Determination Committee had not yet been established (Refworld, 2015).

Although some of SSA migrants had lived in Israel for many years, the lack of a perspective to gain full civic rights led many Africans to view their stay as temporary. This attitude manifested itself, for example, in sending their children back home when they reached school age (Sabar & Gez, 2009). However, since the late 1990s, with the introduction of massive deportations, Africans have chosen instead to keep their children in Israel as part of their emerging struggle for residency rights. Due to the ambiguity created by the unpredictability of state decisions, many African migrants in Israel mistakenly chose their children's lot in addition to their own, raising questions about integration when citizenship status is uncertain (Sabar & Gez, 2009).

As illegal residents in the country, for many years the Africans lived much of their lives in a segregated community with limited links and bridges to Israeli society and culture. However, when in 2005-2006 new regulations were passed, granting residency status to some of their Israeli-born or Israeli-raised children, changes in behaviour were intensified. This had contradictory results. Sending their children to an Israeli school presented African parents with new challenges to their close-knit community and required them to allocate a share of the children's schooling to the melting pot of Israeli citizenship. As a result of school integration, which involved mixing with children who spoke a different language and shared a different religion and social costume, tensions and even alienation from the family's own tradition often arose (Sabar & Gez, 2009).

While the assimilation of children of migrant workers described above was widespread in Israel, the first generation of migrants, who tended to be less well-integrated and, for example, less familiar with the Hebrew language, were somehow trying to stem the tide of alienation from the traditions of their ancestors. For example, many African migrants were taken to national and ethnic festivals by their parents. They learned their parents' language and generally maintained some knowledge of and engagement with their family's traditions. However, some close observers foresaw what many African children would soon experience for themselves, that the forced deportation of parents could condemn a child to social and cultural exile in their parents' homeland. In Israel, for the most part, the children of African migrants have shown a remarkable desire to integrate and belong to Israeli society, and to be more Israeli than the Israelis, not least through active participation in the public Hebrew-language education system (Sabar & Gez, 2009).

As far as Israel was facing thousands of new African migrants, mainly refugees from Sudan and Eritrea, it was even more important to pursue a clear policy towards non-Jewish migrants in general and their children in particular. The Israeli state's reluctance to formulate a clear policy towards its non-Jewish migrants and their children affected the ethno-religious foundations of the state. The legitimate concerns of migrants were perceived by Israeli politicians as a challenge to its definition as the homeland of the Jewish people and were therefore rejected or ignored. However, within Israel's informal policy, regulations were formed between the migrants themselves through long and complex processes of daily negotiations, official state representatives and human rights organizations (Sabar & Gez, 2009).

The fate of the some 40,000 asylum seekers (in 2018) in their country divided Israeli society. On the one hand, government policies of exclusion and a political discourse of criminalisation, as well as xenophobia, express hostility towards this non-Jewish migration. On the other hand, an unexpected mobilisation of civil society in favour of African refugees highlighted a duty of hospitality towards these populations seeking asylum, using the Jewish past to legitimise their reception. In places of daily coexistence, opposing dynamics were also reported. They testified to the spatial, social and political marginalisation of Sub-Saharan migrants, on the one hand, and to their *de facto* incorporation into the labour market, educational institutions, culture, leisure and local consumption practices, on the other (Anteby-Yemini, 2020).

In addition to the harsher treatment of these migrants, new challenges emerged, such as the management of the deaths of migrants without official status or the performance of their burial rituals in the Israeli urban space (Anteby-Yemini, 2018). The Sudanese and Eritrean communities illustrated situations where the political ties between these diasporas and their countries of origin diverged, leading to different management of the deceased in migration,

either on the deadly route through the Sinai desert, at the sealed Sinai border, or in the host country (Anteby-Yemini, 2018).

In the case of the Sudanese, they were forced to a mortuary 'stay' in the country of exile, redefining a new territorialization in Israel that did not correspond to the migratory projects of this community in search of asylum in a Western country. In the case of Eritreans, the posthumous return to the country of origin became the norm, and this re-territorialisation testified to the strong nationalist sentiment for their homeland, despite the forced exile (Anteby-Yemini, 2018). Although the relationship between these migrants and their state remained tense, Eritrea was clearly their home. It was re-actualised after death, revealing the specific form of a trans-local Eritrean nationalism and a transnational Eritrean collective identity. Moreover, the absence created by the flight of forced migrants was often compensated for by the links they continued to maintain with their loved ones, be it through remittances to repay debts incurred during migration, to support their family financially or to finance funeral rituals. But if the family back home was dependent on these remittances, migrants were in turn dependent on families back home for the performance of certain rites that guarantee the post-mortem fate of those who died during migration. Thus, rituals related to death among Eritreans and Sudanese in Israel constructed multiple spaces of belonging (Anteby-Yemini, 2018).

Rwanda's previous highly controversial involvement in receiving African deportees from Israel also raised serious concerns about whether the UK government's and Boris Johnson's plans in 2022 to deport irregular migrants to Rwanda, even with UK funding of £ 120 million in economic development programs in return for accepting refugees, would be legal, given the questionable resources or even willingness of Kigali to host deportations (Beaumont, 2022). Of the estimated 4,000 people deported by Israel to Rwanda and Uganda under the 'voluntary departure' scheme between 2014 and 2017, almost all were believed to have left the country almost immediately, with many attempting to return to Europe via people-smuggling routes. Amnesty International also pointed out that Israel has far fewer refugees than Rwanda and is a much wealthier country. In 2018, Israel's Supreme Court was considering whether to approve a coercive programme that would offer African migrants the option of a financially incentivised deportation to one of two 'unnamed African countries' (Rwanda and Uganda) or face indefinite detention. The UNHCR expressed concern about the lack of transparency of the secret arrangements and the lack of security or a durable solution to the migrants' plight, and that many subsequently attempted dangerous onward movements within Africa or to Europe (Beaumont, 2022). Testimonies of deported migrants from Israel to Rwanda collected by IRRI suggested that most, if not all, were smuggled out of the country by land to Kampala, Uganda, within days of arriving in the Rwandan capital, Kigali. Other deported migrants described being given only a holiday visa on arrival in Rwanda and being taken to a hotel from where they were encouraged to travel illegally to Uganda. From Kampala, the majority travelled north to South Sudan, Sudan and Libya, with many ultimately risking the Mediterranean Sea or falling into the hands of the Islamic State (ISIS) in the hope of finding safety and a destination in Europe (Beaumont, 2022; Tingle, 2022).

The controversial UK's planned deportations to Rwanda stalled, following a ruling by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). The ECHR ruled that ongoing legal proceedings in the UK had to be concluded before deportations to Rwanda could begin. The British High Court subsequently ruled that the UK government's plan to send asylum seekers to Rwanda was legal. However, on 24 January 2023, the High Court in London granted permission to appeal against the ruling that the UK's plan to send migrants to Rwanda was legal. Thus, Kagame's decade-long ambition to earn money by hosting asylum seekers deported by Israel, Denmark and the UK was doomed (Himbara, 2023).

5. Conclusion

Cartoon 12: *Who was first?*
An ongoing conflict, probably never-ending

Source: © Maarten Wolterink, cartoonmovement.com, 9 October 2023

For decades, Israel's self-interested Africa policy has conjured up the spirits that it had summoned in the form of African migrants who are now hard to get rid of. Sub-Saharan African refugees and migrants in Israel can be described as highly motivated and active but with illusions and activities for a better future. In contrast to those who remain in their home countries because of fear and hopelessness, African migrants use a great deal of energy to maintain their agency and self-esteem in a situation that from the outside appears almost hopeless. They hope for a significantly different future and do not remain passive like those left behind, but try to actively work for the hoped-for changes (Rosenthal & Hofmann, 2020).

With its 2016 Counter-Terrorism Law, Israel was cementing the boundaries of citizenship through security laws. By transforming pre-state colonial legislation into contemporary law, Israel effectively integrated the bureaucratic mechanisms of racial discrimination into primary legislation. These mechanisms within the law create the legitimacy for a population-management system monitoring threats, including political affiliations and loyalties. In Israel, the Nation-State Law and the Counter-Terrorism Law have delineated a precarious, dangerous zone of political membership for minorities, including African migrants in Israel just as Palestinians, making citizenship contingent on the prerogative of the state to revoke it, ostensibly for security reasons (Berda, 2020). The development of practices of population classification in terms of an 'axis of suspicion' that amalgamates 'political risk' with 'security risk' is largely based on the impact of colonial security bureaucracies on independent regimes seeking legitimacy as new democracies. They seek to do this by tracing decisions to use an inherited arsenal of colonial and settler-colonial practices of security law for population management, particularly mobility restrictions, surveillance and political control (Berda, 2020; Habbas & Berda, 2023).

Criticism of racism and criticism of anti-Semitism repeatedly result in open arguments and mutual accusations. These conflicts particularly arise when it comes to Israel or the Middle East conflict. A recent example is an incident that attracted international attention involving the renowned Cameroonian historian and political theorist Achille Mbembe who was invited to be the opening speaker of the Ruhrtriennale in the Ruhr-area of Germany in 2020. Mbembe's statements about Israel and his support of a boycott of Israel were criticised by one side as anti-Semitic, whereas the other side, critical of racism, not only rejected these allegations as baseless but also saw them as the reproduction of racist structures at the expense of a racialized speaker (Biskamp, 2020).

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Résumé : *[L'impact des relations subsahariennes d'Israël sur les migrants africains en Israël]* – Dans les années 1960, l'Afrique subsaharienne a connu une offensive diplomatique à grande échelle de la part d'Israël. Le Ghana de Kwame Nkrumah a été le premier pays à établir des relations diplomatiques et économiques. D'autres pays suivirent bientôt, si bien qu'au milieu des années 1960, une quarantaine de pays africains recevaient une aide agricole et militaire d'Israël et bénéficiaient de bourses pour leurs étudiants. L'implication d'Israël a été renforcée par les activités de la CIA en Afrique à l'époque, qui étaient conçues et financées par les Etats-Unis et d'autres puissances occidentales comme leur « troisième force » en Afrique. Depuis, la situation a évolué en raison de la solidarité croissante des Africains avec les Palestiniens et de leur rejet du système israélien de « l'apartheid », c'est-à-dire de la discrimination systématique à l'encontre des populations non-israéliennes. Israël a perdu le soutien de la plupart des pays d'ASS au début des années 1970 en raison de sa collaboration avec l'Afrique du Sud de l'apartheid. Comme l'a dit Nelson Mandela : « L'Afrique du Sud ne sera jamais libre tant que la Palestine ne sera pas libre ». Lors de sa 12e session ordinaire à Kampala en 1975, l'OUA a pour la première fois identifié l'idéologie fondatrice d'Israël, le sionisme, comme une forme de racisme. Néanmoins, plusieurs pays africains ont continué à entretenir des contacts de faible niveau par l'intermédiaire de treize ambassades étrangères, par exemple en Ethiopie, en Tanzanie, en Ouganda et au Zaïre, tandis que les échanges éducatifs et commerciaux se sont poursuivis, bien qu'à des niveaux considérablement réduits et à l'abri des regards du public. Mais le fléau du terrorisme islamiste a nécessité une relance des relations. La coopération militaire et sécuritaire, y compris la cybersécurité, est particulièrement intense avec par exemple l'Ethiopie, le Zaïre, l'Ouganda, le Ghana, le Togo et l'Afrique du Sud. Elle a aussi souvent servi à soutenir des régimes africains despotiques. Aujourd'hui, l'Afrique subsaharienne constitue un marché lucratif pour l'industrie de défense israélienne. Le Cameroun, le Tchad, la Guinée-Equatoriale, le Lesotho, le Nigeria, le Rwanda, les Seychelles, l'Afrique du Sud et l'Ouganda ont reçu des armes d'Israël entre 2006 et 2010. En 2014, 40 % des exportations d'armes d'Israël étaient destinées aux pays africains. Après la fin de la guerre froide et le début du processus de paix israélo-arabe, la plupart des Etats africains ont repris leurs relations avec Israël après que Netanyahu soit devenu Premier ministre en 2009 sous le slogan : « Israël revient à l'Afrique, l'Afrique revient à Israël ». Israël entretient désormais des relations avec 40 Etats subsahariens, dont certains adoptent une position plus pro-israélienne qu'auparavant. La stabilisation de la Corne de l'Afrique était considérée comme cruciale car elle était directement liée aux pressions migratoires auxquelles Israël était confronté depuis le milieu de la dernière décennie. On estime que 40 000 réfugiés africains vivent sur le sol israélien, la plupart venant du Soudan et de l'Erythrée. La réputation internationale d'Israël a été affectée par sa politique décisive visant à limiter le nombre de migrants en construisant un mur à la frontière avec l'Egypte. Depuis 2013, le gouvernement a tenté d'expulser environ 4 000 migrants vers le Rwanda et l'Ouganda dans le cadre d'un programme de « départ volontaire » entre 2014 et 2017. Presque tout le monde a de nouveau fui le Rwanda et a entrepris le dangereux voyage vers l'Europe.

Zusammenfassung : *[Die Auswirkungen von Israels Beziehungen zu Afrika südlich der Sahara auf afrikanische Migranten in Israel]* – In den 1960er Jahren erlebte Afrika südlich der Sahara eine umfassende diplomatische Offensive Israels. Das Ghana Kwame Nkrumahs war das erste Land, das diplomatische und wirtschaftliche Beziehungen aufbaute. Andere Länder folgten bald, so dass Mitte der 1960er Jahre etwa vierzig afrikanische Länder Agrar- und Militärhilfe von Israel erhielten und von Stipendien für ihre Studenten profitierten. Das Engagement Israels wurde durch die damaligen Aktivitäten der CIA in Afrika gefördert, die von den Vereinigten Staaten und anderen westlichen Mächten als ihrer „dritten Kraft" in Afrika gestaltet und finanziert wurden. Seitdem hat sich die Situation aufgrund der wachsenden Solidarität der Afrikaner mit den Palästinensern und ihrer Ablehnung des israelischen „Apartheid"-Systems, d.h. der systematischen Diskriminierung nicht-israelischer Bevölkerungsgruppen, weiterentwickelt. Israel verlor Anfang der 1970er Jahre aufgrund seiner Zusammenarbeit mit dem Apartheid-Südafrika die Unterstützung der meisten SSA-Länder. Wie Nelson Mandela sagte: „Südafrika wird niemals frei sein, bis Palästina frei ist." Auf ihrer 12. ordentlichen Tagung in Kampala im Jahr 1975 bezeichnete die OAU erstmals Israels Gründungsideologie, den Zionismus, als eine Form des Rassismus. Dennoch unterhielten mehrere afrikanische Länder weiterhin Kontakte auf niedriger Ebene über dreizehn ausländische Botschaften, beispielsweise in Äthiopien, Tansania, Uganda und Zaire, während der Bildungs- und Handelsaustausch fortgesetzt wurde, wenn auch auf deutlich reduziertem Niveau und abseits der Öffentlichkeit. Doch die Geißel des islamistischen Terrorismus machte eine Wiederbelebung der Beziehungen erforderlich. Die militärische und sicherheitspolitische Zusammenarbeit, einschließlich der Cybersicherheit, ist beispielsweise mit Äthiopien, Zaire, Uganda, Ghana, Togo und Südafrika besonders intensiv. Sie diente häufig auch der Unterstützung despotischer afrikanischer Regime. Heute ist Afrika südlich der Sahara ein lukrativer Markt für die israelische Rüstungsindustrie. Kamerun, Tschad, Aquatorialguinea, Lesotho, Nigeria, Ruanda, die Seychellen, Südafrika und Uganda erhielten zwischen 2006 und 2010 Waffen aus Israel. Im Jahr 2014 gingen 40 % der israelischen Waffenexporte in afrikanische Länder. Nach dem Ende des Kalten Krieges und dem Beginn des israelisch-arabischen Friedensprozesses nahmen die meisten afrikanischen Staaten die Beziehungen zu Israel wieder auf, nachdem Netanyahu 2009 Premierminister wurde unter dem Motto: „Israel kommt nach Afrika zurück, Afrika kommt nach Israel zurück". Israel unterhält mittlerweile Beziehungen zu 40 Staaten südlich der Sahara, von denen einige eine pro-israelischere Haltung einnehmen als zuvor. Die Stabilisierung des Horns von Afrika wurde als entscheidend angesehen, da sie in direktem Zusammenhang mit dem Einwanderungsdruck stand, dem Israel seit Mitte des letzten Jahrzehnts ausgesetzt war. Auf israelischem Boden leben schätzungsweise 40.000 afrikanische Flüchtlinge, die meisten aus dem Sudan und Eritrea. Israels internationales Ansehen wurde durch seine entschlossene Politik beeinträchtigt, die Zahl der Migranten durch den Bau einer Mauer an der Grenze zu Ägypten zu begrenzen. Seit 2013 hat die Regierung im Rahmen eines Programms der „freiwilligen Ausreise" zwischen 2014 und 2017 versucht, rund 4.000 Migranten nach Ruanda und Uganda abzuschieben. Fast alle flohen wieder aus Rwanda und machten sich auf die gefährliche Reise nach Europa.