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GLIC EARLY WARNING COMMENTARY

ISRAEL, AFRICA, AND GLOBAL GEOPOLITICAL SHIFTS: AN EARLY WARNING PERSPECTIVE

Introduction

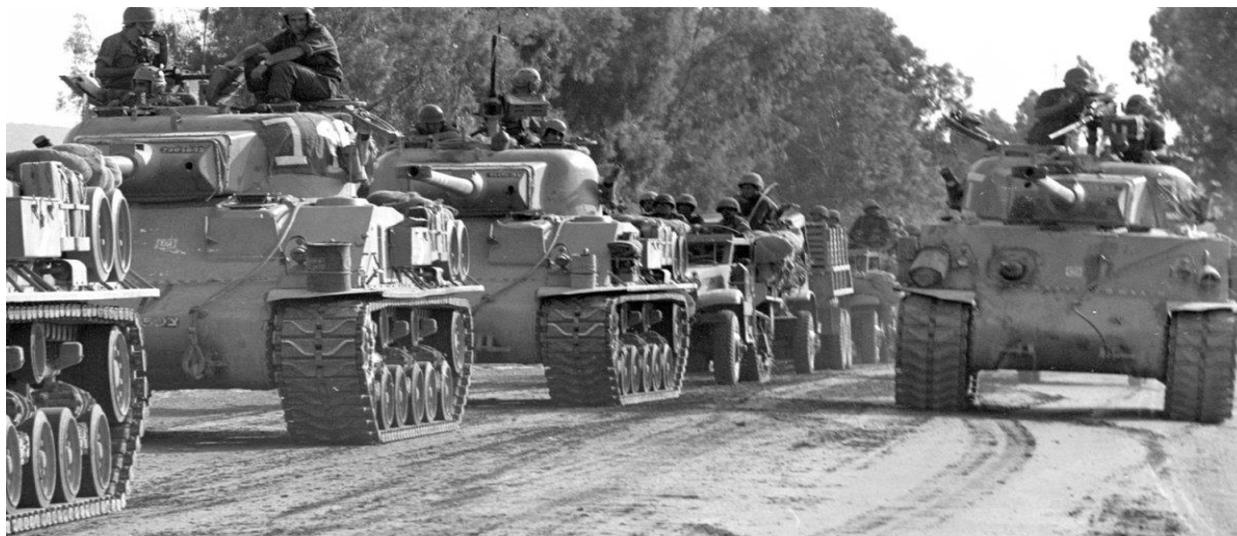
In the recent past, Africa has increasingly become a central arena for diplomatic engagement, economic partnerships and security cooperation. The State of Israel is known to be one of the countries that has intensified its engagement with the continent. Some of the factors that shaped Israel's relations with African countries include the Cold War Politics, the Arab-Israeli conflict and contemporary strategic considerations. Going by the words of Alden and Schoeman (2015), it is important to note that Israel has sought to strengthen diplomatic, economic, and security ties with African states as part of a broader strategy to expand its global influence and counter diplomatic isolation. At the same time, Africa's geopolitical importance has grown due to its natural resources, expanding markets, and strategic voting power in international institutions such as the United Nations. As major powers, including the United States, China, and Russia, compete for influence on the continent, Israel's renewed engagement with Africa reflects broader global geopolitical shifts. In this documentary, the historical foundations of Israel-Africa relations, the strategic motivations behind their renewed partnership, and how these dynamics intersect with evolving global geopolitical trends are explored.

Historical Foundations of Israel–Africa Relations

Israel's engagement with Africa dates back to the early years following its independence in 1948. During the wave of African decolonization in the 1950s and 1960s, Israel sought diplomatic ties with newly independent African states. Israeli leaders believed that cooperation with Africa would not only break regional isolation but also promote development partnerships based on shared experiences of nation-building (Jean-Loup, 2017). One of the most prominent advocates of Israel-Africa cooperation was former Israeli foreign minister Golda Meir. Under her leadership, Israel launched numerous development initiatives across Africa through the Israeli Agency for International Development Cooperation (MASHAV). These programs focused on agriculture, water management, healthcare, and technical training. By the mid-1960s, Israel had established diplomatic relations with more than thirty African countries. However, this period of cooperation faced major setbacks following the Six-Day War. Under pressure from Arab states and the broader geopolitical dynamics of the Cold War, many African countries severed diplomatic ties with Israel

during the 1970s (Alden and Schoeman, 2015).

Figure 1: Armoured Convoy During the Six-Day War



Despite this diplomatic rupture, informal economic and security contacts continued between Israel and several African states. These connections laid the foundation for the gradual restoration of relations beginning in the late 1980s and accelerating after the end of the Cold War.

Renewed Diplomatic Engagement in the 21st Century

In the twenty-first century, Israel has significantly intensified its diplomatic outreach to Africa. A notable milestone occurred in 2016 when Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu undertook a historic tour of East Africa, visiting countries such as Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Rwanda. This tour symbolized Israel's strategic effort to rebuild political and economic partnerships across the continent.

Figure 2: Israeli PM Visits Kenya in Renewal of Ties (July 05, 2016)



Israel's engagement with Africa today focuses on three key areas: development cooperation, technology transfer, and security collaboration. Israeli expertise in areas such as desert agriculture, irrigation technology, cybersecurity, and renewable energy has made the country an attractive partner for many African states seeking innovative solutions to developmental challenges (Inbar and Shamir, 2014). Security cooperation has also become a significant component of Israel-Africa relations. Several African governments have collaborated with Israel in counter-terrorism efforts, intelligence sharing, and border security operations, particularly in regions affected by militant groups. Furthermore, Israel views Africa as an important diplomatic arena. With 54 member states in the United Nations system, African countries collectively hold substantial voting power in international organizations. Strengthening ties with African states therefore serves Israel's broader goal of gaining diplomatic support on global issues.

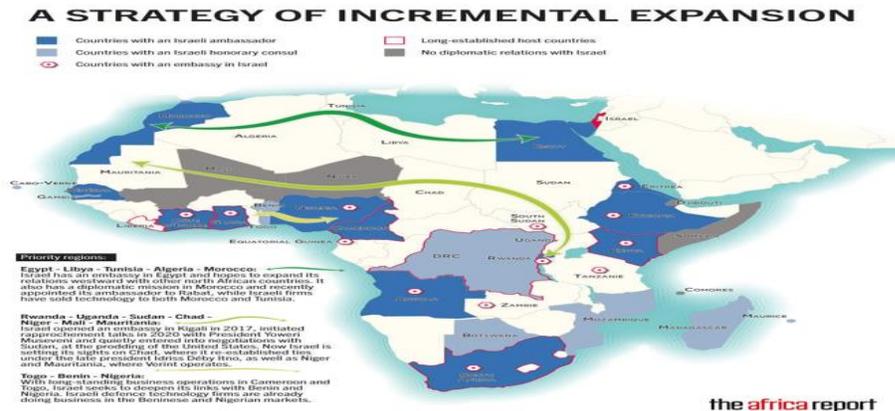
Africa's Strategic Importance in Global Geopolitics

Africa has become a focal point of global geopolitical competition due to its vast natural resources, demographic growth, and strategic geographic position. The continent holds significant reserves of minerals essential to modern technologies, including cobalt, lithium, and rare earth elements. These resources are critical for industries such as renewable energy, electronics, and electric vehicles (Carmody, Kragelund, and Reboredo, 2021). Moreover, Africa's population, expected to double by 2050, represents one of the largest emerging consumer markets in the world. As a result, major global powers have intensified economic engagement with African countries through trade agreements, infrastructure projects, and investment initiatives. China, for example, has become Africa's largest trading partner, financing large-scale infrastructure projects through initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative. Meanwhile, the United States has expanded economic partnerships through programs such as the African Growth and Opportunity Act. Israel's renewed interest in Africa must therefore be understood within this broader geopolitical context. By strengthening partnerships with African states, Israel seeks to position itself as a technological and security partner within an increasingly competitive global landscape.

Israel's Strategic Interests in Africa

Israel's engagement with Africa is driven by several strategic motivations. First, economic opportunities play a significant role. Israeli companies are actively involved in sectors such as agriculture, water technology, renewable energy, and telecommunications across the continent. Second, security concerns influence Israel's foreign policy toward Africa. The country has sought partnerships with African governments to combat terrorism, particularly in regions affected by extremist groups. Cooperation in intelligence sharing, surveillance technology, and military training has become an important component of these relationships (Inbar and Shamir, 2020).

Figure 3: How Israel's defence and intelligence industries are making inroads across Africa



Third, diplomatic considerations remain central. Israel has historically faced challenges in securing support within international organizations due to the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Strengthening relations with African countries provides Israel with opportunities to expand diplomatic alliances and influence voting patterns within global institutions. Finally, Israel's engagement with Africa also reflects a broader effort to diversify its international partnerships beyond traditional Western allies.

Africa's Perspective and Strategic Autonomy

While external powers compete for influence in Africa, African governments increasingly emphasize strategic autonomy and diversified partnerships. Rather than aligning exclusively with any single global power, many African states pursue pragmatic foreign policies aimed at maximizing economic development and political independence. Engagement with Israel therefore represents one component of a broader network of international partnerships that includes cooperation with China, the United States, the European Union, and emerging powers such as India and Turkey (Carmody, Kragelund, and Reborado, 2021). This approach reflects a growing recognition among African leaders that geopolitical competition can provide opportunities for economic investment, technological transfer, and diplomatic leverage. By balancing relationships with multiple partners, African states seek to strengthen their bargaining power within the global system.

The Early Warning Perspective

From an early warning perspective, the evolving relationship between Israel and African states reflects broader shifts in global geopolitics that could signal emerging diplomatic, security, and economic realignments across the continent. Israel's increasing engagement in sectors such as security cooperation, agricultural innovation, intelligence sharing, and technological development in several African countries coincides with intensifying strategic competition among global powers including the United States, China, and Russia, raising early warning concerns that Africa may become an arena for influence rivalry and geopolitical bargaining. One key indicator lies in

diplomatic dynamics within continental institutions such as the African Union and global platforms like the United Nations, where divisions over the Israel–Palestine issue could deepen, particularly as tensions between Israel and Palestine continue to reverberate globally. At the same time, Israel’s expanding security partnerships with African governments, often aimed at combating extremist groups such as Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab, may generate both capacity-building benefits and risks of heightened militarization or domestic political sensitivities if surveillance and defense technologies are perceived as tools of internal control. Additionally, diplomatic realignments influenced by frameworks like the Abraham Accords, alongside growing involvement of Middle Eastern actors such as the United Arab Emirates, may reshape economic corridors, investment flows, and strategic infrastructure across Africa, potentially altering traditional alliances and economic dependencies. Early warning monitoring should therefore pay close attention to shifts in African voting behavior in international forums, the expansion of military or intelligence cooperation agreements, strategic investments linked to Israeli or Gulf interests, and domestic political reactions within African societies where public opinion on the Israel–Palestine conflict remains sensitive, as these developments collectively signal how Africa’s geopolitical position may evolve within the changing global order.

Conclusion: The Future of Israel–Africa Relations

The evolving relationship between Israel and Africa illustrates how regional partnerships are increasingly shaped by global geopolitical transformations. From early development cooperation in the 1960s to renewed diplomatic engagement in the twenty-first century, Israel’s interactions with African states reflect broader shifts in international politics. Africa’s rising global importance, driven by demographic growth, resource wealth, and strategic geographic position, has attracted the attention of major powers across the world. In this context, Israel’s efforts to strengthen ties with African countries represent both a diplomatic strategy and a response to the changing global order. Looking ahead, the future of Israel-Africa relations will likely depend on several factors, including economic cooperation, technological partnerships, and security collaboration. At the same time, African states will continue to navigate complex geopolitical dynamics as they balance relationships with multiple global actors. Ultimately, the relationship between Israel and Africa demonstrates how regional diplomacy can intersect with global geopolitical shifts, shaping alliances and strategic partnerships in an increasingly interconnected world.

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