

The Impact of the US on Israel-China Relations: Past, Present, and Future

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Abstract

On January 9 1950, Israel became one of the first countries in the world to recognize the People's Republic of China. Yet, it took more than 40 years until formal diplomatic relations were established between Jerusalem and Beijing. During this time and over subsequent decades, Israel and China developed a complicated and multifaceted relationship that has included diplomatic clashes at the United Nations, flourishing trade ties, extensive technological cooperation, and clandestine arms deals. Yet, in a relationship characterized by twists and turns, it seems that the only constant has been the United States (US). Since the 1950s, all American administrations have been paying close attention to the Sino-Israeli relationship. In so doing, the US has been monitoring, guiding, and, if necessary, obstructing ties between Israel and China. While China has been treated as the challenger of the US in the international arena since the collapse of the Soviet Union, nowadays it appears that the great power rivalry between Washington and Beijing has entered a critical stage. Against this background, this article aspires to provide an overview of American influence on the Sino-Israeli relationship while focusing on challenges that Israel currently faces in navigating between the two superpowers.

Keywords: China; Great Powers Competition; Israel; Middle East; US-China Relations

I. Introduction

On January 24, 2022, Israel and the People's Republic of China (hereafter China) celebrated the 30th anniversary of establishing diplomatic ties. In a historic phone call between the Israeli President, Isaac Herzog, and Chinese President Xi Jinping, both presidents highlighted the strength and broad scope of cooperation between Jerusalem and Beijing.¹

The 30th anniversary was seen as an opportunity to further strengthen the cooperation between Israel and China. For instance, Israel enjoyed a rather high-profile visit from the Chinese Vice President, Wang Qishan, who attended the annual conference of the China-Israel Joint Committee on Innovation Cooperation, where there was also an agreement between both sides to accelerate their negotiations on a Free Trade Agreement (FTA).²

Fast-forwarding three months to April 2022, China and Israel experienced a crisis following a security fiasco where the Israelis suspected the Chinese embassy of sending thermal cups with listening devices disguised as holiday gifts to several ministerial offices. After it was proved a false alarm, the Chinese pressured the Israeli government to publish an official announcement debunking any claims against China of spying.³ To a great extent, the contrast between the two events illustrates the complicated relationship between Israel and China. On the one hand, the

¹ Xinhua, "Xi says China to continue promoting relationship with Israel" (2021/11/17), Download date:2022/4/24, 《XinhuaNet》, http://www.news.cn/english/2021-11/17/c_1310317045.htm.

² Lazar Berman, "Marking 30 years of ties, Israel and China convene joint committee on innovation" (2022/1/24), Download date: 2022 /4/24, 《The Times of Israel》, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/marking-30-years-of-ties-israel-and-china-convene-joint-committee-on-innovation>; Doron Ella & Oded Eran, "After 30 years of ties, Israel, China agree to disagree - opinion" (2022/2/2), Download date:2022/4/24, 《The Jerusalem Post》, <https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-695314>.

³ TOI Staff, "China fumes as Shin Bet admits mugs Beijing gave to ministers not bugged after all" (2022/4/12), Download date:2022/4/24, 《The Times of Israel》, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/china-fumes-as-shin-bet-admits-mugs-beijing-gave-to-ministers-not-bugged-after-all/>.

decades-long relationship that exists between Beijing and Jerusalem (and one could even say between the Jewish and Chinese people) encompasses cooperation in numerous policy areas. On the other hand, the various conflicts over the years demonstrate a certain level of mistrust and highlight the fact that while both sides benefit from increased cooperation, they are far from being considered allies. That said it seems that no factor has played a larger role in the development of relations between Israel and China than the United States (US). As such, and amid the increasing notion that we are (yet again) facing a situation of great power competition, the objective of this paper is to provide an overview of the American involvement and influence on Sino-Israeli relations. In so doing, it seeks to examine the extent to which the escalating tensions between both superpowers could deteriorate the relationship between Jerusalem and Beijing.

Following this brief introduction, the paper proceeds as follows. The next section of the paper offers historical background on the impact the US has had on Sino-Israeli ties over the years. The third section will then focus on the recent shift in the US approach vis-a-vis China that started with President Donald Trump and continues with President Joe Biden's administration. Finally, the fourth section provides some concluding remarks.

II. The US factor in Sino-Israeli relations: Historical overview

When discussing Sino-Israeli relations, it is rather challenging to exclude the American factor since, according to Shichor;⁴ the US has been

⁴ Yitzhak Shichor, "The US is wrong in its attitude towards China - and Israel may also pay the price" (2022/1/25), Download date:2022/6/13, *《Arena Journal》*, <https://www.arenajournal.org.il/single-post/issue11-shichor-israel-china-usa>. [in Hebrew].

interfering in the relationship between Israel and China for over 70 years. Along similar lines, Wald maintains that disagreement over China is one of the oldest causes of disagreement between the US and Israel.’⁵

The beginning of American involvement can be traced back to the 1950s when Israel was one of the first countries in the Western world to recognize the new Communist regime on the mainland China. The American administration opposed the Israeli decision as concerns arose that Israel (with its new ‘leftist’ government) would join the Communist bloc.⁶

Still, the key reason for the lack of Sino-Israeli cooperation in the subsequent two decades (the 1950s-1960s) was not the American pressure but rather the Chinese reluctance to establish diplomatic relations with the state of Israel. Specifically, against the backdrop of the Israeli-Arab/Palestinian conflict, the Chinese anti-Israeli position was not only rooted in its partisan views on liberation struggles against imperialism but also motivated by its objective to gain the support of the non-aligned countries in general and the Muslim countries in particular.⁷

Evidently, the situation changed quite dramatically in the 1970s and 1980s. The US-China rapprochement and the American need to bolster the Chinese capacity to counter the Soviet Union in Asia brought Israel and China closer together in the context of security/military cooperation.

⁵ Shalom Salomon Wald, “China, the American Challenge and the Implications for Israel and the Jewish People” (2021/9/13), Download date: 2022/6/14, *《The Jewish People Policy Institute》*, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/israel-discovers-that-on-china-biden-is-just-as-tough-as-trump-1.10595084>.

⁶ Bass Miranda, “In the Shadow of Giants: The Origins of the China–Israel Defense Relationship,” *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (2022), pp. 481-497; Yitzhak Shichor, “The US is wrong in its attitude towards China - and Israel may also pay the price” (2022/1/25), Download date: 2022/6/14, *《Arena Journal》*, <https://www.arenajournal.org.il/single-post/issue11-shichor-israel-china-usa>.

⁷ Guy Burton “China, Jerusalem and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict” (2018/2/20), Download date: 2022/6/14, *《Middle East Institute》*, <http://www.mei.edu/content/map/china-jerusalem-and-israeli-palestinian-conflict>.

In fact, not only did the US not object to the increased Sino-Israeli cooperation but also the Americans actively supported it by suggesting to their incidental Chinese partners to buy arms from Israel.⁸

The advantages of establishing security cooperation between Jerusalem and Beijing were clear and created a ‘win-win-win’ situation. For Israel, selling weapons and technology to China opened a new big market for Israeli industries, while advancing the Israeli political objective of forming diplomatic relations with one of the biggest and (potentially) most important countries in the world. For China, Israel constituted the perfect partner, as there was no other country in the world with such extensive experience in the fighting, and upgrading of, Soviet-made weapons. Moreover, Israel’s arms arsenal also included advanced Western-made weapons systems. Another advantage is related to the fact that Israel was willing to sell military technology and not only hardware. In this context, it is also worthwhile to mention that Israel, in comparison to other countries, was not part of any formal alliance (e.g., the North Atlantic Treaty Organization) and thus was not constrained in arms sales and military technology transfers. Finally, cooperation between the Israelis and China seemed to be an excellent solution for the American administration. As a close and trusted ally of the US, Israel solved the problem of export controls rendering the US unable to sell arms directly to China, which would otherwise jeopardize relations with its allies in East Asia.⁹ Against this background, security cooperation between Israel and China flourished

⁸ Yitzhak Shichor, “The US is wrong in its attitude towards China - and Israel may also pay the price” (2022/1/25), Download date:2022/6/14, 《*Arena Journal*》, <https://www.arenajournal.org.il/single-post/issue11-shichor-israel-china-usa>.

⁹ Yitzhak Shichor, “Israel’s Military Transfers to China and Taiwan,” *Survival*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (1998), pp. 68-91; Yitzhak Shichor, “Proxy: Unlocking the origins of Israel’s military sales to China,” *CIRS Asia Paper No. 3*, (2020).

from the end of the 1970s to the end of the 1980s.

The relations between Israel and China took another turn at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. Essentially, two key factors changed the American perspective towards China and thus, indirectly influenced its position towards increased Sino-Israeli cooperation. First, the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre dealt a heavy blow to the relations between Washington and Beijing as the US (and some might say the Western liberal world) realized that its hope of China heading down the democratic path was ill considered. What is more, the end of the Cold War eliminated the biggest threat to American hegemony in the international arena but simultaneously brought attention to a new potential challenger, namely China.¹⁰

Ironically, the sweeping international isolation and sanctions imposed on China by the US and its Western allies following the Tiananmen massacre led Beijing to ease its general reluctance to officially establish diplomatic ties with Israel. Another important contributing factor was the 1991 Madrid Peace Conference which convinced China decision-makers that it was time for China to formalize its relations with Jerusalem.¹¹ Notwithstanding this, the American administration no longer looked favorably on Israel and China getting closer, ergo their increased security cooperation.

¹⁰ Yitzhak Shichor, "Israel and China: Mutual Demystification in Chinese-Israeli Relations," in Colin Shindler, *Israel and the World Powers: Diplomatic Alliances and International Relations Beyond the Middle East* (London: IB Tauris, 2014).

¹¹ P. R. Kumaraswamy, "Israel-China Relations and the Phalcon Controversy," *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (2005), pp. 93-103; E. Zev Sufott, "Israel's China policy 1950-92," *Israel Affairs*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2000), pp. 94-118.

Three major incidents demonstrate the problematic nature of Sino-Israeli cooperation when we add the American factor. The first incident occurred in early 1991, following the newly established diplomatic relations between Jerusalem and Beijing. Essentially, the American administration accused Israel of improperly transferring American missile technology used in the *Patriot* missiles stationed in Israel during the first Gulf War to China. Yet, an investigation by the American State Department found no evidence of such transfer. Still, the *Patriot* controversy could be seen as a portent of more cases of American opposition.

Indeed, a few years later, a major conflict erupted between Israel, the US, and China over the *Phalcon* AWACS (Airborne Early Warning and Control System). The *Phalcon*, an advanced Israeli radar system that could provide China with great intelligence and surveillance capabilities over the Taiwan Strait, was meant to be sold to China in a \$1-2 billion deal. However, following a fierce objection from the American side, Israel had to cancel the deal and pay \$350 million in compensation to Beijing. The failed *Phalcon* deal is considered by many as one of the most severe disputes between Israel and the US, as well as between Israel and China.

Finally, the third incident revolved around Israeli-made Harpy drones. In this case, Israel sold the drones to China in the mid-1990s, with maintenance scheduled for a decade later. However, the American administration was concerned that the maintenance work would be, in fact, an upgrade. Thus, there would not only be a risk that Israel would transfer some joint Israeli-American technology, but that it would also provide Beijing with superior capabilities over the Taiwan Strait. The outcome of the American pressure was (yet again) another withdrawal of the Israeli

side from a deal with China (as well as paying compensation).¹²

Beyond the deterioration of relations between Jerusalem, Washington, and Beijing, all of those incidents resulted in the unofficial cessation of Israel-China military deals. Furthermore, following a demand by the American administration, Israel implemented a series of legal and institutional changes that aimed to control and restrict export in the context of security and dual-use technologies. In 2007, for example, Israel passed the Export Control Law and established an Export Controls Agency within the Israeli Ministry of Defense.¹³

Despite these restrictions, Israel has continued its cooperation with China in the security (rather than military) sphere, particularly in the context of internal security. For instance, while China was preparing for the 2008 Beijing Olympics, there were reports of Israel training Chinese forces in counter-terrorism. In 2011, more reports surfaced that Israel trained a Chinese delegation from the People's Armed Police (PAP) at an instructional base run by Israel's Border Police.¹⁴

That said, since the 2010s Israel and China have entered a new

¹² Jonathan Goldstein, "A Quadrilateral Relationship: Israel, China, Taiwan, and the United States Since 1992," *American Journal of Chinese Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (2005), pp. 177-202; P. R. Kumaraswamy, "Israel-China Relations and the Falcon Controversy," *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (2005), pp. 93-103; Yiyi Chen, "China's Relationship with Israel, Opportunities and Challenges, Perspectives from China," *Israel Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (2012), pp. 1-21; Yitzhak Shichor, "The US is wrong in its attitude towards China - and Israel may also pay the price" (2022/1/25), Download date: 2022/6/15, *Arena Journal*, <https://www.arenajournal.org.il/single-post/issue11-shichor-israel-china-usa>.

¹³ S. Samuel C. Rajiv, "Israel-China Ties at 25: The Limited Partnership," *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (2017), pp. 413-431; Yoram Evron, "Economy, Science and Technology in China-Israel Relations," in Jonathan Goldstein & Yitzhak Shichor, eds. *China and Israel: From Discord to Concord*, (Jerusalem: Magnes Press 2016), pp. 193-225.

¹⁴ S. Samuel C. Rajiv, "Israel-China Ties at 25: The Limited Partnership," *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (2017), pp. 413-431; Yitzhak Shichor, "The US is wrong in its attitude towards China - and Israel may also pay the price" (2022/1/25), Download date: 2022/6/15, *Arena Journal*, <https://www.arenajournal.org.il/single-post/issue11-shichor-israel-china-usa>.

‘honeymoon’ phase in their relationship. Principally, domestic and external circumstances influence Israeli and Chinese decision-makers to seek increased cooperation. China has accelerated its economic development and modernization efforts and views Israel as an excellent source of technological innovation that could significantly contribute to the Chinese economy and international standing. In addition, Israel plays an important role in China’s flagship foreign policy endeavor, specifically as a regional hub for the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Finally, the argument could also be made that an increase in Chinese involvement in the Middle East and Israel could help China promote its image as a responsible international actor.

As for Israel, Jerusalem had a strong interest in strengthening ties with the second-largest economy in the world. Not only was Israel counting on Chinese investment in its tech industries and infrastructure projects, but hoped to have better access to the (ever-growing) Chinese market. In this context, it is worthwhile to highlight two other aspects that made China attractive to the Israelis. First is that Israel wanted to explore new fronts as Western economies suffered from recession following the 2008 financial crisis. The Israeli government, led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, wanted to pivot to Asia so as to decrease its dependence on European and American markets and diversify its economic relations in case of the deterioration of relations with the US and/or the European Union due to stagnation or even escalation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.¹⁵

Against this backdrop, Israel and China have since increased

¹⁵ Ludovica Castelli, “The U.S.-Israel-China Triangle and the Sorek B Project” (2020/5/26), Download date: 2022/6/15, 《*Centro Studi Internazionali*》, <https://www.cesi-italia.org/en/articles/the-us-israel-china-triangle-and-the-sorek-b-project>; Lahav Harkov, “Israel caught in the middle of growing US-China tensions - analysis” (2020/5/13), Download date: 2022/6/15, 《*The Jerusalem Post*》, <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/israel-caught-in-the-middle-of-growing-us-china-tensions-analysis-627773>.

cooperation in a plethora of policy areas, including, inter alia, technology, innovation, trade, investment, communication, infrastructure, health, culture, and education. Particularly impressive is the Chinese interest in investing in Israel, as (state-owned and ‘private’) Chinese companies were involved in 463 investments and mergers from 2002 to 2020. Also noteworthy is China’s \$4 billion collaboration with Israel in the context of infrastructure projects.¹⁶ Still, the crown jewel of Sino-Israel relations is the one-of-kind Comprehensive Innovation Partnership Treaty signed in 2017 by Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and Chinese President Xi. In this regard, during his visit to China to sign the agreement, Netanyahu stated that Israel and China are a marriage made in heaven.¹⁷

Notwithstanding the aforementioned, Shichor tellingly predicted that Sino-Israeli relations are expected to expand and diversify as long as Sino-US relations remain stable and steady. However...deterioration in Sino-US relations, not to mention confrontation... could impose limits also on Sino-Israeli relations—not only in military fields (which is obvious) but also in other fields (e.g., science and technology, communications, or diplomacy).¹⁸ Evidenced by the aftermath of the escalation in relations between Washington and Beijing that started with the Trump administration, which is exactly what has happened.

¹⁶ Shira Efron, Karen Schwindt, and Emily Haskel, *Chinese Investment in Israeli Technology and Infrastructure: Security Implications for Israel and the United States* (Santa Monica: RAND Cooperation, 2020), https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR3176.html; Doron Ella, “Chinese Investments in Israel: Developments and a Look to the Future” (2021/2/1), Download date: 2022/6/15, *The Institute for National Security Studies (INSS)*, <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/chinese-investments/>.

¹⁷ Shannon Tiezzi, “Israel and China a ‘Marriage Made in Heaven,’ Says Netanyahu” (2017/3/22), Download date: 2022/6/15, *The Diplomat*, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/03/israel-and-china-a-marriage-made-in-heaven-says-netanyahu/>.

¹⁸ Yitzhak Shichor, “Israel and China: Mutual Demystification in Chinese-Israeli Relations,” in Colin Shindler, eds, *Israel and the World Powers: Diplomatic Alliances and International Relations Beyond the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014), pp. 106–124.

III. Israel-China Relations and the Trump/Biden Administrations

Following the election of Donald Trump to office, and the subsequent US-China trade war and COVID-19 pandemic, the great powers' competition has seemingly intensified over the last couple of years. The escalating rivalry between the US and China, as previously mentioned, has had an impact on Sino-Israeli relations. Thus, American officials have been steadily increasing the pressure on Jerusalem to curtail cooperation with Beijing as much as possible and limit the overall Chinese involvement in Israel.

More specifically, the American administration bears great concern that China is trying to establish a Chinese-centric international order. In so doing, and in order to gain a strategic edge over the US, Beijing has placed great emphasis on its involvement in cooperation related to strategic infrastructure projects, advanced (dual-use) technologies, energy, telecommunications networks, and other critical industries (such as food and health). American decision-makers worry that China initiatives, such as BRI, provide footholds in areas of strategic interest (e.g. ports), and that the ensuing inability of China's BRI partners to repay their loans would ultimately be repaid in sovereignty (i.e. the infamous debt trap). Finally, in the specific case of Israel, the US is not only uneasy about the prospect of Israeli and joint American-Israeli technology transfers to Chinese hands but also that the growing China's influence in Israel could pose a threat to Israel's security.¹⁹

¹⁹ Dale Aluf & Keyi Li, "China-Israel: Heading Towards an Uncertain Future," *Sino-Israel Global Network & Academic Leadership*, (2020), <https://sino-israel.org/research/china-israel-heading-towards-an-uncertain-future/>; Shira Efron, "The U.S.-Israel Relationship's China Problem" (2020/5/6), Download date: 2022/6/15, *Israel Policy Forum*, <https://israelpolicyforum.org/2020/05/06/the-u-s-israel-relationships-china-problem/>; Mercy A. Kuo, "Israel Balancing US-China Relations: Geostrategic Context" (2019/4/16), Download date: 2022/6/15, *The Diplomat*, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/04/israel-balancing-us-china-relations-geostrategic-context/>.

Against this background, US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, stated during a visit to Israel in May 2020: We don't want the Chinese Communist Party to have access to Israeli infrastructure and to Israeli communication systems – all of the things that put Israeli citizens at risk, and in turn – put the capacity for America to work alongside Israel on important projects at risk as well.²⁰ Secretary of State Pompeo's message to the Israeli decision-makers (and public) was another overt instance of senior American officials trying to exert pressure and warn the Israelis that further cooperation with Beijing would not only be a risk for Israel but could also damage the close relationship between Jerusalem and Washington.²¹

The above concerns were also shared by many in the Israeli security establishment and think-tank community who criticized the Israeli government for ignoring the implication of strengthening ties with Beijing.²² In the words of Csepregi, Israeli national security personnel were highly alarmed by the Netanyahu government's efforts to put economic interests over national security considerations, going against the grain of the security-focused Israeli decision-making culture.²³

²⁰ Quoted in Dale Aluf & Keyi Li, "China-Israel: Heading Towards an Uncertain Future," *Sino-Israel Global Network & Academic Leadership*, (2020/2/11), Download date: 2022/6/15, 《NPR》, <https://sino-israel.org/research/china-israel-heading-towards-an-uncertain-future/>.

²¹ Daniel Estrin & Emily Feng, "There's A Growing Sore Spot In Israeli-U.S. Relations: China" (2019/9/11), Download date: 2022/6/15, 《NPR》, <https://www.npr.org/2019/09/11/757290503/theres-a-growing-sore-spot-in-israeli-u-s-relations-china>; Zhu Zhiquan, "Israel: Caught between a rock and a hard place with China and the US" (2019/11/22), Download date: 2022/6/15, 《Think China》, <https://www.thinkchina.sg/israel-caught-between-rock-and-hard-place-china-and-us>; Lahav Harkov, "Israel caught in the middle of growing US-China tensions – analysis" (2020/5/13), Download date: 2022/6/15, 《The Jerusalem Post》, <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/israel-caught-in-the-middle-of-growing-us-china-tensions-analysis-627773>.

²² Aghavni Harutyunyan, "China and Israel: Evolving Relationship within the Belt and Road Initiative," *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (2020), pp. 410-429.

²³ Zsolt Csepregi, "How the Abraham Accords Disrupted China-Israel Relations" (2021/8/24), Download date: 2022/4/24, 《The Diplomat》, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/08/how-the-abraham-accords-disrupted-china-israel-relations/>; Ibrahim Rabaia & Hend Sultan, "China and Israel: Strategic Economic Ties under American Pressure," *Contemporary Chinese Political Economy and Strategic Relations: An International Journal*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (2021), pp. 1399-1428.

In this context, one of the most serious disputes between the Israelis and the Americans is over the port in Haifa. In 2015, The Shanghai International Port Group (SIPG) won a bid to build and operate the new port in Haifa for 25 years (starting September 1, 2021). The Chinese involvement in the new development project was strongly endorsed by Israeli officials. This is evidenced by Israel's Minister of Transportation, Israel Katz's, statement: This is a historic day for Israel...It's an expression of confidence in the State of Israel on the part of a superpower, which has decided to invest billions of shekels in Israel and turn it into an international cargo center for all the world.²⁴ Along similar lines, Isaac Blumenthal, the CEO of Israel's Port authority declared that this is a historic event unmatched in several decades.²⁵

Notwithstanding this, in the last couple of years, the new Bayport Terminal has become a source of contention between Israel and the US as the American administration, from President Trump to senior officials and intelligence officers, raised concerns about the potential consequences of Chinese control and presence in the area. Essentially, the Haifa port is the biggest in Israel and serves as a key transportation hub. Thus, China could not only take over the port if the situation arises, but could also allow access to the Chinese military vessels. Moreover, the port is situated close to a navy port, where the Israeli submarine fleet is based and where the US Navy docks its Sixth Fleet. Unsurprisingly, the chief concern US administration (as well as many in the American security establishment) is that the new port will serve as a key intelligence/espionage hub for Beijing

²⁴ Quoted in Roie Yellinek, "The Israel-China-U.S. Triangle and the Haifa Port Project" (2018/11/27), Download date:2022/6/15, *《Middle East Institute》*, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/israel-china-us-triangle-and-haifa-port-project>.

²⁵ Quoted in Galia Lavi & Assaf Orion, "The Launch of the Haifa Bayport Terminal: Economic and Security Considerations," *INSS Insight*, No. 1516 (2021), p. 1.

in the Eastern Mediterranean where the Chinese could gather intelligence and conduct operations not only against the Israelis but also the US.²⁶

It is worth noting, however, that many of the above concerns are contested by officials and analysts; in the words of a senior Israeli official: The security warnings about China are a joke, completely mad.²⁷ The argument sustained by critics is that China does not need a port to spy on the Israeli and American navies. They also point out the degree of double standards regarding China involvement in the operation of ports (quite active in Europe and the US).²⁸ In fact, the American ambassador to Israel, Daniel Shapiro, recalled that when the Israelis approached the US regarding the Haifa port project, US companies showed little interest in involvement and none within American diplomatic and security circles objected to the Chinese getting the bid.²⁹ Still, as Lavi and Orion posit: even if the port does not embody special risks or create significant Israeli dependency on China, in the eyes of the United States, and certainly in Pentagon and US Navy circles, it has become a provocative symbol of treacherous cooperation by a close ally, Israel, with America's arch-rival, China, and

²⁶ Galia Lavi & Assaf Orion, "The Launch of the Haifa Bayport Terminal: Economic and Security Considerations," *INSS Insight*, No. 1516 (2021), pp. 3-4; Roie Yellinek, "The Israel-China-U.S. Triangle and the Haifa Port Project" (2018/11/27), Download date:2022/6/15, *《Middle East Institute》*, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/israel-china-us-triangle-and-haifa-port-project>; Shira Efron, Howard J. Shatz, Arthur Chan, Emily Haskel, Lyle J. Morris, and Andrew Scobell, *The Evolving Israel-China Relationship* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2019), https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2641.html; Jake Wallis Simons, "How China drove a wedge between America and Israel" (2021/8/30), Download date:2022/4/24, *《The Spectator》*, <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/how-china-drove-a-wedge-between-america-and-israel>.

²⁷ Zhu Zhiquan, "Israel: Caught between a rock and a hard place with China and the US" (2019/11/22), Download date:2022/6/15, *《Think China》*, <https://www.thinkchina.sg/israel-caught-between-rock-and-hard-place-china-and-us>.

²⁸ Galia Lavi & Assaf Orion, "The Launch of the Haifa Bayport Terminal: Economic and Security Considerations," *INSS Insight*, No. 1516 (2021), pp. 3-4.

²⁹ Ron Kampeas, "Breaking China: A rupture looms between Israel and the United States" (2020/6/3), Download date:2022/6/15, *《The Times of Israel》*, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/breaking-china-a-rupture-looms-between-israel-and-the-united-states/>.

therefore also a threat to the special relationship between the United States and Israel.³⁰

Ultimately, the US was inefficacious in compelling Israel to back down from its agreement with China regarding the port in Haifa. Despite this, it was met with much more success in the case of the Sorek B desalination plant. The Sorek B plant is expected to be the largest desalination plant in the world with a production capacity of 200 million cubic meters of water per year. Besides the strategic importance of the facility (producing a quarter of Israel's annual consumption), the plant is situated near Israel's nuclear facility, as well as to the Israeli Air Force base which functions as Israel's primary spaceport. As such, the American administration voiced its objections to Hutchison Water International, a subsidiary of a Hong Kong-based company, reaching the final stage of the tender. Furthermore, the Israeli security establishment including Nir Ben-Moshe, the head of the security service of the Israel Defense Forces, expressed disapproval to the Israeli Ministry of Energy. Eventually, after extensive pressure from the American administration, the Israeli company IDE Technologies won the bid.³¹

The constant American pressure on the Israeli government has yielded additional results beyond the Sorek B tender. For example, following an assessment by the Israeli Defense Ministry and reports

³⁰ Galia Lavi & Assaf Orion, "The Launch of the Haifa Bayport Terminal: Economic and Security Considerations," *INSS Insight*, No. 1516 (2021), pp. 3-4.

³¹ Shira Efron, "The U.S.-Israel Relationship's China Problem" (2020/5/6), Download date:2022/6/18, *Israel Policy Forum*, <https://israelpolicyforum.org/2020/05/06/the-u-s-israel-relationships-china-problem/>; Aghavni Harutyunyan, "China and Israel: Evolving Relationship within the Belt and Road Initiative," *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (2020), pp. 410-429; Dale Aluf & Keyi Li, "China-Israel: Heading Towards an Uncertain Future," *Sino-Israel Global Network & Academic Leadership*, (2020), <https://sino-israel.org/research/china-israel-heading-towards-an-uncertain-future/>.

about a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Jerusalem and Washington, Chinese companies have been excluded from any operations related to Israeli 5G networks.³² The Israel government also introduced The Advisory Committee to Inspect National Security Aspects of Foreign Investments. The committee, according to the Israeli Prime Minister's Office, aims to 'find the appropriate balance between the need to encourage foreign investments in Israel and ensure continued economic prosperity and considerations of national security.'³³ While China (or any other country for that matter) is not mentioned as the rationale behind the establishment of the committee, it is rather clear that China is the main target.³⁴

That said there are serious problems related to the operation and jurisdiction of the committee. Primarily, the committee was not formally or legally constructed. The committee thus not only lacks transparency but its decisions are not legally binding. The committee's jurisdiction is further limited in that it can only offer its opinion on matters concerning investments in finance, communications, infrastructure, transportation, and energy. Notably, the most sensitive sector, namely the tech sector, is not included in the committee's mandate. Another shortcoming of

³² Dale Aluf & Keyi Li, "China-Israel: Heading Towards an Uncertain Future," *Sino-Israel Global Network & Academic Leadership*, (2020), <https://sino-israel.org/research/china-israel-heading-towards-an-uncertain-future/>; Yaacov Ayish, "Israel must partner with US in power competition with China - opinion" (2020/10/6), Download date:2022/6/16, *The Jerusalem Post*, <https://www.jpost.com/opinion/israel-must-partner-with-us-in-the-great-power-competition-with-china-644668>.

³³ Quoted in Lahav Harkov, "US concern about Chinese biotech investments in Israel rises with COVID-19" (2020/5/13), Download date:2022/6/16, *The Jerusalem Post*, <https://www.jpost.com/international/us-china-ties-have-hit-another-low-point-in-the-wake-of-coronavirus-627848>.

³⁴ Ludovica Castelli, "The U.S.-Israel-China Triangle and the Sorek B Project" (2020/6/6), Download date: 2022/6/16, *Centro Studi Internazionali*, <https://www.cesi-italia.org/en/articoli/1137/the-u-s-israel-china-triangle-and-the-sorek-b-project>; The Economist, "Israel is being forced to choose between America and China" (2021/7/15), Download date:2022/4/24, *The Economist*, <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2021/07/15/israel-is-being-forced-to-choose-between-america-and-china>.

the committee is its inability to review bids that were opened before the committee was created.³⁵ Herein lies the problem with the *Sorek B* tender; following the American objection, the Israelis countered that the Committee could not intervene as the bid had been opened before its establishment.³⁶ Taking note of the above deficiencies, Simon describes the committee as a fig leaf³⁷ while Feith posits that the committee's 'limitation was crafted to avoid offending China, so it antagonized U.S. officials instead.'³⁸

Against this background, one can notice the rather challenging balancing act that Israel is trying to cope with – on the one hand, siding with its most important ally and, on the other, staying on good terms with one of its most important (economic) partners. In this context, it is also noteworthy that Beijing did not remain passive, and showed its disapproval through statements and taking action(s). For instance, following the reports on Israeli-American MOU to exclude China from Israeli 5G networks, Chen Weihua, a journalist from China's state-owned media outlet the *China Daily*, responded by stating that 'Chinese cities like Shanghai provided safe haven to some 30,000 Jews fleeing Nazi Europe in WWII, but now

³⁵ Lahav Harkov, "US concern about Chinese biotech investments in Israel rises with COVID-19" (2020/5/13), Download date:2022/6/16, *《The Jerusalem Post》*, <https://www.jpost.com/international/us-china-ties-have-hit-another-low-point-in-the-wake-of-coronavirus-627848>; Shira Efron, "The U.S.-Israel Relationship's China Problem" (2020/5/6), Download date:2022/6/16, *《Israel Policy Forum》*, <https://israelpolicyforum.org/2020/05/06/the-u-s-israel-relationships-china-problem/>.

³⁶ Barak Ravid, "Scoop: U.S. asked Israel to clarify Chinese-controlled company's role in \$1.5B desalination plant bid" (2020/5/2), Download date:2022/6/16, *《Axios》*, <https://www.axios.com/scoop-us-asked-israel-to-clarify-chinese-controlled-companys-role-in-15b-desalination-plant-bid-9022c780-14d0-4f22-acc7-f954d0d557e9.html>.

³⁷ Jake Wallis Simons, "How China drove a wedge between America and Israel" (2021/8/30), Download date:2022/4/20, *《The Spectator》*, <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/how-china-drove-a-wedge-between-america-and-israel>.

³⁸ Douglas J. Feith, "The Chinese Challenge to the U.S.-Israel Relationship" (2020/5/15), Download date:2022/6/16, *《Wall Street Journal》*, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-chinese-challenge-to-the-u-s-israel-relationship-11589576485>.

Israel returns the favor by being a US poodle against China in 5G.³⁹ Furthermore, not only did China delay the appointment of a new Chinese ambassador to Israel following the sudden death of Ambassador Du Wei in May 2020 but limited the interaction between senior Chinese and Israeli officials (in comparison to other Middle Eastern partners).⁴⁰ Finally, one could also notice a decrease in investments as ‘Chinese investment in Israeli tech companies has fallen from 72 deals in 2018 to 45 in 2020.’⁴¹

The above compellingly indicates that the space for Israel to maneuver between China and the US is shrinking. In this regard, I agree with Ella, who maintains that: Under Netanyahu, Israel felt that it could have its cake and eat it—do business with the Chinese without the Americans being angry with us...[and] It took Israel time to realize the extent to which the US now sees China as its chief rival.⁴²

With the understanding that Israel pays a high economic and political price for siding with Washington, it is important to mention that besides exerting pressure on Israel, the Trump administration did try to find alternatives to Chinese investment. Alternatives materialized through Trump’s Middle East peace initiatives, namely the ‘*Peace for Prosperity*’ (also known as the ‘Deal of the Century’) and, in particular, the Abraham

³⁹ Quoted in “China has proven to be a bad actor. We owe them nothing. Editorial” (2020/8/19), Download date: 2022/6/16, *The Jerusalem Post*, <https://www.jpost.com/opinion/china-has-proven-to-be-a-bad-actor-we-owe-them-nothing-639116>.

⁴⁰ Eyal Propper, “Autumn Chills: Israel-China Relations and the Normalization Agreements with the Gulf States,” *INSS Insight*, No. 1389 (2020), <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/china-abraham-accords/>.

⁴¹ The Economist, “Israel is being forced to choose between America and China” (2021/7/15), Download date: 2022/4/24, *The Economist*, <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2021/07/15/israel-is-being-forced-to-choose-between-america-and-china>.

⁴² The Economist, “Israel is being forced to choose between America and China” (2021/7/15), Download date: 2022/4/24, *The Economist*, <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2021/07/15/israel-is-being-forced-to-choose-between-america-and-china>.

Accords. The historic agreement's key achievement was the normalization of relations between the state of Israel and the United Arab Emirates.⁴³ Principally, the *Abraham Accords* aimed to connect Israel with the rich Gulf States. In so doing, the American objective was not only to create peace, prosperity, and stability in the Middle East region but also to shift Israel's (as well as the Gulf states) attention from China by linking of Gulf capital, Israeli technology, global markets, and Arab labor.⁴⁴ A prominent example in this context was the UAE's ambitious plan to invest in various infrastructure projects in Israel such as the Haifa and Ashdod Ports.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, with the election of Joe Biden as the new US President, President Trump's grand strategy for the Middle East and his vision of flourishing relations between Israel and its new Gulf partners never became known as the Biden administration preferred to take a different path from that of Trump's in relations to the Middle East.

One path President Biden did not diverge from, though, is related to the US policies vis-à-vis Beijing. While some in Israel (and in Beijing) hoped that the new American administration would take a 'softer' stance on China and Sino-Israeli cooperation, this was certainly not the case. One could even say that this was rooted in a miscalculation, or even ignorance, of American foreign policy in general and the history of American

⁴³ Essentially, other countries followed suit in normalizing relations with Jerusalem. These include for instance Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco.

⁴⁴ Zsolt Csepregi, "How the Abraham Accords Disrupted China-Israel Relations" (2021/8/24), Download date:2022/4/24, *The Diplomat*, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/08/how-the-abraham-accords-disrupted-china-israel-relations/>; see also Jake Wallis Simons, "How China drove a wedge between America and Israel" (2021/8/30), Download date:2022/4/24, *The Spectator*, <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/how-china-drove-a-wedge-between-america-and-israel>.

⁴⁵ Amiram Barkat, "The Dubai tycoon with ambitions for Haifa Port" (2021/2/17), Download date:2022/6/19, *Globes*, <https://en.globes.co.il/en/article-the-dubai-tycoon-with-ambitions-for-haifa-port-1001361063>; AP, "Direct Israel-UAE shipping route? Dubai firm bids to take over Haifa port" (2020/9/16), Download date:2022/6/19, *The Times of Israel*, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/direct-israel-uae-shipping-route-dubai-firm-bids-to-take-over-haifa-port/>.

involvement in Sino-Israeli relations in particular. A view that has attracted bipartisan support is that China is the key threat to the American hegemony in the international sphere. As such, while an ever-increasing polarization exists in American politics, both Democrats and Republicans support hardening U.S. policy toward China on matters including military posture, trade and investment, technology controls, cross-border data restrictions and academic exchange.⁴⁶ In fact, it appears that President Biden did not only follow Trump's hardening of the US position on China; rather, the administrative confusion and inconsistency that criticized the mercurial Trump White House is no longer there for Israel to exploit.⁴⁷ For the same reason, Afterman posits: The Biden administration uses a different language and is less emotional, but it is more systematic and perhaps more effective.⁴⁸

Indeed, the American administrations have been exerting ostensive pressure on Israeli decision-makers. For instance, the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), William Burns, made a visit to Israel in August 2021 with the key objective of voicing apprehension to new Israeli Prime Minister, Naftali Bennett, on the Chinese involvement and

⁴⁶ Douglas J. Feith, "The Chinese Challenge to the U.S.-Israel Relationship" (2020/5/15), Download date: 2022/6/16, *《Wall Street Journal》*, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-chinese-challenge-to-the-u-s-israel-relationship-11589576485>; see also Shalom Salomon Wald, "China, the American Challenge and the Implications for Israel and the Jewish People" (2021/9/13), Download date: 2022/6/14, *《The Jewish People Policy Institute》*; Dale Aluf & Keyi Li, "China-Israel: Heading Towards an Uncertain Future," *Sino-Israel Global Network & Academic Leadership*, (2020), <https://sino-israel.org/research/china-israel-heading-towards-an-uncertain-future>.

⁴⁷ David Rosenberg, "Opinion | It's the End of Israel's Beautiful Friendship With China. So What?" (2021/9/9) Download date: 2022/4/24, *《Haaretz》*, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-it-s-the-end-of-israel-s-beautiful-friendship-with-china-so-what-1.10195448>; See also Oded Eran & Shimon Stein, "The United States and Israel: Disagreements Could Threaten Relations," *INSS Insight*, No. 1535, (2021).

⁴⁸ Quoted in David Rosenberg, "Israel Discovers That on China, Biden Is Just as Tough as Trump" (2022/2/7), Download date: 2022/4/24, *《Haaretz》*, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/israel-discovers-that-on-china-biden-is-just-as-tough-as-trump-1.10595084>.

investment in Israel.⁴⁹ A few months later, in December 2021, the American National Security Adviser, Jake Sullivan, raised the topic again during his meetings with high-ranked Israeli officials including Prime Minister Bennett, as well as the Israeli Foreign and Defense Ministers.⁵⁰

In a similar fashion, Beijing has also taken measures on multiple fronts to demonstrate to the Israelis the potential consequences of Israel's alignment with the US against China. For instance, while China was rather active in its engagement with most Middle Eastern and Gulf states, for a significant period there were no high-level contacts between Israeli and Chinese officials. In addition, China abandoned its (relatively) natural position in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict at the United Nations (UN) and harshly criticized Israel for war crimes in Gaza.⁵¹

The assertive approach taken by the Biden administration as well as the Chinese response has made Israel's balancing act under the new leadership of Prime Minister Bennett even more challenging. To further muddy the waters, there are voices within the Israeli political and security circles who do not only believe that the Americans are overly sensitive regarding anything related to China but also argue that the US is holding Israel to impossible standards when it comes to China. For example, the former Director of the Mossad, Yossi Cohen, stated: I do not understand what the

⁴⁹ Barak Ravid, "Scoop: CIA director raised China concerns with Israeli prime minister" (2021/8/19), Download date:2022/6/19, *《Axios》*, <https://www.axios.com/2021/08/18/cia-israel-china-investments>.

⁵⁰ Rina Bassist, "US National national security advisor meets with Bennet, Lapid, Gantz in Israel" (2021/12/22), Download date: June 14, 2022, *《Al-Monitor》*, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/12/us-national-security-adviser-meets-bennett-lapid-gantz-israel>.

⁵¹ Shalom Salomon Wald, "China, the American Challenge and the Implications for Israel and the Jewish People" (2021/9/13), Download date:2022/6/14, *《The Jewish People Policy Institute》*; David Rosenberg, "Israel Discovers That on China, Biden Is Just as Tough as Trump" (2022/2/7), Download date:2022/4/24, *《Haaretz》*, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/israel-discovers-that-on-china-biden-is-just-as-tough-as-trump-1.10595084>.

Americans want from China. If anyone understands it, he should explain it to me...China is not opposed to us and is not our enemy.⁵² Another argument purported by critics of the US is that Israel should not blindly follow the American line of restrictive action in relation to Chinese projects and investments as many of its restrictions are not being imposed on other countries or even within the US. Prominent examples in this context are the Chinese involvement in ports and the relatively small portion of Chinese investment (in comparison to American and European investment) of the total Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Israel.⁵³

Notwithstanding this, for the time being, it seems that Israel has been trying to show the American administration that it cannot only act as a good ally but that it also takes its concerns about Beijing seriously. For instance, Israel joined the US at the UN in condemning China's human rights violations in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Hong Kong.⁵⁴ In addition, Jerusalem and Washington have recently started to engage in inter-ministerial/agency consultations regarding Sino-Israeli relations.⁵⁵ Israel also promised to

⁵² Quoted in David Feith, "Opinion: Israel's growing ties to China are testing its relationship with the U.S." (2021/7/6), Download date: 2022/4/24, *The Washington Post*, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/07/06/israels-growing-ties-china-are-testing-its-relationship-with-us/>.

⁵³ Jake Wallis Simons, "How China drove a wedge between America and Israel" (2021/8/30), Download date: 2022/4/24, *The Spectator*, <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/how-china-drove-a-wedge-between-america-and-israel>; Galia Lavi & Assaf Orion, "The Launch of the Haifa Bayport Terminal: Economic and Security Considerations," *INSS Insight*, No. 1516 (2021), pp. 3-4; Yitzhak Shichor, "The US is wrong in its attitude towards China - and Israel may also pay the price" (2022/1/25), Download date: 2022/6/13, *Arena Journal*, <https://www.arenajournal.org.il/single-post/issue11-shichor-israel-china-usa>.

⁵⁴ David Feith, "Opinion: Israel's growing ties to China are testing its relationship with the U.S." (2021/7/6), Download date: 2022/4/24, *The Washington Post*, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/07/06/israels-growing-ties-china-are-testing-its-relationship-with-us/>.

⁵⁵ Ravid, B. (2022) Biden administration presses Israel on Chinese investments, *Axios* (2022/1/6), Download date: 2022/6/24, <https://www.axios.com/us-israel-china-investments-talks-e48fe0fa-25ab-4e6d-ae3c-eef68380a538.html>.

keep Washington posted regarding any significant interaction with China.⁵⁶ A good illustration in this regard is that for the first time, Israel notified the American administration about its intention to hold the fifth China-Israel Joint Committee on Innovation Cooperation (JCIC) in January 2022.⁵⁷ In the context of tenders, Israel showed that it takes American concerns to heart as Chinese companies lost important bids such as Israel's light rail project and the Mekorot (Israel's national water company) bid to build a water system in North Israel.⁵⁸

IV. Conclusions

Since the emergence of Sino-Israeli relations in the 1950s, the US has taken great interest in controlling and monitoring the relationship based on its geopolitical interests at any given time. Recently, as great power competition intensifies between the US and China, it seems that the American administration is less patient concerning the cooperation between Jerusalem and Beijing and Chinese investment in strategic sectors in Israel. In comparison to the post-Cold War era when the US focused its

⁵⁶ Danny Zaken, "Israel has announced that it will be transparent with the United States regarding deals with China" (2022/1/3), Download date:2022/6/19, *《Globes》*, <https://www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1001397182>; TOI Staff, "Israel will keep US in the loop on major economic deals with China — report" (2022/1/3), Download date:2022/6/19, *《The Times of Israel》*, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-will-keep-us-in-the-loop-on-major-economic-deals-with-china-report/>.

⁵⁷ Doron Ella & Oded Eran, "After 30 years of ties, Israel, China agree to disagree - opinion" (2022/2/2), Download date:2022/4/24, *《The Jerusalem Post》*, <https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-695314>.

⁵⁸ Yuval Sadeh, "Light Rail Tender - Is this the swan song of the Chinese infrastructure companies in Israel?" (2022/1/31), Download date:2022/6/19, *《Calcalist》*, https://www.calcalist.co.il/local_news/article/bjm00zmscy; Lahav Harkov, "Chinese companies lose Tel Aviv light rail tender" (2022/1/31), Download date:2022/6/19, *《The Jerusalem Post》*, <https://www.jpost.com/business-and-innovation/energy-and-infrastructure/article-695065>; "Shafdan expansion project" (2022/3/1), Download date:2022/6/19, *《Global Water Intelligence》*, <https://www.globalwaterintel.com/sponsored-content/shafdan-expansion-project-mekorot>.

attention on Sino-Israeli security cooperation in the form of arms deals and technology transfer, the Americans are now exerting pressure on Israel in almost every policy area.

Against this backdrop, the question is how Israel could find ways to manage this delicate triangular relationship with Washington and Beijing amid the current geopolitical turmoil. Essentially, it appears Israel ought to approach this challenge on multiple fronts.

First, in the case of its relationship with the US, Israel and the US should continue expanding their consultations on China and engage in discussions regarding the US and Israel's interests vis-à-vis Beijing.⁵⁹ In this context, while continuing to show the Americans that it still views the US as its most important ally, Israel could also ensure to stand firm when the American objections seem to contradict other practices of American foreign policy towards other countries. Israeli decision-makers must also remind the Americans that Israel is an important partner to the US and that their relationship is by no means one-sided, as Israel has served a crucial role in advancing as well as protecting the US global interest for decades.⁶⁰ In addition, given the economic price that Israel has been paying for its alignment with the US, the Bennett administration would benefit from asking Washington to provide possible alternatives to Chinese capital and investment (e.g., American investments or American assistance in helping Israel to connect to other foreign markets). Finally, the Israeli-American confutations on China should not only take place on a governmental

⁵⁹ Mercy A. Kuo, "The China Challenge in Israel-US Relations" (2021/8/23), Download date:2022/6/19, 《*The Diplomat*》, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/08/the-china-challenge-in-israel-us-relations/>.

⁶⁰ Yitzhak Shichor, "The US is wrong in its attitude towards China - and Israel may also pay the price" (2022/1/25), Download date:2022/6/13, 《*Arena Journal*》, <https://www.arenajournal.org.il/single-post/issue11-shichor-israel-china-usa>.

level, but could also include Track II diplomacy to involve think tanks, businesses, and civil society actors.⁶¹

Secondly, Israel would benefit from improving its own capacity to understand and engage with China. As such, Israel needs to work towards the establishment of a larger pool of China (as well as Asia) experts in governmental, academic, and business circles.⁶² In addition, Israel should learn from the experience of others and study how other countries respond to the challenges of cooperation with China, for instance, in the context of creating effective investment screening mechanisms.⁶³

Thirdly, in order to avoid a scenario where Israel is caught in the crossfire between China and the US or develops overreliance on one of them, Israel ought to diversify its economic and political partners beyond the US, China, and its traditional European allies. One possibility is expanding its scope of engagement with Asian countries such as Japan, India, and South Korea, and institutions like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).⁶⁴ In fact, while there is a chance that an Israeli pivot to Asia (i.e., beyond China) would put the US at ease, relations with Beijing may also improve as it would show the Chinese that Israel is not simply a Western-oriented American puppet and its connection

⁶¹ Daniel Samet, "Israel's China Problem," *The National Interest*, No. 175 (2021).

⁶² Shalom Salomon Wald, "China, the American Challenge and the Implications for Israel and the Jewish People" (2021/9/13), Download date:2022/6/14, *《The Jewish People Policy Institute》*, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/israel-discovers-that-on-china-biden-is-just-as-tough-as-trump-1.10595084>.

⁶³ Oded Eran & Shimon Stein, "The United States and Israel: Disagreements Could Threaten Relations," *INSS Insight*, No. 1535 (2021); Nir Ben Moshe, "Chinese Espionage Operations in the United States: And in Israel?" *INSS Insight*, No. 1560, (2022).

⁶⁴ Mercy A. Kuo, "The China Challenge in Israel-US Relations" (2021/8/23), Download date:2022/6/19, *《The Diplomat》*, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/08/the-china-challenge-in-israel-us-relations/>; Daniel Samet, "Israel's China Problem," *The National Interest*, No. 175 (2021); Doron Ella, "Trade in Goods and Services Between Israel and China in the Era of COVID-19," *INSS*, (2021), pg. 10-12.

and affiliation with Asian countries is also important to Israeli decision-makers.⁶⁵

To conclude, no matter which course of action Israel eventually decides to take, it seems that the US will continue to play a dominant role in the Sino-Israeli relationship in the foreseeable future.

⁶⁵ Shalom Salomon Wald, “China, the American Challenge and the Implications for Israel and the Jewish People” (2021/9/13), Download date:2022/6/14, 《*The Jewish People Policy Institute*》, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/israel-discovers-that-on-china-biden-is-just-as-tough-as-trump-1.10595084>.