

# As China Courts Israel's Rivals, Will Israel Move Closer to Taiwan?

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A delivery driver waits to cross an intersection near the Israeli Embassy in Beijing on May 19, 2021. Mark Schiefelbein/AP Photo



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12/10/2024 Updated: 12/10/2024

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*Commentary*

Israel and Taiwan share notable similarities: both face existential threats from hostile neighbors and have experienced international isolation.

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During the Cold War, Israel, Taiwan, and apartheid-era South Africa collaborated on nuclear development until the United States intervened. Given this history, Israel likely has no barriers to reopening ties with Taiwan.



Previously, Israel might have kept Taiwan at arm's length to avoid upsetting China. However, these reservations seem to be fading, given China's alliance with Iran and the increasingly tougher stance the United States takes on the Chinese communist regime.



Taiwan depends on China for economic aid, military technology, and key materials for its defense sector. Diplomatically, China openly supports Palestine and does not classify Hamas as a terrorist organization. This has led some in Israel to consider playing the "Taiwan card."

In August 2023, the United States **approved** the first-ever military aid to Taiwan under the Foreign Military Financing (FMF) Act, typically used to assist sovereign nations in developing their defense industries through direct funding. Washington appears to be encouraging Taiwan to model its defense capabilities after Israel's.

Until now, only Israel enjoyed FMF privileges. Extending this to Taiwan aims to help the island build its military-industrial system. While Taiwan has a relatively self-reliant defense industry, upgrades are needed to integrate with U.S. systems, especially in weapon digitalization and artificial intelligence.

With its expertise, Israel has been brought into a cooperative mechanism with Taiwan under U.S. guidance. The same month U.S. military aid to Taiwan was approved, an Israeli parliamentary delegation **visited** Taiwan's then-President Tsai Ing-wen. Both parties agreed to deepen cooperation in all areas, including defense capabilities.

# China's Middle East Strategy

China's Middle East policy has long focused on aligning with countries opposed to U.S. interests.

Although Israel recognized the newly established People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1950, Beijing did not formalize diplomatic ties with Israel until 1992, despite Israel quietly exporting military technology to China for years prior. Publicly, China kept its distance, prioritizing relationships with the Arab world.

In 1971, Albania, a then-communist ally, and Algeria, a prominent Arab nation, spearheaded the effort that enabled the PRC to replace Taiwan (the Republic of China, ROC) in the United Nations. Since the United States backs Israel, China aligns with Israel's adversaries.

Historically, China openly supported the Palestinian Liberation Organization and expressed solidarity with the Palestinian cause, hosting frequent visits by various Palestinian groups to Beijing.

Today, China's Middle East policy aims to challenge the U.S.-led international order by aligning with third-world countries and underdeveloped regions. Middle Eastern countries, rich in resources but lacking robust industrial systems, are ideal partners for China's outreach.

China considers Middle Eastern countries essential in opposing the U.S.-led international order. Beijing's support for Palestine, Arab nations, Iran, Russia, and North Korea forms a new axis of power.

When push comes to shove, China is willing to risk alienating Israel to maintain ties with other Middle Eastern states.

## Historical Goodwill Exploited

During World War II, Shanghai [offered](#) refuge to some 20,000 Jewish migrants fleeing Europe at a time when many other countries had

closed their doors. This history left many in the Jewish community feeling grateful toward the Chinese people—specifically, the residents of Shanghai who welcomed them.

However, it's crucial to remember that the pre-communist ROC government granted this refuge under the ruling Kuomintang (KMT) party, which later retreated to Taiwan after losing to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in a civil war in the mainland in 1949.

The CCP has since leveraged this sentiment for diplomatic and public relations gains, even though it does not represent this historical goodwill.

Following the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, the United States **imposed** an embargo on military exports to China. Israel, not subject to this ban, **transferred** advanced military technology to China in subsequent years. Examples include the **Harpy** anti-radiation drone and the **Python-3** air-to-air missile technology, which were transferred between the 1980s and early 1990s. Reports **suggest** that China reverse-engineered these technologies for its military use.

In 2000, when Israel was set to upgrade China's Phalcon airborne early warning and control system, the United States **pressured** Israel to cancel the deal. Concerned about jeopardizing its vital defense relationship with the United States, Israel complied, effectively ending most forms of military cooperation with China.

In civilian sectors, Israel's expertise has also significantly benefited China. Israel shared semiconductor technology, agricultural innovations like drip irrigation that transformed arid regions, and desalination technology that helped China meet its freshwater needs. Israel's contributions created a significant loophole in the arms embargo, and the assistance was pivotal for China.

Communist China establishes and sustains its so-called friendships with other countries based on practical benefits.

Ukraine provided Beijing with critical military technology, Israel shared advanced military and civilian expertise, and Japan offered

investment and science. These countries, once significant contributors to China's development, are now among its primary rivals.

If the Middle East situation worsens—such as a full-scale war between Israel and Iran—it could trigger global realignments.

An expanded conflict involving China, Russia, and Iran against Western alliances might force Israel to sever ties with Beijing.

Such a scenario would mark a profound transformation of the global political landscape.

*Views expressed in this article are opinions of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Epoch Times.*

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