

CHINA IN THE SHADOW OF OCTOBER 7



Israeli Media Coverage of china in 2024



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Edited by

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INTRODUCTION TO THE CHINA*MED* PROJECT



The wider Mediterranean is a vast region that stretches from the Iranian Plateau to the Strait of Gibraltar, from the Alps to the Horn of Africa. It is an area characterized by long-term trends, but it is also the epicenter of centrifugal forces that connect Europe, Africa, and Asia. Our research team at ChinaMed Project analyses how the dynamics of this region intersect with one of the most consequential macro-trends of this century: the transition of China, with its 1.4 billion people, from the periphery to the center of the international system.

Our research platform's mission is to track and investigate how China's presence in the region is changing the balance of power on the ground in a nuanced, yet incremental fashion. We achieve this by collecting data and creating indicators that analyze China's growing economic, commercial, and security ties with the countries of the wider Mediterranean, which we make publicly available at ChinaMed Data.

Moreover, we publish the ChinaMed Observer, sharp and focused analyses of the media discourses in China and the

countries of the wider Mediterranean region on the most recent events and the most pressing trends in Sino-Mediterranean relations.

We also actively engage with and participate in the expanding connections between China and the wider Mediterranean through a range of academic initiatives including: the China Management & Business Program, scientific publications, and academic events. The ChinaMed Project, a part of the TOChina Hub developed by the University of Turin and promoted by the Torino World Affairs Institute, carries out these initiatives and its research through its partnerships such as those with the HH Sheikh Nasser al-Mohammad al-Sabah Programme at Durham University, the China-Global South Project, and the Asian Studies Unit of the Research Department of the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies. ChinaMed also enjoys the support of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Fondazione CRT, one of Italy's largest charitable foundations.

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It is a pleasure to express our gratitude for the support provided to our project – in accordance with Article 23 bis of the Decree of the President of the Italian Republic 18/1967 – to the Unit for Analysis, Policy Planning, Statistics and Historical Documentation of the Directorate General for Public and Cultural Diplomacy of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, its brilliant head Counsellor Giuliana Del Papa, and her valuable team. It goes without saying that the views expressed in this report are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2024, Israeli media coverage of China remained predominantly negative, continuing the trend established the previous year. Driven initially by Beijing's perceived "pro-Palestinian" stance following the October 7 attack, disillusionment among Israel's China experts has only deepened throughout the duration of the war in Gaza. Chinese statements regarding the conflict have led the Israeli press to increasingly depict China as aligned with Iran within an emerging "Axis of Evil." Notably, Beijing's rhetorical support for the establishment of a Palestinian state, its efforts to mediate inter-Palestinian reconciliation, its inaction with respect to Houthi attacks, and its ties with Tehran have been framed as fundamentally opposed to Israeli interests.

This sustained negative media portrayal has likely influenced Israeli public opinion, reinforcing the perception of China as a potential threat. Against this backdrop—and amid heightened concerns over national security and international isolation—apprehensions have grown regarding the proliferation of Chinese weaponry in the Middle East, the espionage and security risks of imported Chinese technology, and the possibility of China boycotting Israeli markets.

Although many Israeli experts have pushed back against more alarmist narratives, the overall outlook on China remains negative. Even as Beijing appears to be making some efforts to repair bilateral ties and moderate its rhetoric, Tel Aviv and Israeli experts remain largely reluctant to strengthen relations, viewing China as too closely aligned with adversarial regional actors. With the Middle East facing the possibility of renewed conflict and Beijing maintaining its alignment with the Palestinian cause, Arab states and Iran, a positive shift in Israeli public opinion and media portrayals of China appears highly unlikely in the near future.

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Introduction

As highlighted in our 2023 report,¹ October 7 was a watershed moment for Israeli perceptions of China. Prior to the Hamas-led attack, there was spirited debate within the Israeli press over their country's approach to the escalating U.S.-China rivalry. While the vast majority of Israeli analysts advocated for prioritizing ties with Washington over Beijing—viewing China's expanding diplomatic outreach in the Middle East as detrimental to Israeli interests—some contended that Tel Aviv had too readily acquiesced to American pressure by imposing restrictions on what had been a thriving technological and economic relationship with China. A small minority even cautioned against over-reliance on Washington, suggesting that Beijing could also play a constructive role in fostering advancing normalization, particularly after it helped broker the rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

However, China's official response to the October 7 attack and the ensuing war in Gaza completely flattened this debate. Beijing's stance of "neutrality" — particularly its refusal to explicitly condemn Hamas and other Iranian-backed militant groups or to leverage its influence to curb their actions — was widely interpreted in Israeli media as "pro-Palestinian," if not outright "pro-Hamas." This position not only strained official bilateral relations but also profoundly alienated Israeli experts, with even the most conciliatory voices coming to view Beijing's response as a betrayal of the strong ties developed over previous decades.²

Throughout 2024, Israeli analysts continued to interpret, explain and condemn Chinese actions and statements related to Israel, the war in Gaza, and broader regional developments. As Beijing maintained a rather consistent stance and deepened its engagement with the Palestinians — particularly through efforts to mediate between Fatah and Hamas — negative perceptions of China not only persisted but intensified in Israeli media discourse. Public opinion followed suit, with China increasingly depicted as an ally of Iran and its regional "proxies." This shift, coupled with media narratives emphasizing national security concerns and fears of international isolation, heightened anxieties over Chinese arms sales in the Middle East, the potential espionage and security risks associated with imported Chinese consumer electronics and electric vehicles, and the possibility of Beijing engaging in a boycott of Israeli markets.

Despite these concerns, some Israeli academics, industry experts, and government officials—while still highly critical of China's diplomatic position—offered a more nuanced perspective regarding trade relations, pushing back against what they saw as exaggerated fears and arguing that

economic engagement with Beijing remained in Israel's national interest.

However, it is important to note that China was largely an afterthought for much of the Israeli media throughout 2024. Amid a year marked by wars on multiple fronts and the plight of Israeli hostages in Gaza, Beijing's criticism of Tel Aviv's conduct was far from the most pressing issue. Moreover, China was only one among many sources of global condemnation directed at Israel, driven by the immense humanitarian toll of its military campaigns, its escalatory actions in the region, and the controversial proposals put forth by members of the Netanyahu cabinet.

The Continued deterioration of Sino-Israeli Relations

In 2024, Israeli experts on China remained deeply disillusioned as they sought to explain to the Israeli public why Beijing continued to adopt what were perceived as "anti-Israel" positions, despite the evident damage to bilateral relations and Israeli public opinion. **Carice Witte**, founder and CEO of the Signal Group for Israel-China relations, noted that "China does not intend to cut off relations with Israel, but at the same time it is harming them through its actions."³ **Itamar Eichner**, diplomatic correspondent for Ynet, explained that China's diplomatic behavior during the war led to the collapse of the idea, previously held by many scholars and policy-makers, that a real rapprochement between the two countries was possible.⁴

For **Tuvia Gering**, researcher at the Glazer Israel-China Policy Centre at the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), China's bolstering of its traditional pro-Palestine rhetoric to repeatedly include Palestinians refugees' right of return not only stands "in complete opposition to Israeli interests" but also challenges its own non-interference policy by showing a clear "double standard in the face of Palestinian terrorism":

*"China's choice to support the right of return now is a reward for Palestinian terrorism and blatant interference in Israel's internal affairs, and is tantamount to Israeli support for Taiwan's independence."*⁵

China's deteriorating relationship with Israel is also reflected in Tel Aviv's warming ties with Taipei, characterized by increased cooperation and mobilization around shared support for liberal democracy and resilience against foreign military pressure.⁶ Pro-Palestine protests in Taiwan went mostly unreported in Israeli media, which instead underscored the Taiwanese authorities' diplomatic goodwill and multi-layered shows of solidarity following October 7, including

¹ Enrico Fardella and Andrea Ghiselli (Eds.), "Power Shifts? China's Growing Influence in the Gulf: Key Trends and Regional Debates in 2023," *Torino World Affairs Institute*, 2024, <https://www.chinamed.it/publications/power-shifts-chinas-growing-influence-in-the-gulf-key-trends-and-regional-debates-in-2023>.

² Amanda Chen, "Israeli Media Reaction to China's Stance on the Israel-Hamas War," *ChinaMed Project*, November 10, 2023, <https://www.chinamed.it/observer/israeli-media-reaction-to-chinas-stance-on-the-israel-hamas-war>.

³ Dean Shmuel Elmas, "HaMedina SheSipka Neshek LeMekhablim, Karta Brit Yim Halranim VeMaf'ila Lakhatz Al Israel" כרתה המדינה שסיפקה נשק למחבלים, כרתה ברית עם האיראנים ומפעילה לחץ על ישראל [The country that supplied weapons to terrorists has made an alliance with the Iranians and is putting pressure on Israel], *Globes*, January 12, 2024, <https://www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1001467614>.

⁴ Itamar Eichner, "Tomekhet BeKhamas, Be'ad 'Zkhut HaShiva", Kakh Karsa HaKonseptzia Mul Sin" כך קרסה הקונספציה מול סיין [Supporting Hamas, in favor of the "right of return": This is how the belief about China collapsed], *Ynet*, December 20, 2023, <https://www.ynet.co.il/news/article/rjuwfm1vp>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Itamar Eichner, "Pakhad MeKonseptzia VeKhizuk HaHagana: HaMedina SheLomedet Et HaMaskanot MeHaMilkhama BeHamas" פחד מקונספציה וחזיון ההגנה: המדינה שלומדת את המסקנות מהמלחמה בחמאס [Fear of Conquest and Strengthening Defense: The State Learning the Lessons from the War on Hamas], *Ynet*, June 1, 2024, <https://www.ynet.co.il/news/article/h1xmplh4c>.

official condemnations of Hamas and generous aid, notably a USD 70,000 donation for “the Israeli Defense Forces and Israeli families”⁷ from the Taiwanese mission in Israel.⁸

Other events that harmed China's public image in Israel include Beijing's ignoring of repeated appeals to intercede on behalf of the half-Chinese hostage Noa Argamani, who was eventually rescued in an Israel Defense Forces (IDF) operation in June 2024.⁹ Additionally, TikTok came under scrutiny for hosting anti-Israel content, prompting senior representatives of the social media app to visit Tel Aviv to deny accusations of algorithmic and internal bias against Israel.¹⁰ Meanwhile, the Israeli branch of China's University of International Business and Economics in Petah Tikva closed after only four years. The university's president in Israel, Maj. Gen. (res.) **Matan Vilnai**, who previously served as ambassador to China, explained to Ynet that:

“Since the university operated under the auspices of the Chinese government, which has taken a tough stance against Israel since the war, it is believed that they decided they were not interested in continuing their activities in Israel.”¹¹

These developments appear to have had a significant impact on public perceptions of China in Israel. In a survey conducted by the INSS in September 2024 only 16% of Israeli respondents viewed China as a friendly country or as an ally of Israel.¹²

China in the Middle East and the “Axis of Evil”

Throughout 2024, Israeli media largely maintained a negative view on China's role in the region, very frequently grouping China alongside Russia, Iran and Iranian “regional proxies” in

a purported “axis partnership.” Independent analyst Dr. **Anat Hochberg-Marom** contended that the majority of Hamas' weapons originate from Russia, China and Iran, which she regarded as evidence of “systemic support from the Axis of Evil.”¹³ While Western intelligence sources have indicated that Hamas has also armed its fighters with weapons stolen from the IDF, as well as from assembling unexploded rockets and bombs dropped by Israel on the Gaza Strip,¹⁴ the perception of China as a direct backer of Hamas and Iran has remained a ubiquitous narrative in Israeli discourse.

Analyst **Dean Shmuel Elmas** opined in *Globes* that “just as Hamas is Iran, so too is China, [...] Israel must acknowledge the strong alignment between China and Iran while cautiously maintaining ties with both China and Russia to avoid geopolitical setbacks.”¹⁵ To understand Beijing's position in this “axis,” **Carice Witte** clarified that Beijing sides with Iran not because of a real alignment of values, rather, for its own ambition “to reshape the world order and dictate a security vision for the Middle East” in contrast to Western hegemony.¹⁶

Regarding China's role facilitating a national unity agreement between Fatah, Hamas and twelve other Palestinian factions in July 2024, Ynet journalist **Sharon Kidon** interpreted Beijing's mediation efforts as an intent to resolve regional conflicts independently of U.S. influence.¹⁷ Nevertheless, the relevance of the agreement, known as the “Beijing Declaration,” was widely dismissed in the Israeli media.¹⁸ Israeli analysts argued that the agreement ignored longstanding factional disagreements and legitimized groups such as Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, which are designated as terrorist organizations by the U.S. and other Western countries.¹⁹ *Haaretz* journalist **Jack Khoury**, reported that for Fatah, which currently heads the internationally recognized Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, the agreement was just meant to appease Beijing diplomatically and held little practical significance.²⁰

⁷ Caroline Haïat, “Taiwan Embassy donates \$70,000 to Israeli soldiers and families,” *i24News*, October 23, 2023, <https://www.i24news.tv/en/news/israel-at-war/1698071583-taiwan-embassy-donates-70-000-for-israeli-soldiers-and-families>. In May 2024, Taipei also made a one-off donation of \$500,000 to Mercy Corps for humanitarian relief in Gaza in May 2024.

⁸ Itamar Eichner, “Paragon LeTaiwan, Akitza LeSin: Kakh Hishpia HaMilkhama Al Yakhasei Israel Mul Shtei HaYerivot” עקיצה לסין: כך השפיעה [A paragon for Taiwan, a sting for China: This is how the war affected Israel's relations with the two rivals], Ynet, October 11, 2024, <https://www.ynet.co.il/news/article/rlyb0vllkkg>.

⁹ Barak Ravid, “Erdan LeShagrir Sin BeMoetzet HaBitakhon: Bimkom Lidrosh Hafsakat Esh, Lakhatzu Leshakhr Et Noa Argamani” ארדן לשגריר סין [Erdan to Chinese Ambassador to the Security Council: Instead of demanding a ceasefire, press for the release of Noa Argamani], *Wallat*, February 21, 2024, <https://news.wallat.co.il/item/3645331>.

¹⁰ Nevo Trabelsy, “Masa HaHasbara Shel Bkhirei Tik Tok: ‘Anakhnu Lo Mushlamim’” אנחנו לא מושלמים [TikTok executives' advocacy campaign in Israel: “We are not perfect”], *Globes*, February 8, 2024, <https://www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1001470508>.

¹¹ Navit Sommer, “HaUniversita HaSinit HaRishona Belsrael – Ozevet Et HaAretz” עוזבת את הארץ [The first Chinese university in Israel - leaving the country], Ynet, September 18, 2024, <https://www.ynet.co.il/economy/article/rjp7thp6c>.

¹² Mora Deitch, Rebecca Meller, Idit Shafran Gittleman and Anat Shapira, “Swords of Iron Survey Results - September 2024,” *Institute for National Security Studies*, September 24, 2024, <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/survey-september-2024/>.

¹³ Anat Hochberg-Marom, “Iran? Tzinor HaKhamtzan Shel Hamas Nimtza Davka BeAsia” | ד״ר ענת הוכברג-מרום [Iran? Hamas's oxygen pipeline is actually in Asia | Dr. Anat Hochberg-Marom], *Maariv*, April 5, 2024, <https://www.maariv.co.il/journalists/Article-1089472>.

¹⁴ Ynet, “12 Minharot MeSinai, VeNeshek SheHigia Gam Melsrael: Kakh Hit'atzem Tzva HaTeror Shel Hamas” [12 tunnels from Sinai, and weapons that also came from Israel: This is how Hamas's terror army grew stronger], January 28, 2024, <https://www.ynet.co.il/news/article/hjx10mqa>.

¹⁵ Dean Shmuel Elmas, “HaMasar Meakhorei Hakhlatah Anakit HaSapanut COSCO LeHafsik Lashut Lelsrael” המסר מאחורי החלטת ענקית הספנות קוסקו להפסיק [The message behind shipping giant COSCO's decision to stop sailing to Israel: China chose Iran], *Globes*, January 7, 2024, <https://www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1001467122>.

¹⁶ See note 3, Dean Shmuel Elmas, *Globes*, January 12, 2024.

¹⁷ Sharon Kidon, “Bai bai Amerika: Hayim Sin Hi HaMa'aTzama HaKhadasha BeMizrakh HaTikhon?” ביי ביי אמריקה: האם סין היא המעצמה החדשה במזרח התיכון? [Bye bye America: Is China the new superpower in the Middle East?], Ynet, July 24, 2024, <https://www.ynet.co.il/news/theheadline/article/hi70c0524>.

¹⁸ Amanda Chen, “Israeli Media Reacts to the Beijing Declaration,” *ChinaMed Project*, August 7, 2024, <https://www.chinamed.it/observer/israeli-media-reacts-to-the-beijing-declaration>.

¹⁹ Shachar Kleiman, HaInterest HaSini VeHaMashber BeHamas: Ma Omed Meakhorei “Heskem HaAkhadut HaFalestini?”? האינטרס הסיני והמשבר בהמאס: מה עומד מאחורי “הסכם האחדות הפלסטינית”? [Palestinian reconciliation? In this film we were already: “Hamas is collapsing, expectations are low”], Ynet, July 23, 2024, <https://www.ynet.co.il/news/article/ryoh3wpda>.

²⁰ Jack Khoury, Hamas VeFatah Sikmu BeSin Al “Shikum HaAkhdut”, Akh LeHatzhara Ein Kol Mashmaut Maasit, על “שיקום האחדות”, [Hamas, Fatah Sign Palestinian “Unity” Agreement in China, With No Practical Significance], *Haaretz*, July 23, 2024, <https://www.haaretz.co.il/news/politics/2024-07-23/ty-article/00000190-de8b-dbe5-a7fa-ffbbdc850000>.

The Crisis in the Red Sea, an Opportunity or Challenge for Beijing?

Israeli experts have expressed differing perspectives on Beijing's stance regarding the Red Sea crisis. Although Houthi attacks have significantly impacted international trade, with serious implications for China as well, Chinese authorities have refrained from directly criticizing the Houthis, shifting the discussion to the situation in Gaza. **Geng Shuang** (耿爽), China's Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN, underscored in January 2024 that only "a ceasefire in Gaza and relief of the humanitarian crisis there will help prevent an escalation in the situation in the Red Sea and the Middle East."²⁴

Despite these reassurances from the Houthis, **Carice Witte** argued that Beijing is also suffering from the instability in the Red Sea, “perhaps even more than other countries,” explaining:

“One of my colleagues was crossing the Strait on a Chinese vessel and saw a foreign ship explode in front of his eyes, [...] this impacts you no matter what.”

An Israeli communications official added that technological breakthroughs have transformed undersea cables into a new front between the West and the “Russia-China-Iran Axis,” which possesses the capability “to install listening devices on [the cables] to monitor and collect a great deal of information.”³⁰ Geopolitics and energy analyst **Dean Shmuel** underscored the potential consequences for Israel:

“[Given] the volume of Israel’s trade with China, which is the top source of imports at approximately USD 11.8 billion and the second-largest export destination at approximately USD 3.4 billion, it is understandable that financial communications via cables are enormous in scope.”³¹

Despite the severe disruptions to supply chains critical to Chinese exports, Beijing’s leverage over Iran (or lack thereof) has not contributed to de-escalation in the Red Sea, contrary to the expectations of some Israeli experts. This has led many to realize the significant autonomy of non-state actors and the limited ability of both China and Iran to exert control over them.

Chinese Weaponry in the Middle East

During their campaign in the Gaza Strip, the IDF uncovered large stockpiles of Chinese-made weaponry, including advanced drones, assault rifles and automatic grenade launchers, in the possession of Hamas fighters. This discovery prompted serious questions among Israelis about whether Beijing has knowingly supplied military equipment to Palestinian militant groups.³² However, most informed assessments suggest that China was unaware, as an anonymous Israeli intelligence source told *Maariv*:

“it is likely that there is another player involved in it, and it is likely that this player is Iran. China will not like the fact that this is what the Iranians are doing with their weapons. It does not look good, and this can become a problem for them.”³³

The issue of the proliferation of Chinese arms in the region extends beyond Hamas. Israeli analysts have also expressed unease over reports that Egypt is seeking to acquire the Chinese J-10C stealth fighter jet. In July 2024, negotiations for a potential sale reportedly took place during a meeting

between Egyptian Air Force Commander **Mahmoud Fouad Abd El-Gawad** and his Chinese counterpart, Chang Dingqiu (常丁求). More recent, though unverified, reports suggest that Egypt may have already received its first batch of the export variant of the J-10C, equipped with PL-15 long-range air-to-air missiles.³⁴

The possibility of Egypt and other states procuring the J-10C has raised alarm among Israelis, particularly due to longstanding allegations regarding the aircraft’s origins. According to reporting by *The Sunday Times*, the J-10C is based on the IAI Lavi, an Israeli fighter jet developed with U.S. funding but canceled in 1987.³⁵ The report claims that Israel transferred the Lavi’s design – including its American technology – to China, a claim that Israeli officials have denied.

Military analyst **Udi Etzion**, writing for *Walla!*, warned that the introduction of the J-10C into Egypt’s arsenal could significantly undermine Israel’s air superiority in the region.³⁶ Until now, Israel has been the only Middle Eastern country operating stealth fighters, specifically the F-35I, a variant of the U.S.-made Lockheed Martin F-35.

Israel’s strategic advantage has long been reinforced by American efforts to restrict the proliferation of the most advanced military technology in the region.³⁷ Washington has consistently pressured Middle Eastern partners to avoid purchasing major Chinese and Russian weapons systems, and has frustrated attempts by countries such as Türkiye and the UAE to procure the F-35. However, rapidly growing dissatisfaction with the Trump administration may push Middle Eastern states – which have so far used the prospect of Chinese weapons deals mostly as leverage in negotiations with Washington – to follow through with these acquisitions, potentially threatening Israel’s longstanding military technological dominance in the region.

Growing Distrust of Chinese Tech

Beyond military hardware, the strengthening military ties between China and Middle Eastern actors have raised serious concerns among Israeli cybersecurity experts, particularly regarding the security risks of imported Chinese goods.³⁸ The

³⁰ Assaf Gilad, “Shnei Kavlei Tikshoret BeEropa Nekhtekhu: Hayim HaMetikhut BaYabeshet Alula Lehagi’a leIsrael?” שני כבלי תקשורת באירופה נחתכו: האם? “Two communications cables in Europe were cut: Could tensions on the continent reach Israel?”, *Globes*, November 20, 2024, <https://www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1001494626>.

³¹ Dean Shmuel Elmas, “Trilionei Dolarim Besakana? Halyum HaTat-Yami Shel HaKhutim” [Trillions of dollars at risk? The Houthi underwater threat], *Globes*, February 9, 2024, <https://www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1001470099>.

³² Dean Shmuel Elmas, “Nekhsaf Til Neged-Tankim HaSini SheBo Hamas Mishtamesh Neged Tzahal” [Chinese anti-tank missile used by Hamas against the IDF revealed], *Globes*, June 30, 2024, <https://www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1001482987>.

³³ *Maariv*, “Ze Higi’a BeHafta’a Gedola”: Israel Itra Kamuyot Adirot אירועים גדולים: “זה הגיע בהפתעה גדולה”: ישראל יטרה כמויות אדירות [“It came as a big surprise”: Israel detects huge quantities of Chinese-made weapons in Gaza | Report], January 7, 2024, <https://www.maariv.co.il/news/military/Article-1066047>.

³⁴ Taha Sakr, “Chinese J-10CE Jets Arrive in Egypt, Marking Shift in Air Superiority Strategy,” *Daily News Egypt*, February 13, 2025, <https://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2025/02/13/chinese-j-10ce-jets-arrive-in-egypt-marking-shift-in-air-superiority-strategy/>.

³⁵ Harrison Kass, “China’s J-10 Fighter: An F-16 ‘Copy’ with Israeli DNA?,” *The National Interest*, November 10, 2024, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/chinas-j-10-fighter-f-16-copy-israeli-dna-210756>.

³⁶ Udi Etzion, “Israel Te’abed Et HaYitron? Mitzraim Shokelet Lirkosh Metosei Khamkan MeSin” [Will Israel lose its advantage? Egypt is considering purchasing stealth aircraft], *Walla!*, July 24, 2024, <https://news.walla.co.il/item/3679894>.

³⁷ Jarrod Bernstein, “Ensuring Israel’s Qualitative Military Edge,” *Obama White House - National Archives*, November 17, 2011, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2011/11/17/ensuring-israels-qualitative-military-edge>.

³⁸ Assaf Gilad, “Artzot Habrit Hekhrima Et HaMatzlemot HaSiniyot. Mishteret Israel Hitziva Otan BaKvishim” ארצה? “בחרמה את המצלמות הסיניות. משטרת ישראל הציבה אותן בכבישים [The US confiscated the Chinese cameras. The Israeli police placed them on the roads.], *Globes*, June 26, 2024, <https://www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1001482781>.

most critical voices have even called for a general boycott of Chinese technology, especially in the wake of Israel's "pager attack" in September 2024.

During this operation, booby-trapped pagers and walkie-talkies intended for Hezbollah members exploded, resulting in 42 deaths and over 3,500 injuries across Lebanon, the majority of whom were civilians. Although Tel Aviv claimed responsibility, the attack demonstrated for many Israelis the potential vulnerability of commercial electronic devices and may have set a precedent for similar future attacks, including those potentially targeting Israelis.

For this reason, **Nadir Izrael**, co-founder and CTO of Armis, a U.S.-Israeli cybersecurity firm, advised that, just as the U.S. government has placed bans on the purchase of Chinese equipment, Israel should similarly avoid integrating Chinese technology into its critical systems.³⁹ Likewise, in response to the provision of 550 Chinese Chery Tiggo 8 Pro cars to IDF officers, Dr. **Harel Menashri**, a founder of the Shin Bet's cyber division and currently the Head of Cyber at the Holon Institute of Technology, warned of the risks posed by allowing Chinese-made vehicles, equipped with their many sensors, onto Israeli military bases, adding that: "I know of almost no Chinese technology that doesn't transmit [data back to China]."⁴⁰

These concerns over Chinese tech are well-reported across the Israeli media, with articles frequently highlighting how both Washington and Beijing have taken steps to mitigate potential espionage risks—for example, China's restrictions on Teslas entering security facilities.

For instance, *Globes* has repeatedly discussed the security risks associated with the IDF, the police and other Israeli security agencies purchasing tens of thousands of Chinese-made cameras, drones and electric vehicles.⁴¹ Additionally, due to a shortage of drones at the outset of the war in Gaza, it is noted that many Israeli reservists have relied upon commercially available Chinese drones, either purchased independently or received through donations.

In response, the IDF has clarified that the most advanced Israeli-made drones are now being reserved for military forces and that local companies are ramping up their drone production capacity. Moreover, all Chinese drones undergo a

"sterilization" process to prevent communication with their original manufacturers.⁴² A similar sterilization process is applied to Chinese vehicles, according to a military source cited by *Walla!*, ensuring that they do not transmit information to external entities.⁴³ Soldiers are also prohibited from discussing classified topics while driving, and Chinese vehicles have been banned from the most sensitive military bases.

For its part, the Shin Bet – the agency responsible for countering foreign espionage in Israel – does not own any Chinese-made vehicles. However, Israel's Ministry of Finance, which oversees government vehicle procurement, clarified that "as of today, no instructions have been received from the authorized bodies in the country regarding the use of Chinese vehicles."⁴⁴ Thus, despite widespread concern in the media, the Israeli establishment appears to believe that its current measures sufficiently mitigate potential threats.

However, the Israeli media debate on Chinese technology is far from one-sided. While security concerns are frequently raised, there is also recognition of the practical advantages Chinese products offer. Chinese drones have proven to be a useful stopgap for the IDF in the war in Gaza, and Chinese electric vehicles continue to attract Israeli consumers. As reported by *Xinhua*, BYD's Atto 3 was the top-selling car in Israel in 2024, according to data from the Israel Vehicle Importers Association.⁴⁵ Indeed, Chinese automakers dominated Israel's EV market, accounting for 68.69% of total sales in 2024, with 46,137 units sold.

Another sector dominated by China is green energy, where Chinese-manufactured solar panels have largely captured the Israeli market. While concerns about potential security risks exist here as well, Israeli industry experts offered a measured perspective.

Moshe (Moshiko) Hassan, head of research at the Israeli cybersecurity firm Upwind, noted that although "China is everywhere in the Western world, they almost never carry out destructive attacks such as disabling the power grid or harming the masses."⁴⁶ Similarly, **Shalev Julio**, from Dream Security, a company specializing in protecting critical government infrastructure, emphasized that cybersecurity vulnerabilities exist in nearly all modern technologies, regardless of their country of origin.⁴⁷

³⁹ Assaf Gilad, "Mitkafet Biparim Aval Hafukh. Hayim Gam Israel Khasufa?" [Pager attack but the other way around. Is Israel also exposed?], *Globes*, November 8, 2024, <https://www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1001493545>.

⁴⁰ Dean Shmuel Elmas, "BeArtzot Habrit Mefakhadim MeHaMekhoniyot HaSiniyot. BaAretz Mekhalkim Otan LaKtzinim." [In the US, people are afraid of Chinese cars. In Israel, they are distributed to officers], *Globes*, March 30, 2024, <https://www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1001475083>.

⁴¹ Dean Shmuel Elmas, "Biglal HaMakhsor BeRakhfanim: Tzahal Mishtamesh BeKelim Siniyim SheNikhnesu LaReshima HaShkhora Shel Artzot Habrit" [Due to the shortage of drones: The IDF is using Chinese tools that were blacklisted by the US], *Globes*, July 23, 2024, <https://www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1001485017>.

⁴² Assaf Gilad, "Alfei Rakhfanim MeTotzeret Sin BaDerekh LeTzahal. Elu HaKhashashot" [Thousands of Chinese-made drones on their way to the IDF. These are the concerns], *Globes*, April 25, 2024, <https://www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1001477365>.

⁴³ Udi Etzion, "Lama BaShabak Lo Mishtamshim BeMekhoniyot Siniyot?" [Why doesn't the Shin Bet use Chinese cars?], *Walla!*, March 6, 2024, <https://cars.walla.co.il/item/3648821>.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ *Xinhua*, "Chinese electric model tops Israel's car sales in 2024," January 3, 2025, <https://english.news.cn/20250103/5d7870fe25ab4e5cb3bc965d652c1432/c.html>.

⁴⁶ Assaf Gilad, "HaMakhshev Sini: Hayim Mitkanim Solariyim BeIsrael Khasufim LeSakana Bitkhonit?" [Chinese Computer: Are solar installations in Israel exposed to a security risk?], *Globes*, July 14, 2024, <https://www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1001484178>.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

Beijing's "Silent" Boycott of Israel

Despite calls from some Israelis to boycott Chinese technology, it appears that China has itself restricted its tech exports to Israel. Since the outbreak of the war in Gaza, Israeli manufacturers have reported increasing difficulties in importing components from China.⁴⁸

An investigation by *Globes* revealed that, according to a document Israel received on December 17, 2023, "in light of the war, Chinese customs wished to delay the export to Israel of customs items classified in chapters 84 and 85, so that they will not be used by the IDF in the war effort."⁴⁹ These restricted items include various dual-use technologies – products primarily intended for civilian purposes but also applicable to military production – ranging from nuclear reactors and boilers to sound recorders and TV accessories.

Israeli importers have characterized the situation as an "Italian strike," in which, despite the absence of official sanctions, Chinese suppliers have been deliberately slowing operations by introducing bureaucratic hurdles and delaying shipments, with COSCO Shipping, the world's largest shipping company, announcing it would completely suspend service to Israeli ports.⁵⁰ In response, some Israeli companies have been attempting to circumvent these restrictions by rerouting imports through third parties in "non-sanctioned" countries, though this has significantly increased costs and extended delivery times.

These challenges have reinforced suspicions in Israel of a "silent boycott" by China, with many interpreting the growing difficulties as evidence of Beijing's increasing diplomatic hostility. This perspective is also shared within the Israeli government. An Israeli government source told *Ynet*:

*"In all the checks we have made with [Chinese] official bodies, it is not about a change in regulations, but about enforcement that has not been done in the past. We are concerned that strict enforcement is being implemented because we are in a state of war. We have contacted the Chinese and their official response is that there is no change in policy. It is clear to all of us that this has a direct connection to the war."*⁵¹

A business insider from the drone industry explained to *Globes* that "Chinese restrictions are just part of a process that is already taking place," noting that Beijing is expected to announce additional measures this year to limit the export of dual-use components to Western markets (of which they consider Israel to be part of) in response to EU and U.S. sanctions.⁵²

Despite the record-breaking sales of Chinese vehicles in Israel, local car importers have also expressed concern that this so-called silent boycott could disrupt their thriving business ties with Chinese suppliers. A senior figure in the Israeli automotive industry told *Walla!* that while "the Chinese know how to separate politics and business,"⁵³ maintaining ties with Israel is increasingly becoming a reputational liability:

*"There is a clear attempt by Chinese manufacturers to lower their media profile, avoid publishing sales achievements in Israel and not to report on the signing of new export contracts with Israelis."*⁵⁴

The source did not rule out the possibility of further barriers and restrictions, especially if EU tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles discourage Chinese manufacturers from developing models suited for Israel, which often serves as a testing ground for automotive companies looking to enter the European market.⁵⁵

However, *Globes'* **Dubi Ben-Gedalyahu** painted a more nuanced perspective, arguing that a "silent boycott" is not new in the industry. Even Japanese manufacturers, he pointed out, avoid overt presence in Israel to prevent backlash from Arab markets. Regarding security concerns over Chinese exports, he argued that frictions with Beijing over Gaza are unlikely to harm Chinese firms' profits in Israel, as their competitive pricing and the trust they have with veteran Israeli importers largely offsets most consumer concerns.⁵⁶

As such, despite the widely reported restrictions imposed by China and the sharp decline in trade in 2023, the demand for continued economic cooperation appears strong as Chinese goods continue to reach Israel through available shipping channels. Some Israeli experts have even argued that maintaining economic engagement in the face of mounting political tensions serves Israeli national interests.

⁴⁸ Udi Etzion, "Kherem Shaket: Beli Hoda'a Rishmit, Khevrat HaSapanut HaSinit HaGedola Tedaleg Israel" [Silent boycott: Without official announcement, the major Chinese shipping company is skipping Israel], *Walla!*, January 8, 2024, <https://finance.walla.co.il/item/3633941>.

⁴⁹ Dean Shmuel Elmas, "Anakit HaSapanut MSC Ma'ala Makhirim LeIsrael" [Shipping giant MSC raises prices to Israel], *Globes*, January 8, 2024, <https://www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1001467196>.

⁵⁰ Dean Shmuel Elmas, Khevrat HaSapanut HaSinit HaReviyit BeGodla BaOlam Mafsika Lashut LeIsrael [The world's fourth-largest Chinese shipping company stops sailing to Israel], *Globes*, January 7 (updated on January 8), 2024, <https://www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1001467108>.

⁵¹ Navit Sommer, "Mif'alei Haitek Belsrael Mitkashim Leyabe Rekhivim MeSin: 'Maf'ilim Aleinu Sanktziot'" [Israeli high-tech factories are having difficulty importing components from China: "They are imposing sanctions on us"], *Ynet*, December 24, 2024, <https://www.ynet.co.il/economy/article/rlvgacrpa>.

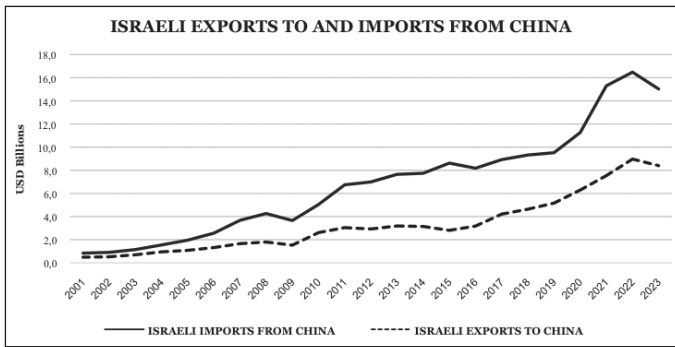
⁵² Assaf Oni, "HaLehkima BeUkraine Mitbaseset Al Rakhfanim. Akhshav Sin Magbila Et HaYitzu Shelahem" [The fighting in Ukraine is based on drones. Now China is restricting their exports.], *Globes*, December 10, 2024, <https://www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1001496454>.

⁵³ See note 48, Udi Etzion, *Walla!*, January 8, 2024.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Dubi Ben Gedalyahu, "Baiden Ma'ala Et HaMas Shel Klei Rekhev MeSin Le100%. Hayim HaMahalakh Yashpi'a Al Israel?" [Biden raises tax on vehicles from China to 100%. Will the move affect Israel?], *Globes*, May 16, 2024, <https://www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1001478793>.

⁵⁶ Dubi Ben Gedalyahu, "Sin Bakhara Tzad BaMilkhama - Hayim Ze Yigrom Lalsraelim Liknot Pakhot Rekhavim Siniyim?" [China chose a side in the war - will this cause Israelis to buy fewer Chinese vehicles?], *Globes*, January 14, 2024, <https://www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1001467655>.



Prepared by the ChinaMed team. Data from: <https://www.chinamed.it/chinamed-data/middle-east/israel>

Galia Lavi, Deputy Director of the Glazer Israel-China Policy Center at INSS, emphasized that given China's economic significance, "maintaining cooperation with a sober perspective is an Israeli interest and the key to a successful and secure relationship." However, she also stressed that this does not mean Israel should avoid criticizing Beijing, adding that "the State of Israel should even consider appropriate diplomatic ways [...] even if only symbolic" to counter China's perceived anti-Israel stance.⁵⁷

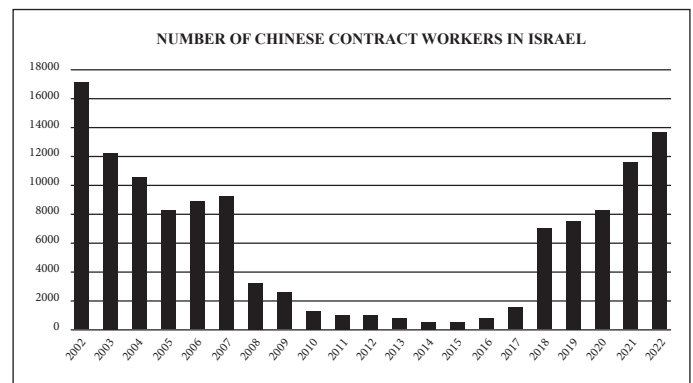
A Shift in Tone?

One of the primary factors fueling Israeli resentment toward China was Beijing's rhetoric, accused of dismissing legitimate Israeli concerns and international law in favor of Iran and its proxies. For instance, during the missile exchange between Iran and Israel in April 2024, Chinese officials characterized Israel as the aggressor for the "vicious crime" of its airstrike on the Iranian consulate complex in Damascus, while describing Iran's military response as a "restrained" act of self-defense.⁵⁸

An apparent shift in tone occurred on July 31, 2024, when Israel assassinated Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran. While China condemned the act, it refrained from directly attributing it to Israel.⁵⁹ For Israeli media, China seems to have increased its diplomatic pressure on Iran through exchanges of messages, expressing concern that further escalation could jeopardize its strategic and economic interests, particularly regarding the oil trade and regional stability.⁶⁰

When Iran retaliated for Haniyeh's assassination by launching more than 180 ballistic missiles at Israel on October 1, 2024, Chinese state media, for the first time, acknowledged Hamas' role in the October 7 attacks and recognized the security threat posed by Iranian-backed actors to Israel.⁶¹ However, Israeli media largely overlooked this supposed shift until Chinese Foreign Minister **Wang Yi** (王毅) requested a call with his Israeli counterpart **Israel Katz** on October 14, purportedly to discuss Tel Aviv's imminent retaliation against Tehran.

Maariv politics reporter **Anna Barsky** interpreted the move as a positive sign, reflecting China's renewed interest in Israel's position following the escalation.⁶² During the conversation, Katz underscored that China's support for Iran conflicted with its own interests, urging Beijing to adopt a more balanced stance. Despite tensions, both ministers highlighted the importance of continued economic cooperation, including trade and the presence of 20,000 Chinese workers in Israel, and the shared intent to strengthen ties.⁶³



Prepared by the ChinaMed team. Data from: <https://www.chinamed.it/chinamed-data/middle-east/israel>

In her analysis, **Galia Lavi** noted three possible explanations for China's rhetorical shift: 1) China may have realized its support for Iran was misplaced; 2) its extreme rhetoric had created an unbalanced situation; or 3) that the shift was an attempt to persuade Israel to temper its response to Iran's actions.⁶⁴ However, Lavi rejected these theories, arguing that the shift was more cosmetic than substantive and did not signal a meaningful change in policy:

⁵⁷ Asaf Zagrizak, "Shalosh Shanaim Akharei SheKam: Namal HaMifratz Noges BaMitkharim. VeMa Yim HaKhashash MeSin?" נמל? שלוש שנים אחרי שקם: נמל? [Three years after its establishment: The Gulf Port is biting its competitors. And what about the fear of MeSin?], *Globes*, September 8, 2024, <https://www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1001488689>.

⁵⁸ Adam Koi, "Chinese Perspectives on the Recent Iran-Israel Clash," ChinaMed Project, April 30, 2024, <https://www.chinamed.it/observer/chinese-perspectives-on-the-recent-iran-israel-clash>.

⁵⁹ Adam Koi and Andrea Ghiselli, "Chinese Perspectives on the Assassination of Hamas Political Chief Ismail Haniyeh," *ChinaMed Project*, August 9, 2024, <https://www.chinamed.it/observer/chinese-perspectives-on-the-assassination-of-hamas-political-chief-ismail-haniyeh>.

⁶⁰ Danny Zaken, "Shomrot Et HaInteresim Shelahen: HaTzir HaRusi-Sini Menase Limnoa Melran Haslama" הציר הרוסי-סיני מנסה למנוע מאיראן הסלמה [Protecting their interests: The Russian-Chinese axis is trying to prevent Iran from escalating], *IsraelHayom*, August 8, 2024, <https://www.israelhayom.co.il/news/defense/article/16222015>.

⁶¹ *China Daily*, "Fueling antagonism only intensifies spiral of violence in the Middle East: China Daily editorial" October 7, 2024, <https://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202410/07/WS6703ca84a310f1265a1c6498.html>.

⁶² Anna Barsky, "Pirsum Rishon: BeYozmat HaSinim, Sar HaKhutz Katz VeMakbilav Shokhakhu" פרסום ראשון: ביוזמת הסינים שר החוץ כ"ץ ומקבילו שוחחו [First publication: At the initiative of the Chinese, Foreign Minister Katz and his counterpart spoke], *Maariv*, October 14, 2024, <https://www.maariv.co.il/news/politics/article-1140168>.

⁶³ Shirir Avitan Cohen, "Sar HaKhutz Katz LeMakbilav HaSini: 'Tehran Meareret Et HaYatzivut BaEzor - Israel Tagiv LaMitkafa HaIranit'" שר החוץ כ"ץ: "טהרן מערערת את היציבות באזור - ישראל תגיב למתקפה האיראנית [Foreign Minister Katz to his Chinese counterpart: "Tehran is destabilizing the region - Israel will respond to the Iranian attack"], *IsraelHayom*, October 15, 2024, <https://www.israelhayom.co.il/news/geopolitics/article/16614713>.

⁶⁴ Galia Lavi, "Continuity and Change in Chinese Rhetoric Toward Israel Since October 7," *INSS Insight*, November 14, 2024, <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/china-rhetoric/>.

*"In general, the main issue is not what China says, but what it does not say. As long as Beijing ignores the actions of the other side— Hamas, Hezbollah, Iran—there is no reason to celebrate, even if it does not directly condemn Israel."*⁶⁵

Regardless, Chinese diplomatic efforts to rekindle Sino-Israeli ties seem to have been reiterated by the arrival of newly appointed ambassador **Xiao Junzheng** (肖军正), a seasoned diplomat with experience in Iran, Türkiye, Egypt and Greece. Upon his arrival in Israel on November 29, 2024, he commented:

*"The current regional situation is complicated and sensitive with growing concerns of a spillover effect. In the meantime, efforts to promote peace never cease and peace will eventually be achieved. I would like to say a few words especially to the institutions and Chinese people in Israel and to all friends who care about China-Israel relations: security is fundamental."*⁶⁶

Conclusion

The beginning of 2025 saw a ceasefire in Gaza brokered by the United States, Egypt, and Qatar, bringing an end to direct hostilities, alongside exchanges of Israeli hostages for Palestinians detained by Israel. However, the situation remains highly precarious, as U.S. President Donald Trump's proposal for Washington to assume control of the Gaza Strip and expel its population threatens to unravel the fragile peace in the region.

Trump's plan has already drawn widespread condemnation across the Middle East, eliciting sharp rebukes from the governments of Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, as well as from China. Nonetheless, it has garnered support from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and multiple polls suggest that a majority of Israelis also endorse the U.S. President's idea.⁶⁷

While the feasibility of such a plan remains questionable, its pursuit by the U.S. and Israel could significantly reshape regional politics. Advancing Trump's proposal could further push Arab states toward Beijing as a counterbalance to Israeli

and American influence, as well as in response to Western inaction toward Palestinian rights. As our analysis reveals, many Israeli commentators already perceive China as an ally of Palestinian militant groups and Iran. Given this entrenched view, Israeli suspicions of China are unlikely to diminish in the near future, regardless of any attempts by Chinese officials to moderate their rhetoric.

Notably, Chinese efforts to mend relations have not been warmly received in Israel. The highest-level direct talks between the two countries since the start of the Gaza war — Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's meeting with his Israeli counterpart, Gideon Saar, on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference — were virtually ignored in Israeli media. This is likely because, despite Wang Yi signaling of China's willingness to mend ties, Beijing has continued to insist on the immediate need for a Palestinian state while openly opposing Israeli occupation, colonization and military operations in the Gaza Strip and West Bank.⁶⁸

This rhetorical position has reinforced the perception that Beijing is aligned against Tel Aviv, fueling fear in the Israeli media over Chinese technology and trade. However, on these issues, many Israeli commentators have pushed back against what they consider alarmist narratives. Government representatives have emphasized the measures already in place to mitigate security risks associated with Chinese products, while industry experts have sought to contextualize trade restrictions and defend commercial ties with China, arguing that economic cooperation serves Israel's national interests.

Given that economic engagement has always been the cornerstone of Israel-China relations, and that Beijing remains a key player in many emerging economic sectors, it is no surprise that many Israelis continue to see China as a valuable economic partner. However, as Israel's relationship with the U.S. becomes increasingly crucial, not only for security but also in the context of the Netanyahu government's foreign policy objectives regarding Palestine and Iran, it remains to be seen whether Tel Aviv can sustain what many Israelis view as a necessary trade partnership with Beijing as the Trump administration launches the first salvo of a global trade war against both its own allies and China.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Itamar Eichner, "Shagrir Sin HaKhadash, VeHaHatzhara SheOrera Tikva LeDaf Khadash BaYakhasim" שגריר סין החדש וההצהרה שעוררה תקווה לדף חדש [China's new ambassador, and the statement that raised hope for a new chapter in relations], Ynet, December 3, 2024, <https://www.ynet.co.il/news/article/rjbysui71l>.

⁶⁷ Rina Bassist, "As Trump doubles down on Gaza plan, 69% of Israelis support idea despite concern," Al-Monitor, February 10, 2025, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2025/02/trump-doubles-down-gaza-plan-69-israelis-support-idea-despite-concern>.

⁶⁸ Kawala Xie, "China signals willingness to boost Israel ties despite strains from Gaza conflict," South China Morning Post, February 16, 2025, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3298885/china-signals-willingness-boost-israel-ties-after-gaza-conflict-strained-relations>.

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