



Navigating the Divide: Israel, Africa, and the Shifting Tides of UN Diplomacy, 2023-2026

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1. Executive Summary

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

2. Background: Israel-Africa Relations and UN Dynamics Before October 7

Israel's 1978 Camp David Accords with Egypt and its subsequent withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula in 1982, provided the principal justification for African governments to resume diplomatic ties with Jerusalem. Zaire and Cameroon were among the first to renew relations in 1982. This diplomatic rapprochement was further accelerated by African frustration over unfulfilled Arab economic promises and the rise of radical Islam, funded by states such as Libya and Iran, which prompted nations like Kenya, Tanzania, and Zambia to seek Israeli assistance. Additionally, the collapse of the Soviet Union led previously radical, Soviet-aligned states like Ethiopia and Angola to establish or renew relations with Israel. Concurrently, Israel's post-Cold War foreign policy shifted away from South Africa, as the end of white-minority rule ushered in a less supportive government in Pretoria.

In the 21st century, Israel sought to upgrade its African ties through economic and military cooperation, systematically aiming to influence voting patterns in international forums. Israel made extensive use of its international development agency, MASHAV, to sponsor agricultural and development projects, particularly in East Africa. In July 2016, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu embarked on a historic state visit to Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, and Ethiopia. A primary, publicly stated goal of this tour was to forge connections with African leaders to counter the "automatic majorities" against Israel at the UN. To further project soft power, Israel hosted a MASHAV-sponsored agricultural conference in December 2016 for senior officials from over a dozen West African states. This was closely followed by Netanyahu's attendance at the ECOWAS summit in Liberia. Because many African

nations operate with relatively small foreign policy establishments, interpersonal connections between Israeli diplomats and African leaders became crucial for influencing UN votes.

Despite significant Israeli aid, the voting patterns of East African states did not universally improve. However, close security cooperation and historical ties have successfully fostered steadfast diplomatic support from several key African nations. Crucially, Rwanda and Nigeria abstained from a December 2014 UN Security Council vote demanding an end to the occupation and the creation of a Palestinian state. Their abstentions caused the resolution to fail by a single vote, allowing the United States to avoid using its veto power.¹

Arguably Israel's strongest African ally at the UN, Cameroon routinely abstains from or votes alongside Israel on relevant resolutions. Under President Paul Biya, who has ruled since 1982, Yaoundé abstained from a 2022 UNGA vote on Palestinian self-determination. Furthermore, Cameroon abstained from all resolutions condemning Israel during the 2023 UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) session, and it remains the sole African nation that has not recognized a Palestinian state.²

Three other African countries that have shown less rigid voting patterns toward Israel are Rwanda, Togo, and Malawi. Driven by a shared history of ethnic tragedy and President Paul Kagame's desire to leverage Israeli technological and security expertise to improve relations with Washington, Rwanda frequently supports Israel through UN abstentions,³ including a critical abstention on a 2021 vote condemning Israeli settlements and a 2022 vote on Palestinian self-determination. Following the Trump administration's decision to move the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem, Togo was the only African state to vote against a UN resolution urging nations not to locate their diplomatic missions in the city. This support is heavily influenced by Foreign Minister Robert Dussey, a former Catholic monk whose religious sect prioritizes the welfare of Israel.⁴ Finally, while serving on the UNHRC alongside

¹ Peter Beaumont, "US and Israeli intervention led UN to reject Palestinian resolution," 31 December 2014, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/31/us-israel-un-reject-palestinian-resolution-nigeria-security-council>

² Franck Foute, "Paul Biya, Israel's Strongest Ally in Africa?" 31 October 2023, *The Africa Report*, <https://www.theafricareport.com/326317/paul-biya-israels-strongest-ally-in-africa/>.

³ Rina Bassist, "Israel and Rwanda's Emerging Alliance: A Mutual Strategic Choice," 27 March 2018, *Ifriqia: The Moshe Dayan Center*, <https://dayan.org/content/israel-and-rwandas-emerging-alliance-mutual-strategic-choice>.

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

⁴ "General Assembly Overwhelmingly Adopts Resolution Asking Nations Not to Locate Diplomatic Missions in Jerusalem," 21 December 2017, *The United Nations*, <https://press.un.org/en/2017/ga11995.doc.htm>. Erez Lin,

Cameroon, Malawi displayed a mixed voting record: although it supported the Palestinian right to self-determination, it voted against motions criticizing Israel's human rights record or condemning its settlements. In addition, South Sudan, since its independence in 2011, has demonstrated a more favorable voting record at the UN General Assembly (UNGA).

Leading up to the 2020–2021 Abraham Accords, Israel made significant investments in Africa, including the restoration of diplomatic relations with Chad. Separately, the resumption of full diplomatic relations with Morocco deepened historic security, trade, and intelligence ties, bolstered by Morocco's Jewish diaspora. Morocco's voting pattern at the UN reflects a nuanced approach: while maintaining solidarity with Arab League positions on Palestinian statehood, Rabat has concurrently pursued bilateral defense and economic integration with Jerusalem. As for Sudan, normalization stalled following domestic instability and the outbreak of violent civil conflict in April 2023. The clashes between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), under Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (Hemedti), quickly escalated into a devastating and ongoing civil war.⁵

Although the Accords have not yet yielded concrete benefits for Israel in Africa, the United Arab Emirates' infrastructure investments in the self-declared Republic of Somaliland could present future strategic opportunities near the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait.⁶ This remains true despite the diplomatic risks associated with recognizing a separatist entity, as discussed below.

3. Israel and Africa Post-October 7: Changing Patterns of UN Votes

In the aftermath of the October 7 Hamas attack, Israel's relations with Africa have come into focus, with South Africa bringing Israel before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague on charges of genocide and withdrawing its ambassador from Israel. This is due in part to the ruling African National Congress (ANC), which has openly supported Hamas and identified itself with the

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

⁵ "Abraham Accords Against the Backdrop of the Middle East Political Mosaic. (2022). *Przegląd Strategiczny*. <https://doi.org/10.14746/ps.2022.1.7>

⁶ David Pilling, Chloe Cornish, and Andrew Schipani, "The UAE's Rising Influence in Africa," 30 May 2024, *The Financial Times*, <https://www.ft.com/content/388e1690-223f-41a8-a5f2-0c971dbfe6f0>; Irit Back, "Israel and the Horn of Africa- what are the odds with the countries that still don't recognize Israel?" in *The New Normal? Arab States and Normalization with Israel Abraham Accords: Israel and the Middle East*, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2021: 28–31.

Palestinian cause.⁷ Undoubtedly, Israel's previous support for the apartheid government also plays a role in shaping the ANC's historical memory of its struggle, but the roots of South Africa's current geopolitical alignment are more complex. The ANC's historical anti-colonial roots and links with the then-Soviet Union, which provided aid to its military struggle against the apartheid regime, have seen it move closer to Russia, as well as Iran, refusing to condemn the Russian invasion of Ukraine and increasingly taking a more strident anti-Western line. Another significant development was the withdrawal of Chad's diplomatic delegation from Israel in protest against Israel's actions in Gaza. Israel renewed diplomatic relations with the Muslim-majority state in 2019 and had invested significant diplomatic capital in restoring relations. The withdrawal of Chad's diplomatic delegation thus constituted a significant blow to Israel.⁸

Several African states openly condemned Hamas' actions, including Kenya, Ghana, Togo, Cameroon, Zambia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.⁹ The October 27 vote at the UN General Assembly following Hamas' actions on October 7 called for an "immediate, durable and sustained humanitarian truce leading to a cessation of hostilities" and for the "immediate and unconditional release of all civilians being illegally held captive, demanding their safety, well-being and humane treatment in compliance with international law."¹⁰ This vote did not contain any condemnation of Hamas and saw widespread support from African countries, including Ghana and Kenya, with which Israel has close relations. Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Ethiopia, South Sudan, and Zambia all abstained. However, this vote was also accompanied by a Canadian-sponsored amendment that condemned Hamas.¹¹ Six African states (Cabo Verde, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, and South Sudan) voted in favor of the amendment; nine others abstained (including Angola, Cameroon, and Ivory Coast), while

⁷ Irit Back, "At the Tribunal in The Hague, the South African Government is Reviving Mandela's Legacy for its own Political Purposes," 15 January 2024, *Haaretz* (Hebrew), <https://www.haaretz.co.il/news/world/africa/2024-01-15/ty-article/.highlight/0000018d-03aa-d832-a59d-17bf4bfa0000>.

⁸ Ignatius Anor, "After Chad, South Africa Recall Diplomats from Israel, Will Others Follow?" 13 November 2023, *Voice of America*, <https://www.voaafrica.com/a/after-chad-south-africa-recall-diplomats-from-israel-will-others-follow-/7349771.html>.

⁹ Asher Lubotzsky, "Africa and the War in Gaza: Analyzing Israel's Current Standing and Future Prospects in Africa," *Strategic Assessment, The Institute for National Security Studies (INSS)*, (January 2024), https://www.inss.org.il/strategic_assessment/africa-gaza/.

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

¹¹ For a comprehensive overview see Asher Lubotzsky, "Africa and the War in Gaza: Analyzing Israel's Current Standing and Future Prospects in Africa," *Strategic Assessment, The Institute for National Security Studies (INSS)*, (January 2024), https://www.inss.org.il/strategic_assessment/africa-gaza/.

15 countries did not vote on the amendment.¹² This vote was followed by the December 12 UN General Assembly vote on a non-binding resolution calling for an “immediate humanitarian ceasefire, the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages, as well as ensuring humanitarian access.”¹³ Liberia was the only African country to vote against the resolution, which saw abstentions from Cameroon, South Sudan, Malawi, Cabo Verde, Equatorial Guinea, and Togo. Like the October vote, the December 12 vote was followed by an Austrian-backed amendment condemning Hamas. Compared with the October amendment, the December 12 amendment also received support from Rwanda, Ethiopia, and Liberia, alongside Cabo Verde, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, and South Sudan. Nigeria, however, switched its vote from support to opposition. While a majority voted in favor, the amendment did not have the two-thirds majority needed to pass, and Cameroon and Togo, two of the African countries closest to Israel, abstained. This had a significant impact on the outcome.¹⁴

Viewed in the context of African voting patterns at the General Assembly, the 2023 votes fit a broader pattern, while the amendments condemning Hamas, sponsored by Canada and Austria respectively, are more accurate representations of Israel’s support from particular African countries. For example, throughout 2022 and 2023, including after the October 7 attack, Ghana and Kenya voted against Israel on UN General Assembly resolutions, but voted with Israel on the specific amendments condemning Hamas. States such as Cameroon and Togo have consistently abstained on nearly all votes related to Israel, showing a consistent voting pattern, regardless of the subject of the vote.

As the war in Gaza continued throughout 2024 and into 2025, before the U.S.-negotiated ceasefire and the announcement of President Trump’s twenty-point plan for Gaza in October 2025, the UN General Assembly held numerous major votes relating to Israel, Gaza, and the conflict with Palestinians. While the United States continued to provide Israel with its diplomatic “iron dome” at the UN, African voting patterns remained variable.

On May 10, 2024, the General Assembly voted on a resolution supporting Palestine’s bid for expanded rights at the United Nations and recommending that the Security Council reconsider Palestinian membership. The resolution passed by a vote of 143–9, with 25 abstentions. Almost all

¹² See Chart Attached.

¹³ “UN General Assembly Votes by Large Majority for Immediate Humanitarian Ceasefire During Emergency Session,” 12 December 2023, *United Nations*, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/12/1144717>.

¹⁴ See Chart Attached.

African states supported the resolution, demonstrating the continued strength of African solidarity with Palestinian diplomatic initiatives. However, several countries that maintain comparatively favorable relations with Israel adopted a more cautious approach. Malawi, South Sudan, and Eritrea were among the African states that abstained, while states like Cameroon and Togo did not participate in the vote on the resolution.¹⁵

A similar trend was evident in the September 2024 General Assembly vote endorsing the International Court of Justice advisory opinion regarding Israel's presence in the occupied Palestinian territory. The resolution passed 124–14, with 43 abstentions. Again, most African states voted in favor, while a smaller group of countries with stronger ties to Israel preferred abstention rather to opposition. These included Kenya, Malawi, Togo, Cameroon, Eritrea, and South Sudan.¹⁶

The December 11, 2024, General Assembly resolution called for an “immediate, unconditional and permanent ceasefire” in Gaza, the release of all hostages, and expanded humanitarian access. The resolution passed by an overwhelming majority of 158 votes in favor, 9 against, and 13 abstentions. The African states that abstained were Cameroon, Malawi, South Sudan, and Togo, all of whom are viewed as closer African partners of Israel.¹⁷

During the September 2025 vote on the New York Declaration on Palestinian statehood, most African states voted in favor of the resolution; Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, and South Sudan abstained, while Israel's other African allies voted in favor.¹⁸ The December UN Resolution, which reaffirmed Palestinian self-determination and called for renewed efforts toward a negotiated settlement, was adopted by a vote of 151 in favor, 11 against, and 11 abstentions. No African state voted against the resolution, but Cameroon, the Central African

¹⁵ United Nations, General Assembly, “Admission of New Members,” 10 May 2024, United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine, <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/admission-of-new-members-10may24/>.

¹⁶ United Nations General Assembly, “General Assembly Overwhelmingly Adopts Historic Text Demanding Israel End Its Unlawful Presence, Policies in Occupied Palestinian Territory within 1 Year,” 18 September 2024, *United Nations: Question of Palestine*, <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/un-ga-press-release-18sep24/>.

¹⁷ United Nations General Assembly, “Demand for Ceasefire in Gaza: General Assembly's 10th Emergency Special Session Resolution (A/RES/ES-10/26),” 11 December 2024, *United Nations: Question of Palestine*, <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/demand-for-ceasefire-in-gaza-ga-resolution/>.

¹⁸ United Nations General Assembly, “General Assembly Endorses New York Declaration, Charting Path to Palestinian Statehood,” 12 September 2025, *United Nations: Question of Palestine*, <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/ga-meeting-coverage-12sep25/>.

Republic, Ethiopia, and South Sudan all abstained.¹⁹

Yet even amid the war in Gaza and significant international criticism of Israel, Malawi announced the opening of its embassy in Israel, fulfilling a promise made in 2020. The embassy opening also heralded the launch of an agricultural cooperation program between the two states and could pave the way for other embassy openings. The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Sierra Leone have openly declared their desire to establish embassies in Jerusalem, although neither has yet done so.²⁰ Israel also reopened its embassy in Lusaka, Zambia, after 52 years, accompanied by a visit by Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar to the Zambian capital.²¹ Yet, there were also setbacks. In September 2025, the Chadian government announced that it would close its embassy in Israel due to financial constraints, but that the closure would not affect diplomatic relations between the two states.²²

Israel has also occasionally sought to advance resolutions of its own at the General Assembly, although such initiatives remain relatively rare. In December 2024, Israel introduced a resolution on the Report of the Conference on Disarmament, which was adopted without a vote. The Conference on Disarmament, based in Geneva, is the UN's principal multilateral forum for negotiating arms-control and disarmament agreements. Its work covers nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, as well as the prevention of an arms race in outer space. Considering Israel's geostrategic position, this is particularly relevant because many of the issues addressed in the Conference concern nuclear nonproliferation and the broader Middle East security environment.²³ In December 2025, Israel initially introduced a resolution on agricultural technology for sustainable development. The text was subsequently revised and jointly sponsored by Israel and ten other countries, including Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, and Rwanda, and was adopted by

¹⁹ United Nations General Assembly, "Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine (A/RES/80/72)," 2 December 2025, *United Nations: Question of Palestine*, <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/peaceful-settlement-of-the-question-of-palestine-a-res-80-72-2dec25/>.

²⁰ "We will continue to support Israel' Malawi FM during embassy inauguration ceremony," 18 April 2024, *Jerusalem Post*, <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/article-797765>; "Sierra Leone to open embassy in Jerusalem," 25 August 2023, *The Times of Israel*, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/sierra-leone-to-open-embassy-in-jerusalem/>.

²¹ Nava Freiberg and Tol Staff, "Marking 'New Chapter' in Ties, Sa'ar Inaugurates Israeli Embassy in Zambia," 20 August 2025, *The Times of Israel*, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/marking-new-chapter-in-ties-saar-inaugurates-israeli-embassy-in-zambia/>.

²² Ndalet Pohl, "Le Tchad ferme son ambassade en Israël pour des raisons budgétaires," *Tchadinfos*, September 5, 2025, <https://tchadinfos.com/2025/09/05/le-tchad-ferme-son-ambassade-en-israel-pour-des-raisons-budgetaires/>

²³ United Nations General Assembly. "Report of the Conference on Disarmament." Resolution 79/71. 2 December 2024. A/RES/79/71. <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/79/71>.

the General Assembly by 138 votes in favor, 27 against, and 11 abstentions.²⁴ This case is particularly relevant to assessing African voting behavior because several African states not only voted for an Israeli-sponsored initiative but also joined Israel as sponsors of the resolution; all are seen as having close diplomatic ties with Jerusalem.

By contrast, in December 2024, Israel introduced a proposal concerning revised estimates for UNRWA in the General Assembly's Fifth Committee, which is responsible for the UN's administrative and budgetary affairs. The proposal never reached a substantive vote: the Fifth Committee adopted a motion of no action by 99–16, with 40 abstentions, preventing the proposal from proceeding.²⁵ The contrast between these cases illustrates an important feature of African voting patterns at the UN: African states' positions toward Israel are not uniformly negative, but vary considerably according to the issue, with some states willing to sponsor and support Israeli initiatives on development and disarmament while opposing—or declining to advance—initiatives directly related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and UNRWA.

The voting record at the UN Human Rights Council since October 7, 2023, reinforces the picture of a broadly pro-Palestinian, but not uniformly anti-Israel, African position, even though the Council has historically been openly antagonistic toward Israel. The Council's recurring resolutions on Palestinian self-determination, Israeli settlements, the occupied Syrian Golan, and the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory—including the humanitarian crisis in Gaza—have generally received strong support from African members. In April 2024, for example, the resolution addressing the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and accountability, which also called for an immediate ceasefire and humanitarian access to Gaza, passed by 28–6, with 13 abstentions. Most African members voted in favor, although Benin and Cameroon abstained and Malawi voted against.²⁶ The resolution on Palestinian self-determination passed by an overwhelming 42–2–3, with virtually all African members voting in favor.

²⁴ United Nations General Assembly, "Agricultural Technology for Sustainable Development," Resolution 80/133, 15 December 2025, *A/RES/80/133*, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/80/133>; UN Vote Analysis, "Agricultural Technology for Sustainable Development, A/RES/80/133," accessed August 30, 2026, <https://www.unvoteanalysis.com/>.

²⁵ United Nations General Assembly, Fifth Committee, "Revised Estimates UNRWA," *A/C.5/79/L.16*, 22 December 2024, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4069955>.

²⁶ United Nations Human Rights Council, "Human Rights Situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Including East Jerusalem, and the Obligation to Ensure Accountability and Justice," Resolution 55/28, April 5, 2024, vote: 28–6–13, <https://searchlibrary.ohchr.org/record/31464>.

A similar pattern emerged during two April 2025 votes. The Human Rights Council's accountability and human rights resolution received 27 votes in favor, four against and 16 abstentions, with several African states, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya and Malawi, abstaining²⁷, while the resolution advocating for self-determination of the Palestinian people passed 43–2–2 and received the support of virtually all African members.²⁸ In March 2026, the pattern was again evident: the resolution concerning the Palestinian right to self-determination passed 42–0–5, with only the DRC among African members abstaining,²⁹ while the more contentious resolution addressing the human rights situation and humanitarian conditions in Gaza passed 24–4–19 and produced a more varied pattern of African voting. Angola, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Gambia, Ghana, Mauritius, and South Africa voted in favor, while Benin, Burundi, the DRC, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Malawi abstained.³⁰

Overall, the African record suggests a strong and consistent consensus in favor of Palestinian self-determination and opposition to the occupation and settlements, but greater variation when resolutions specifically address Israel's conduct, accountability, arms transfers, or the humanitarian consequences of the Gaza war. A small group of states, including South Africa, Algeria, Gambia, Ghana, and Morocco, has remained consistently supportive of these resolutions, while others, particularly the DRC, Kenya, Malawi, and at times Ethiopia, have increasingly preferred abstention or, in a few cases, opposition. The pattern therefore points less to a uniform African anti-Israel bloc than to a broad normative commitment to Palestinian rights combined with significant country-level differences over how directly to condemn or constrain Israel through their votes.

4. Israel and Somaliland: Strategic Depth in the Horn of Africa or a Diplomatic Miscalculation?

One of the most significant recent developments in Israel's relationship with Africa has been its decision to be the first UN member state, after Taiwan, to recognize the independence of the

²⁷ United Nations Human Rights Council, "Human Rights Situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Including East Jerusalem, and the Obligation to Ensure Accountability and Justice," Resolution 58/2, April 2, 2025, vote: 27–4–16, <https://searchlibrary.ohchr.org/record/31945>.

²⁸ United Nations Human Rights Council, "Right of the Palestinian People to Self-Determination," Resolution 58/27, April 4, 2025, vote: 43–2–2, <https://searchlibrary.ohchr.org/record/31975>.

²⁹ United Nations Human Rights Council, "Right of the Palestinian People to Self-Determination," Resolution 61/33, March 31, 2026, vote: 42–0–5, <https://searchlibrary.ohchr.org/record/35388>.

³⁰ United Nations Human Rights Council, "Human Rights Situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Including East Jerusalem, and the Obligation to Ensure Accountability and Justice," Resolution 61/4, March 27, 2026, vote: 24–4–19, <https://searchlibrary.ohchr.org/record/35380>.

Republic of Somaliland in December 2025.³¹ African states have to date refused to recognize Somaliland because of the longstanding emphasis the African Union has placed on safeguarding the territorial integrity of existing states, fearing the precedent that recognition of Somaliland could set for other contested borders drawn during the colonial period. As a result, following Israel's recognition of Somaliland, the African Union Assembly in February 2026 strongly condemned the move and called for its immediate revocation, while reiterating its commitment to Somalia's unity and territorial integrity.³²

Likewise, at the UN, Israel's recognition of Somaliland was met with condemnation. On January 5, 2026, Kuwait, in its capacity as chair of the Arab Group, circulated at the United Nations a communiqué adopted by the Council of the League of Arab States concerning Israel's recognition of Somaliland. The communiqué condemned Israel's December 26, 2025, recognition as a "flagrant violation" of Somalia's sovereignty and territorial integrity and reaffirmed that Somaliland constitutes an integral part of the Federal Republic of Somalia. It also called for international action to preserve Somalia's unity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity and warned of the broader implications for stability in the Horn of Africa, the Red Sea, and the Gulf of Aden.³³

Somaliland has been a self-declared country since 1991 and has been a rare success story in the Horn of Africa's turbulent politics, particularly in contrast to war-ravaged Somalia. For Israel, given Somaliland's location at the southern entrance of the Red Sea, adjacent to the Bab el-Mandeb Strait and directly opposite Yemen, this move represents the expansion of Israel's new periphery doctrine from diplomatic engagement into a broader strategy of positioning against Iran and its regional proxy network. In contrast to the original periphery doctrine, the contemporary doctrine is centered

³¹ Amit Yarom, "After Israel's Recognition of Somaliland, What Comes Next?" *Atlantic Council*, 15 January 2026, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/after-israels-recognition-of-somaliland-what-comes-next/>

³² *African Union Commission*, "The Chairperson of the African Union Commission Rejects Any Recognition of Somaliland and Reaffirms the African Union's Unwavering Commitment to the Unity and Sovereignty of Somalia," 26 December 2025. <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20251226/au-chairperson-rejects-any-recognition-somaliland>; *African Union*, Decisions, Declarations and Resolutions of the Thirty-Ninth Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the Union, February 14–15, 2026, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, https://au.int/sites/default/files/decisions/46188-Assembly_Decisions_31_March_E.pdf.

³³ *United Nations*, Letter dated 5 January 2026 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Kuwait to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, A/80/588–S/2025/862, 5 January 2026, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4099134>.

on countering Iran's efforts to encircle Israel through its "Axis of Resistance"—a network of state partners, militias, and proxy organizations stretching from Lebanon and Syria to Iraq, Yemen, and beyond. Israel's response has been to develop its own network of strategic partnerships beyond its immediate borders, creating geographic depth and operational flexibility in regions where Iranian influence has expanded. This has been facilitated by both Israel's deepening security ties with the United Arab Emirates and Abu Dhabi's substantial economic and strategic engagement across Africa, which have helped lay the foundations for this emerging strategic architecture. The UAE's investments in the Horn of Africa—particularly its development of Berbera Port—and its broader strategy in the Red Sea have created important economic and strategic conditions for expanding Israeli involvement in the region.³⁴ The UAE's role illustrates how the Abraham Accords have evolved beyond bilateral normalization agreements into a wider regional framework connecting Israel, Gulf states, and strategically located African partners. This is also reflected in the UAE's investments connecting Berbera to landlocked Ethiopia,³⁵ a country with which Israel has longstanding ties. This strategic shift is particularly pertinent given the power projection by Iran-backed Houthi forces in Yemen. For Israel, a foothold in Somaliland provides a crucial Red Sea bridgehead to monitor and counter Iran's proxies.³⁶ These moves in Somaliland have also occurred in parallel with warming ties with Ethiopia.

Ties between Jerusalem and Addis Ababa were strained during the Tigray War, prompting Jerusalem to adopt a more cautious approach amid reports of human rights abuses and the use of Israeli-made drones by Ethiopian forces. International pressure reportedly led Israel to limit some military sales, while Ethiopia turned to other suppliers, including Iran, which provided armed drones and expanded Tehran's security ties in Africa.³⁷ Since then, however, relations have warmed. In May 2025, Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar visited Addis Ababa and met Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, signaling renewed efforts to deepen cooperation in economic, technological, agricultural, diplomatic, and security

³⁴ David Pilling, Chloe Cornish, and Andrew Schipani, "The UAE's Rising Influence in Africa," 30 May 2024, *The Financial Times*, <https://www.ft.com/content/388e1690-223f-41a8-a5f2-0c971dbfe6f0>

³⁵ William Wallis and Peter Andringa, "The UAE's Imperial Push into Africa," 4 August 2026, *The Financial Times*, <https://www.ft.com/content/a4c6e5da-dc9f-43b0-a794-c3f6bb9bca7d>.

³⁶ Asher Lubotzky, "Somaliland and Israel-Considerations Regarding Recognition and Cooperation," 24 November 2025, *Institute for National Security Studies (INSS)*, <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/somaliland>

³⁷ Banafsheh Keynoush, "Iran to Remain a Key Partner for Ethiopia in the Tigray Conflict," *Middle East Institute*, 26 January 2022, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/iran-remain-key-partner-ethiopia-tigray-conflict>.

fields.³⁸ The rapprochement has unfolded alongside Ethiopia's efforts to secure access to the Red Sea through Somaliland, including its 2024 agreement with Hargeisa for access to the port of Berbera, and Israel's growing strategic engagement in the Horn of Africa, culminating in its recognition of Somaliland in December 2025. Together, these developments reflect the growing strategic importance of the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea to both Ethiopia and Israel.

However, prioritizing this anti-Iran security architecture comes at a severe diplomatic cost in Africa. By blatantly defying the African Union's foundational commitment to territorial integrity, Israel risks dismantling decades of painstaking diplomatic outreach across the continent. This unilateral recognition threatens to alienate crucial African partners by casting Israel as a destabilizing actor indifferent to the continent's historical border sensitivities. Ultimately, the tactical maritime advantages gained in the Horn of Africa may be eclipsed by a profound diplomatic backlash, leading to Israel's deeper isolation in the AU, the UN, and among developing nations.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

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

A critical component of this effort is Israel's continued engagement with African leaders through trade and investment, which can also yield greater support at the United Nations. Israel's diplomatic staff at the United Nations and other international organizations can also deepen relations with their African counterparts through sustained outreach. Success stories such as Israel's relations with Cameroon, Rwanda, and Togo have been built on longstanding connections that have also been fostered by considerable personal investments by Israel's political leadership, which have been parlayed into votes that have served Israel's national interests at international

³⁸ Ethiopian News Agency, "Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar Arrives in Addis Ababa for Official Visit," 5 May 2025, https://www.ena.et/web/eng/w/eng_6537274.

forums. Yet, it is also important to emphasize the limits of Israel's influence. Israel's support for African states, including through development aid and expanded economic ties, does not necessarily lead to wholesale changes in voting patterns at the UN, as many states have no issue "with the duality of maintaining ties with Israel, while at the same time not supporting it in the UN." Upgrading Israel's diplomatic presence in Africa is no longer just an economic or regional goal; in the post-October 7 landscape, it is a strategic necessity for countering diplomatic isolation. Israel still has not recovered from the severing of diplomatic ties with the majority of African states following the 1973 Yom Kippur War, and to date, Israel has only twelve permanent embassies on the continent, including embassies in Egypt and Morocco. The volatile UN voting patterns seen between 2023 and 2026 underscore the cost of this limited footprint. With greater on-the-ground engagement and closer contact with relevant parties, Israel will be better equipped to shape public opinion and directly address the political pressures that influence African decision-makers at the General Assembly. Ultimately, tying continued Israeli investment to an expanded, proactive diplomatic presence can help translate economic ties into tangible UN backing, securing a critical base of international support for Israel beyond its traditional Western allies.

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